

The Confessor's Tongue for December 22, 2024

26th Sunday After Pentecost; Sunday Before Nativity; Great Martyr Anastasia
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., Vespers Liturgy (with the Old Testament Readings for the Feast) Monday at noon, Vigil Tuesday evening at 6:00, and the Feastday Liturgy Wednesday 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!

God Has Entered the Bosom of Life

A Homily for the Nativity of Christ

Christ is Born!

Truly, God has been born as Man, on earth! Why? – "That we might live through Him" (I John 4: 9). For without the Incarnate God, the God-Man Lord Jesus Christ, human life is overall, a completely suicidal absurdity; death is truly the most obvious and awful absurdity on earth. To comprehend death is to comprehend life - all of the height and depth, the boundless eternity, of life. This is something accomplished only by the All-man-loving Lord, Who in His immeasurable love becomes man, while ever remaining God Incarnate, God-Man in the world of man. Human life acquires its eternal meaning, its purpose, as Divine-life, life in God. Outside of God, life is absurd and utter nonsense, filled to overflowing with offense and bitterness. Only in God, O man, does your life find its sole rational, logical meaning. And your intelligence, my brother, your human thought, finds its Divine and eternal meaning only in God, only as Divine-intelligence. It is only in the God-Man Lord Jesus Christ that Human thought becomes Divine intelligence. Likewise, only in God do your senses, O man, find their Divine, eternal purpose. Lacking that, your senses are but your most

merciless torturer, constantly crucifying you on an eternal cross, with no resurrection to follow. And your conscience? Where do we people find this savage stranger? It is only through Divine-conscience that it unites itself with its divine, eternal, purpose. Without it, human conscience is also a savage and terrible absurdity. And your death and mine, everyone's death overall: in all of Creation, is it not the cruelest torture within human existence? Yes, that is truly so. Yet even it achieves its eternal meaning and purpose only through the death and Resurrection of the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, for through Him, through Him alone, is the victory over death accomplished, and does death in the human world have meaning. Likewise, it is only as the good and grace-filled God-Man, in the worshipping and all-quickening Body of Christ the Incarnate God – the Church - that all mankind, all humanity in its infinite variety, discovers its Divine, eternal, Godly and human higher meaning.

With His Incarnation, becoming Man, God entered most patently entered into the womb, the bosom of human life, entered into the blood, the heart, and the center of all existence. Through His Incarnation, by becoming Man, God, Whom man had voluntarily crowded out of the human world, out of the human soul, comes back into the world, into the body, into the soul. He becomes fully Man, and being Him, labors for man, makes his abode in the world, in the midst of His Creation; He saves Creation, exercises His Providence over Creation, sanctifies and saves Creation, transfigures and deifies Creation. God's Incarnation is the greatest, most staggering, and most providential event to have occurred either on earth or in Heaven, for in [the Incarnation] the miracle of miracles is accomplished. If, to date, the greatest miracle had been the creation of the world out of nothing, God's Incarnation as Man surely surpasses it as a miracle. If in the creation of the world, God's words were transformed into matter, in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself took on a body and became matter, became flesh. Thus God's Incarnation became providential for each individual, for each creature throughout all Creation.

As for you: live in Him, live in God-Man, and you will be healed of all deaths, sins, passions, and of every work of the devil. Let your life become Divine-life. In that, O man, as soon as you become a member of the Church, a member of the Divine-human Body of Christ, rests all of the Mystery of Heaven on earth: And how does one live in the Church of Christ? Live by the Holy Mysteries and the Holy Virtues. This is why the Feast of the Nativity is preceded by a Fast. Fasting is the first among the virtues, and is always accompanied by prayer. Those two fundamental virtues lead man to God-Man, and through Divine Wisdom teach him how to live by Him and in Him.

And what is to be done with the body given you by God? – Purify it, free it from all uncleanness, from all passion, from all evil, from every demon. What does that mean? It means to purify it of every sin, for the devil hides in any sin, in every sin the devil works without regard to your free will. In great sins, it is prince of demons, in little sins, a little demon. You and I and everyone else, have been given all of the resources with which to defeat all of those demons, all of the passions, all of the sins, all of the deaths in us and in the world around us. First and foremost among those resources are prayer and fasting. From the truthful lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, who always speaks the real Truth, [we hear] the life-giving truth: “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 17: 21),- “this kind” of all manner of sins, all manner of passions, all manner of demons.

