

✠ 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 Sermon of Saint Peter Chrysologus

died AD450

feast day - December 2

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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, and 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. The first man, Adam, the father of the race, the origin of all posterity, lost by his sin the good of nature, the freedom of his race, and the life of his offspring. Consequently, his unfortunate posterity endured the evil of nature, the slavery of the race, the death of their offspring. Hence it came about that Christ by His birth restored nature, took away death by dying, summoned life back by His resurrection.

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.

Where is the newly born king of the Jews? This is tantamount to saying: why does the king of the Jews lie in a manger, and not repose in the Temple? Why is He not resplendent in purple, rather than poorly clad in rags? Why does he lie hidden in a cave, and not on display in the Sanctuary? The beasts have received in a manger Him whom

you have disdained to receive in his house. As it has been written: *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib.* But you, O Israel, have not sought out your master.

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 astrologer's 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 his astonishment, God in human flesh.

St. Anastasius the Persian ~ Feast Day January 22

Six centuries after Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar followed the Star and brought gifts to the Christ child, another magus learned of Christ, believed, and gave his life for his faith.

Magundat, a Persian, was the son of a magician, who had taught him all the practices of his art. Magundat and his brother were serving in the Persian army in 614 at the time that King Chosroës took Jerusalem and carried off the true Cross of Christ. Magundat's natural inquisitiveness made him curious about a piece of wood that could be so important and he saw many Christian things in Jerusalem which aroused his interest.

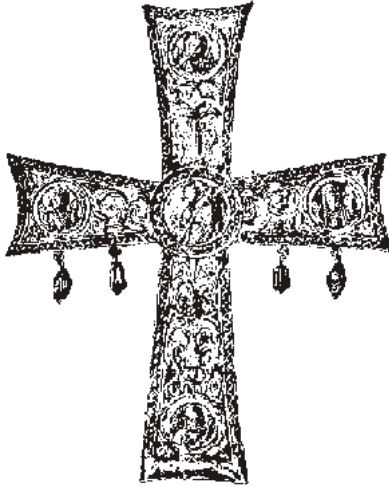
Returning to Persia after being discharged from the army, he resettled in Hierapolis, taking lodging with a silversmith who was a Persian Christian. From this man, and through the icons which he saw, Magundat learned the stories of our faith and how to pray to the Holy Trinity. When he progressed to the point that he desired baptism, Magundat's host advised him to leave Hierapolis, which was more closely ruled by the Persians, so he returned to Jerusalem. There, the priest Modestus was serving as the spiritual leader of the Christians since Chosroës had taken Patriarch Zachary captive into Persia.

Magundat completed his catechumenate with Modestus and took the name *Anastasius*, signifying his rising to new life, at his baptism. In the fervor of his conversion, Anastasius decided to become a monk, and was accepted as a postulant in a nearby monastery by the Abbot, Justin. After living the monastic life for some time (and memorizing the Psalter), Anastasius was tonsured in the year 621, seven years after seeing the Cross of our Lord.

The next seven years, the monk Anastasius spent in the life of devotion and service in the monastery, striving to combat the temptations to magic and superstition which the devil sent in remembrance of his earlier life. He then began a journey to visit more holy places associated with our Lord's life and that of his holy mother. At Caesarea (then ruled by the Persians), he witnessed some Persian soothsayers practicing their fortune-telling in the street, and he reprimanded them for their superstitious practices. When they accused him of being a spy, he told them that he had once been a magus like them, but that he had become a follower of Christ. They immediately had him arrested and imprisoned and soon brought before the governor for interrogation. The governor offered him great honors, considering the high position of magi in Persia, if he would renounce his "foolish" conversion to Christianity. But Anastasius boldly professed his faith and so was chained at the neck and foot to another prisoner and commanded to carry heavy stones. He was ridiculed by the other Persians as a traitor to his country and culture. Kicking and beating him, plucking out his beard hairs, they also added more weight to his load of stones. When he was beaten by soldiers, Anastasius asked to remove his monk's habit so that it would not be defiled by such treatment.

The governor reported his troubles with the former magus and soldier to Chosroës, the king, who suggested that all he had to do was verbally renounce Christ - it wouldn't matter what he actually believed in his heart as long as he publicly went along with the accepted beliefs. Anastasius was not tempted by this offer, so he was ordered to be sent to the king for execution.





