

The Confessor's Tongue for December 31, A. D. 2017

Thirtieth Sunday after Pentecost: Leavetaking of Nativity

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.

The Sunday After Nativity

On this Sunday is commemorated the righteous Joseph, the Betrothed of the Most Holy Virgin Theotokos, David the King, and James, brother of God. The Holy righteous elder Joseph came from the royal line of David (Mt. 1:6; Lk. 1:27). The Holy Evangelist calls him "righteous" (Mt. 1:18), and this name, according to the remarks St. John Chrysostom, demonstrates that the betrothed of the Most Holy Virgin "had all virtues". He lived in Nazareth and earned his living by working with his hands, being a woodworker, i.e. carpenter. As the man was strictly God-fearing, quite honorable, quiet, meek, humble, modest, sincere, peace loving, attentive to the voice of his conscience and to the announcements from above, Joseph was quite worthy of the great honor of living as the nearest spectator of the fulfillment of the "great mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16). He was already an eighty year old man and, according to the witness of St. Epiphanius, already "lived many years as a widower", when he was taken by his selection of the Providence of God to be the protector of the virginity of the Most Holy Virgin Mary (see Nov. 22). In the opinion of some, St. Joseph died soon after his visit to Jerusalem with the twelve year-old Jesus Christ (Luke 2:41-52), as he is not mentioned in the Gospels after that.

January 1 New Year

At the present time we celebrate January 1 as the beginning of the new year. Forty five years before the Nativity of Christ the Romans celebrated the New Year on January 1 instead of March 1, as they had before, and spent this day in licentious noisy games in disguises, in mad entertainment and abominable dissolution; therefore Christians for a long time did not dedicate this day as the New Year, and their days of the New Year looking at the different countries and times were: March 1, March 25, September 1, September 23 and December 25. In 1594 French King Charles IX established that the year begins on January 1; eventually other western countries accepted this establishment. At first Russia began the year on March 1 (see March 1), and then later on September 1 (see September 1). At the end of 1699 Emperor Peter 1 issued a decree to begin the civil year on January 1, and 1700 was the first year, which began with this month.

The name *January* is given this month because it was dedicated to Janus by ancient Romans, represented by two faces — in front (young) and behind (old) — meaning that he stands between two times: his one face looks forward, and the other looks back at the year just expired.

The accusations and instructions of St. John Chrysostom are involuntarily remembered in his sermon for the New Year: "The diabolical revelry, he

says, "continuing today in the all night, laughter, malicious gossip, nightly dancing and ridiculous burlesque has taken our city in captivity... The games concerned me most of all, occurring in the inns today, fulfilling intemperance and great impiety; -- an impiety that occupies them on these days observing, guessing and thinking that if on the first day of this month they spend in pleasure and gladness, then the rest of the year will be spent that way also; - but the intemperance that at dawn women and men having filled their glasses and cups with wine, drink without any limit... If you want to benefit from the first day of this month, act in such a way: that when you see the end of year, it will praise the Master that He entered into you such a cycle of years, a broken heart, numbering the years of your life, telling yourself: the days flow and pass, the years terminate..., and what good have we done?... Remember this philosophy at the beginning of months during the cycle of years... To observe on these days - not only the work of Christian philosophy, but also the errors of paganism"... Really, it is strange and inexcusable for the Christian to expect special benefits from how he meets the New Year, forgetting that true happiness and well-being depend not on the cycle of time, but on the will of God and from the character of our activity; it is inexcusable to approach New Year with noisy carousing from evening to midnight, to do only purely pagan things and for the truly Christian dishonor... Meeting similar days, as on the New Year's, with various profligacies and disgraces not only testifies to absence of piety, but also sustains antagonism to Christianity and the church...

