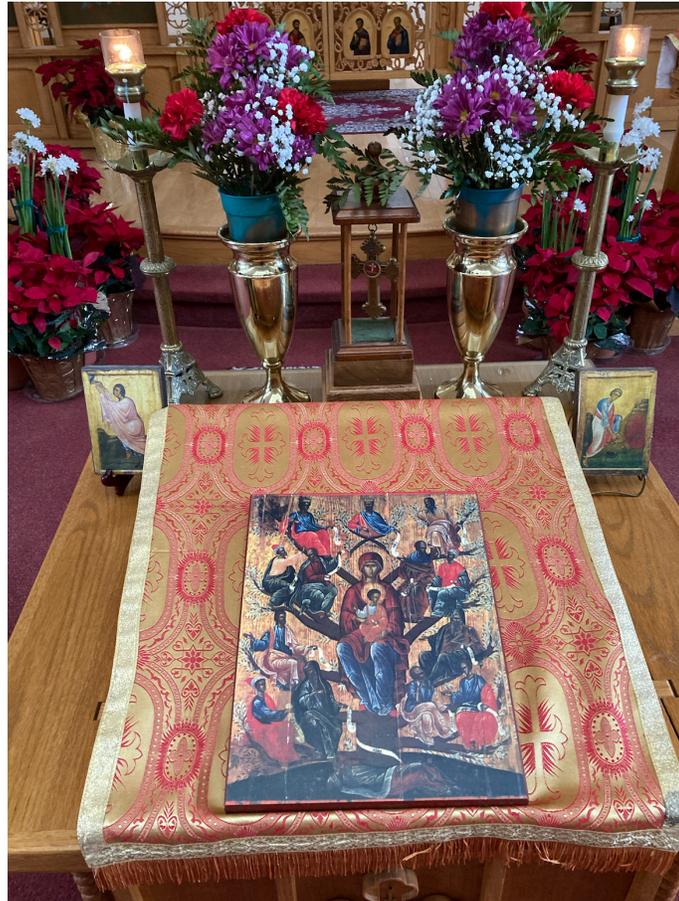


Notes from the Sermon on Sunday, December 18, 2022:

The Sunday of the Holy Fathers:

Believing or Belonging



This is the last Sunday before Christmas - we lit all of our Advent candles and considered the lives of the Holy Fathers (and Mothers) who came before Christ. We heard the stories of Abraham, Moses, and others from the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40) and considered many of them again – from Abraham to Joseph – as mentioned in the first chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel.

It was suggested that for many people today it is common either to believe in a spiritual reality, but not belong to a church or religious community; or to be identify oneself as belonging to a particular religious community (especially along ethnic lines such as Russian, Ukrainian, Greek, Armenian, etc), but in fact, not to be particularly active in attending the liturgical services of the Churches.

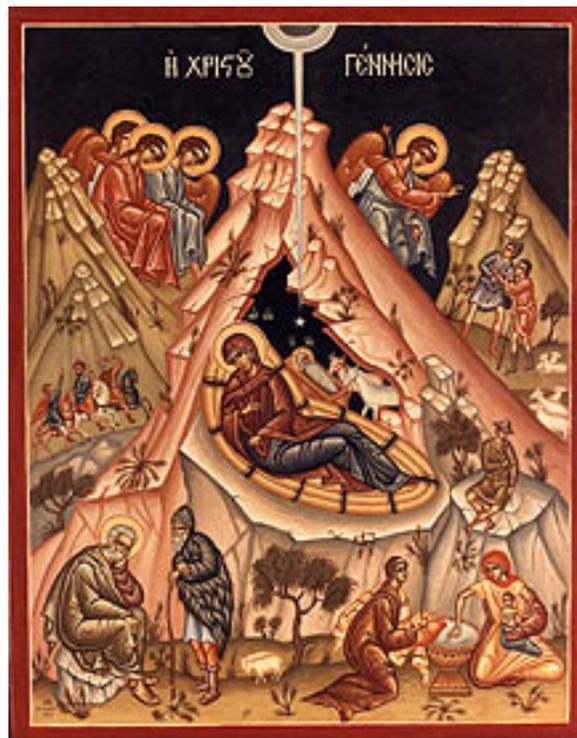
On this Sunday, it was important to emphasize that in relation to those fathers and mothers who came before Christ we identify ourselves as desiring both to believe in the same God and

belong to the same community of faithful searchers. The last line of today's Epistle affirmed that we are indeed connected to their search and we will hope to eventually arrive at the same place together:

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us (Heb. 11:39-40).

Anticipating the Christmas icon, we considered the ways that the characters in the Gospel accounts (both from Mathew and Luke) were incorporated into the story of Jesus' birth, being reminded of the following text from the Vespers of Christmas Eve:

What shall we offer You, O Christ,
Who for our sakes have appeared on earth as a man?
Every creature made by You offers You thanks:
the Angels offer a hymn; the heavens, a star;
the Wise Men, gifts; the shepherds, their wonder;
the earth, its cave; the wilderness, a manger,
and we offer You a virgin Mother!//
O Pre-eternal God, have mercy on us!



Everything – whether the elements of creation like the heavens, the earth, and the wilderness or the Angels, Wisemen, Shepherds, humanity and the Virgin Mary – learned about,

participated in, and celebrated the presence of Jesus by being and offering what they were created to do. In realizing this, they were brought together with one another.

CONCLUSION: This Sunday before Christmas celebrates the desires and paths of the Holy Fathers and Mothers in their search for God. It anticipates the participation on Christmas Day of everything made by [Christ] offering Him thanks in the ways most appropriate to them.

May our journey towards believing unite us with them as those who belong together.