

✠ St. Gregory's Journal ✠

December, 2007 - Volume XII, Issue 11

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

A Reading from a Sermon of St. John Chrysostom

*died AD407
feast day - January 27*

Inside:

*Glad Tiding of Great Joy . . . 3
Generosity of the Saints . . . 4
Parish News 6
Calendar 7*

This day He Who was ineffably begotten of the Father, was for me born of the Virgin, in a way no tongue can tell. Begotten according to his nature before all ages from the Father: in what manner he knows Who has begotten Him; born again this day from the Virgin, above the order of nature, in what manner knoweth the power of the Holy Spirit. And His heavenly generation is true, and His generation here on earth is true. As God He is truly begotten of God; so also as man is He truly born from the Virgin. In heaven He alone is the Only-Begotten of the One God; on earth He alone is the Only-Begotten of the unique Virgin.

And as in the heavenly generation, to imply a mother is heretical, so in this earthly generation, to speak of a father is blasphemy. The Father begot in the Spirit (*Pater absque defluxu genuit*), and the Virgin brought forth without defilement. The Father begot without the limitations of the flesh, since he begot as became the godhead; so neither did the Virgin endure corruption in her childbearing, since she brought forth miraculously. Hence, since this heavenly birth cannot be described, neither does His coming amongst us in these days permit of too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a Virgin this day gave birth, and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of this generation I have learned to venerate in silence, and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech. For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of Him who works.

It is indeed the way of nature that a woman in wedlock brings forth; when an unwed virgin, after she has borne a child, is still a virgin, then nature is here surpassed. Of that which happens in accord with nature we may enquire; what passes above it we honor in silence; not as something to be avoided, passed over, but as that which we venerate in silence, as something sublime, beyond all telling.



What shall I say to you; what shall I tell you? I behold a Mother who has brought forth; I see a Child come to this light by birth. The manner of His conception I cannot comprehend. Nature here is overcome, the boundaries of the established order set aside, where God so wills. For not according to nature has this thing come to pass. Nature here rested, while the Will of God labored. O ineffable grace! The Only Begotten, Who is before all ages, Who cannot be touched or be perceived, Who is simple, without body, has now put on my body, that is visible and liable to corruption. For what reason? That coming amongst us He may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that men cannot see. For since men believe that the eyes are more trustworthy than the ears, they doubt of that which they do not see, and so He has designed to show Himself in bodily presence, that He may remove all doubt.

And He was born from a Virgin, who knew not His purpose; neither had she labored with Him to bring it to pass, nor contributed to that which He had done, but was the simple instrument of His Hidden Power. That alone she knew which she had learned by her question to Gabriel: “How shall this be done, because I know not man?” Then said he; do you wish to hear his words? “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most high shall overshadow thee.”

And in what manner was the Almighty with her, Who in a little while came forth from her? He was as the craftsman, who coming on some suitable material, fashions to himself a beautiful vessel; so Christ, finding the holy body and soul of the Virgin, builds for Himself a living temple, and as He had willed, formed there a man from the Virgin; and putting Him on, this day came forth, unashamed of the lowliness of our nature. For it was to Him no lowering to put on what He Himself had made. Let that handiwork be forever glorified, which became the cloak of its own Creator. For as in the first creation of flesh, man could not be made before the clay had come into His hand, so neither could this corruptible body be glorified, until it had first become the garment of its Maker.

Glad Tidings of Great Joy

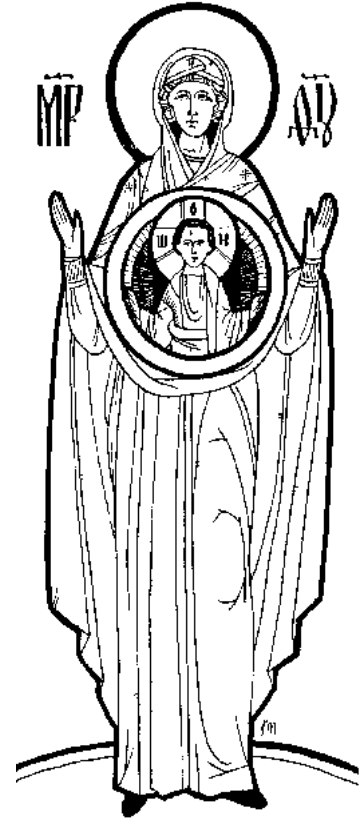
(Excerpts taken from *The Winter Pascha* by Fr. Thomas Hopko)

The birth of Jesus is announced to the world as a proclamation of great joy. The archangel Gabriel comes first to Zacharias the priest when he is offering incense at the altar and tells him that his wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son who will be the forerunner of the Messiah. “You will have joy and gladness,” he tells him, “and many will rejoice at his birth” (Luke 1:14). The same messenger of the Lord comes to the Virgin Mary, and the message is the same. Mary’s “soul magnifies the Lord,” and her “spirit rejoices in God” her Savior (Luke 1:46-47). For her child will be the Messiah Himself, “called the Son of the Most High,” to whom the Lord God will give “the throne of his father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). And the birth is announced to the world again by the angel of the Lord. It is an announcement of “glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people (Luke 2:10).