January 1: Circumcision of Christ

Circumcision was established by God in the Old Testament as a sign of the covenant of God with Abraham and his posterity. The Lord Jesus Christ on the eighth day after His Nativity was obliged to undergo, in the accordance with the law, the rite of circumcision (Gen 17:14; Lev. 12:2-3) with the assigning to him the name of Jesus (Luke 2:21; 1:31). The Old Testament circumcision in the New Testament has conceded its place to the sacrament of baptism, of which it was a prototype (Col. 2:11-12). In the East evidence for the celebration of the Circumcision of the Lord arises in the fourth century. Stephen the Sabbaite wrote the Canon for the Circumcision in the seventh century. Commemorated on this feast together with the Circumcision in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and the naming Him Jesus the Holy Church sings: "Today the Master, circumcised in the flesh, is called Jesus"; "on the eighth day the Master was circumcised as a Child: He received the name Jesus for He is the Savior and Lord of the world". But inviting their incense "in sanctity"

to celebrate "the naming of the glorious Master Christ": "for today the one pleasing to God is called Jesus", - the Holy Church mainly hymns "the circumcision in the flesh of the incarnate God the Word".

By celebrating the circumcision of the Savior and His naming the Holy Church confirms our faith in that unchangeable truth that He is the God-man, "and yes not as the heretics say that he became incarnate as an illusion, but he truly has flesh and was not opposed to the law, but its fulfiller". Together with this example of the Savior, Who, "did not disdain circumcision of His flesh", "today of His own will was circumcised in the flesh", and, "the law fulfilling the law of the Creator", "gave to His own Self an image and a plan for the salvation of all", the Holy Church teaches us to be constantly obedient and submissive to the laws for our own good and for a Christian example to others. The circumcision which the Lord accepted as a sign of the covenant of God with man, and the name as a seal of His Service for the salvation of the world (Mt. 1:21; Mark 16:17; 9:38-39; Luke 10:17; Acts 3:6,16; 19:13; Phil. 2:9-10), inspire us, that as we enter into the New Covenant with God we should be circumcised "with a circumcision made without hands, by cutting off the body of sinful flesh, in the circumcision of Christ (Col. 2:11). Our Christian name must not be a dead sound, but the living testimony that we are devoted to the service of God and we are in a beneficial union in Him for His glory and our eternal salvation and blessedness.

January 1: St. Basil the Great

St. Basil the Great was born in 329 in Caesarea, Cappadocia from god-fearing and noble Christian parents. The child's first education was received from his god-fearing grandmother Macrina, and his first instruction in the rules of eloquent speech was from his father in Neocaesarea. Reaching a youthful age, St. Basil traveled to the then prominent cities to complete his education. In Athens he met Gregory the Theologian and submitted himself to him and for the rest of his life remained his faithful friend. Here he studied grammar, rhetoric, astrology, mathematics, philosophy and medicine, and has attained the most brilliant success in these subjects. Having a brilliant mind and wisdom, St. Basil at the same time distinguished himself with good moral behavior, humility and a pure way of life.

Having returned to Caesarea, St. Basil often fulfilled the duties of a lawyer. Then, having accepted baptism, together with the rank of Reader, he became interested in monasticism, and went to study monastic life in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. Returning from his travels, he settled in a hermitage near Neocaesarea, devoting himself to the ascetical efforts of fasting and prayer. Together with this, seeking true knowledge and striving for divine wisdom, he was engaged in the study of Holy Scriptures, and compared translations of them, and also studied the

works of Origen.

When danger threatened the faith, St. Basil left the hermitage and was revealed as a most fervent fighter for Orthodoxy. In 364 he was ordained a presbyter in the church in Caesarea. Now his zeal never knew weariness: he devoted all of himself for service to the Lord and indefatigably taught the congregation, sometimes preaching twice a day, in the morning and evening, and sometimes after the sermon in one church he went to preach in another. The sermon blossomed so wonderfully in the mouth of St. Basil, that he sometimes postponed teaching until the next day.

