

The Shepherd

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FROM THE FATHERS

‘IF CHRIST IS GOD, as indeed He is, but took not human nature upon Him, then our state is as strangers to salvation. Let us, then, worship Him as God, and believe that He also was become man. It does not profit us to speak of the man without the Godhead, nor is there salvation in refusing to confess the manhood together with the Godhead. Let us confess the presence of the King and Physician; for Jesus the King, when about to become our Physician, girded Himself about with the apron of humanity, and He healed that which was sick.’

SAINT CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, C.315 - 386 A.D.

‘THE LORD’S POVERTY is my inheritance; and His weakness is my strength for “He being rich, became poor for your sakes, that through His poverty ye might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). He chose to lack for Himself, that He might abound for all. The sobs of that squalling infancy cleanse me, those tears wash away my sins. Therefore, Lord Jesus, I owe more to Thy wrongs because I was redeemed than I do to the works because I was created. It would be of no benefit to be born, if there had not been the benefit of being redeemed.’

SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN, 339 - 397 A.D.

‘A ROYAL VIRGIN of the house of David is chosen as the bearer of the Sacred Fruit, who had conceived her Divine and human Offspring in her soul, before she conceived Him in her body.’

SAINT LEO THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, + 461 A.D.

‘AS THE SON OF GOD by being born of a virgin showed that the dignity of virginity was pleasing unto Him, so also being now about to take flesh he chose to be born during the most peaceful period of time, teaching us also to seek after peace, and deigning to visit those who loved peace. There could be no greater sign of the peace at this time than this, that the whole world could be enrolled under one census.’

VENERABLE BEDE OF JARROW, 672 - 735 A.D.

‘WHATEVER THE ANGEL had told her, whatever she had learned from Zacharias and from Elizabeth, and from the shepherds, all these things she stored in her mind, and, comparing them one with another, the Mother of Wisdom discerns one harmony of truth in all: that He was truly God that was born of her.’

VENERABLE SIMEON THE TRANSLATOR, TENTH CENTURY.

‘LIKE A GOOD SHEPHERD, who leaves the ninety and nine sheep on the mountains and goes to seek the one that had gone astray, the Lord is not satisfied with the never-silent doxology of the numberless choirs of the Angels, but He comes to call back to His glorification that which was a little lower than the Angels, the race of man that had gone astray.’

‘THE WALL, which separated heaven from earth, is broken down; the weapon which barred the way to the Tree of life is disappeared! To man who had sinned his Creator comes, calling him into His embrace. In the words of the Apostle, the Holy Spirit cries out: “Be ye reconciled to God in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19). It is not you who have sinned who have come to God, but the Son of God, against Whom you sinned, has come to you! He calls all to Himself, He grants forgiveness to all who but thirst for it.’

SAINT JOHN OF SHANGHAI THE WONDERWORKER, 1896-1966 A.D.

THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST, THE GREAT MYSTERY OF PIETY

By Bishop Alexander of Buenos Aires

Introduction

IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND, there is no event greater and more joyful than the incarnation and coming of the Son of God into the world. It is an act of the endless love of God the Father, Who so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The incarnation of the Son of God from the Virgin Mary changed the world for the better in a radical way: It gave men a new way of thinking, ennobled their morals and directed world events along a new course. It brought men power to struggle against sin, reconciled men to God, brought about the adoption of men by the Father, and regenerated their whole nature. It poured a stream of divine life into the corrupted human organism and thereby brought eternal life to men. For these reasons, the incarnation of the Son of God proved to be at the very centre of world events, and chronology is reckoned relative to it – before and after the Nativity of Christ. The celebration of the Nativity of Christ became a most joyous festival of believing humanity.

The Event of the Nativity of Christ

Preceding the Nativity of Jesus Christ, there was a general expectation of the Saviour. The Jews expected His coming on the basis of prophecies, and all the prophecies relating to the coming of the Son of God had been fulfilled. For example, the Patriarch Jacob had foretold that the Saviour would come when the sceptre would depart from Judah (Gen 49:10). The Prophet Daniel had foretold that the Kingdom of the Messiah would begin at the seventieth week (490 years) after the issuance of a

command concerning the restoration of Jerusalem, during the era of a powerful pagan kingdom, which would be as strong as iron (Dan 9:24-27). And, indeed, at the end of Daniel's seventy weeks, Judæa fell under the dominion of the mighty Roman Empire, while the sceptre passed from Judah to Herod, an Idumæan by birth.

The pagans also, in misery from unbelief and a general dissipation of morals, expected a Deliverer with impatience. Men, having fallen away from God, began to deify earthly good things, wealth and worldly glory. The Son of God rejected these worthless idols as the fruit of sin and human passions, and was pleased to come into the world under the most modest conditions

Two Evangelists describe the events of the Nativity: the Apostles Matthew (of the twelve) and Luke (of the seventy disciples). Since the Evangelist Matthew wrote his Gospel for the Hebrews, he set himself the aim of proving that the Messiah descended from the forefathers Abraham and King David, as had been foretold by the prophets. Therefore, the Evangelist Matthew begins his narrative of the Nativity of Christ with a genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17).

