

✠ 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. Peter Chrysologus

*died AD450
feast day - December 2*

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When cautious physicians skillfully prepare a remedy of salutary juices against deadly diseases, and if the patient rashly takes it differently from the directions or in amount not conducive to healing, or with improper timing, that which was planned to bring health becomes a cause of danger. So, too, if the hearer rashly tries to understand the word of God without the teaching authority, and learning, and the doctrine of the faith, that which is the nutrition of life becomes an occasion of perdition. We must strive, brethren, that what has been divinely written for our progress may not turn out, through our lack of skill in hearing, to be something detrimental to our souls.

Do you think that the Evangelist taught that the Chaldaean watchers of the stars, the Magi journeying with the aid of the stars, studying the affairs of the heavens in the darkness of the nights, attributing the causes of birth and death to the movements of the stars, asserting that good or evil comes to men through the decision of these luminous bodies - do you think that the Evangelist taught that it was by the mere natural guidance of a star that they today discovered the birth of the Christ hidden from the ages?

Let no one have such a thought! That is what the world thinks, what the pagans understand, what the reading yields at first blush. But the Gospel text speaks matters not human, but divine; matters not ordinary, but new; matters not deceptive through cleverness, but based upon truth; matters not illusory to the eyes, but rooted in hearts; matters not fluid through conjectures, but firmly established by authority; matters coming from God, not fate; matters not gathered by reckonings, but acquired by the practice of virtues.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, the text says, *in the days of king Herod, behold, there came Magi from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is the newly born king of the Jews? We have seen his star in the east, had have come to worship him.* When Jesus was born, the Source of things arose, the Maker of the race was begotten, the Creator of nature was born, in order to repair nature, restore the race, re-establish the original state.



Behold, *there came Magi from the East.* The Magi came from the East to the orient, that He who had bade them come might receive them on their arrival. For, when would a Magus have sought God save by God's command? When would a star-gazer have found the King of heaven, save by God's revelation? When would a Chaldaean, who served as many gods as there were stars in the sky, have adored the one God without God's aid? The magi themselves are more of a heavenly sign than the star, for a Magus recognized the King of Judaea and the Author of the Law, while the Judean does not; Chaldaea pays deference while Judaea does not; Jerusalem turns away and plays apostate, Syria follows and adores.

We *have seen his star.* The star appeared not of itself, but by command; not because of the gravitation of heaven, but by an impulse of God; not because of the law of the stars, but of the novelty of signs; not because of any clear climate in the sky, but because of the power of Him being born; not from art, but from God; not because of an astrologers' knowledge, but the Creator's foreknowledge; not by an arithmetical reckoning, but by a divine decree; through heavenly care, not Chaldaean curiosity; not through art of magic, but because of Jewish prophecy.

Thus, when the Magus saw that human cares had come to naught, that his own arts had failed, that the labors of worldly wisdom had been exhausted, that the perspiration of all the sects had congealed and the treasures of all philosophy had been emptied out, that the night of paganism had fled and the clouds of opinions dissolved, that the very shadows of the devils had skulked into hiding, that the star was not, like a comet with its surrounding tail, hiding what it was announcing, covering up what was shining - when the magus saw all this, he spoke: *It is a divine decree that I see you in Judaea, resplendent with a new ray, a significant light, and a steady splendor, and there - above the law of the universe, above the arrangement of flesh, above the nature of men - there pointing out the King now born.*

With his error thus dispelled, he follows, he runs, he arrives, he finds, he rejoices, he falls prostrate, he adores. For, not through the star, not through his skill, but through the help of God has he found, in astonishment, God in human flesh.

The Manifestation of Our Lord Jesus Christ

On January 6, we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, the beginning of a long season, one which is rich in theological and historical significance and which includes numerous worthy customs.