Caring for the spiritual needs of his parish, St. Basil also did not disregard the physical. During a famine the inhabitants of Caesarea have found him a generous benefactor. In 370 St. Basil was installed as the Bishop of Caesarea and in this rank, and not abandoning his ascetical paradigm of life, he fervently cared for his clergy from the first server at the altar to the last, all becoming wiser, and demanding from all strict virtue. St. Basil himself loved the beauty of the church, the elegance of the temple, harmony in worship, and this feeling inspired those around him. His very appearance: his bearing, the pale determined face, deep eyes, his calm body language of importance raised a feeling of piety in everyone. By word and purity of life that fervently edifies all his flock in faith and piety, he was "the father of orphans, protector of widows, and wealth for the poor, consolation of the ill, and guide of the wealthy, a staff for the old", "and a teacher of virtue for the youth who lived the monastic life". With burning Christian love for his neighbors, St. Basil built shelters, alms-houses, and hospitable hospices. Courageous and devoted, he was always ready for any work and deprivation for the sake of the welfare of neighbors. St. Basil was not concerned about any danger for his own life, for he not only visited, but also embraced lepers, thus giving them great joy to feel the intimacy of his devoted love for them.

As a wise defender of Orthodoxy, St. Basil "with strong divine words you brought down heresies" and "with sermons you poured out teachings to the god-fearing world". Humble and meek, condescending and merciful to sinners with infirmities, but unshakable in faith and ready to endure all for the truth of Christ, St. Basil was a strict chastiser of the evil adversaries of faith and more than anything cared about the purity of Orthodoxy not only in Caesarea but also in the entire Eastern Church. "He, in the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, neither slept nor dozed and because of his efforts he exhausted the rest of his body, yet up to now he did not find the cure for evil". And only due to his efforts the church in Caesarea was saved from Arianism. St. Basil died in 379 at the age of 50. From his service in the Church and his unusual high moral and selfless life St. Basil is named "the great" and is glorified as the "glory and beauty of the Church", "star and eye of the universe", "teacher of dogma", "chamber of learning", "leader of life".

The following works of St. Basil have reached us: nine discourses on The Six Days, thirteen discourses on the Psalms, twenty five discourses on various events, five books Against the Arians and one On the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, rules for church deans, a typikon for monastics, prayers and the Liturgy known by his name. The Crusaders transferred the body of St. Basil the Great, according to western writers, to Flanders; his honorable head, according to Right Reverend Porphyrius, is in the Athonite Laura of St. Athanasius; his arm is kept in Venice.

Note: In some places on St. Basil's Day they visit homes to gather pirogi, pig's feet, and other Christmas holiday pork provisions. Pork is the main treat at this time, and St. Basil is considered by the people to be the patron of pigs. Shepherds deeply honor St. Basil but they are afraid to displease him. In the Orel Province at the New Year they prepare roast pig and call it *kasaretskim*, from the name of St. Basil of Caesarea. S. V. Bulgakov, *Handbook for Church Servers*, Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris ©. All rights reserved.

St. Basil the Great on the Psalms

According to the teaching of St. Basil the Great: "the Book of Psalms is in itself the most useful of all books. It prophesies the future, it commemorates an event, it gives laws for living, and it lays down the rules for activity. In short, it is a general treasury of good teachings that one carefully finds to everyone's benefit. It heals even the chronic wounds of the soul, and the recently wounded submits to a speedy healing, and it raises the ill, and supports the uninjured; in general, in howsoever many ways possible, it subdues the passions that in human life under various conditions dominate the souls. And herewith it produces in man that quiet delight and satisfaction, which makes the mind chaste.

The Holy Spirit knew that it is difficult to lead the human race to virtue, and that because of the propensity to pleasure we neglect the right way. And so what is one to do? The pleasantry of sweet singing is mixed in with the teachings, that together with the sweetness and the melodiousness to the ear, we received by an imperceptible image even that which is pleasing in the word. And wise physicians, who prescribe bitter medicine to drink to those who turn away from him in disgust, often smooth it over with a cup of honey. To this end this structured chanting of psalms are invented, so that even children and grown-ups, or in general those not brought up by the rules, or so it seems, only sang them, and actually trained their souls.

