

The Confessor's Tongue for December 27, A. D. 2020

29th Sunday after Pentecost; Protonmartyr Stephen

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 25: Nativity of Our Lord in the Flesh

This week we celebrate the Great Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. We do well to keep the Feast by attending as many of the services celebrating it as we can manage: Royal Hours Tuesday 8:00 a.m., Baptisms 10:00 a.m. Vespers Liturgy (with the Old Testament Readings for the Feast) Monday at noon, Vigil Monday evening at 6:00, and the Feastday Liturgy Wednesday morning at 8:00.

We celebrate the Feast by greeting each other with the greeting, "Christ is born!" and the response, "Glorify Him!". We do not fast again until January 5, the Eve of Theophany. We sing the troparion (before) and kontakion (after) of the Feast in place of our usual prayers before and after meals through the Leavetaking December 31.

Nativity, Troparion, tone 4

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God / hath shone upon the world the light of wisdom. / For by it, those who worshipped the stars / were taught by a star to adore Thee, / the Sun of Righteousness, / and to know Thee, the Orient from on high. // O Lord, glory to Thee!

Nativity, Kontakion, tone 3

Today the Virgin giveth birth to the Transcendent One, / and the earth offereth a cave to the Unapproachable One! / Angels with Shepherds glorify Him! / The wise men journey with the star: // since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child!

Notes on the 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, and then later on 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. V. Bulgakov, *Handbook for Church Servers*.

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Awaiting the New Year A.D. 2021

We all wish for better things in 2021 than we experienced in 2020, but whatever God brings us in the approaching year, He is calling us to go deeper into Him, to draw closer to Him, to detach ourselves from worldly attachments that we may be more fully His. In this coming year, we all need to grow in grace and in the true knowledge of God. We all need to be strengthened in our faith and built up in our inner man. We all need to beseech God for a spirit of prayer. We all need hunger for His Word and to spend more time reading, contemplating, and applying it.

This coming year is a time for us learn to live humbly, quietly, faithfully. It is a time for us to learn to live in accordance with the Greek saying, "As illegal aliens", or, as it might be rephrased, "beneath the radar," trying not to draw unnecessary attention to ourselves. We need wisdom to guard our lips, forego discussing church business online, and develop our relationships with one another face to face. If hard times are ahead, we will need each other more than ever. Now is the time to foster these relations.

God has given us something very good and beautiful here at St. Maximus. Let us work to preserve it and strengthen it. Let us guard our mouths from evil words which may harm others, and may we guard our ears against words that would cause us to disdain our brethren. Careless words do great harm.

I pray that whatever this New Year brings that we all will experience God's presence, grace, and power in new and deeper ways than every before, that we will know His faithfulness and goodness so that a year from now, we will all be filled with joy and peace in him despite any storm that may rage about us.

Fr. Justin

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And if blood of Martyrs is to flow on the steps  
We must first build the steps;  
And if the Temple is to be cast down  
We must first build the Temple. T.S. Eliot  
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December 11: Sunday of the Forefathers

The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers occurs between the 11th and the 17th of December. This Sunday commemorates all the ancestors of the people of God, the holy patriarchs living up to the law, given on Sinai, and under the law, - from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed; together with them are commemorated "those who preached Christ" the holy prophets - from Samuel to Zechariah and to John the Baptist, and all the Old Testament righteous men, who were righteous in the faith in the coming of the Messiah. Especially in the service for this day are praised "the pious youths" Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, who "in faith were thrown into the fiery furnace" and . . . who

are mystically a prototype of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ" from the Virgin. . . .

On this day, the holy Church appoints the Gospel reading about those invited to a lord's supper but then at the last minute declined to come, warning us, that we can be distracted from worthily meeting the Lord by permitting the predominance of flesh over spirit, the attachment to the terrestrial, the blinding by gleam of worldly goods, the predilection for vanity, the unwillingness to deny one's self-love and pride everyday, the enslavement to passions and covetousness. The Epistle reading directly commands us to destroy our earthly members: fornication, impurity, passion, evil lust and cupidity, to lay aside anger, evil, blaspheming, slander, lies, and in general to take off the old man and put on the new in the image of the Creator (Col. 3:4-11).

V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © All rights reserved

Choruses from the Rock

T. S. Eliot, 1934

This poem of T.S. Eliot, inspired by his faith in Christ, speaks much truth to us today. Man's spiritual development and then his apostasy are treated in this section..

VII (5th installment)

In the beginning God created the world. Waste and void.
Waste and void. And darkness was upon the face of the deep.
And when there were men, in their various ways, they struggled in torment towards God
Blindly and vainly, for man is a vain thing, and man without God is a seed upon the wind: driven this way and that, and finding no place of lodgement and germination.
They followed the light and the shadow, and the light led them forward to light and the shadow led them to darkness, Worshipping snakes or trees, worshipping devils rather than nothing: crying for life beyond life, for ecstasy not of the flesh.
Waste and void. Waste and void. And darkness on the face of the deep.

And the Spirit moved upon the face of the water.
And men who turned towards the light and were known of the light
Invented the Higher Religions; and the Higher Religions were good
And led men from light to light, to knowledge of Good and Evil.
But their light was ever surrounded and shot with darkness
As the air of temperate seas is pierced by the still dead breath of the Arctic Current;
And they came to an end, a dead end stirred with a flicker of life.
And they came to the withered ancient look of a child that has died of starvation.
Prayer wheels, worship of the dead, denial of this world, affirmation of rites with forgotten meanings
In the restless wind-whipped sand, or the hills where the wind will not let the snow rest.
Waste and void. Waste and void. And darkness on the face of the deep.

Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in time and of time,
A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history:
transecting, bisecting the world of time, a moment in time but not like a moment of time,
A moment in time but time was made through that moment:
for without the meaning there is no time, and that moment of time gave the meaning.

Then it seemed as if men must proceed from light to light, in the light of the Word,
Through the Passion and Sacrifice saved in spite of their negative being;
Bestial as always before, carnal, self-seeking as always before,
selfish and purblind as ever before.
Yet always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming their march on the way that was lit by the light;
Often halting, loitering, straying, delaying, returning, yet following no other way.
But it seems that something has happened that has never happened before: though we know not just when, or why, or how, or where.
Men have left God not for other gods, they say, but for no god;
and this has never happened before
That men both deny gods and worship gods, professing first Reason,
And then Money, and Power, and what they call Life, or Race, or Dialectic.
The Church disowned, the tower overthrown, the bells upturned, what have we to do
But stand with empty hands and palms turned upwards
In an age which advances progressively backwards?
Voice of the Unemployed [afar off]:
In this land
There shall be one cigarette to two men,
To two women one half pint of bitter
Ale...

Chorus: What does the world say, does the whole world stray in high-powered cars on a by-pass way?
Voice of the Unemployed [more faintly]
in this land
No man has hired us
Chorus: Waste and void. Waste and void. And darkness on the face of the deep.
Has the Church failed mankind, or has mankind failed the Church?
When the Church is no longer regarded, not even opposed, and men have forgotten
All gods except Usury, Lust and Power.

Upcoming Events 2020

31 December: Vigil for St. Basil, 7:00 p.m.
6 January: Holy Theophany
21 January: St. Maximus

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!