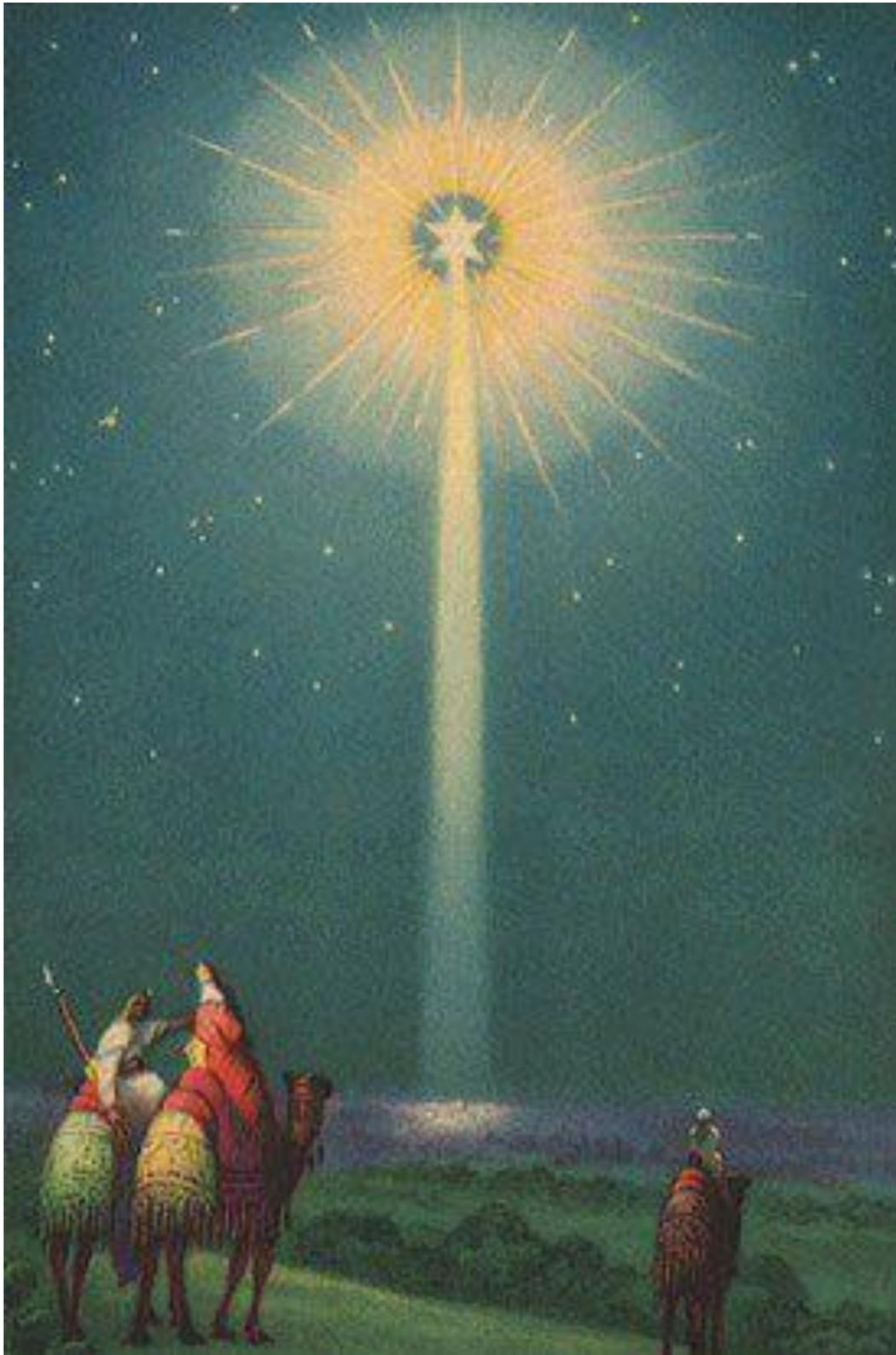




“Joy of All Who Sorrow”