Abbot Justin heard of the sufferings of the monk Anastasius and sent two other monks to assist him in whatever way they could. One of the monks traveled with Anastasius to his martyrdom and later relayed the details so that others might know the story. All along the journey to Barsaloe, in Assyria, where the king was, Anastasius was greeted by local Christians who encouraged him and who were, in turn, made stronger in their faith by his perseverance. On September 14, through the intercession of the local tax-collector, who was a Christian, Anastasius was given permission to attend divine services in church. This day, which after the recovery of the Cross by the Emperor Heraclius became the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, was at this time celebrated as the day of dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

Arriving in Barsaloe, Anastasius was put in prison to await the formality of a trial before the king. The jailer was a Christian, and he allowed all the local Christians to visit Anastasius in his cell. Once again, Anastasius was offered great rewards for returning to the religion of his country and forsaking Christianity, but as before, the monk was steadfast. He declared that he could not be tempted away from eternal salvation by the worldly riches and position offered by a king who would also soon die.

St. Anastasius was forced to witness the strangulation of all the other condemned prisoners before he himself was killed in the same way. The bodies of those executed were left exposed to be devoured by wild dogs, but St. Anastasius' body was untouched and taken by the Christians to the monastery of St. Sergius nearby. His fellow monk who had traveled with him, retrieved his tunic. St. Anastasius' relics were eventually taken to Constantinople and then to Rome.

As the first Magi had been brought to Christ by the shining of a star, St. Anastasius had begun his journey of faith through the power of the Holy Cross. He received the crown of martyrdom on January 22, 628. Ten days later, the Emperor Heraclius entered Persia, and the following year, he triumphantly returned the Cross to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. *We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee, because by thy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.*

Parish News

Many thanks are due to all who helped make our celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord - the first in our new home - so beautiful. Thanks to those who decorated the chapel with great

artistry; thanks to acolytes and choir singers whose contributions to the Liturgy were reverent and joyous; and thanks to those who contributed food for the festivities after the evening Mass.

We have now weathered our first “home-owner’s” disaster, following the flooding of the Parish Hall as a result of a broken water pipe. The disaster relief company which was sent in by our insurance company did a good job of removing carpet and repairing drywall. Replacement carpet will be laid soon, and we should be able to return to using the Parish Hall and kitchen by the middle of January. We are very fortunate to have had the use of the upstairs rooms for social functions during this time.

We will celebrate more feast days this month, beginning on January 1 with the Circumcision of Our Lord. Matins will be at 9:30 and Sung Mass at 10AM, followed by a breakfast served by Fr. Nicholas and Khourya Rebecca. On Saturday, January 6, we will celebrate the feast of the Epiphany, having the Blessing of Water at 9:30, Sung Mass at 10:00, and a pot-luck brunch following. The feast of the Conversion of St. Paul will be celebrated with Vespers on the Eve, January 24, at 7:30PM.



The annual parish meeting of St. Gregory’s will be held on Sunday, January 28. A pot-luck brunch will follow the Liturgy and then we will meet to take care of the administrative business of the parish: to hear a financial report of the past year and a proposed budget for the new year; to elect parish council members (2 are to be elected); and to hear reports from the pastor and others on the on-going life of the parish. We have much to be thankful for and this is a time to celebrate together.

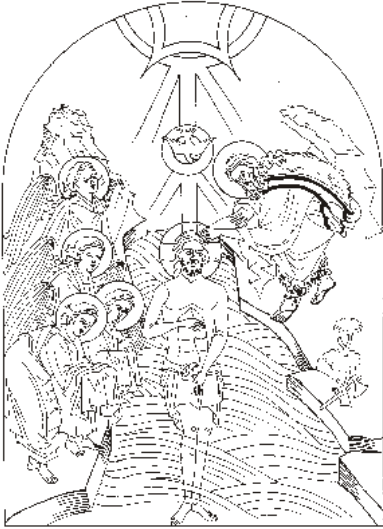
Fr. Nicholas will be available to bless homes during the season of Epiphany. Please see him early in the season to schedule this annual ceremony.

Because of the delays with our building renovations, His Grace, Bishop THOMAS has postponed his visit for dedicating the building until sometime following Pascha. On Friday, March 30, Sayedna THOMAS has scheduled a service for the chrismations of the people of our mission-in-formation in Warrenton, Virginia. St. Gregory’s will offer a Sung Mass in Warrenton, following the chrismations, to celebrate their entry into the Orthodox Church, our Archdiocese, and the Western Rite Vicariate.

