

The Confessor's Tongue for December 19, A. D. 2021

26th Sunday After Pentecost: Sunday Before 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.

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 Friday 8:00 a.m., Vespers Liturgy (with the Old Testament Readings for the Feast) Friday at noon, Vigil Friday evening at 6:00, and the Feastday Liturgy Saturday 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!

Ordination Next Sunday

Next Sunday, one of our own, Deacon Maximus Shane Gibson, who was with us for many years and has been at St. Tikhon's Seminary the past two and a half years, will be ordained to the Holy Priesthood at St. Seraphim's Cathedral by Bishop Gerasim. Please pray for him and his wife Michelle and daughter Magdalena. Their lives are about to change.

The following week through January 4, he will be in our parish serving with us, so you will have opportunity to see them. It is a blessing to our parish when people from it enter the priesthood or a monastery.

Questions for the New Year

We now celebrate the Feast of Christ's birth and coming into our dark world to bring us light. "Christ is born!" we cry. "God is with us!" The reality of God's joining Himself to the human race forever in the person of Jesus Christ is worth celebrating. It changes everything for us and the whole human race. It is the most important event in all of history and marks the great turning point for the human race.

But how has this truth changed us since last Nativity? Have we grown in grace and in the knowledge of God this past year? Have we driven sin

from more of the territory of our hearts like the Hebrews were to drive the Canaanites from the Promised Land, or have we allowed it to dwell peacefully within us and even increase?

The New Year will be upon us in a eleven days. In the light of Nativity and in the midst of the joy of the Feast, take some time to plan spiritually for the new year, to set some spiritual goals, to set in order what has fallen into disorder in your life, to respond more fully to the truth that Christ is born and God is with us. What steps can you take this year to make sure that you really do seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, so that all the other things you need may be added to you in accordance with Christ's promise? How can you improve and increase your prayer? Your presence at services? Your fasting? Your giving? Your service to your spouse, your family, your employer, your parish, and your town? How can you build yourselves up in your most holy faith through reading, contemplating, and living the Holy Scriptures? How can you be inspired by reading the lives of the saints, or instructed in the spiritual life by reading the spiritual literature of the Church?

We must give more earnest heed to these things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip away from us and we slip away from Christ. Take some time over the next week and a half to plan prayerfully for your new year in Christ. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

From Patriarch Pavle of Serbia on Nativity

And precisely today — here and now, for the two thousandth time — we celebrate and remember the event that divides history in two; the event so significant that we count the years from it, and now complete the second millennium. Two thousand years have passed since that night when history's greatest miracle took place in that cave near Bethlehem, when the Son of God Himself came and put on flesh and became like one of us and 'dwelt among us' [John 1:14]. He is none other than the eternal and uncreated Son, the Word or Logos of God, through Whom all things were made. Since that night, nothing in human life and history is as it was before. The 'Sun of Righteousness' [Malachi 4:2] was born to us, and all the depths of human fallenness and struggle against God have been filled by His warmth and light. From that night on, all human life and the history of every nation comes down to only one dilemma — to one simple question: Are you for or against Christ? One simple question, but a question so crucial that our entire life, and the future of our people, hinges upon it. That question overshadows and defines every historical period of the past twenty centuries.

For or against Him? Earlier periods that were, at least for the most part, 'for Christ', brought forth fruit that stands as an example and a starting point for

all times. That fruit is called Christian culture. It represents an attempt to Christianize every segment of personal, social and national life, so that nothing remains outside or apart from Christ. We call it an attempt, since nothing in history is absolute and final. But the value is truly in the deeply Christian attempt, since a basic characteristic of Christianity is its all-inclusiveness — that Christ be all in all. . . .