No. 97 December 2016



The Nativity Fast

A Time of Preparation

The Fast of the Nativity is the Church's wise solace and aid to human infirmity. We are a forgetful people, but our forgetfulness is not unknown to God; and our hearts with all their misconceptions and weakened understandings are not unfamiliar to the Holy Spirit who guides and sustains this Church. We who fall far from God through the magnitude of our sin, are called nonetheless to be close to Him. We who run afar off are called to return. Through the fast that precedes the great Feast of the Incarnation -- which itself is the heart and substance of our calling -- the Church helps draw us into the full mystery of what that call entails. Like Great Lent, the fast of the Nativity is a journey. 'Come, O ye faithful, and let us behold where Christ is born. Let us join the Magi, kings from the east, and follow the guiding star'. Let us 'join the Magi', let us 'follow' and 'behold'. On the fifteenth of November, the Church joins together in a journey toward that salvation first promised to Adam in God's curse laid upon the serpent (Gen 3.14-15). The One who will crush the head of the serpent, of sin and the devil and all that is counter to the life God offers, is Him to whom the star leads us. The fast of the Nativity is our journey into the new and marvellous life of the Holy Trinity, which is offered by God but which we must approach of our own volition. In this act, we are joined to the story of our fathers. The gift of a new land and great blessings was freely given by God to Abraham, but in order to obtain it, 'Abram went, as the Lord had told him' (Gen 12.4).

Make ready, O Bethlehem: let the manger be prepared, let the cave show its welcome. The Truth has come, the shadow has passed away; born of a Virgin, God has appeared to men, formed as we are and making godlike the garment He has put on. Therefore, Adam is renewed with Eve, and they cry out: 'Thy good pleasure has appeared on earth to save our kind'. (Sticheron from the first hour of the Royal Hours of Christmas)

Adam and Eve and all of humankind are renewed and made alive in the Incarnation of God in Christ, who 'appeared on earth to save our kind'. Fallen flesh, so long bound to death, so long yearning for growth and maturation into the fullness of life, is sewn into the garment of Christ and at last made fully alive. There is a pleasing old saying, with perhaps more than a touch of truth to it, that humankind drew its first full breath at the infant Christ's first cry. We are called, then, to approach this great mystery as God's condescension into our own lives, personally and collectively. The Canon of Matins for the Nativity lays it out clearly: 'He establishes a path for us, whereby we may mount up to heaven'. The Nativity is not only about God's coming down to us, but about our rising up to Him, just as sinful humanity was lifted up into the person of Christ in the Incarnation itself. We are called to arise, then, during the fast that is the journey into this Feast. 'O blessed Lord who seest all, raise us up far above sin, and establish Thy singers firm and unshaken upon the foundation of the faith'.

The faithful take up this call through the abandonment of those things which bind, rather than free, in order that a focus on God as 'all in all' might become ever more real and central to daily life. Meals are lessened and regimented, that a constant, lingering hunger may remind us of the great need we each have for spiritual food that goes beyond our daily bread. The number of Church services is gradually increased, that we might know whence comes that true food. Sweets and drink are set aside, that we might never feel content with the trivial and temporal joys of this world. Parties and social engagements are reduced, that we might realise that all is not so well with us as we often take it to be. Anything which holds the slightest power over us, whether cigarettes or television, travel or recreation, is minimized or - better - cast wholly aside, that we might bring ourselves to be possessed and governed only by God. The fast is an ascetic time, designed by

the Church to strip away common stumbling blocks into sin, to provide us with the means of self-perception that we lack in our typical indulgence, and to begin to grow the seeds of virtue. All these are necessary if we are ever to know even partially, or appreciate even menially, the 'depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God'. We must take up the task of our own purification, gifted by God and achieved only through His grace, that we might approach Him on Christmas Day as did the Magi and the shepherds in Bethlehem:

Come, O ye faithful, inspired by God let us arise and behold the divine condescension from on high that is made manifest to us in Bethlehem. Cleansing our minds, let us offer through our lives virtues instead of myrrh, preparing with faith our entry into the feast of the Nativity, storing up treasure in our souls and crying: Glory in the highest to God in Trinity, whose good pleasure is now revealed to men, that in His love for mankind He may set Adam free from the ancestral curse. (Sticheron of the Sixth Hour, Christmas Eve)

The Church journeys toward the birth of Christ God, steered by the ship that is the Nativity fast. She does so with the knowledge that unless she struggles up the mountain that is desperately too steep for her to climb, she will never know the breadth of the gift that is the mountain's levelling by the hand of God. Resurrection unto life is the ultimate gift of the Incarnation, but unless a man understands that he is dead, he will never know the meaning of resurrection. The fast is a holy and blessed tool that brings us closer to such self-awareness. It reveals to us who we are, or perhaps more importantly who we are not, and makes us more consciously aware of that for which we stand in need. Then and only then, with eyes opened -- even only partially -- by the ascetic endeavour, we will truly know the life-giving light of the Nativity of Christ. We will hear with awe the proclamation of the hymn at vespers, taking the mystery presented therein as united directly to us:

