

The Confessor's Tongue for December 21, A. D. 2014

Twenty-Eighth Sunday After Pentecost; Sunday Before Nativity; 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.

Sunday Before Nativity

The Sunday before the Nativity of the Lord (December 18-24) is known as the Sunday of the Holy Fathers. On this day the Church commemorates all those who were well-pleasing to God from all ages, from Adam to St Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos, those who are mentioned in the genealogy of Luke 3:23-38. The holy prophets and prophetesses are also remembered today, especially the Prophet Daniel and the three holy youths (December 17). *ocr.org*

December 21: Virgin Martyr Juliana

The Holy Virgin Martyr Juliana, daughter of an illustrious pagan named Africanus, was born in the city of Nicomedia. As a child, she was betrothed to a certain Elusius, one of the emperor's advisors. St Juliana was endowed with a profound intellect and goodness of soul. She saw through the delusion and deception of the pagan faith, and secretly accepted holy Baptism.

When the time of her wedding approached, Juliana refused to be married. Her father urged her not to break her engagement, but when she refused to obey him, he began to beat her viciously. Then Africanus handed his daughter over to the Eparch, who happened to be Elusius, Juliana's former fiancé. Elusius fervently asked Juliana to marry him, promising not to require her to abandon her faith. St Juliana refused and said that she'd rather be put to death.

They beat the saint both long and harshly, but after each beating she received healing and new strength from God. Her punishment took place before a large number of people. Of these, 500 men and 150 women came to confess Christ after witnessing the steadfastness and courage of the holy virgin miraculously healed from her wounds. They were all beheaded, and were baptized in their own blood.

Convinced of the futility of attempting to separate the holy virgin from her heavenly Bridegroom, Eleusius sentenced Juliana to death. She accepted the sentence with joy and glorified the Lord for permitting her to receive a martyr's crown. The holy Martyr Juliana was executed in the year 304.

St Juliana is the subject of an Anglo-Saxon poem, believed to have been written by Cynewulf in the eighth century. *oca.org*

From Elder Barsanuphius of Optina

Even perfect people have passions—there are no totally passionless people. Passionlessness exists in full measure only beyond the grave. But with the perfect, the passions have come to a standstill, since they are not given a chance. Each man, no matter

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how exalted a life he has led, no matter how many grace-filled gifts he has been vouchsafed, must remember and never forget that he, too, is a passionate man.

And so, my spiritual children, read the Holy Scriptures and the works of the Holy Fathers, because through them the Holy Spirit Himself is speaking; and let us not read the works of the kind of teachers that try to tear us away from Christ. May the Lord save us all from that. Let us follow the teaching of Christ alone, and we shall be saved....

The Feast of Renewal:

Teaching on the Weeks Preceding Nativity St. John of Kronstadt (+20 Dec 1908)

We are approaching, beloved brethren, the world-saving feast of the birth in the flesh of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. For several days before the feast, the holy Church already celebrates this wondrous mystery in the spiritual hymns of her daily services [starting December 20]. These hymns remind us of our divine birthright, and the squandering of our sonship through sin; of its restoration through repentance; of our common spiritual kinship; and of the spirit of love and care for one another.

And in order that we celebrate this feast of God's limitless love and His extreme condescension not in a worldly, but in a spiritual manner, let us briefly consider the following:

Why did God become man while remaining God? What does God's incarnation require of us? Having set forth these two questions, I shall answer the first with the words of the Archangel to Joseph, the betrothed of the Holy Virgin: God became man to save *His people from their sin* (Matt. 1:21). For this reason, He is called Jesus, which means "Savior." And so, it was for our salvation that the Lord came to earth and became man, for the regeneration in us of the image of God which had fallen. The Son of God became the Son of Man in order to make us sons of God who were called the children of wrath and worthy of eternal damnation. In the words of the Apostle John the Theologian: "That we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1); "Now God became man that He may make Adam a god" (Sticheron for the Praises of Annunciation).

O the unutterable love of God! O the unspeakable compassion of the Lord! And He, the Most Holy, did this: He deified mankind in His chosen ones, cleansed them from all evil both of soul and body, sanctified, glorified, led them from corruption to everlasting life, made them worthy to stand in blessedness before the awesome throne of His glory. And He deified us also, brothers and sisters: He gave us a new birth through water and the

Holy Spirit, sanctified us, made us His sons, gave us the promise of eternal life and eternal blessings, surpassing all telling and imagining. And in confirmation, as a surety of the future blessings, He gave to us, still here on earth, the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts: God "hath sent for the Spirit of His Son into your heart, crying, 'Abba, Father'" (Galatians 4:6) writes the Apostle Paul.