Is it not then likely that the common people, usually careless, will go from here (that is, from the temple), comfortably keeping in their memory the apostolic and prophetic commandment, and sing verses from the psalms even in their homes, and even exclaim them in the market place. And if he, who like the wild beasts becomes furious with anger, will soon become pleasant upon hearing the psalms, his anger goes away, immediately taming the ferocity in his soul

with sweet singing. The psalm is the quietness in souls, the dispenser of peace; it pacifies rebellious and agitated thoughts; it softens the irritability of the soul and makes intemperance be wise. The psalm is the mediator of friendship, the solidarity among the distant, the reconciliation of combatants. For who can still count as an enemy one who uplifts with one voice to God?

Therefore psalm singing delivers to us one of the greatest good that is love, discovering singing together instead of knots for unification, reducing the people to one harmonious choir. The psalm is a refuge from demons, the accession under the protection of Angels, a weapon against nightly terrors, rest from daily work, safety for children, the adornment of blossoming age, the consolation of old age, the most appropriate apparel for women. The psalm inhabits deserts, makes the market places fully wise. For the new ones walking in the way it is the beginning of learning, for the successful it is the increase of leadership, for the perfected it is the affirmation; it is the voice of the Church. It makes feasts bright; it brings forth sorrow as if from God. For the psalm even compels tears from a heart of stone. The psalm is the preoccupation of Angels, the heavenly cohabitation, and the spiritual incense. It is the wise invention of the Teacher, who constructed it in order that we sing and together study what is useful.

From this even the lessons are better imprinted on our souls. For what is studied with compulsion does not remain in us for a long time; but that with pleasure and pleasantness is accepted and takes root more firmly in our souls. What will you learn from the psalms? Will you not know from here great courage, strict justice, honest chastity, perfection of good sense, image of repentance, a measure of patience, and anything good, what would you call that? Here is the perfect theology, prediction of the coming Christ in the flesh, the threat of the judgment, the hope of resurrection, the fear of punishment, the promise of glory, the revelation of mysteries. Everything is gathered in the Book of Psalms as if it were in a great and common treasury.

January 6: The Theophany of Christ

Luminous was the feast which hath passed [Nativity], yet even more glorious is this present day; for on the former the magi worshipped the Savior, but on this a glorious servant hath baptized the Master. Then the shepherds, piping, beheld and marvelled; but now, the voice of the Father hath proclaimed the only-begotten Son.
Vespers Aposticha for January 2

The meaning of each Feast and each Mystery is found in its hymns. Thus, we learn that Theophany is even greater than Nativity (contrary to the emphasis of our culture which makes Christmas the feast of feasts, pays no heed at all to Theophany/Epiphany, and reduces Holy Pascha (Easter) to one Sunday). At the Nativity of Christ, we celebrate the birth of the

God-man in the flesh. At the Theophany, we celebrate the manifestation of not only Christ's divinity but also the first manifestation to man of the Holy Trinity as the Forerunner, the Father, and the Spirit all bear witness to Christ as the Son and Lamb of God. Christ sanctifies the waters through His Baptism for our regeneration. The sinless One who needs no cleansing receives baptism from the hand of a servant for our cleansing. Let us rejoice in the Feast!

We celebrate Theophany through its leavetaking on January 14. We use the troparion and kontakion of the Feast in our daily prayers and at meals in place of the usual "Our Father" and "We give thanks..."

Theophany, Troparion, tone 1

When Thou, O Lord wast baptized in the Jordan / the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. / For the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, / naming Thee His beloved Son. / And the Spirit, in the form of dove, / confirmed the certainty of that word. / O Christ our God, who hast manifested Thyself and enlightened the world // glory to Thee.