In *The Christian Calendar*, authors L. W. Cowie and John Selwyn Gummer tells us that “the word ‘Epiphany’ is the Greek for ‘manifestation’ and this festival...originated in the Eastern Church. It is older than Christmas and is mentioned by Clement of Alexandria as far back as AD 200... It was first adopted in the Western Church in southern Gaul. There, by the middle of the fourth century, it was kept as a separate festival from Christmas. In Rome it became instead a commemoration of the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. The Magi are seen as representative of all the non-Jews to whom Christ came. Their gifts symbolize three aspects of His life - gold for kingship; frankincense for priesthood; myrrh for death.”



The Magi “are identified as Caspar (who brings frankincense for Christ’s divinity), Melchior (who brings gold for His royalty), and Balthazar (who brings myrrh for His sorrows), names found in the sixth-century mosaic at Sant’ Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. Their portrayal in Persian dress caused the conquering army of the Zoroastrian Shah Khosraw II, zealously destroying the churches of Jerusalem in 614, to exempt the church of the Holy Sepulchre, where a mosaic represented them. As early as the third century they are taken for kings fulfilling the prophecy at Isaiah 60:3; a subsequent notion of their descent from the three sons of Noah caused Balthazar to be depicted as a black descendant of Ham. They are said to have arrived in Jerusalem with a suite of 1,000 men, leaving a 7,000-strong army on the left bank of the Euphrates. On their return they devoted themselves to prayer and contemplation; when St. Thomas arrived in Parthia they were baptized and became missionaries. Their remains were discovered by the empress Helena and translated to Constantinople, thence in turn to Milan and Cologne. In the West they are patrons of travelers. [from *The Oxford Companion to the Year* by Bonnie Blackburn and Leofranc Holford-Strevens]

Dom Prosper Guéranger, in his *The Liturgical Year*, tells us:

The Epiphany is indeed a great Feast, and the joy caused us by the Birth of our Jesus must be renewed on it, for, as though it were a second Christmas Day, it shows us our Incarnate God in a new light. It leaves us all the sweetness of the dear Babe of Bethlehem, who hath appeared to us



already in love; but to this it adds its own grand manifestation of the divinity of our Jesus. At Christmas, it was a few Shepherds that were invited by the Angels to go and recognize the Word made Flesh; but now, at the Epiphany, the voice of God himself calls the whole world to adore this Jesus, and hear him.

The mystery of the Epiphany brings upon us three magnificent rays of the Sun of Justice, our Saviour. In the calendar of pagan Rome, this sixth day of January was devoted to the celebration of a triple triumph of Augustus, the founder of the Roman Empire: but when Jesus, our Prince of peace, whose empire knows no limits, had secured victory to his Church by the blood of the Martyrs - then did this his Church decree, that a triple triumph of the Immortal King should be substituted, in the Christian Calendar, for those other three triumphs which had been won by the adopted son of Caesar.

The sixth of January, therefore, restored the celebration of our Lord's Birth to the Twenty-Fifth of December; but, in return there were united in the one same Epiphany, three manifestations of Jesus' glory: the mystery of the Magi coming from the East, under the guidance of a star, and adoring the Infant of Bethlehem as the divine King; the mystery of the Baptism of Christ, who, whilst standing in the waters of the Jordan, was proclaimed by the Eternal Father as Son of God; and thirdly, the mystery of the divine power of this same Jesus, when he changed the water into wine at the marriage-feast of Cana."

God took what had once been a pagan observance and sanctified it by giving the Church new events associated with the life of our Savior to celebrate. Epiphany includes other instances of this same phenomenon. Dr. Thomas Talley, in his book *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, tells of ancient Egyptian rituals related to the birth of the new year which revolve around the waters of the Nile River. Since the Nile has always been the "life-blood" of the Egyptian people, it is not surprising that Egyptian Christians would make use of its water in the Epiphany blessing of water and celebration of Christ's turning the water into wine. As late as the 17th century, according to Talley, there were pools in the floors of Coptic churches for bathing in the blessed Nile water, a practice completely separate from baptism.

