



SUNDAY, JANUARY 7, 2018

**THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: THE NATIVITY OF OUR
LORD GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST**

DIVINE LITURGY OF SAINT BASIL THE GREAT

INTROIT OF THE LITTLE ENTRANCE:

Out of the womb, before the morning star, have I begotten Thee! The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind. Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

NATIVITY TROPARION - TONE FOUR:

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, has shone to the world the Light of Wisdom. For by it, those who worshiped the stars were taught by a star to adore Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee the Orient from on high. O Lord, glory to Thee!

NATIVITY KONTAKION - TONE THREE:

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One! Angels, with shepherds, glorify Him! The wise men journey with the star! Since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child.

INSTEAD OF "HOLY GOD...":

As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Alleluia!

INSTEAD OF "IT IS TRULY MEET...":

Magnify, O my soul, the most pure Virgin Theotokos, more honorable and more glorious than the heavenly hosts. I behold a strange, most glorious mystery! Heaven – the cave! The cherubic throne – the Virgin! The manger – the place where Christ lay, the uncontrollable God whom we magnify in song!

EPISTLE READING

THE PROKEIMENON IN TONE EIGHT:

Let all the earth worship Thee and praise Thee! Let it praise Thy name, O Most High.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD: GALATIANS 4: 4-7

Brethren, when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

THE ALLELUIA VERSES:

The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

GOSPEL READING

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD: MATTHEW 2: 1-12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.’” Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

FROM THE PROLOGUE:

DECEMBER 25/JANUARY 7, BY SAINT NIKOLAI VELIMIROVIC:

The Nativity of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son (Galatians 4:4) to save the human race. And when nine months were fulfilled from the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel had appeared to the Most-holy Virgin in Nazareth, saying, Rejoice, thou that art highly favored ... behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son (Luke 1:28, 31), at that time there went forth a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the people of the Roman Empire should be taxed. In accordance with this decree, everyone had to go to his own town and be registered. That is why the righteous Joseph came with the Most-holy Virgin to Bethlehem, the city of David, for they were both of the royal lineage of David. Since many people descended on this small town for the census, Joseph and Mary were unable to find lodging in any house, and they sought shelter in a cave which shepherds used as a sheepfold. In this cave—on the night between Saturday and Sunday, on the 25th of December—the Most-holy Virgin gave birth to the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. Giving birth to Him without pain just as He was conceived without sin by the Holy Spirit and not by man, she herself wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, worshiped Him as God, and laid Him in a manger. Then the righteous Joseph drew near and worshiped Him as the Divine Fruit of the Virgin’s womb. Then the shepherds came in from the fields, directed by an angel of God, and worshiped Him as the Messiah and Savior. The shepherds heard a multitude of God’s angels singing: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Luke 2:14). At that time three wise men arrived from the east, led by a wondrous star, bearing their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. They worshiped Him as the King of kings, and offered Him their gifts (Matthew 2). Thus entered the world He Whose

coming was foretold by the prophets, and Who was born in the same manner in which it had been prophesied: of a Most-holy Virgin, in the town of Bethlehem, of the lineage of David according to the flesh, at the time when there was no king in Jerusalem of the lineage of Judah, but rather when Herod, a foreigner, was reigning. After many types and prefigurings, messengers and heralds, prophets and righteous men, wise men and kings, finally He appeared, the Lord of the world and King of kings, to perform the work of the salvation of mankind, which could not be performed by His servants. To Him be eternal glory and praise! Amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE: The Nativity of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

Out of burning love, Thou didst come down from heaven;
From eternal beauty, Thou didst descend into monstrous pain;
From eternal light, Thou didst descend into the thick darkness of evil.
Thou didst extend Thy holy hand to those choked in sin.
Heaven was amazed, the earth quaked.
Welcome, O Christ! O ye peoples, rejoice!

Out of burning love, by which Thou didst create the world,
As a slave Thou didst debase Thyself to loose the enslaved,
To restore the house that Adam destroyed,
To enlighten the darkened, to unloose sinners.
Love that knows not fear or humiliation—
Welcome, O Christ! The Master of Salvation!

Out of burning love, O King of all beauty,
Thou didst leave the radiance of the beautiful Cherubim,
Thou didst descend into the cave of human life,
To despairing men, with a torch and peace.
How to contain Thee?—The earth became frightened.
Welcome, O Christ! Heaven bears Thee up!

The most beautiful Virgin for a long time hoped in Thee.
The earth raises her to Thee, that through her Thou wilt descend
From the lofty throne, from the heavenly city,
To bring health, to release man from sin.
O Holy Virgin, Golden Censer—
To thee be glory and praise, O Mother full of grace!

REFLECTION

The Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem, was first worshiped by shepherds and wise men (astrologers) from the east—the simplest and the wisest of this world. Even today, those who most sincerely worship the Lord Jesus as God and Savior are the simplest and the wisest of this world. Perverted simplicity and half-learned wisdom were always the enemies of Christ's divinity and His Gospel. But who were these wise men from the east? This question was especially studied by St. Dimitri of Rostov. He claims that they were kings of certain smaller regions or individual towns in Persia, Arabia and Egypt. At the same time, they were erudite in the knowledge of astronomy. This wondrous star appeared to them, which announced the birth of the New King. According to St. Dimitri, this star appeared to them nine months before the birth of the Lord Jesus, i.e., at the time of His conception by the Most-holy Theotokos. They spent nine months in studying this

star, in preparing for the journey and in traveling. They arrived in Bethlehem shortly after the birth of the Savior of the world. One of them was called Melchior. He was old, with long white hair and beard. He offered the Lord the gift of gold. The second was called Caspar, of ruddy face, young and beardless. He offered the Lord the gift of frankincense. The third was called Balthasar, of dark complexion and a very heavy beard. He offered the Lord the gift of myrrh. After their deaths, their bodies were taken to Constantinople, from Constantinople to Milan, and from Milan to Cologne. It can be added that these three wise men were representatives of the three main races of men that descended from Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. The Persian represented the Japhethites, the Arabian represented the Semites, and the Egyptian represented the Hamites. Thus it can be said that, through these three, the whole human race worshiped the Incarnate Lord and God.

HOMILY

on the birth of the Lord, the Son of God

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world (John 16:28).

The only-begotten Son of God, brethren, begotten in eternity of the Father without a mother, was born in time of a mother without a father. That first begetting is an unfathomable mystery of the Holy Trinity in eternity, and the second is the unfathomable mystery of God's power and love for mankind in time. The greatest mystery in time corresponds to the greatest mystery in eternity. Without entering into this greatest mystery with the small taper of our understanding, let us be content, brethren, with the knowledge that our salvation had its origin not from man or from earth, but from the greatest heights of the divine invisible world. So great is God's mercy, and so great is the dignity of man, that the Son of God Himself came down from eternity into time, from heaven to earth, from the throne of glory to the shepherd's cave, solely to save mankind, to cleanse men from sin and to return them to Paradise. I came forth from the Father, where I had everything, and am come into the world, which cannot give Me anything. The Lord was born in a cave to show that the whole world is one dark cave, which He alone can illumine. The Lord was born in Bethlehem—and Bethlehem means "the House of Bread"—to show that He is the only Bread of Life worthy of true men.

O Lord Jesus, the Pre-eternal Son of the Living God and the Son of the Virgin Mary, enlighten us and nourish us with Thyself.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.