Knowing that Jesus was not the son of Joseph, the Evangelist does not say that Joseph begat [fathered] Jesus, but says that Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus, Who is called Christ. But why, then, does he adduce Joseph's genealogy and not Mary's? The Hebrews did not have the custom of reckoning genealogies according to the female line, but their Law commanded a man to take a wife without fail from the tribe to which he belonged. Therefore, the Evangelist, not deviating from custom, adduces Joseph's genealogy, to show that Mary, Joseph's wife, and consequently also Jesus, descend from the same tribe of Judah and clan of David.

The most holy Virgin, informed by the Archangel Gabriel that she had been chosen to become the mother of the Messiah, set out for a meeting with Elizabeth, being only the espoused bride of Joseph. Almost three months had already passed since the good tidings of the angel. Joseph, who had not been initiated into this mystery, noticed her condition; her outward

appearance gave him cause to consider unfaithfulness. He could have publicly denounced her and subjected her to the severe punishment established by the Law of Moses, but, in accordance with his goodness, he did not want to resort to such a drastic measure. After long vacillations, he decided to put his bride away secretly, without making any publicity, having delivered to her a bill of divorcement.

But an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and declared that the bride espoused to him would give birth from the Holy Spirit; therefore he advised Joseph: 'Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife.' And he was further instructed to name the Son born of her Jesus (Ieshua), that is, Saviour, since He would save His people from their sins. Joseph recognized this dream as inspiration from on high and obeyed it, taking Mary as his wife, but knew her not, that is, he lived with her not as a husband with a wife, but as a brother with a sister (or, judging from the enormous difference in years, rather as a father with a daughter).

In narrating this, the Evangelist adds for himself: 'Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel' (Es. 7:14). The name 'Emmanuel' means "God with us." Here, Esaias is not calling the One born of the Virgin Emmanuel: he is saying that men will call him such. Thus, this is not the proper name of the One born of the Virgin, but only a prophetic indication that God will be in His person.

The holy Evangelist Luke notes that the time of the Nativity of Christ coincided with a census of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire. This census was carried out in accordance with the command of Cæsar Augustus, that is, the Roman Emperor Octavian, who had received the title Augustus ("sacred") from the Roman Senate. The edict on the census came out in the 746th year from the founding of Rome, but in Judæa the census began approximately in the 750th year, during the final years of the reign of Herod, who was surnamed the Great.

The Hebrews reckoned their genealogies according to tribes and clans. This custom was so strong that, having learned of the command of Augustus, they went to be registered each to the

town of his clan. Joseph and the Virgin Mary descended, as is well known, from the clan of David. Therefore, they went to set out for Bethlehem, called the city of David because David was born there. Thus, by God's Providence, the ancient prophesy of the Prophet Micah was fulfilled, that Christ would be born precisely in Bethlehem: 'But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting' (Mic. 5:2, Matt. 2:6).

According to Roman laws, women were subject to the universal census equally with men. Therefore, Joseph went to Bethlehem not alone, but with the Most Holy Virgin. An unexpected journey to his native Bethlehem, a journey so close to the delivery of the Infant, must have convinced Joseph that Cæsar's decree was providential, directing events for the Son of Mary to be born precisely where the Messiah-Saviour ought to be born.

After an exhausting journey, the elderly Joseph and the Virgin Mary arrived in Bethlehem. There was no room in the inn for the mother of the Saviour of the world, and she, with her companion, was forced to lodge in a cave, where livestock were driven from pasture during bad weather. Here, during a winter night, under the most wretched conditions, the Saviour of the world - Christ - was born.

Having borne a Son, the Most Holy Virgin herself swaddled Him and laid Him in a manger. In these brief words, the Evangelist informs us that the Mother of God gave birth painlessly. The Evangelist's expression, brought forth her firstborn son, causes unbelievers to say that, after Jesus the first-born, the Most Holy Virgin had other children, since the Evangelists mention the 'brethren' of Christ (Simon, Joses, Judas and James).

However, according to the Law of Moses (Ex. 13:2), every infant of the male sex that opened the womb was called the first-born, even if he were the last. The so-called 'brethren' of Jesus in the Gospels are not His own brothers, but only relatives, the children of the aged Joseph by his first wife, Salome, and also the children of Mary the wife of Cleophas (whom the Evangelist

John calls his mother's sister). In any case, they all were much older than Christ and therefore could not in any way be the children of the Virgin Mary.

Jesus Christ was born at night, when everyone in Bethlehem and its environs was sleeping. Only the shepherds, who were watching over the flock entrusted to them, were not sleeping. Unto these modest men, who laboured and were heavy laden, an angel appeared with the joyous tidings of the birth of the Saviour of the world.