Following the example of the Magi, gift-giving on Epiphany (rather than at Christmas) has been the custom in many centuries and places. According to Cowie and Gummer in *The Christian Calendar*, “in the Middle Ages it was the custom for the rich and powerful to make offerings in church of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This is still done by the Queen in England at a service in the Chapel Royal, St. James’ Palace, where two Gentlemen Ushers make the offering at the altar on her behalf. The gift of twenty-five golden sovereigns is changed into notes and distributed to the aged poor, the frankincense is used in a church, and the myrrh is given to a hospital.”

In the Orthodox Church, the season of Epiphany provides an opportunity for blessing homes. For this reason, chalk for marking the doors of homes is also blessed on the feast-day, as well as water for the house blessings.

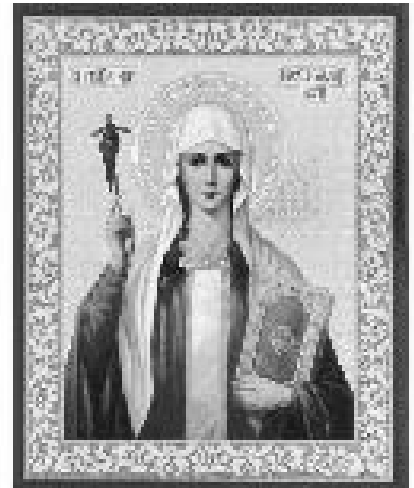
St. Nina, Enlightener of Georgia *Feast day, January 14*

The ways of the world have drifted far from the ways of God. In the world, power and riches and prominent positions are important. But Holy Scripture reminds us that God’s way is the opposite. We are told that even great and powerful people must be “born again” and become like little children. The rich who have made idols of their worldly possessions are to “give all they have to the poor” and follow him. In the Magnificat, we sing of how God will “*put down the mighty from their seat and exalt the humble and meek.*”

The most important sign God gave us of his ways was to send His beloved Son to us in the form of a tiny, helpless infant. God also uses his saints to show us the way of humility. St. Nina of Georgia is one who, through humility and despite her lowly position, brought the Christian faith to an entire nation.

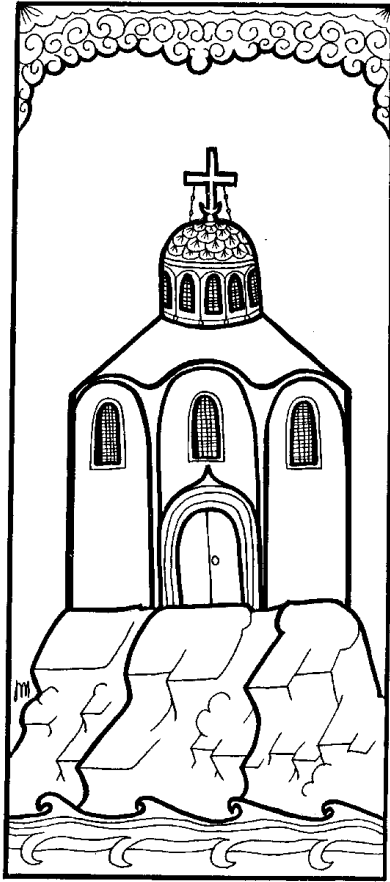
Raised as a Christian in her native land, Nina was captured as a young girl and forced into slavery in the country of Georgia. Without bitterness for this alteration of her life, Nina went about her duties of cleaning and caring for her captors with self-effacing kindness.

The Georgian people were pagans who worshiped as their primary god, Amazi, a sword-wielding vengeful spirit, whose copper image could bring death to anyone who touched it, but Nina unselfconsciously continued to pray to our Lord



Jesus Christ as she had done all her life. When those she worked with or for asked her about her God, she did not hesitate to tell them of the wonderful works of God.