Lying before you and me, before all of us, brothers and sisters, is the Nativity: God is born as a person “so that we might receive life through Him” and so that through God we might perfect both soul and body. That is something easiest to achieve through prayer and fasting, which cleanse and purify both body and soul, so that the sweetest Divine Infant, our Lord Jesus, might joyously come to dwell in them, and that by God our human essence, in all its infinite variety might be fulfilled and perfected. For that was why your body and your soul, O man, were created, so that they might be fulfilled through God and [you] might live in God in God’s kingdom above. Our God-given teachers in this matter are humble prayer and fasting with humility. They are sacred and fundamental virtues [found in the] Gospels. May they soar with us, may they anticipate and proclaim to us and to all people throughout Creation the all-salvific and all-joyous Good News: Christ is born! *St. Justin of Chelije, The Nativity of Christ, 1970*

Praying the Great Litany

The Litanies of the Church services express the corporate prayer of the Church for the world. Each petition is not a prayer in itself but a call to us the faithful to pray for a particular need by thinking of the subject and its need in each bidding and to pray for it simply with the words “Lord, have mercy” or “Grant it, O Lord”. The Deacon bids us to pray for a concern, and we respond by praying, “Lord, have mercy.” If we do not give our attention, if we do not respond, prayer is not taking place. Herein we can see the corporate nature of our services. It is a work of the people, not a pious spectacle for spectators.

To help us apprehend better the nature of what we pray, let us look at the Great Litany cast as a prayer. It might go something like this:

O Lord, who hast joined us to Thy Father and given us Thy Spirit and made us citizens of Thy Kingdom, grant us peace from above to be at peace with Thee, with others, and with ourselves. Grant peace to our troubled world. Preserve the Church in every place in a good, healthy condition, and draw

all men into union with Thyself and with one another. Bless this church building and those that gather in it in faith, reverence, and the fear of Thee. Grant them thy great mercy. Have mercy on our bishop, the priests, the deacons, all the clergy, and all the people. Keep them on the path of salvation and help them to do thy will. Have mercy on our country, its president, on its civil authorities, and on those who serve in the armed forces and help them to use for good the authority you have given them. Help them to serve in a way that pleases and glorifies Thee. Have mercy on this place we live and on every city and those who live in the country. Be merciful to us by giving us weather favorable for crops, an abundant harvest, and for domestic peace in which to enjoy Thy gifts. Have mercy on those who travel by protecting them, on those sick by healing them, on those suffering, by comforting them, on those in captivity by freeing them, and grant them all Thy salvation. Deliver us from all tribulation, wrath, danger, and necessity. Help us to do Thy will and please Thee in all we do. Save us from the machinations of the evil one. Show mercy to us rather than giving us the justice we deserve. Keep us in Thy love, in Thy will, in Thy Church and from all evil. We put ourselves, each other, and all our live in Thy hands. We are yours. Let Thy will be done in us. Amen.

The concerns contained in the Great Litany encompass the whole world. Our part when we hear the Great Litany intoned is to listen attentively, lift each concern to the Lord, and to agree with it and pray it by asking God’s mercy in that concern. To ask mercy means we ask God to be good to us in ways far beyond what we deserve, have earned, or can claim by right. We need His mercy in everything! May we attentively pray with the Great Litany. *Fr. Justin*

Two Short Prayers of St. Isaac the Syrian

O Christ, Who art covered with light as with a garment, Who for my sake stoodest naked before Pilate, clothe me with that might which Thou didst cause to overshadow the saints, whereby they conquered this world of struggle. May Thy Divinity, O Lord, take pleasure in me, and lead me above the world to be with Thee.

I beg and beseech Thee, O Lord, grant to all who have gone astray a true knowledge of Thee, so that each and every one may come to know Thy glory.

Upcoming Events 2024

- 24 December: Nativity Eve Vespers Liturgy at noon, Vigil at 6:00 p.m.
- 25 December: Nativity of our Lord, 8:00 a.m. Liturgy
- 31 December: All-Night Vigil for St. Basil and the New Year, 10:00 p.m.
- 6 January: Holy Theophany & Great Blessing of Water; house blessings begin.

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!