The resplendent light surrounding the angel amidst the nocturnal darkness frightened the shepherds. But the angel at once calmed them, saying: 'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.' By these words, the angel gave them to understand the true purpose of the Messiah, Who had come not for the Jews alone, but for all people, for joy would be to all people who would accept Him as the Saviour. The angel explained to the shepherds that they would find Christ, the Lord Who had been born, in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Why did an angel not announce the birth of Christ to the Jewish elders, to the scribes and the Pharisees, calling them also to worship the Divine Infant? Because these blind leaders of the blind had ceased to understand the true meaning of the prophecies concerning the Messiah and, on account of their exclusiveness and haughtiness, they imagined that the Deliverer would appear in the full splendour of a majestic conqueror-king, to subjugate the whole world. The modest preacher of peace and love toward one's enemies was unacceptable to them.

The shepherds did not doubt that the angel had been sent to them from God, and therefore they were counted worthy to hear the triumphant heavenly hymn: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.' The angels glorify God, Who had sent the Saviour to men, for from that time, the peace of the conscience has been restored and the enmity between heaven and earth, which arose as a consequence of sin, has been eliminated.

The angels withdrew, while the shepherds hastily set out for

Bethlehem; they found the Infant lying in a manger and were the first to worship Him. They told Mary and Joseph about the event that had brought them to the cradle of Christ; they told the same to others also, and all that heard their story were astonished. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart, i.e., she remembered all that she had heard. The Evangelist Luke, who describes many events in the life of the Virgin, such as the Annunciation and the details of the birth of Christ (Luke, Ch. 2), evidently wrote from her words. On the eighth day after his birth, the Infant was circumscribed as prescribed by the Law of Moses.

The Adoration of the Magi

A further Gospel story, concerning the adoration of the Magi (Matt., Ch. 2), is very edifying. This is, first of all, a story about the 'epiphany' or manifestation of Christ to the pagans.

Joseph and the Most Holy Mother of God with the Infant Jesus were still in Bethlehem when Magi came to Jerusalem from a distant land to the east (Persia or Babylon). Learned men, engaged in observing and studying the stars, were called Magi or wise men. At that time, men believed that, at the birth of a great man, a new star appears in the sky.

Many pagans, within the confines of Persia, had learned from the dispersed Jews of the coming of the Messiah, the Great King of Israel. From the Jews, they could even have learned the following prophecy of Balaam relating to the Messiah: 'I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab' (Num. 24:17). ('Moab' is a personification of the enemies of the Messiah.)

The Persian Magi thus expected that, when the promised King would be born, a new star would appear in the sky. The prophecy of Balaam spoke of a star in the spiritual sense; nevertheless, the Lord, in His mercy, to bring the pagans to faith, gave a sign in the sky in the form of the appearance of an extraordinary star. Having seen it, the Magi understood that the expected King had been born.

After a protracted and long journey, they finally reached

Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish kingdom, and began to ask: 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.' These words from such conspicuous strangers, stirred up many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, including King Herod, to whom the arrival of the exotic eastern scholars was immediately reported.

From the first days of his accession, Herod's throne had been shaky. The people hated him as a usurper of the Davidic throne and a tyrant, and they abhorred him as a pagan. The last years of Herod's life were complicated still more by personal adversities and bloody reprisals. He became extremely suspicious, and for the least cause executed enemies both real and imagined. Thus perished several of Herod's children and even his wife, whom earlier he had loved ardently. Ill and decrepit, Herod now resided in his new palace in Sion. Having heard of a King Who had been born, he became particularly agitated. Vulnerable in his old age, he feared that his rule would be overthrown and handed over to the new-born King.

In order to clear up just who this new pretender to the throne was, Herod gathered all the priests and scribes – men that knew the books of Sacred Scripture well – and he inquired of them where Christ should be born. They answered: 'In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet Micah'. Then Herod privately summoned the Magi, found out from them the time of the appearance of the star, and sent them on to Bethlehem. Feigning piety, the cunning Herod said to them: 'Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.' In fact, Herod was going to use their report to put the Infant to death.

The Magi listened to King Herod without suspecting anything, and went to Bethlehem. There again that star appeared, which they had seen before in the east. Moving across the sky, it went before them, indicating the way. In Bethlehem, the star stopped over that spot where the Infant Jesus was, Who had been born.

The Magi went into the house and saw the Infant Jesus with His mother. They bowed down to the ground before Him and presented to Him their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh (a

precious aromatic oil). In the gifts of the Magi, one may see the following symbolic significance. They brought gold to Him, as to a King (as tribute or taxes); frankincense, as to God (incense is used at divine services); and myrrh, as to a Man Who must die (the dead were anointed with oils mixed with aromatic myrrh).

Having worshipped the King awaited by all, the Magi would have returned to Jerusalem and to King Herod. However, an angel appeared to them in a dream, revealing Herod's perfidious designs, and commanded them to return to their own country by another way, without passing through Jerusalem. A tradition has preserved the names of the Magi, who afterwards became Christians: Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar.

