



Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 W. Main Street Emmitsburg, MD
21727

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The Holy Forefathers December 24, 2023

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Years ago, before Ancestry.com or 23AndMe.com came out, indeed before there was even an Internet at all, I sent a few dollars off to a company that said it could identify something about the origins and history of my surname. Like many people I was interested in what my forebearers were like and wanted to know something about them. The company I wrote to really had no idea, but they sent me a packet with general information about my name, little realizing that it had been Anglicized and therefore change when my grandfather came through Ellis Island. I still wondered about those who came before me.

This Sunday is the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers of our Lord. It offers us a glimpse into forbearers of Jesus, the big picture, not so much of our Lord's blood ancestors, but more of His background in a general sense.. The patriarchs, prophets, leaders and heroes of the Old Testament were not all necessarily related to our Lord by blood, but they represented what our Lord was born to be and to do. They look forward to the fulfillment of what they hoped for and what they stood for. They were an incredibly diverse group of people, but they all had one thing in common: They were steadfast in their faith in the One True God.

The Troparion of the Sunday points back to the central revelation involving the first Patriarch, Abraham. The writer of Genesis says that Abraham was a normal man, called by God apparently out of

the blue, to become the father of a people who were to bear the truth of the One, True God to the entire world. This was the purpose behind God 's call to Abraham. "By you and your descendants, all people shall be blessed," God told Abraham. And Abraham responded in faith, and that faith, the writer of Genesis says, was reckoned to him as righteousness.

So much was said about this by St. Paul in his epistles, that we allow it to go in one ear and out the other without even considering it. We heard it in Ephesians, Romans, Galatians and now Colossians. The lessons are dutifully read, but I wonder if we realize what he is really saying. St. Paul's teaching goes all the way back to the book of Genesis, in which the writer observes that Abraham's was justified before God not by his righteousness, but by his relationship of faith. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is evidence of that truth for all people beyond any doubt. Jesus reached out to those who were pushed aside and isolated from the main line of Jewish people. He reached out to sinners and publicans, to those who were not accepted by others. He illustrated in His parables and in His miracles God's concern for the poor, the humble, the needy, the sick and the suffering. It was a Samaritan who gave help the man at the side of the road, and it was a publican that He called to be one of His disciples. These people were called by God to repent, as are we all, but no fault, no sin is too great to be forgiven by Him. He was indeed the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, and His mercy would know no bounds. This is Who Jesus is, the very embodiment of what the writer of Genesis said about Abraham.: He is the One Who bring all of us who are sinners into His Kingdom, not because of who we are or what we are like, but because He is merciful. It is through Grace that we are saved, or we are not saved at all!

The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers sets the stage for the birth of God Incarnate, reminding us of why He is born, what He came to do, Who He Is. It is for those who cannot save themselves that He came. Grasping onto Him, with trust in His promise to save us, we are indeed saved by our faith. We who are sinners, struggling to repent, we who are indeed unrighteous like Abraham, are nevertheless to be a part of His eternal Kingdom. Not only is Jesus the reason for the season, but He is our one, true and only hope for salvation and eternal life – the very embodiment of the Holy Forefathers who came before.

To Him be all honor and glory forever. Amen!

Fr. Elias

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