Theophany, Kontakion, tone 4

Today Thou hast appeared to the universe / and Thy Light, O Lord, hath shone on us, / who with understanding praise Thee: / Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, // O Light unapproachable!

The Blessing of Homes

Homes are customarily blessed after the Great Blessing of Waters at Theophany, though they can be blessed at any time. This is a brief service in the home of prayer and sanctifying the house through the sprinkling of holy water. A longer order of blessing is often used for the first blessing and cleansing of a new home. In Russia, it is common that laymen themselves sprinkle their homes each year with the blessed waters of Theophany.

If we desire to have the priest pay us a visit to bless our house, with the house cleaned and ready, we dress as we would for a church service. When the priest arrives, we turn off the television, radio, stereo, etc. Pets that may interfere are placed out of the way. A small table may be set up before the Icon Corner, upon which a wide-mouthed but small bowl full of newly blessed water is placed. A lit candle, censer (if you have one), and icon are placed on the table. These things should be arranged before the priest arrives.

Family members and any guests gather and stand before the small table. The first names of those residing in the home are printed on a piece of paper and placed on the table. Proper baptismal names should be used.

One family member may carry the lit candle, going before the priest and leading him through the house, turning on lights, opening doors, etc. The other family members may accompany the priest or may stay at the table (children, though, usually want to see their rooms blessed).

After the service you may take advantage of having the priest in your home for the house blessing to ask questions, to voice any concerns you may have, or simply conduct some spiritual conversation. Some parishioners desire a more extended visit or to have a meal with the priest. This should be arranged beforehand.

After the service, some of the faithful will make an offering to the church or give a gift to the priest. There is

no obligation to do this, but if done, it is done following the service.

On a Rule for Beginners

St. Isaac the Syrian, From Homily 17

This is the rule of life that is chaste and pleasing to God: to refrain from glancing here and there with your eyes, but always to gaze steadily on what lies before you; to refrain from speaking idly and to say only what is necessary; to regard mean attire as sufficient for your body's need and, in like manner, to make use of foods that sustain the body, and not those that satisfy gluttony; to take a little from all foods, and not disdain some and select others and choose to fill your belly with these. Discretion is greater than all the other virtues. Without companions (when not ill or infirm), do not partake of wine. Do not interrupt the words of one who is talking, and contradict him like someone uncouth; but like a wise man be patient. And wherever you find yourself, consider yourself the inferior, and the servant of your brethren. Do not expose any part of your body in front of any man; and do not touch the body of another, except for some necessary reason, nor permit anyone to touch your body without good cause, as I have said. Shun familiarity as death. Acquire a chaste rule for your sleep, lest the power that guards you remove itself far from you. Wherever you sleep, if possible, let no man see you. Do not spit in front of anyone. If a fit of coughing comes over you while seated at table, turn your face to your back, and cough in this manner. Eat and drink with moderation, as befits the children of God....

O glutton, bent on the worship of your own belly! It is better for you to cast live coal into your stomach than the fried foods of rulers and princes. Pour your mercy out on all, and be moderate in all things. Keep yourself from much talk, for it is this that extinguishes the noetic movements produced in our heart by God. Flee from discussions of dogma as from an unruly lion; and never embark upon them yourself, either with those raised in the Church or with strangers. Do not pass through the streets of the hot-tempered and quarrelsome, lest your heart be filled with anger, and the darkness of delusion dominate your soul. Do not dwell with a proud man, lest the energy of the Holy Spirit be taken from your soul and she become the dwelling of every evil passion. If you keep these observances, O man, and occupy yourself continuously with the study of God, in truth your soul will see the light of Christ in herself, and will never be darkened unto all eternity. To Him be glory and dominion to the ages. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2017

31 December: All-Night Vigil for St. Basil,
Circumcision of Christ, and the New Year, 10:00
p.m.

6 January: Theophany of Christ

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!