My Beloved Ones,

As we continue to ready our hearts to receive the Lord this season, our Church is mindful of the lessons she wishes us to keep during our preparation. It is for this reason that Sunday before the Nativity is called The Sunday of the Forefathers: because we honor those who lived righteously as they hoped in the coming of Christ.

Special attention is paid to the Patriarch Abraham, in whose near sacrifice of Isaac we can see God offering up His Only Son; or how the betrayal of Joseph by his jealous brothers looks ahead to Christ’s betrayal by Judas; and of course, there is Isaiah, whose prophecy stated, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanu-el.” (Isaiah 7:14)

Today, however, I wish to focus on another group of people we honor as Forefathers: Daniel the Prophet & the Three Holy Youths, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (who are more known by the Babylonian names they were forced to adopt: Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego). Of course, many of us are familiar with the story of Daniel praying to God to stop the mouths of lions from inside their den. However, earlier in the Book of Daniel, we see how another evil action of Nebuchadnezzar led to a prophecy of Christ’s Incarnation. In Chapter 3, we read that Nebuchadnezzar created a large golden idol, and commanded all the people of Babylon to bow to this image whenever they heard a musical instrument; those who refused to obey this command would be thrown into a burning fiery furnace. However, the Three Holy Youths remained devoted to God and told Nebuchadnezzar they would not obey. Nebuchadnezzar was angered, and so ordered the Youths to be burned.

When they were thrown into the furnace the Book of Daniel tells us that the walked in the middle of the fire, praising God and singing hymns. Nebuchadnezzar was not only surprised when he saw that the Youths were unharmed, “But I see four men walking around in the fire,” the king replied. “None of them is tied up or harmed, and the fourth one looks like a son of god” (Daniel 3:25). The King then called the Youths out of the furnace and blessed the God of Israel for delivering them. In the story of the Three Holy Youths, we can see that the description of the fourth man is prediction of our Lord, and how symbolically, the Fire which did not burn the Youths describes how the Theotokos remained Ever-Virgin, even after she gave birth to God the Word.

As we approach the Nativity, we are busy. Old friends wish to visit before the holiday, and we are occupied with trying to find the appropriate gifts which demonstrate the love we have for our family. But the Church is here to remind us that the most important thing we need to do is to follow our righteous Forefathers in their purity, and in their hope in the Lord. How wonderful it is that we can observe the coming of the long-awaited Messiah? We must take great joy and strength in the fulfillment of their hope, and ask them to intercede for us, both now, and always.

+ALEXIOS
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