The joy of the Messiah’s appearance abounds in the Church’s liturgical services of the Winter Pascha. When the “Hail” of the angelic salutation is translated “Rejoice,” as it often is in the church services since in Greek that is what it literally means, there is an even greater presence of the “good news of great joy” for the faithful, since they, together with the whole of creation, are greeted with this salutation again and again in the songs of the festal celebration.

One of the most devastating accusations that can be made against Christians is that they have no joy. Joyless Christians are a contradiction in terms. People who are bitter, complaining, condemning, accusing, dissatisfied, and depressed are certainly not Christians. They can only be people whose life is untouched by grace, people whose existence is confined to the suffocating limitations of “this world” whose “ruler” is the devil and whose “form...is passing away” (John 12:31, 1 Cor. 7:31). They cannot possibly be those who belong to Christ and the kingdom of God. For Christians by definition have Christ’s “joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13). They are people whose joy, which no one can take away, is literally full and complete (John 15:11; 16:22, 24).

In his famous book *For the Life of the World*, Father Alexander Schmemmann speaks about the joy of Christians. From its very beginning, he says,





Christianity has been the proclamation of joy, of the only possible joy on earth. It rendered impossible all joy we usually think of as possible. But within this impossibility, at the very bottom of this darkness, it announced and conveyed a new all-embracing joy, and with this joy it transformed the end into a Beginning. Without the proclamation of this joy Christianity is incomprehensible. It is only as joy that the Church was victorious in the world, and it lost the world when it lost that joy, and ceased to be a credible witness to it. Of all accusations against Christians, the most terrible one was uttered by Nietzsche when he said that Christians had no joy.

Father Alexander goes on to say that before Christians can do anything else with all of their “programs and missions, projects and techniques,” they “must recover the meaning of this great joy.” he says that joy “is not something one can define or analyze. One enters into joy. ‘Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord’ (Matthew 25:21).” And one enters into this joy, this exceeding great joy, he insists, only by entering into the liturgical, eucharistic life of the church herself. Here, and only here, as in the celebration of the Nativity of Christ and His Epiphany in the world, can a person partake of that joyful reality for which the world itself was created in the beginning.

The Generosity of the Saints ~ St. Servulus and St. Theophylact

At this time of year, the world is obsessed with gifts - gift-giving, gift-receiving, and especially gift-purchasing. Surrounded by the commercial frenzy, it is often difficult for Christians to remain focused on proper gift-giving - on the spirit of charity and generosity and on preparing to receive again in our hearts the most important gift of all, the Christ child, the Savior.

To help us in our efforts, the Church offers the saints, who will both intercede for us and also serve as examples of true generosity.

We learn from our patron, St. Gregory the Great, about a saint of his day, Servulus of Rome. Servulus was a most pitiable man. He suffered from a paralysis that prevented him from standing, sitting, feeding himself or turning himself over. His family was too poor to afford his care, so each day, his mother and brother carried him to the door of St. Clement’s Church in Rome, where he lay so that passersby who took pity on him could

place coins on his pallet. Servulus endured this life of begging with patience and humility. He never considered himself so poor that he couldn't share the offerings given to him with others who were hungry or in need.

Servulus kept his good spirit by asking those who came to pray in the church to read passages of Scripture (which he memorized) to him, and he endured his physical pain by singing hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God.

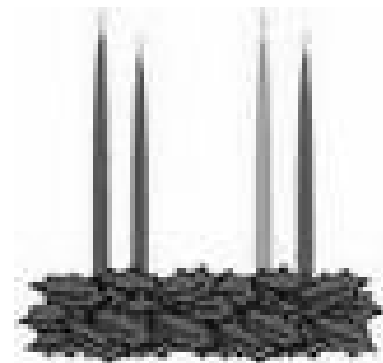
On December 23, 590, as he felt himself nearing death, Servulus called for others to join him in praying, singing and reciting the Psalms. Soon he declared that he could hear the angels singing, and he breathed his last. This poor man, who had generously shared the little that he had with others, was buried in St. Clement's Church and his relics brought about many miracles.

On December 31, we celebrate the feast day of another saint of the Church whose station in life was quite the opposite of St. Servulus. Theophylact not only had robust health and worldly comforts, but he also had a brilliant mind and had received an excellent education, both secular and religious. Living in Constantinople, he gained a reputation as a scholar and took advantage of all the cultural offerings of the capitol city. Theophylact was ordained a deacon and given the responsibility for tutoring Prince Constantine Doukas, for whom he wrote a treatise, *The Education of Princes*. Theophylact led a charmed life.

But God and the Emperor conspired to provide a new challenge for Theophylact. After hearing an especially enthusiastic and flattering sermon which the deacon preached, Emperor Alexius had Theophylact appointed as Archbishop of Ochrid (Ohrid) in Bulgaria.

By Constantinopolitan standards, the Bulgarians were primitive, uncouth people and they resented Byzantine rule. The citizens of Ochrid were not happy to receive their new - foreign - archbishop and he was not happy to be there. Theophylact tried everything he could to be released from his appointment and was very homesick for his beloved Constantinople.