Come, let us greatly rejoice in the Lord as we tell of this present mystery. The middle wall of partition has been destroyed; the flaming sword turns back, the cherubim withdraw from the tree of life, and I partake of the delight of Paradise from which I was cast out through disobedience. For the express Image of the Father, the Imprint of His eternity, takes the form of a servant, and without undergoing change He comes forth from a Mother who knew not wedlock. For what He was, He has remained, true God: and what He was not, He has taken upon himself, becoming man through love for mankind. Unto Him let us cry aloud: God born of a Virgin, have mercy upon us! (Sticheron of Vespers of the Nativity)

We will never fully comprehend this ineffable mystery; some knowledge is properly God's alone. But by His grace through the ascetic effort, we will come to understand -- perhaps, most of us, only to the slightest degree -- how this mystery is our own mystery, how His life is our own life, and how the salvation of Christmas Day is, indeed, our own salvation. And with this realisation, joy: joy far greater than a mere entrance into the temple on Christmas Day could ever bring us. This is the joy of the age-old journey of man, our own journey, come to its fulfilment in the awe-inspiring mystery of God Himself become a man. With this joy in our hearts, we shall embrace the hymnographer's words as our own:

Today the Virgin comes to the cave to give birth ineffably to the pre-eternal Word. Hearing this, be of good cheer, O inhabited earth, and with the angels and the shepherds glorify Him whose will it was to be made manifest a young Child, the pre-eternal God. (Kontakion of the Forefeast)

The Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple

A Hymn of St Nikolai of Zicha

The parents of the Holy Virgin
Lead her to the Holy Temple
And according to their promise
They give her to the Lord.
The lead the Temple to the temple
While angels chant
And chant with joy
To the young Virgin in purest attire.

The virgins accompany our Virgin
With hymns and tapers;
Zacharias leads her
To the Holy of Holies;
And into the holy place he takes her
Where the awesome mystery is hidden.

Where the Ark of the Covenant is,
Where the golden lampstand is,
Where the staff and manna are,
Into the guarding place of all mysteries;
There the pure Virgin is led –
The Mystical Ark of the living Christ.



Notes & Jottings

PATRIARCH SAINT TIKHON OF MOSCOW

Our good friend, Subdeacon Claude Lopez, has sent us a gift from Switzerland. He has carved an ikon of St Tikhon and inserted into the wood a secondary relic: a piece of the coffin of the glorified Patriarch. This fragrant ikon/reliquary is now in our collegiate church for the veneration of the faithful. We extend our grateful thanks to Subdeacon Claude and wish him Many Years.

PARISH OF HOLY MARTYR PHILOTHEA AND ST BEDE THE VENERABLE

In May last year we were able to offer hospitality to Fr Liviu Barbu and his parish who were in need of a helping hand. Since then, the Romanian congregation has been worshipping with us, Sunday by Sunday. During this period of time, the number of Romanian parishioners has rapidly increased. Our church is hardly big enough to cope with an ever increasing congregation. Thus the parish is needing separate church facilities and, to this end, is negotiating with the Anglican Diocese of Norwich for the use of, the currently disused, St Mary's Church at Gillingham, a nearby village.

On Sunday 11 December, Bishop Ignatius of Mures will visit the parish and the Liturgy will be served in St Mary's, Gillingham. This will be their Patronal Feast and, after the Liturgy, the Sunday school children will perform a play, *The Old Woman and The Wall*. The children taking part will be from both St Philothea and Bede Parish and from "Joy of All Who Sorrow" Collegiate Church.

SAINT HERMAN CALENDARS FOR 2017

These are currently in stock and retail at £8.25 each. Order now to avoid disappointment.

NAMEDAYS

We send congratulations to everyone who is celebrating a nameday at this time and wish them

MANY YEARS!

7 Dec – **Great Martyr Catherine of Alexandria** – Catherine Meyer

13 Dec - **Apostle Andrew the First Called** – Andrei Bosisas

19 Dec – **St Nicholas of Myra** – Subdeacon Nicolas Mabin, Nicholas Meade,
Nicholas Morgan

28 Dec – **St Anthea, mother of St Eleutherius** – Anthea Barry

28 Dec – **St Stephen of Sourozh** – Archpriest Stephen Platt.



COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF THE MOTHER OF GOD
JOY OF ALL WHO SORROW

DECEMBER 2016

Saturday 3 December

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 4 December

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple)

Saturday 10 December

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 11 December

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Monk-Martyr Stephen the New)

Saturday 17 December

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 18 December

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (St Sabbas the Sanctified)

Saturday 24 December

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 25 December

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (St Herman of Alaska)



The only valuables on earth are good works done for Christ.

St Seraphim of Sarov

Collegiate Church of the Ikon of the Mother of God: Joy of All Who Sorrow
The White House, Low Road, Mettingham, Suffolk, NR35 1TP
Tel: (01986) 895176
www.mettingham.org.uk