Thus, the first to worship the Saviour Who had been born were shepherds, nature's true children, who could open up before Him only the treasure of their hearts, full of simplicity, faith and humility. Significantly later came the Magi from the East, imbued with erudite wisdom, who laid down gold, frankincense and myrrh, together with reverent joy, before the Divine Infant. They had had to make a long journey to reach Judæa, and even from Jerusalem, they were not immediately able to find the birthplace of the King of the Jews.

Does this not indicate that both simplicity of heart and profound, conscientious erudition lead equally to Christ? But the first way is more direct, short and sure than the second. The shepherds were guided directly by angels, while the Magi were 'taught' by an unreasoning star, and through Herod by the scribes and the Jewish elders. Not without difficulties and dangers did they attain their desired goal, and they did not hear the heavenly harmony that sounded over the earth – 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.'

The Son of God and the Son of Man

'Great is the mystery of godliness [piety]: God was manifest in the flesh' (1 Tim. 3:16). These words of the holy Apostle testify that the miracle of the incarnation of the Son of God exceeds the understanding of our limited mind. Indeed, we can believe, but cannot explain, the event that took place two thousand years ago in Bethlehem: that, in the one Person of Jesus Christ, two natures so different and contrary in essence were joined together: the

super-terrestrial, eternal and infinite Divine nature with the material, limited and feeble human nature.

Nonetheless, the Gospels and the apostolic epistles reveal to us, to the extent of our abilities, certain aspects of the miracle of the incarnation of the Son of God. Saint John the Theologian, at the very beginning of his Gospel, elevates our thought to the pre-eternal existence of the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, Whom he calls the Word, saying: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:1-3, 14).

The Son of God's name, the Word, indicates that one must not understand His birth from the Father in the sense of an ordinary birth: it occurred passionlessly and without separation. The Son of God is born from the Father like a word is born from a thought. A thought and a word are distinct from one another, and at the same time inseparable. There is no word without a thought, and a thought is without fail expressed in a word.

The subsequent apostolic preaching reveals all the more fully the truth of Christ's Divine-human nature: He is the only begotten (the only) Son of God, Who was begotten of the Father before all ages, i.e., He is eternal, as God the Father is also eternal. The Son of God has the same Divine nature that God the Father has, and is therefore omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is the Creator of the visible and invisible worlds, and of us men.

In a word, He, being the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, is true and perfect God. Faith in Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God represents the stronghold or rock upon which the Church is established, according to the word of the Lord: 'Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' (Matt. 16:18).

Being perfect God, Christ the Saviour is at the same time also perfect Man. He had a human body and soul with all its properties – reason, will and senses. As a man, He was born of the Virgin Mary. As the Son of Mary, He obeyed her and Joseph. As a man, He was baptized in the Jordan and went around the towns and villages with His salvific preaching. As a man, He

experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue; He had a need for sleep and rest; He endured painful sensations and physical sufferings. Living the physical life inherent to a man, the Lord also lived a spiritual life as a man. He strengthened His spiritual powers by fasting and by prayer. He experienced human feelings - joy, wrath, sorrow; He shed tears. In this way, the Lord Jesus Christ, having taken on our human nature, was in all things like unto us, except for sin.

Having two natures, Jesus Christ also had two free wills. Jesus Christ's rational, conscious, human will invariably subordinates its human aspirations and desires to His Divine will. But the human will in Christ is clearly visible during His difficult experiences in the Garden of Gethsemane: 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt' (Matt. 26:39).

Thus, by His obedience to God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ corrected our disobedience and taught us to put God's will above our own desires.

The Purpose of the Incarnation of the Son of God

The parable of the lost sheep speaks graphically and vividly of the purpose of the coming of the Son of God into the world. The good shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep, by which is meant the angelic world, and sets out for the mountains in order to seek out his lost sheep - the human race perishing in sins. The shepherd's great love for the perishing sheep is evident not only in the fact that he solicitously seeks it, but especially in the fact that after finding it, he takes it upon his shoulders and carries it back.

In other words, God, by His power, returns to man the innocence, holiness and blessedness lost by him; having united Himself with our human nature, the Son of God, according to the word of the Prophet, 'hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows' (Es.53:4).

Christ became man not only to teach us the true way and to show us a good example. He became man in order to unite us with Himself, to join our feeble, diseased human nature to His Divinity. The Nativity of Christ testifies to the fact that we attain the ultimate aim of our life not only by faith and by striving for

good, but chiefly by the regenerating power of the incarnate Son of God, with Whom we are united.

Delving deeply into the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, we see that it is closely bound up with the mystery of Holy Communion and with the Church, which, according to apostolic teaching, is the mystical Body of Christ. In the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, a man is joined to the Divine-human nature of Christ; he unites with Him and in this union is wholly transfigured. At the same time, in Holy Communion, a Christian unites also with other members of the Church – and thus the mystical Body of Christ grows.