And so, my brethren, the feast of the Nativity of Christ reminds us that we are born of God, that we are sons of God, that we have been saved from sin that we must live for God and not for sin; not for flesh and blood, not for the world which lies in evil (I John 5:19), not for earthly corruption, but for an inheritance incorruptible... reserved in heaven the Lord Himself will give you a sign, behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

You are preparing yourselves to meet the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, you must ask yourselves: Have you preserved the spiritual birth from God which we each received in Baptism? Are you always heedful of your Divine sonship and the sacred treasure of the Spirit which you acquired in Baptism? Have you grown closer to God through faith and love, like His beloved children? Have you loved one another as befits children of God? Have you despised evil and all-destructive sin? Have you loved truth and every virtue? Have you loved immortal and eternal life prepared in a land which will not pass away and to which we are called by Him who now has come to our corrupt earth? These are questions which we must ask ourselves now and decide; not only with our minds, but above all, with our hearts and our very deeds.

In general, we should not allow ourselves to celebrate any Christian feast without seriously considering: What is its meaning and what is its purpose? What is our responsibility towards it? We must know the Christian meaning behind every feast. Then the feast will become profitable for our souls; salvation. Otherwise, the enemy of our salvation will snatch us and turn the feast of God into a feast of the flesh, of lawlessness, as so often happens. Having resolved the first question: Why did God become man? let us look at the second question.

What does the incarnation of God require of us?

It requires us to remember and hold in sacred honor the fact that we are born of God; and if we have sullied and trampled upon this birthright with our sins, we must restore it by washing it with tears of repentance; we must restore and renew within us the image of God which had fallen and the union with God of blessedness, truth, and holiness, which has been destroyed.

The incarnation of the Son of God requires from us, above all, mutual love, humility, that we help and serve one another; for how can we not love one another when we see the love of God for us? How can we not be humble, seeing such humility, such voluntary condescension for our sake of the Son of

God? How can we not help one another in every possible way, when the Son of God Himself came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life as a ransom for many? (Matthew 20:28). Like the wise man, let us brothers also prepare gifts for the new-born King. Instead of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, let us bring Him the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Amen.

An Explanation of Matthew 9:16-17

St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894)

No man puts a piece of new cloth unto an old garment...nor do men put new wine into old wineskins.

What does the Savior wish to teach us by this comparison? By this comparison, the Lord taught that strenuous labors, without the spirit of true life, bring no benefit to our moral character, but rather, confusion and corruption. A repentant sinner is given grace, which forms in him a determination to please the Lord, without sparing his own life. All labors are useful to a person with determination. However, should a person who lacks it, attempt on occasion, for example, to impose a fast on himself, he will strain and strain harder, but then he gives up his efforts. And after this, his life becomes even worse.

Theological Terminology: Vouchsafe

From *vouch* and *safe*; to vouch or answer for safety. It means to condescend to grant; to condescend, to deign, to yield. *Condescend* means "to descend from the privileges of superior rank or dignity to do some act to an inferior which strict justice or the ordinary rules of civility do not require. Thus, we pray: "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this night without sin..."; "And vouchsafe, O Lord, that with boldness and without condemnation, we may dare to call upon Thee, the heavenly God and Father, and to say..." In using this word, we ask God for something we need, recognizing that He does not owe it to us, but He graciously deigns to grant it to us out of His love and mercy toward us

St. Innocent, Enlightener of the Aleuts

"...strive to possess and stir up within yourself the desire to do what the Holy Scriptures teach. If you presently lack such desires, fall down in fervent prayer before our Savior Jesus Christ and ask Him to grant you this. And once grace calls you to the way of salvation, never resist it."

Upcoming Events 2014

- 24 December: Nativity Eve: Royal Hours, Vespers, Liturgy, Vigil.
- 25 December: Nativity of our Lord in the Flesh
- 27 December: Patronal Feast at Holy Nativity of Our Lord Monastery, Kemp. Hours 9:30, Liturgy 10:00
- 31 December: All-Night Vigil for St. Basil/New Year
- 6 January: Holy Theophany & House Blessing Season

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!