

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

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St. Gregory the Great Orthodox Church - A Western Rite Mission of the Antiochian Archdiocese

A Reading from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

*died AD 407
feast day - January 27*

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What shall I say! And how shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infants' bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of his Goodness. For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His Spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, to sanctify me; He gives me His Spirit, that He may save me.

Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Come, and we shall commemorate the solemn festival. It is a strange manner of celebrating a festival; but truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been implanted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels.

Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle. He has come on earth, while being Whole in heaven; and while complete in heaven, He is without diminution on earth. Though He was God, He became Man; not denying Himself to be God. Though being the impassable Word, He became

flesh; that He might dwell amongst us, He became Flesh. He did not become God. He was God. Wherefore He became flesh, so that He Whom heaven did not contain, a manger would this day receive. He was placed in a manger, so that He, by whom all things are nourished, may receive an infant's food from His Virgin Mother. So, the Father of all ages, as an infant at the breast, nestles in the virginal arms... and the heavens give glory, as the Lord is revealed.

From the Roman Martyrology



In the twenty-fourth day of the month of December; In the year five-thousand one-hundred and ninety-nine from the creation of the world, when in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; In the year two-thousand nine-hundred and fifty-seven from the flood; In the year two-thousand and fifty-one from the birth of Abraham; In the year one-thousand five-hundred and ten from the going forth of the people of Israel out of Egypt under Moses; In the year one-thousand and thirty-two from the anointing of David as king; In the sixty-fifth week according to the prophecy of Daniel; In the one-hundred and ninety-fourth Olympiad; In the year seven-hundred and fifty-two from the foundation of the city of Rome; In the forty-second year of the reign of the Emperor Octavian Augustus; In the sixth age of the world, while the whole earth was at peace— JESUS CHRIST eternal God and the Son of the eternal Father, willing to consecrate the world by His gracious coming, having been conceived of the Holy Ghost, and the nine months of His conception being now accomplished, was born in Bethlehem of Judah of the Virgin Mary, made man.

The birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the flesh.

The Holy Innocents - December 28

The martyrs for the faith which the Church venerates are beyond number. These saints, who have received the palm of victory, gave witness in many different ways. Some who were in public positions, such as St. George, challenged the persecuting authorities and converted many others through their great courage. Bishops and other leaders of the church, such as St. Ignatius, turned their sacrifice into an opportunity for comforting and encouraging their flocks. Others, such as St. Alban, made

split-second decisions to give up their earthly lives in order to protect another.

The most heart-rending of all the stories of martyrdom is that of the Holy Innocents, who were the first to give their lives for our Lord Jesus Christ. They forfeited lives barely begun and were martyred without conscious choice.

The basic story is given to us in St. Matthew's Gospel: the three Wise Men, traveling from the East to meet a new king, whose birth they had seen predicted in the stars, did the logical thing and went first to the local ruler to ask for information. King Herod was so enraged at the idea of a rival king that he responded by having his soldiers kill all the male children two years old and under who were living in Bethlehem and the surrounding villages.



Centuries earlier, Hebrew mothers had also wept at the murder of their sons during the sojourn in Egypt when the baby Moses was spared so that he could lead his people out of Egypt toward the Promised Land. Now St. Joseph, the protector of the Theotokos and the Christ Child, was warned in a dream of Herod's plans so he took them into Egypt in order to escape the bloodshed. This fulfilled the prophecy of Hosea: "Out of Egypt I called my son." [Hos. 11:1]. The land of Egypt was thus blessed by the presence of the Savior.

St. Matthew draws a parallel between this massacre and the time of the Babylonian exile, quoting the Prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." [Matt. 2:15] The editors of *The Orthodox Study Bible* tell us that the Jews being led into exile went past the tomb of Rachel and thought of her, crying out from the tomb for her people - her children's children - as they gave up their lives and freedom. Rachel's children are once again being slaughtered and One is being sent into exile. But, as before, this One will return and this time it will be to bring salvation to the world.

The Gospel story is supplemented by the record of historians such as Josephus, who give further proof of Herod's insanity by telling of his murder of his wife, mother-in-law, sons and many others at his court. According to tradition, Herod also at this time had Zacharias murdered when he refused to hand over his son John, the herald of the Savior. Herod soon became ill with a horrible disease that infected his bowels and gave him sores, a disease which ended the violent life of this evil man.

The Church teaches us that “heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” [Psalm 30:5]. We weep over tragedies, but we rejoice in how God can turn a tragedy into a triumph. These little ones were honored by the Church in its earliest days and in the 5th century, a formal feast day was established.



Fr. Thomas Hopko, in *The Winter Pascha*, says that “More than all others, the martyrs are the friends of Christ. In their sufferings, according to the daring words of Saint Paul, they ‘complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His body, that is the Church’ [Col. 1:24].”

St. Augustine preached: “Let earth rejoice with exceeding joy, for she is the fruitful mother of this great host of heavenly soldiers. The favor of vile Herod could never have done such service to these blessed ones as hath his hatred. For the Church testifieth by this holy solemnity, that whereas iniquity did specially abound against these little Saints, so much the more were heavenly blessings poured out upon them.”

