

December 16 2018. 29th Sunday after Pentecost. Prophet Sophonias.



This Prophet, also known as Zephaniah, is ninth of the Twelve Minor Prophets of the Old Testament. He was the son of Chusi (Cushi), from the tribe of Levi, or according to some, the great-grandson of King Hezekias. He was a contemporary of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Prophetess Oldama. He prophesied in the years of Josias, who reigned in the years 641-610 before Christ.

The prophet lived at the royal court, where he preached repentance and helped King Josiah eliminate idol-worship. His book of prophecy is divided into three chapters. His name means "Yah is darkness."

A **prophet** is one who speaks for God. The term usually refers to God's spokesmen in the Old Testament, beginning with Abraham, and ending with St. John the Forerunner. The word *prophet* itself derives from the Greeks, who used the word *profitis*, to refer to an interpreter or spokesperson of a deity, who "utters forth."

In Hebrew, however, the word traditionally translated as prophet *nevi*, which likely means "proclaimer." The meaning of *nevi* is perhaps described in Deuteronomy 18:18, where God said, "I will put my words in his mouth and he will speak to them all that I command him." Thus, the *navi* was thought to be the "mouth" of God.

Some examples of prophets in the Old Testament include Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Isaiah, David, Solomon, and Job. Also, sixteen books in the Old Testament are called by the names of prophets, although not necessarily written by their hands. They are traditionally divided into the "major" and "minor" prophets:

Orthodoxy teaches that John the Baptist (also known as John the Forerunner) was the last of the prophets, thus tightly linking the period of prophecy in the Old Testament with Jesus, who delivered the fullness or fulfillment of the law.

Some Protestant (and thus heretical) sects hold that prophecy continues to this day, including Pentecostals and Quakers. In doing so, they often manage to diminish the role of Holy Tradition by overemphasizing such new "revelations." Mormons also think that the current president of their church is a prophet. This, however, is not to say that the spirit of prophecy is dead in the Church; there are many instances of saints and other Orthodox receiving prophetic dreams or visions. The term "prophet" itself, though, is generally reserved for Old Testament figures.

<https://orthodoxwiki.org/Prophet>

Epistle 1 Timothy 1:15-17

¹⁵ This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. ¹⁶ However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Luke 18: 18-27

¹⁸ Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁹ So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. ²⁰ You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’ ”

²¹ And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.”

²² So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

²³ But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

²⁴ And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ And those who heard it said, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ But He said, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.”

Homily on the Holy Prophet Zephaniah (Sophonias)

An Excerpt from *Of Whom the World was not Worthy* by Protopresbyter James Thornton

...I will today focus on just a few verses from the first chapter of the Book of Zephaniah, since they are so relevant to our own efforts as Orthodox Christians in the world.

Historians tell us that King Josiah achieved much success during his reign in eradicating pagan worship in Judah, yet it stubbornly persisted in certain places. The Holy Prophet, enlightened by God by his genuine sanctity, writes as if he is quoting God, Who, he says, will not tolerate any corruption or idolatry among His people, [for example] the Hebrew Priests who had become unscrupulous careerists, who lived comfortable, even luxurious, existences, without struggle or much effort, who had essentially lost their

faith in God, and who had compromised with falsehood by trying to take the easy way through blending the Hebrew religion with paganism. ... Those who had turned back from God, who had not sought Him nor enquired for him, were the lukewarm, the indifferent, and the lazy, no different in Saint Zephaniah's day than in our own time. All such men, the Holy Prophet states, God will punish.

