

Pastoral Message from Fr. George for 12.29.23

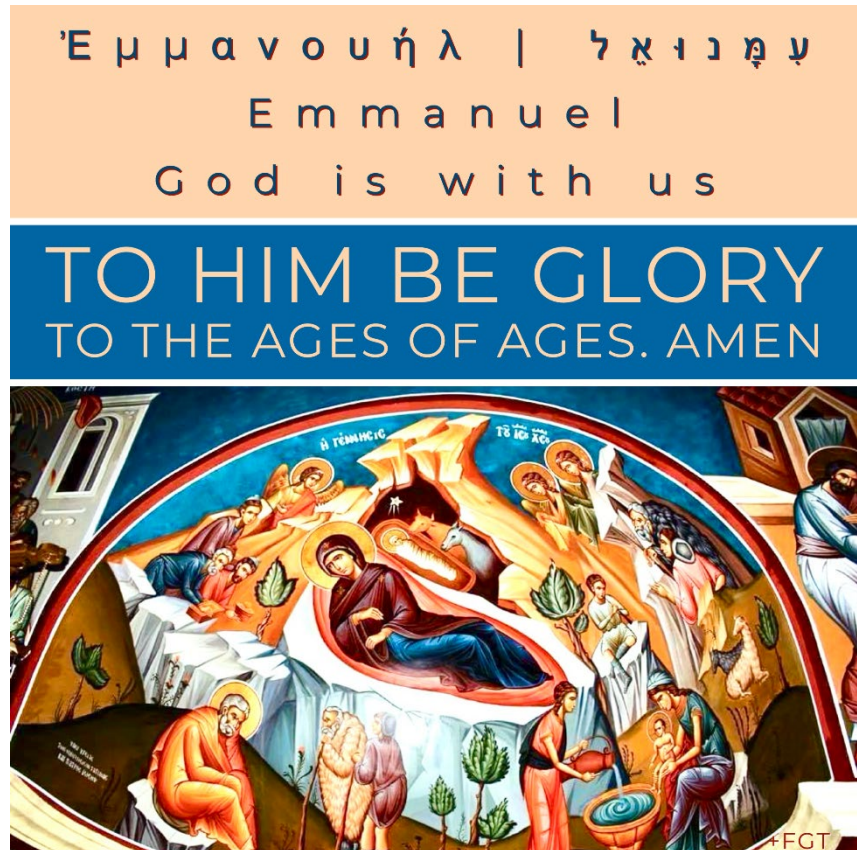
As we continue to celebrate Christmas, I invite you to read “The Nativity Sermon of St. John Chrysostom”:

Behold a new and wondrous mystery.

My ears resound to the Shepherd’s song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn. The Angels sing. The Archangels blend their voice in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory. All join to praise

this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He Who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised.

Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolds within itself on every side, the Sun of justice. And ask not how: for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed; He had the power; He descended; He redeemed; all things yielded in obedience to God. This day He Who is, is Born; and He Who



is, becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is His. Nor yet by any loss of divinity became He man, nor through increase became He God from man; but being the Word He became flesh, His nature, because of impassability, remaining unchanged.

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him Angels, nor Archangels, nor Thrones, nor Dominations, nor Powers, nor Principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Since this heavenly birth cannot be described, neither does His coming amongst us in these days permit of too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a Virgin this day gave birth, and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of this generation I have learned to venerate in silence and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech.

For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of Him who works.

What shall I say to you; what shall I tell you? I behold a Mother who has brought forth; I see a Child come to this light by birth. The manner of His conception I cannot comprehend.

Nature here rested, while the Will of God labored. O ineffable grace! The Only Begotten, Who is before all ages, Who cannot be touched or be perceived, Who is simple, without body, has now put on my body, that is visible and liable to corruption. For what reason? That coming amongst us he may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that men cannot see. For since men believe that the eyes are more trustworthy than

the ears, they doubt of that which they do not see, and so He has deigned to show Himself in bodily presence, that He may remove all doubt.

Christ, finding the holy body and soul of the Virgin, builds for Himself a living temple, and as He had willed, formed there a man from the Virgin; and, putting Him on, this day came forth; unashamed of the lowliness of our nature.

For it was to Him no lowering to put on what He Himself had made. Let that handiwork be forever glorified, which became the cloak of its own Creator. For as in the first creation of flesh, man could not be made



before the clay had come into His hand, so neither could this corruptible body be glorified, until it had first become the garment of its Maker.