Heterodox Christians who do not believe in Holy Communion understand union with Christ in an allegorical, metaphorical sense, or in the sense of only a spiritual communion with Him. But for spiritual communion, the incarnation of the Son of God is superfluous. After all, even before the Nativity of Christ, the prophets and the righteous were counted worthy of grace-filled communion with God.

One must understand that man is ill not only spiritually, but also physically: all of human nature has been harmed by sin. It is essential, therefore, to heal the whole man, not only his spiritual part. To remove any doubt in the necessity for total communion with Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His discourse on the Bread of Life, speaks thus: 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day...He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him' (John 6:53-54, 56).

Later, Christ uses the metaphor of the grapevine to explain to His disciples that it is precisely in close union with Him that man receives the strength essential for spiritual development and perfection: 'As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing' (John 15:4-5).

Some holy Fathers have justly likened Holy Communion to the mystical tree of life, from which our primogenitors ate in

Eden, and which afterwards St. John the Theologian saw in Paradise (Gen. 2:9, Rev. 2:7, 22:2). In Holy Communion, a Christian is joined to the immortal life of the God-Man.

Thus, the purpose of the incarnation of the Son of God lies in the spiritual and physical regeneration of man. Spiritual renewal is accomplished throughout the course of a Christian's whole life. But the renewal of his physical nature is completed on the day of the general resurrection of the dead, when the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:43).



THE VENERATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

BY PROTOPRESBYTER MICHAEL POLSKY

Continuation from the previous issue

THE LIFE STORY OF THE ALL-HOLY VIRGIN MARY FROM THE ANNUNCIATION TO THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

1. The Annunciation

WHY WAS IT THAT FOR HIS INCARNATION God chose precisely the Virgin Mary from Nazareth? Like is drawn to like. The Son of God, by the will of God the Father and the action of the Holy Spirit, could only take up His abode in such a Virgin, and could only receive human nature from such a human being, who was worthy thereof, and who according to the qualities of her soul was fitted to receive God in herself.

From the account of the Annunciation to the All-holy Virgin it is clear that it was just such a Virgin that God sought, and that He found her in Mary.

With regard to the purposes of the incarnation of God, Mary was the best of all women on earth ('Blessed art thou among women') and among all the tribes and generations of mankind ('All generations shall call her blessed').

That she might receive God in herself and might minister at the 'mystery of piety,' which is the appearance in the world of 'God in the flesh' (1 Tim. 3:16), Mary was already sufficiently prepared on the day of the Annunciation. God saves man, but not without man. He seeks him who will receive Him. And God sought in the world for a person through whom He might come amongst men.

- God sought a 'ladder' which would unite heaven with earth (Genesis 28:12).
- God sought a 'thorn bush' which would not be burned by the presence of His Divinity (Exodus 3:2).
- God sought an 'ark' – not one in which to place the tablets of the Law, but for the Word Incarnate Himself (Genesis 10:5).
- He sought a 'golden vessel' for the manna, the Bread That came down from Heaven, for His Son (Heb. 9:4; John 6:33).
- He sought a 'sanctuary' and 'tabernacle', in which He might 'take up His abode among men' (Exodus 25:8).

The time came for the incarnation of God, and the ancient 'figures for the time then present' (Heb. 9:9) were realised in the tabernacle and ladder with a soul; in the bush, and ark and vessel which had a soul – in the Virgin. For a long time, through many generations the faith was fostered, and at the last in Mary it achieved its highest development and perfection, its final limit and fulfilment. She remembered the ninety-year-old Sarah, who bore a son, when her husband was a hundred years old. She recalled:

- Sarah had wrongfully doubted the fulfilment of God's promise: 'is anything too hard for the Lord?' (Genesis 18:14).
- The childless Rebecca received twins of God in no other way save by the fervent prayer of her husband (Gen. 25:21).
- The grief-stricken Rachel had children only by God's mercy (Genesis 30:22).

- The mother of Sampson conceived him only after the annunciation from the Lord's Angel (Judges 13:2-3).
- Hannah (Anna) gave birth to Samuel after many afflictions, prayers and warm tears, in accordance with the prophecy of the High Priest Eli (1 Kings 1:2-17).
- Her kinswoman, Elizabeth, who had been called barren, conceived John the Baptist in her old age (Luke 1:36).

But all these holy women had husbands, and God's great help was manifested through natural human powers. For this reason, at the Angel's greeting, Mary posed the question: 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?' And then she makes a last effort of faith and the most exalted that is possible to man: that God overcomes the laws of nature and does whatsoever He wills. She believes, that without a husband, by the 'power of the Most High', she will have a Son.