In the words of Abbot Prosper Guéranger: “Blessed Babes! We celebrate your triumph, and we congratulate you in your having been chosen as the companions of Jesus when in his Crib. What a glad waking was yours, from the darkness of unconscious infancy to the precious light of Abraham’s bosom, where were congregated all the elect! What gratitude had you not for the God, who thus chose you, out of millions of other children, to do honor to the birth of his Son, by this sacrifice of your blood and lives! Too young to fight the battle, yet did you win the crown. Sweet Infant Martyrs! We give praise to our God for his having thus favored you, and, with the whole Church, we rejoice in the privileges you have received.”

Today, the Patriarch of Jerusalem still celebrates this feast (December 29 in the Eastern calendar) at the tomb where many of the relics of the Holy Innocents are buried in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Some of the relics were given to Rome and are in the Church of St. Paul’s Outside the Walls and some at St. Mary Major.

In our age, children are still being sacrificed by the evil powers of the world. In every holocaust which this world has endured, in cases of child abuse, in abortion, innocent little ones are suffering and dying. May the intercessions of those first Holy Innocents be with these new martyrs and may they prepare a place for them in Heaven.

*The hymn for conquering Martyrs raise,
 The victor Innocents we praise,
 whom in their woe earth cast away,
 but heaven with joy received today;
 whose Angels see the Father's face
 world without end, and hymn his grace;
 and, while they chant unceasing lays,
 the hymn for conquering Martyrs raise.*

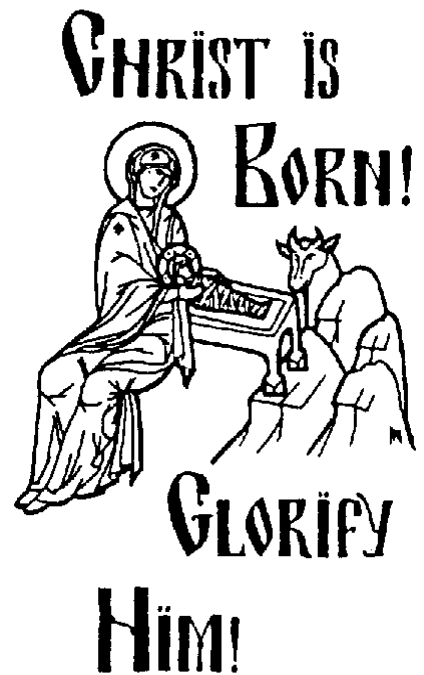
*A voice from Ramah was there sent,
 a voice of weeping and lament,
 when Rachel mourned the children's care
 whom for the tyrant's sword she bare.
 Triumphal is their glory now,
 whom earthly torment could not bow,
 what time, both far and near that went,
 a voice from Ramah was there sent.*

*Fear not, O little flock and blest,
 the lion that your life opprest!
 To heavenly pastures ever new
 the heavenly Shepherd leadeth you;
 who, dwelling now on Sion's hill,
 the Lamb's dear footsteps follow still;
 by tyrant there no more distrest,
 fear not, O little flock and blest.*

*And every tear is wiped away
 by your dear Father's hands for aye:
 death hath no power to hurt you more,
 whose own is life's eternal store.
 Who sow their seed, and sowing weep,
 in everlasting joy shall reap,
 what time they shine in heavenly day,
 and every tear is wiped away.*

*O city blest o'er all the earth,
 who gloriest in the Savior's birth,
 whose are his earliest Martyrs dear,
 by kindred and by triumph here;
 none from henceforth may call thee small,
 of rival towns thou passest all:
 in whom our Monarch had his birth,
 O city blest o'er all the earth!*

*Hymnum canentes martyrum
 by St. Bede the Venerable (673-735)
 tr. John Mason Neale. (1818-1866)*



Parish News

Advent is a season of preparation. As we are getting ready for family celebrations of Christmas by buying presents,

decorating our homes, and listening to endless Christmas carols in stores and on radio and TV, we must also prepare our hearts and minds for this yearly celebration of the Incarnation of Our Lord and for His second coming. For this kind of preparation, the Church directs us to be engaged in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.



We make use of the Western custom of having an Advent wreath as a means for “marking time” in anticipation of Christmas, a custom which has been adopted by many Orthodox Christians (both Eastern and Western Rite). A booklet of devotions for use in the home has been provided which marks the days through readings of the prophecies of the coming of Christ and the stories of the lives of the saints whose feast days occur during Advent. On Saturday, December 17, at 6PM, we will offer a service of Lessons and Advent carols and hymns as another way of preparing for the coming of the Savior.

We refrain from certain foods and from the temptation to over-indulgence during Advent and from our abundance, we share with those who are in need. Please remember to bring canned goods to contribute to the Archdiocesan “Food for the Hungry” collection.

The Christmas Eve schedule will begin with Confessions at 8:30PM, carols at 9:30PM and Sung Mass at 10:00PM. On Christmas morning, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at 10:30AM.

We welcome Kenneth Scott Parker into the holy Orthodox Church and the family of St. Gregory’s. Scott received the sacrament of Chrismation on November 6.

Lien O’Neill receiving the Blessing for an Expectant Mother. In addition to blessing objects for devotional use, the Church provides appropriate blessings for all the major events of life.