Our collection of canned goods for the Food for the Hungry program will continue through the month of January. Please be generous in your contributions for those who are less fortunate. Our collection will be donated to a local food pantry.

Epiphany Antiphons

The three events which are celebrated at Epiphany - the arrival of the Wise Men, the baptism of our Lord, and the miracle at the wedding in Cana - are reflected in the antiphons sung in our Western Rite Orthodox services during the season of Epiphany.



The Benedictus antiphon at the Blessing of Water: *Today the Church is joined to her heavenly Bridegroom; because in the Jordan Christ hath washed away her offences: the Wise Men with their offerings hasten to the Royal marriage, and the guests are regaled with water made wine. Alleluia.*

The Magnificat antiphon at the Blessing of Water: *Now do we celebrate a festival in honor of three days when Christ was made manifest: the day whereon the star led the Wise Men to the manger, the day whereon water was turned to wine at the wedding feast; the day whereon Christ was pleased to be baptized of John in Jordan that He might save us. Alleluia.*

The Magnificat antiphon at the Blessing of Homes in Epiphany: *From the East there came Wise Men to Bethlehem, to worship the Lord; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him precious gifts: gold as to a mighty king, incense as to a true God, and myrrh to foreshow His burial, alleluia.*

The Magnificat antiphon for second Vespers on the Second Sunday after Epiphany: *The springs of waters were hallowed when Christ appeared in majesty before the world: draw ye water from the wells of salvation; for now is every creature sanctified by Christ our God.*

A selection of Psalm antiphons for Epiphany: *Before the Morning star was begotten, yea, before all ages, the Lord our Savior as on this day is made manifest to the world. Thy light is come, O Jerusalem, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee, and the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, alleluia. When they had opened their treasures, the wise men presented unto the Lord gold and frankincense and myrrh, alleluia. O ye seas and river-floods, show forth the praises of the Lord; O ye fountains of living water, bless ye the Lord of all, alleluia. Yon star, a fiery beacon, pointed out the way to God, the King of kings who in a manger lay, where Magi, when they see, do then unfold their princely gifts of frankincense and myrrh and gold.*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>January 2007</h1>						
	1 Circumcision of the Lord <i>9:30 Matins 10AM Sung Mass, brunch following</i>	2 St. Fulgentius, BC 533	3 St. Genevieve, V 512	4 St. Titus, BM, c. 96	5 St. Simeon Stylites, C, 460	6 Epiphany of our Lord <i>9:30 Matins 10AM Sung Mass, brunch following</i>
7^{1st} Sunday after Epiphany <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass</i>	8 Within the Octave; Ss. Lucian & Companions, Mm, c. 290	9 Within the Octave	10 Within the Octave FAST	11 Within the Octave; St. Theodosius, Ab, c. 529	12 Within the Octave; St. Benedict Biscop, Ab, 690 FAST	13 Octave of the Epiphany <i>6PM Vespers</i>
14^{2nd} Sunday after Epiphany <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass</i>	15 St. Paul the Hermit, C, c. 345	16 St. Marcellus, BM, 309	17 St. Anthony, Ab, Patriarch of Monks, 356 FAST	18 St. Prisca, VM, c. 270	19 St. Mark of Ephesus, BC, 1445 FAST	20^{Ss.} Fabian, BM, 250, & Sebastian, M, 3 rd c. <i>6PM Vespers</i>
21^{3rd} Sunday after Epiphany <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass</i>	22 St. Vincent, M, 304 & St. Anastasius the Persian, M, 628	23 St. Emerentiana, VM, 304	24 St. Timothy, Companion of St. Paul, BM, 97 <i>7:30PM Vespers</i> FAST	25 Conversion of St. Paul	26 St. Polycarp, BM, 156 FAST	27 St. John Chrysostom, BCD, 407 <i>6PM Vespers</i>
28^{4th} Sunday after Epiphany <i>9AM Matins 9:30 Sung Mass Pot-luck brunch & Parish Meeting</i>	29 Feria	30 St. Martina, VM, 228; St. Bathildes, Q, 680	31 Feria FAST			Ab = Abbot B = Bishop C = Confessor D = Doctor M = Martyr Q = Queen V = Virgin

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

Coffee Hour follows Liturgy.