But blessed Theophylact turned his disappointment to generosity for the Bulgarians and the Church. He became an advocate for the poor, pleading for tax relief for people whose children were sold into slavery to pay their taxes. Above all, Theophylact offered his abilities as a theologian to the Church



Christmas Eve December 24

*Confessions at 8:30PM
Carols at 9:30PM
Sung Mass at 10:00PM*

during his “exile.” He wrote commentaries on the Gospels, the Epistles, Acts, the prophets, and numerous letters and homilies (which we at St. Gregory’s often hear quoted!). These gifts of St. Theophylact have continued to enlighten and inspire Christians throughout the world since his death in 1107.

Whether our station in life is as lowly as that of St. Servulus or as lofty and yet complicated as that of St. Theophylact, may we, like them, offer what gifts we have to others in the name of Christ who gave his life for us.

Parish News



On the First Sunday in Advent, December 2, we will celebrate the Baptism of Sarah Mae Caldwell, who will become a member of Christ’s One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church and receive Communion for the first time. We will have a shortened form of Matins that day so that the Blessing of the Font can precede the Baptism and Mass, so please come early!

Our annual service of Advent Lessons and Carols will be held on Saturday, December 8 (the Feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary), at 6PM in lieu of Vespers. This service provides us with an opportunity to pause in the midst of this busy season to better prepare ourselves for the celebration of Christ’s Nativity.

We have reserved a block of tickets for the premier performance of a Christmas Oratorio, composed by Bishop HILARION (Alfeyev), the Russian Orthodox Bishop of Vienna and Austria. The concert will be on Monday, December 17, at 7:30PM in the Roman Catholic Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, but ticket holders must arrive before 7:00PM. Please let Fr. Nicholas know if you would like to attend this program.

During Advent and Christmas, we will again be collecting canned goods for the *Food for the Hungry* program. The items we collect will be donated to *Martha’s Table*, our local food pantry and soup kitchen on 14th Street.

The Orthodox Study Bible project has at last been completed and the new editions, with both Old and New Testaments will be available early in 2008. We are placing a bulk order (to save on the cost), so please let Fr. Nicholas know if you would like to have a copy. The price will be approximately thirty dollars.

Our web site (www.stgregoryoc.org) has recently been updated to include many more links to other sites of interest to Western Rite Orthodox Christians.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesda	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>December 2007</h1>						1 St. Eligius, B, 660 <i>6PM Vespers</i>
2 Advent I St. Peter Chrysologus, BCD, c. 450 <i>9AM Matins</i> <i>9:30 Sung Mass</i>	3 Feria	4 St. Barbara, VM, c. 306; St. Clement of Alexandria, BC, c. 210	5 St. Sabbas, Ab, 532	6 St. Nicholas, BC, c. 342	7 St. Ambrose, BCD, 397	8 Conception of the BVM <i>6PM Advent Lessons & Carols</i>
9 Advent II <i>9AM Matins</i> <i>9:30 Sung Mass</i>	10 St. Maltians, BM, 314	11 Within the Octave; St. Damasus, BC, 384	12 Within the Octave	13 Within the Octave; St. Lucy, VM, 304; St. Herman of Alaska, C, 1837	14 Within the Octave	15 Octave of the Conception; St. Maurus, Ab, 6 th c. <i>6PM Vespers</i>
16 Advent III <i>9AM Matins</i> <i>9:30 Sung Mass</i> <i>O Sapientia</i>	17 St. Lazarus the Righteous, C, 1 st c. <i>O Adonai</i>	18 Feria <i>O Radix Jesse</i>	19 Ember Wednesday <i>O Clavis David</i>	20 Vigil of St. Thomas <i>7:30PM Vespers</i> <i>O Oriens</i>	21 St. Thomas the Apostle; Ember Friday <i>O Rex gentium</i>	22 Ember Saturday <i>6PM Vespers</i> <i>O Emmanuel</i>
23 Advent IV <i>9AM Matins</i> <i>9:30 Sung Mass</i>	24 Vigil of the Nativity <i>8:30PM Confession</i> <i>9:30 PM Carols</i> <i>10:00Sung Mass</i>	25 Nativity of Our Lord	26 St. Stephen, Protomartyr	27 St. John, Apostle & Evangelist <i>7:30PM Vespers</i>	28 Holy Innocents, Mm	29 Within the Octave <i>6PM Vespers</i>
30 Christmas I <i>9AM Matins</i> <i>9:30 Sung Mass</i>	31 St. Sylvester, BC 335; Bl. Theophylact, BC, 1107	1 The Circumcision of Our Lord <i>9:30AM Matins</i> <i>10AM Sung Mass</i> <i>Brunch following</i>	2 St. Fulgentius, BC, 533	3 St. Genevieve, V, 512	4 St. Titus, BM, c. 96	5 Vigil of the Epiphany; St. Simeon Stylites, C, 460 <i>6PM Vespers</i>

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

Coffee Hour follows Sunday Liturgy.