What is man, and what is he worth? The twentieth century said that man is nothing, but this feast today tells us, just as that day two thousand years ago told us, that man is sacred. And that applies not only to his spirit or his soul, but also to his body. The whole of man, body and soul together, is an inviolable shrine of incalculable and eternal worth. Today's feast tells us this: the day on which the Bodiless becomes embodied and on which the Son of God becomes the Son of man. This precisely is what is radically new in our faith. That the soul is holy is suggested by other religions, but that the body is equally sacred is found nowhere else. During the whole first eight centuries of Christianity, which were characterized by struggles against heresies, the Church unyieldingly defended this truth: that the whole of man, both body and soul, is holy. And that applies to every human being, regardless of his religion or nationality. Every murder, every disrespect for human personality and freedom, is sin, even more so when it is justified on ideological or nationalistic grounds. (*From a homily given in 1999*)

A Homily on the Prayer Before Communion *Met. Anthony of Surozh, 18 September 1988*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Every time we come to Communion we say to the Lord that we come to Him Who is the Saviour of sinners, but we also state that we consider ourselves as the greatest of all. How much truth is there in such a statement when we make it? Or how can we make such a statement? Is it true? Can we truly say that we do consider ourselves the worst of all sinners? John of Kronstadt in his "Diary" makes a point which I believe is very important; he says that he also asks himself this very question, and he can answer it in all honesty, because, he says, if others had been given so much love, so much grace, so much Divine revelation as was given to him, they would have borne fruit which he proved unable to bear.

And so, this is a way in which we can ask ourselves questions when we come up to Communion, and say the words of the prayer before Communion. Is it simply that we repeat them because they are written in the books? Or is it that we are aware - but aware of what? Aware of being sinners? Yes, we all are aware of being sinners, more or less; but are we aware of how much we have received from God and how little fruit we have borne? It is only if we see vividly, clearly, the contrast between all that was possible, indeed - all that IS possible, and all that we are, that we can honestly say such words.

Let us reflect on them, because we cannot speak words of courtesy, words of empty politeness to God

when we pray. What we say must be true, and we must make of every prayer a test of the truth of our conscience and of our lives.

Let us take this with us until we receive Communion again, so that one day, perhaps not at our next Communion, but after a long life of searching, of praying, of passing judgement on ourselves, we can say truly, "God, O God! How much you have given me, and how little fruit I have borne! If anyone had been given what you gave me, he would already be a Saint of God". Amen.

Building Without Money

All his life, Father Moses was building. Another might not accomplish in a hundred years what he did in thirty-seven. And how did he do it? Always without money. sometimes you'd see that there was none of this, and there was none of that, and yet he'd be planning a building project when there was no money. And you'd say to him, "Batiushka, you're starting such a big project, but do you have the money?" "Yes, yes," he'd say, taking out a wallet with fifteen or twenty rubles in it. "But that's nothing," you'd tell him, "that kind of construction will take thousands!" He'd just smile and say, "But you've forgotten about God. I might not have the money, but He does." And sure enough, God would send it to him. So strong was his faith in God. Another wouldn't even have thought of starting a construction project without funds, but he was so sure of God's aid and so steadfast that he wouldn't even hesitate in the least. And sure enough, his faith would not let him down.

Old timers among the Optina brethren relate that once a certain bishop visited Optina Hermitage on his way to the capital. After touring the monastery, he stopped by the skete, marvelled at its secluded location and arrangement, and then asked the Father Superior, "Who build all this?" Father Moses answered in a few evasive words to the effect that it had all been gradually built there over a period of time. The bishop responded, "I can see for myself that the skete is situated here—what I want to know is, who is it that built the skete?" "It was the superior and the brethren," answered Father Moses. "They say you built it all," continued the bishop. "Yes, I was there too," answered Father Moses. After this, the visitor did not feel like questioning him further.

From The Elder Moses of Optina

Upcoming Events 2021

- 24 December, Friday, Nativity Eve services (8:00 a.m., noon, & 6:00 p.m.) and Baptisms (10:00 a.m.)
- 25 December, Saturday, Nativity of our Lord, Divine Liturgy 8:00 a.m.
- 26 December, Sunday, Ordination of Deacon Maximus to the priesthood, St. Seraphim's Cathedral, 9:30 a.m.
- 31 December, 10:00 p.m. All-Night Vigil

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!