The faith of the All-holy Virgin was marked by perfect selflessness and complete forgetfulness of self. To be pregnant in her condition as a virgin betrothed to an elder for the very purpose of guarding her virginity,¹ this entailed grieving the holy elder Joseph; to appear to have changed her calling; to subject herself to disgrace and dishonour before men, and even to a death sentence according to the law. But the power of her faith was so strong that such considerations did not restrain her, even though the danger was later to be manifest in actuality when the godly elder desired to put her away, surrendering her

¹ That the All-holy Virgin remained unwedded [i.e. a virgin] forever is perfectly apparent from her question: 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?' This question would have been misplaced, if it was generally possible that she would enter into a marriage with Joseph. She was betrothed to the elder Joseph and already destined to perpetual virginity. And Mary, of course, knew why she had been given over to the Temple, that she had been dedicated to God by her parents and had been born after they had given a vow regarding her dedication to God. And after the Nativity of her Son, Mary remained a virgin in the strength of that dedication of hers from infancy, and of her betrothal to the husband-guardian of her virginity. In Scripture the Virgin Mary is everywhere called 'the Mother of Jesus', 'His Mother' (John 19:25; Acts 1:14) and nobody else's mother. There was another Mary, 'the mother of James the Less and Josias' (Mark 15:40; Luke 24: 10), who are called His brethren (Mark 6:3) because of the kinship of the two mothers. This was as cousins apparently; 'the sister of His mother, Maria the wife of Cleopas' (John 19:25) was the mother of the second cousins of Jesus who had lived with Him in Nazareth.

to the will of God and to personal responsibility for her action (Matthew 1:19). Her trust in God was without limit, and from this trust there was born humility and submission to God along with a courage and a fearlessness, which empowered her for this greatest of struggles.

The Angel testified to the Virgin: 'Thou hast found grace with God' (Luke 1:30). Before the Angel's greeting, throughout the course of her young life, she had found God's mercy. In what way? How? Evidently, through faith, obedience and humility. By these virtues—which are the very essence of the holy nature common to all mankind and are the spiritual strength of the woman – with which, in her battle with the devil, she, by the dispensation of God, struck him, in his spirit of faithlessness, disobedience and pride, on the head.

By the power of these virtues, even the 'seed of the woman', Jesus Christ, conquered the devil. He, Who was to appear among men as an example of humility, as the path to salvation – 'I am meek and lowly of heart' (Matt. 11:29) – and by a humility which was precisely that of a human nature and not only of the Divine, He was to conquer the devil (Matt. 4:1-10).

He had to receive that human nature, soul and body, from the most humble handmaiden of the Lord. Christ, 'the seed of the woman' (Genesis 3:15), so that He might crush the serpent in the head, had to be authentically the seed of the woman, the bearer of a true humility taken from her common human nature. It was precisely for this reason that 'He looked upon the lowliness of His handmaiden' and 'exalted her of low degree' (Luke 1:48, 52).

Human nature in her was actually prepared for the saving Divine act by humility, the moral quality which is most important for the raising up again of humanity which had fallen through pride. The Lord says: 'Upon him will I look, on him that is humble and broken of heart, and trembleth at My words' (Es. 66:2). And He looked upon her and made her a new throne of the Divinity, because He Himself said of His dwelling-place: 'I dwell in the high heaven and the holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit' (Es. 57:15).

Thus, the deeds and words of God closely correspond and are true to each other, and the All-holy Virgin Mary with the

particular qualities of her character was distinctly and clearly indicated in the Sacred Scriptures in the strength of those qualities, which were not in her circumstantially, nor accidentally, nor as being commonly found among all virgins, with all their inadequacies, but that she might participate in the work of the salvation of mankind.

That which Eve threw off course and marred in her soul, Mary corrected, and raised up within herself and was made 'amenable' to the Lord Himself; she responded to God's purposes, she prepared the human nature within her to offer it as a gift to God for His work of salvation. All that could be done by human efforts for her personal sanctity Mary did, leaving to the Divine energies only the salvation of her nature unto life eternal, which salvation was worked in Christ for all mankind.

In her humanity was prepared, made ready for the reception of God, given in her all that it could be given: all the faith, all the humility, all the love towards God, all its perfection was offered to God as a gift. More than this it could not offer. After this there could only be the descent of the Divinity upon a soil tilled and made ready. And God perceived on the ground the beauty of man, and that in her, and so in her He found for Himself a place, where He might unite the earthly and the heavenly. The golden vessel for the heavenly manna was readied, and the tabernacle, in which God would dwell, was set up, the ark was made for the Word of God, the new tablets.

The Virgin Mary, it is she who is the objective of the Old Testament Church. If the race of man was prepared to receive the Saviour, for the coming of God upon earth, then it was prepared in her, that it might offer her. She is the one through whom it was possible to receive Christ on earth. All the righteousness of the Old Testament Church was concentrated in her. She is the most exalted of all and the holiest that the Old Covenant could achieve in awaiting the Messiah.

The race of man had to give of itself the New Eve, the new mother of mankind, one being saved and faithful, in place of one unbelieving and sinning. Thus the All-holy Virgin is the culmination and embodiment of all that had gone before in the Old Testament Church.

To be continued in the next issue.

POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

'I AM WRITING to ask your advice on the following matter. I struggle to discuss the truths of Orthodoxy with people outside of church because I fear their negative or confrontational reactions, or worse - turning them away from Orthodoxy. On the other hand, it seems selfish not to be able to adequately outline main concepts of our faith with people who show an interest in talking about it, as it seems like this is a basic Christian's duty. Your thoughts on this would be very helpful!'

B.G., London

YOUR LETTER heartened me because, of course, it is an act of Christian love to try to share our Faith with others. We believe that it is the true Faith, and that, as St Cyprian said, only could people be saved outside the Church if there were people saved outside the Ark of Noah. Of course, none were. So, we cannot simply live our Orthodox lives as if Orthodoxy were some sort of private possession, and not hope, pray and work to share it with our neighbours. If we do, we are not being true to our Church.

However, as you realize there are difficulties. The greatest of these, of course, is ourselves. St Seraphim of Sarov said: 'Acquire the Spirit of peace and thousands around you will be saved.' Few of us are likely to achieve such heights, but that does not give us an excuse to make no effort to do so. So, the first requirement is our own correction of life.

Our first missionary witness should not be so much what we say, but what we are. Our Saviour Himself in speaking of fulfilling the commandments, says 'whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:19). And notice He places 'doing' before teaching. Most of us, of course, give up at the doing, and so we fail both ourselves and those around us.

Secondly, and these are only pointers, I do not have the ability to give you a full and comprehensive answer, we must pray that we be guided to speak aright, because without God's help we can achieve nothing.

Then, of course, you have to learn about your Faith so that you have the ability to answer, so spiritual reading is necessary. So many Orthodox today seem to rely on knowing one or two folk customs, but absolutely nothing about the teaching of the Church and even hold views contrary to that teaching.

And so that this does not go on too long, lastly when you answer questions, I would suggest that you do so as briefly as possible and as 'lightly' as possible. People resent being preached at or being pinned down by a bore. If you say something which is true and edifying and it touches their heart, then they will come back for more.

I remember the story of a man who was a Uniat, who spoke to an elderly Russian priestmonk, and in the course of the conversation this man confessed he was a Uniat. The old priestmonk did not condemn the deception of Uniatism or give him a lecture on the errors of Rome, but simply said: 'Better to be something real!' That one comment struck home in the heart of that man, and he could not shake it off, subsequently he was baptised an Orthodox Christian. Hope this helps.



THE COMING MONTH

THE WHOLE MONTH of December is spent either preparing for the feast of the **Saviour's Nativity** in Bethlehem through the fast, which lasts up to and including Christmas Eve, or celebrating the feast itself which, in the Orthodox practice, lasts not twelve but seven days.

On the two Sundays before the feast day itself, we have commemorations of the **Old Testament Righteous Ones**, and on the second of these, during the Divine Liturgy, the reading of the Gospel is St Matthew 1:1-25, the genealogy of the Saviour according to the flesh.

On the Sunday after the feast, we celebrate the **Kinsmen of our Saviour**: the Prophet King and Psalmist David who was

His ancestor, His ostensible father, Joseph the Betrothed of the Mother of God, and Joseph's son, the Holy Apostle James, who, though not one of the Twelve, was the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and who is called by the Orthodox, the Brother of God. These two are grafted in to His family tree with St David, as we also, the Orthodox Christians, are, so that now we comprise the Chosen People, the New Israel, the true descendants of all those righteous ones of the blessed Israel of old, whom we celebrated before the feast.

Among the Saints celebrated in December, we have the great Wonderworkers, **St Nicolas of Myra** of Lycia (6th/19th) and **St Spiridon of Tremithus** (12th/25th), whose feasts we keep with a Vigil. Also we have:

The **Holy New Hieromartyr Gavriilo** (Gabriel), Patriarch of Serbia (13th/26th), who lived in the seventeenth century, when Serbia was under Turkish rule. He attended the Synod of Moscow in 1655, and for this he came under political suspicion and was thought to be plotting with the Russians against the Ottomans. Later he offended the Jewish community, who claimed that he had converted some of their number, and to make their accusations more effective, they suggested instead that he had converted Moslems to Christianity and baptised them. He was arrested and sentenced to forcible conversion to Islam. This he refused to do, remaining faithful to Christ. He was imprisoned for a short time and finally executed by being hanged in Prussa in 1659 A.D., thus gaining a double crown as a faithful hierarch and as a holy martyr.