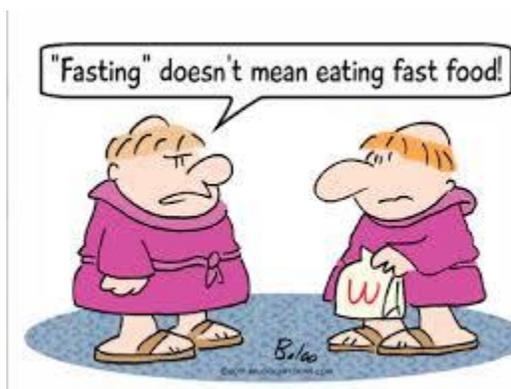
The Holy Prophet, speaking again for God from Whom he had received the enlightenment and authorization to speak thus, then writes, "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD'S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel." [2]

Here, he is saying that we must be silent and submissive at the approach of God, or in the presence of the things of God, and that we must prepare ourselves since "the day of the Lord is at hand." The "day of the Lord" refers both to the judgment that was about to befall Judah, and to eschatology, that is, to the last days, when the judgment of the Almighty will come down upon all of mankind. It may be taken also to refer to the judgment each of us will face at our repose.

A few verses later, the Holy Prophet cries that the "great day of the LORD is near, it is near" [3] and that that day will be "a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness..." [4] These words foretell the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians, but they relate also to eschatology, to the end of the ages, when Christ God will "come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead." [5]

... Christ God is indeed the God of mercy and of love, and there is certainly a sweetness in serving Him. Yet, He is also the God of perfect justice, and therefore the unrepentant must expect no quarter from Him when the day of reckoning, the "day of the Lord," arrives. Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament makes sense otherwise. Not even Christ's own words in the Holy Gospels make sense unless we appreciate that, while those who have lived lives in conformity to God's will receive everlasting blessings in paradise, as is consonant with God's justice and His All-Holy Nature, the unrepentant doers of evil will face His wrath and punishment, since they have failed to struggle to transform their inward beings, to make themselves acceptable to God.

Let us all be cognizant of these harsh realities. Let us not harbor illusions about God or His requirements for us. Let us not hesitate. Let us, without delay, prepare ourselves, for "the day of the Lord is at hand."
<http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/fr-james-thornton-homily-holy-prophet-zephaniah.aspx>



Fasting Guidelines: Nativity Fast 2018

The Nativity Fast began this year on Thursday, November 15. This fast helps us prepare to properly celebrate our Lord's nativity in the flesh and it is to our benefit to observe it as fully as possible. These guidelines are general. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that should be practiced with the oversight and direction of your spiritual father. You should consult your spiritual father if you have any specific questions about the fasting discipline as it applies to you.

Remember that almsgiving is a special part of this particular fast. Further, limiting one's entertainments and increasing other aspects of one's spiritual life – prayer, reading of the Bible and Church Fathers, attendance at Divine Services – is a part of every fast.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE NATIVITY FAST

MONDAYS, WEDNESDAYS, and FRIDAYS of this fast are *Strict Fast* days. On these days we abstain from meat, dairy, fish with backbones, fowl, alcoholic beverages, and olive oil.

TUESDAYS and THURSDAYS of the fast are *Wine and Oil* days. On these days the fasting discipline is relaxed a bit to permit wine and olive oil.

SATURDAYS and SUNDAYS of the fast are *Fish, Wine, and Oil* days. On these days the fast is relaxed even more to permit fish with backbones in addition to wine and oil.

During the forefeast of the Nativity, from **December 20-24**, our fasting is more strict. Each weekday that falls during this period is generally kept as a *Strict Fast* day, while any Saturday or Sunday is observed as a *Wine and Oil* day. The Eve of the Feast, December 24, however, is always kept as a *Strict Fast* day.

Foods that are permitted on all days are vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts, and shellfish.

Please remember that abstaining from food during this period of preparation does us no good if we do not also, as St. John Chrysostom teaches us, fast with

... the eye and the ear and the feet and the hands and all the members of our bodies.

Let the hands fast, by being free of avarice.

Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin.

Let the eyes fast, by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful.

Let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip.

Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism.

For what good is it if we abstain from birds and fishes, but bite and devour our brothers and sisters? <http://www.allsaintsnc.org/fasting-guidelines-nativity-fast-2018/>

December 22: Conception by Anna



Saint Anna, the mother of the Virgin Mary, was the youngest daughter of the priest Nathan from Bethlehem, descended from the tribe of Levi. She married Saint Joachim, who was a native of Galilee. For a long time Saint Anna was childless, but after twenty years, through the fervent prayer of both spouses, an angel of the Lord announced to them that they would be the parents of a daughter, Who would bring blessings to the whole human race.