One day, a distraught mother, whose child was ill and could not be cured by the doctors, came to the household where Nina worked and asked for help from anyone who could give it. Explaining that she had no medical skills or knowledge, Nina said that all she had to offer was prayer to God for the healing of the child. The mother, in her desperation, agreed to let the foreign slave appeal to her foreign God. Our heavenly Father chose this moment to show the Georgian people his mercy and kindness. The child miraculously recovered from his sickness and his mother gratefully promised to worship the God of the slave girl who had brought about this miracle.



Nina satisfied the curiosity of other villagers about God and many of them, too, came to believe in the saving grace of Christ. Others with infirmities were brought to Nina for prayers for healing. Eventually even the queen came to this slave girl for help because of a painful disability she had suffered for many years. When Nina's prayers resulted in the Queen's complete recovery, that great lady asked for instruction in the Christian faith and she, too, became a follower of Christ.

Although overjoyed at his wife's restored health, King Miriam was not pleased with the idea of abandoning the traditional Georgian gods. He feared their retribution and became so angry at the queen's urging that he decided to ban this religion from the land.

Our all-powerful God used another miracle to change the king's mind. When he went hunting one day and rode to the top of the highest hill, where there was usually a magnificent view of the countryside, the entire area was suddenly covered with a thick fog - so thick that the king could not even see his companions. Out of fear of some strange calamity, King Miriam remembered the miracle of his wife's cure and the foreign God who had brought it about. He decided to pray to this God and immediately the air cleared and the view of the hills and the valley below became as it had always been. The king knew that this was a heavenly sign that the Christian God was the true God, and he vowed to worship him and to build a church on this hill to his honor.

King Miriam and many others in his court began to receive instruction in the faith from the humble slave girl, Nina, in preparation for baptism. But there were more lessons for the king to learn. When the Emperor Constantine sent bishops and

priests and relics to the Georgian people, the king was insulted that he was not the first to receive them. Nina had to instruct him in the virtue of humility. When some Georgian tribesmen refused to accept Christianity, King Miriam wanted to force them at the point of the sword, so Nina had to instruct him in the way of peace and the virtue of patience. When the king wanted to reward the slave girl by giving her freedom and wealth and position, she refused all these earthly pleasures to further demonstrate Christian humility.

St. Nina, beloved by all the Georgians who had come to know her and to accept the faith she had taught them, fell asleep in the Lord in the year 338 and was buried in the village where she had been brought as a slave. A church was built here and it became a place of pilgrimage for Christians to honor the one who had showed them the way to Heaven.

May we also learn from St. Nina how to show others the Christian faith through humility and kindness. Holy Nina, pray for us.

Parish News

Thank you to all who helped to make our Christmas celebrations beautiful and joyful - to acolytes and readers, to singers and instrumentalists, to those who provided flowers, and those who came to adore Christ, our Incarnate God.

We will celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany on the Eve, January 5. At 7PM we will have the Blessing of Water, followed by Sung Mass at 7:30. The evening will end with a pot-luck supper.

We welcome into our church family, Sebastian Ambrose, son of Lien and Jim O'Neill, who came into the world on December 2. We also welcome the Finnell family - Val, Tracey, Zachary, Lukas, and Marina - as catechumens. Please pray for them as they continue their journey of faith.

Our annual Parish meeting will be held on Sunday, January 29, following the Liturgy. Please plan to attend this important meeting, as we report on the life of our parish during the past year and look forward to the coming year. New parish council officers will be elected and the budget for 2006 will be presented.

In March of 2006, St. Gregory's will celebrate our 10th Anniversary as a mission of the Antiochian Archdiocese. The



group of interested inquirers who had been meeting for several months at Ss. Peter & Paul Church (then in Bethesda, MD) were chrismated by Bishop ANTOUN on March 3, 1996. Fr. Nicholas was ordained deacon that day and priest the following day. We were given the name St. Gregory's shortly thereafter and held our first Liturgy on the First Sunday of Lent that year. A committee, headed by Stella Green, has been formed to plan ways to mark this important anniversary. Bishop THOMAS will be with us to observe the anniversary on March 18th and 19th. Please see Stella to offer your help with making this a joyous celebration.