The **Venerable Winebald of Heidenheim** (18th/31st) lived in the eighth century and was probably from the West Country. He and his father and brother made a pilgrimage to Rome, where eventually Winebald spent seven years studying before returning to England to serve the Church in this country. After some time, he made a second pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostles, where he met with his fellow-countryman, the future Hieromartyr, Boniface of Crediton. The latter persuaded him to go with him to Germany and serve the mission there. St Boniface subsequently ordained Winebald a priest, entrusting seven mission parishes to him. In the meantime, his brother, St Willibald, had also settled in Germany and had been consecrated as Bishop of Eichstadt. He persuaded Winebald to

found a monastery at Heidenheim. In the event, this was established as a double monastery, with our saint ruling over the men's community, and his sister, St Walberga, over the separate sisterhood. In these synodias, the rule of St Benedict was observed. So greatly did St Winebald revere the great St Benedict that he desired to end his days at Monte Cassino near his tomb. He obtained a blessing from the fathers there to do so, but his brother, the Bishop, prevailed upon to stay at Heidenheim for the benefit of his monastic community and flock. There he died on 18th December, A.D. 761, and sixteen years later, on 24th September, his brother presided over the ceremony of the uncovering of his incorrupt relics, which were enshrined within the monastic church.



*NEWS from the Richmond
Diocese of the Church of the
Genuine Orthodox Christians
of Greece*

CHRISMATIONS

On Sunday 28th October/9th November, **Subdeacon Seraphim Cameron** and his wife **Deborah** of Doagh, County Antrim were received by confession and Holy Chrismation into the Church of the GOC. The mysticon was celebrated by **Priestmonk Sabbas** before the Divine Liturgy. Subdeacon Seraphim served at the Divine Liturgy at which he and his wife received the Holy Mysteries. The newly-chrismated were formerly members of the ROCA (MP) having left that body due to its involvement in the ecumenical movement. May God grant them to stay firm in their confession of faith and to be an example to others of like mind.

NEW CATECHUMEN

On the same Sunday, at the end of the Divine Liturgy, **Dylan Sommer** of Bracknell, a former Anglican, made his vows as a catechumen, receiving the name Demetrius after the Great-Martyr Demetrius of Thessalonika (26th October/8th November). May Demetrius persevere to receive the grace of Holy Baptism.

VISITORS TO THE BROTHERHOOD

On Thursday 13th November, Protopresbyter **Nenad Popovic** of St. Lazar's Church, Birmingham (Serbian Patriarchate) visited the Brotherhood accompanied by his church warden. The visitors prayed at the Shrine of Saint Edward and Fr. Nenad showed a lively interest in the pre-schism saints of Western Europe and hopes to visit us again.

On Friday 14th November **Bishop Seraphim of Sozopol**, accompanied by **Alexander Panayotov**, arrived in the UK and was met at the airport by **Presbytera Marina Popova** and her daughter **Anna**. Presbytera took the visitors to St Albans Cathedral where they were kindly presented with a relic of Saint Alban to venerate. After a meal at the Popov's home the bishop was taken to stay at the Brotherhood, while Alexander stayed at the home of **Plamen Monovski**.

On Saturday morning, Bishop Seraphim and Alexander were taken by **Priest Borislav Popov** and Presbytera to Oxford accompanied by a group of eight pilgrims to visit Christ Church Cathedral. They were given an in-depth tour of the Church and Shrine of St Frideswide, the Patroness of Oxford. The tour guide, **Miranda Hockliffe**, was especially helpful and informative. There is a large icon of Saint Frideswide at the Shrine, painted by **Anastasia Osmolovskaya**.

After this, the pilgrims travelled to the Holy Well of St. Frideswide at Binsey next to the Saxon church of St. Margaret's. The pilgrims read the canon to St. Frideswide, after which they had lunch before going to the home of Plamen Monovski in Camberley where a Question and Answer session was held by Bishop Seraphim. The bishop then returned to Brookwood for Vespers.

On Sunday 3rd/ 16th November Bishop Seraphim served the Divine Liturgy assisted by **Priest Gabriel Lawani, Priest Borislav Popov, Priestmonk Sabbas, Priest Evangelos Liassi and Deacon Ioan Turcu**. The bishop preached on the Gospel for the Sunday (the Rich Man and Lazarus), and at the end of the Liturgy the clergy distributed icon cards of the Martyrs of Batak which the Bishop had donated for the faithful. After the Parish Breakfast there was a Question and Answer session in the church. On Monday morning, Bishop Seraphim was taken to Stansted Airport by Priest Borislav Popov.

GARDENING VOLUNTEERS

On Saturday 25th October the **Saint Tryphon Gardening Group** met and spent a day tidying the garden with their usual care and fervour. On Monday 3rd November, **Mark Slater, John Crask and Christian Radev** spent a day preparing and building a new compost heap. We are grateful to all these volunteers for their help and support.

AFRICAN MISSIONS

Many parishioners have monthly standing orders to various humanitarian charities. Please consider setting up a regular donation to help our less materially privileged Orthodox brothers and sisters in Africa – even as little as £5 a month can make a difference. A regular donation can be set up via the link to CAF Bank on our website: <https://saintedwardbrotherhood.org/donate>

Practical Tip

LET US TRY to at least make one small step. Instead of constantly remembering wrongs, and those whom we presume have wronged us, with bitterness and anger, let us rather remember the wrongs we have done and the people that we have hurt and ask their forgiveness.