What shall I say! And how shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infant's bands. But He has decreed that

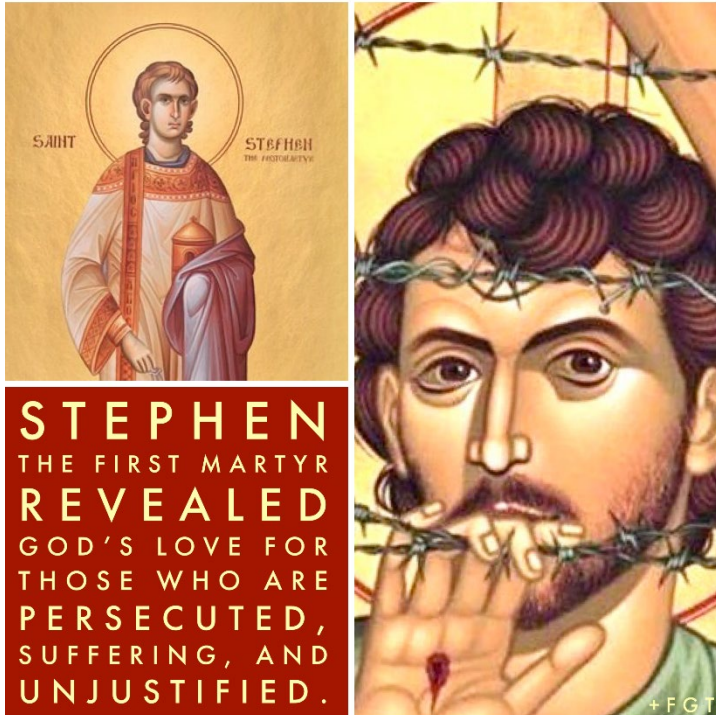
ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His Goodness.

For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, to sanctify me; He gives me His Spirit that He may save me.

Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been planted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels.

Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle. He became Flesh. He did not become God. He was God. Wherefore He became flesh, so that He Whom heaven did not contain, a manger would this day receive. He was placed in a manger, so that He, by whom all things are nourished, may receive an infant's food from His Virgin Mother. So, the Father of all ages, as an infant at the breast, nestles in the virginal arms, that the Magi may more easily see Him. Since this day the Magi too have come, and made a beginning of withstanding tyranny; and the heavens give glory, as the Lord is revealed by a star.

To Him, then, Who out of confusion has wrought a clear path, to Christ, to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, we offer all praise, now and forever. Amen.



We remember Saint Stephen the Protomartyr on December 27, two days after Christmas, while in the West, he is remembered on December 26. Hence the popular Christmas Carol:

*Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about
Deep and crisp and even.*

This describes an action of King Wenceslas on the day after Christmas Day. The tune used with this song is older than the words (written circa 1850) and was previously used with a hymn often sung on the feasts of St. Stephen and other martyrs. It begins:

*Christian friends, your voices raise.
Wake the day with gladness.
God himself to joy and praise
turns our human sadness:
Joy that martyrs won their crown,
opened heaven's bright portal,
when they laid the mortal down
for the life immortal.*

This hymn was written by Saint Joseph the Hymnographer in the 9th century.

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Blessings from Christmas Eve Service

On Christmas Eve, I used the following two poems written by Howard Thurman. After graduation from Morehouse College here in Atlanta, he was ordained a Baptist minister in my hometown of Roanoke, Virginia. His theology of radical nonviolence influenced and shaped a generation of civil rights activists, and he was a key mentor to leaders within the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King Jr. [Click to view his two poems set to music in this Youtube video.](#)
May Howard Thurmond's memory be eternal!

From "The Mood of Christmas..."

I will light Candles this Christmas,
 Candles of joy despite all the sadness,
 Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
 Candles of courage for fears ever present,
 Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
 Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
 Candles of love to inspire all my living,
 Candles that will burn all year long.

The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
 When the star in the sky is gone,
 When the kings and princes are home,
 When the shepherds are back with their flock,
 The work of Christmas begins:
 To find the lost,
 To heal the broken,
 To feed the hungry,
 To release the prisoner,
 To rebuild the nations,
 To bring peace among others,
 To make music in the heart.

WISHING YOU THE
Spirit of Christmas
WHICH IS
Peace
THE
Blessing of Christmas
WHICH IS
Hope
FROM THE
Heart of Christmas
WHICH IS
Christ



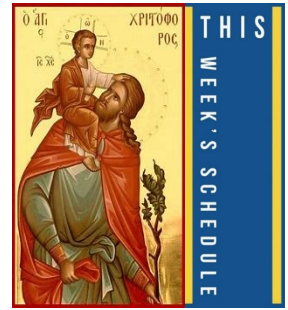
December 31, Sunday After the Nativity

7:45 Orthros 9:00 Divine Liturgy

11:00 Let's EAT!

4:00pm Orthros on the Eve of Circumcision of our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ, & Eve of Feast of St. Basil the Great (commemorated January 1)

5:00 Divine Liturgy & Blessing & Cutting of Vasilopita on the Eve of Circumcision of our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ, & Eve of Feast of St. Basil the Great (commemorated January 1)



January 5, Vigil – Eve for Holy Theophany – Day of Strict Fast

8:00 Great Hours of Holy Theophany

9:30 Vespers Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, Great Blessing of the Waters

January 6, The Holy Theophany of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ

8:00 Orthros

9:00 Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Great Blessing of the Waters

January 7, Feast of the Synaxis of John the Holy Glorious Prophet, Baptist, & Forerunner

7:45 Orthros

9:00 Divine Liturgy, Blessing of the 5 Loaves, January Commemorations

11:00 Religious Education Classes (*for all ages*)



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