Sacred Gift of Life Sunday

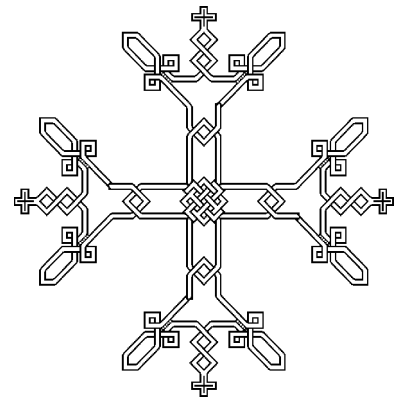
We have received the following announcement from the North American Council of Teen SOYO:

“His Eminence, Metropolitan Philip, has given his blessing for NAC Teen SOYO to commemorate Sunday, January 22, 2006, as the Sacred Gift of Life Sunday: Protecting the Life of the Unborn. Our teens need your critical assistance with this program of education and awareness. We are asking the youth of the Archdiocese, as part of January being Orthodox Education Month, to educate themselves on the Orthodox Church's teaching regarding abortion and to create an awareness that human life is a sacred and holy gift from God.”

Educational materials on the Orthodox stand against abortion and on Zoe for Life and Orthodox Christians for Life, two organizations which work to education and to support mothers in crisis pregnancies, were included with this communication. These will be placed on the table at Coffee Hour for anyone who wishes to borrow them.

The 33rd annual March for Life will take place on Monday, January 23. Participating Orthodox Christians usually march together. We meet on the Mall between 11:00 and 12:00 under a large banner bearing an icon of the Mother of God.

In preparation for the March, Vespers will be held at St. Nicholas' Cathedral on Sunday, January 22, at 7PM.



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>January 2006</h1>						
1 Feast of the Circumcision <i>9:30 Matins 10:00 Sung Mass Brunch following</i>	2 St. Fulgentius, BC, 533	3 St. Genevieve, V, 512	4 St. Titus, BCM, c. 96	5 St. Simeon Stylites, C, 460; Eve of the Epiphany <i>7:30PM Sung Mass, pot-luck supper following</i>	6 Feast of the Epiphany	7 of the Octave <i>6PM Vespers</i>
8 1 st Sunday after Epiphany <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass</i>	9 of the Octave	10 of the Octave	11 St. Theodosius, Ab, c. 529 FAST	12 St. Benedict Biscop, Ab, 690	13 of the Octave FAST	14 St. Hilary, BCD, 367; St. Nina, 338 <i>6PM Vespers</i>
15 2 nd Sunday after Epiphany <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass</i>	16 St. Marcellus, BM, 309; St. Honoratus, BC, 429	17 St. Anthony, Ab, 356	18 St. Prisca, VM, c. 370 FAST	19 St. Mark of Ephesus, BC, 1445	20 Ss. Fabian, BM, 250 & Sebastian, M, 3 rd c. FAST	21 St. Agnes, VM, 304 <i>6PM Vespers</i>
22 3 rd Sunday after Epiphany <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass</i>	23 Feria	24 St. Timothy, companion of St. Paul, BM, 97	25 Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle FAST	26 St. Polycarp, BM, 156	27 St. John Chrysostom, BCD, 407 FAST	28 St. Ephrem, D, 373 <i>6PM Vespers</i>
29 4 th Sunday after Epiphany <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass Parish Meeting</i>	30 St. Martina VM, 228; St. Bathildes, Queen, 680	31 Feria				

Confessions are heard during the Psalms at Matins, following Vespers, or by appointment.

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy. Children's Story Time is during Coffee Hour.