The Orthodox Church does not accept the teaching that the Mother of God was exempted from the consequences of ancestral sin (death, corruption, sin, etc.) at the moment of her conception by virtue of the future merits of Her Son. Only Christ was born perfectly holy and sinless, as Saint

Ambrose of Milan teaches in Chapter Two of his Commentary on Luke. The Holy Virgin was like everyone else in Her mortality, and in being subject to temptation, although She committed no personal sins. She was not a deified creature removed from the rest of humanity. If this were the case, She would not have been truly human, and the nature that Christ took from Her would not have been truly human either. If Christ does not truly share our human nature, then the possibility of our salvation is in doubt.

<https://oca.org/saints/lives/1999/12/09/103506-the-conception-by-righteous-anna-of-the-most-holy-mother-of-god>

The iconographic subject of St Joachim and St Anna *The Meeting at the Golden Gate*, and was a regular component of artistic cycles of the Life of the Virgin. The couple meet at the “Golden Gate” of Jerusalem and embrace. They are aware of St Anna’s pregnancy, of which they have been separately informed by an archangel.

There was a tradition that St Anna went (separately) to Egypt and rejoined the Holy Family after their Flight to Egypt. St Anna is not seen with the adult Christ, so was regarded as having died during the youth of Jesus. <http://www.orthodoxpath.org/saints-and-elders-lives/saint-anna-2/>

EPISTLE OF THE CONFERENCE OF UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX BISHOPS BEYOND THE BORDERS OF UKRAINE

May we all walk together in peace and in tranquility to the Holy Cave and the Christ-child therein, Who leads us to salvation, eternal life, and the Heavenly Kingdom! A blessed fast to you, all!

Ukrainian church splits from Moscow

Financial Times/Roman Olearchyk

Ukrainian Christian Orthodox leaders have chosen a 39-year-old bishop from the Odessa region as head of a new church that will be independent from Russia's patriarchy, severing another of the country's ties with Moscow. The creation of the Church of Ukraine has been condemned by the Kremlin.

The appointment of Metropolitan Epifaniy, a former journalist, follows a decision in October by Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, spiritual leader of Christian Orthodoxy, to cancel the Moscow Patriarchate's 332-year jurisdiction over Ukraine.

"The lord heard our calls and granted us this long-awaited unity," Metropolitan Epifaniy told crowds outside of Kiev's 1,000 year old St Sophia Cathedral.

President Petro Poroshenko declared: "This is a church without Putin . . . This is a church without prayers for Russia's leadership and Russia's army because Russia's leadership and Russia's army are killing Ukrainians."

A source familiar with the selection process said the choice of a young religious leader was crucial for church-building and national unity as Ukraine enters a fifth year of undeclared war with Russia. Metropolitan Epifaniy's religious studies in Athens and Greek language fluency are expected to help build relations with the leadership of global Orthodoxy.

Describing the development as "another act of declaration of Ukraine's independence," Mr Poroshenko put the schism on an equal footing to the country's 1991 independence following the USSR's collapse.

Patriarch Kirill, leader of Russia's Orthodox Church, this week described Kiev's declaration of spiritual independence as "a false church serving the devil."

Ukraine's new church is being formed on the foundations of two Ukrainian Orthodox groups that split from Russia's patriarchate in the 1990s but remained canonically unrecognised until this year. Patriarch Filaret, who led the larger of two churches but will be 90 years old in January, will hold an honorary role in the new church.

A handful of clergy from a third Ukrainian church which remains loyal to Moscow's patriarchy joined the new church. Recent surveys show that its base of followers has plunged amid Russian aggression.

Losing 12,000 parishes in Ukraine erodes influence for Russia, the largest confession among the 300m Orthodox Christians worldwide.

"Why did we come here today," a chaplain who served alongside soldiers fighting in the east, asked crowds awaiting Saturday's appointment. "Because this today is the spiritual front line . . . God is with us, victory is with us."