

# The Confessor's Tongue for December 21, 2008

## Sunday Before Nativity: Holy Forefathers; Martyr Juliana

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

### December 21: Sunday Before Nativity

In the services of this week are glorified the Old Testament saints, from whose human family came our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore in the Gospel appointed for this Sunday is read the "genealogy" of Jesus Christ. Together with these on this Sunday, as well as on the Sunday of the Forefathers (see Dec. 11), are commemorated all those living in faith and all the Old Testament saints who have come to the Savior, who are listed in the Epistle reading for this Sunday.

In the church hymns for this day the Holy Church primarily sings "of the beginning fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", "together with the Three Youths, who quench the fiery flames with the dew of the Spirit" and "the physical images of the hidden mysteries of God revealed to the world", and the prophet Daniel, who, "foretold the birth of the Christ from a virgin" and "foresaw that the cruel world would be counted among those with deep spiritual peace by the coming of Christ, having sometimes stopped the mouths of lions in the pit".

Together with this the Holy Church in the hymns for the present day as well as for the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ, exclaims: "Come let us all faithfully celebrate the Nativity of Christ", "Skip, O hills and mountains; Dance, O prophets who spoke of God! Clap your hands, O peoples and nations! The salvation and the enlightenment of all draw near. He comes to be born in the city of Bethlehem"; "The never setting Sun arises from the bedding of the Virgin to enlighten all those under the sun. Let us hasten with chaste eyes and pure deeds to meet Him."

### December 21: Martyr Juliana

St. Juliana, daughter of wealthy parents, while yet in childhood was betrothed to a certain nobleman. Having accepted Christ and not inclined to her Pagan groom, St. Juliana refused to be joined in marriage and for her faith in Christ was subjected to cruel torture after which she was beheaded in Nicomedia in 304. Seeing the firmness of the martyress in her suffering, 500 men and 130 women accepted Christ for which they all were cut down by the sword. The relics of St. Juliana are now in Naples.

*S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2 ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp 0447-9 Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © 1999-2008. All rights reserved.*

### From The Hermitess Photini (+1928)

Indeed, man has a high calling because he was created in the image and likeness of God. That is, he came from God and will go back to God again to partake of His divine glory and blessedness. Since God is the source of blessedness, he who communicates with God also becomes blessed. Eternal life, blessedness, the Kingdom of Heaven,

joy, paradise, gladness, delight: this is what God is. 'I am the resurrection and the life,' said the Savior. Everyone who communicates with God has blessedness. Whereas hell, which the Savior calls outer darkness, gnashing of teeth, torture, fire, abyss, etc., is nothing but the deprivation of divine grace and a departure from God—not spatially but morally. Wherever there is no light, there will definitely be darkness. What is darkness? Absence of light. This is also how it is with the blessedness of heaven. God is the Ultimate Good. The more man approaches God through the virtues, the more blessed and happy he becomes.

Sin, though, is the ultimate evil. The more a person distances himself from God—not physically, as we said, but spiritually through sin—the more unhappy he becomes. Who is gnashing his teeth? He who is unhappy, due to sin. Who is burning in the unquenchable fire of torture? He who perceives that he himself is the cause of his plight! So where is the seat of eternal fire? In the heart of the sinner. The Savior implies this in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Thus hell is essentially the complete deprivation of divine grace. What is illness? Lack of health. What is sorrow? Lack of joy. The demons used to be bright, good angels, as the Holy Scriptures say. But by sinning, they lost divine grace and became dark, evil, miserable. Since they lost the divine illumination that enlightens and gladdens, they were darkened, and, so to speak, they got drunk with ignorance so that, just as a drunk person under the influence wants to drink even more, likewise those who are drunk with sin always desire evil. They think that by doing evil they will find rest, but this is in vain. They will always be unhappy, because the evil distance them even more from the light until it throws them into the utmost misery, which the Savior calls 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

So distancing oneself from God is the most terrible punishment. That becomes clear from observing the workers of sin in the world, who are always in fear; they always have inner disturbance and anxiety. The purpose of man is to work at the virtues through which he partakes of divine glory and becomes like God, not by nature, but by grace.

### Upcoming Events 2008

- 24 December Nativity Eve: 8:00 a.m. Royal Hours, noon Vespers Liturgy of St. Basil, 5:30 p.m. Vigil, 7:30 p.m. Holy Supper
- 25 December Nativity of Our Lord: 8:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy
- 28 December, 3 p.m. Baptism of Chloe Stoke
- 27 December – January 2: Winter Service Retreat at St. George's, Pharr, TX.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!