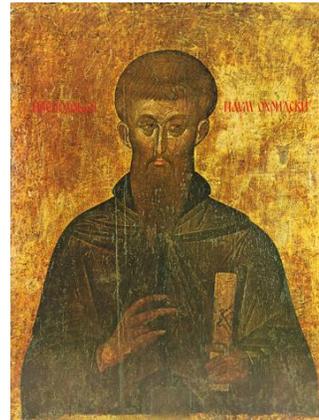


January 5 2020, 29th Sunday after Pentecost. Sunday before the Nativity of Christ, of the Holy Fathers. Tone 4. Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ. **Holy Ten Martyrs of Crete (III)**: Theodulus, Saturninus, Euporus, Gelasius, Eunician, Zoticus, Pompeius, Agathopus, Basilides, and Evaristus (250). St. Niphon, bp. of Cyprus (IV). St. Paul, Bishop of Neo-Caesaria (IV). **St. Nahum of Ochrid**, enlightener of the Bulgarians (910).



These Saints, who were all from Crete, contested for piety's sake during the reign of Decius, in the year 250. Theodulus, Saturninus, Euporus, Gelasius, and Eunician were from Gortynia, the capital; Zoticus was from Knossos; Agathopus, from the port city of Panormus; Basilides, from Cydonia; Evarestus and Pompey, from Heraklion. Haled before the Governor as Christians, they were subjected to torments for thirty days, being scourged, racked, dragged upon the ground through dung heaps, stoned, spat upon. They were questioned again, but their constancy roused the Governor to greater fury. After subjecting them to torments more bitter still, he had them beheaded.

Saint Nahum of Ochrid, was a disciple of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Equal of the Apostles. He was a man of great learning, and he spoke several languages. After a visit to Rome, he settled on the shores of Lake Ochrid (in today's Macedonia). There he built a monastery at the time when Saint Clement of Ochrid (July 27) was serving as a bishop. Many monks gathered around Saint Nahum, who was known as a great wonderworker and a man of prayer. He also laboured to translate the Holy Scriptures from Greek into Slavonic.

Saint Nahum fell asleep in the Lord in 910, and his holy relics continue to work miracles of healing for those who venerate them in faith.

EPISTLE

Hebrews 11:9

⁹ By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," ¹⁹ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.

²² By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

³² And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in* dens and caves of the earth.

³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

GOSPEL

Matthew 1: 1-25

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

² Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. ³ Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. ⁴ Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. ⁵ Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse begot David the king.

David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife* of Uriah. ⁷ Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. ⁸ Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. ⁹ Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. ¹⁰ Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. ¹¹ Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

¹² And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel.

¹³ Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. ¹⁴ Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. ¹⁵ Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. ¹⁶ And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon *are* fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ *are* fourteen generations.

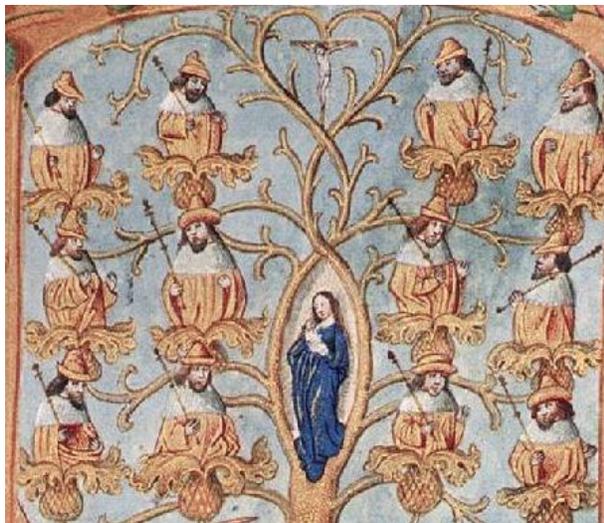
¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

²⁴ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵ and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

Commentary on Matthew 1:18-25 by Elisabeth Johnson

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1158



The Genesis of Jesus

At the beginning of his genealogy (1:1) and at the beginning of his birth narrative (1:18), Matthew introduces what follows as the "*genesis* of Jesus the Messiah."

In the genealogy, the *genesis* speaks of Jesus' ancestral origins, establishing his royal lineage as a descendent of King David through his father Joseph. In the birth narrative, the *genesis* has to do with Jesus' divine origins, with the astounding truth that the child in Mary's womb is "from the Holy Spirit" (1:20). Of course, God's way of launching this new creation brings complications for the human characters involved. Joseph is engaged to Mary, but they have not yet "come together." When Mary is found to be with child, a dilemma arises for Joseph. He does not yet know that

the child is "from the Holy Spirit" and believes that she has been unfaithful, bringing dishonor to both their families. A betrothal was as legally binding as marriage and could only be ended by divorce.

Righteousness (*dikaiosune*) is an important theme in Matthew. This becomes clear when Matthew tells us that Joseph, being a righteous (*dikaios*) man, was unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace and "planned to dismiss her quietly" (1:19). Joseph, being righteous, has mercy and compassion toward Mary, and resolves to end their betrothal without submitting her to public humiliation.

Yet God has other plans. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, "for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (1:20). The angel further says that Mary will bear a son, and that Joseph is to name him Jesus (the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "he saves"), for "he will save his people from their sins" (1:21).

Matthew tells us that all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet, and quotes Isaiah 7:14 from the Septuagint: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel" (1:22-23). The Greek word *parthenos* (virgin) translates the Hebrew word *'almah* (young woman). In the Greek translation of Isaiah, Matthew sees an apt description of what is happening with Mary, a virgin who has conceived and will bear a son. The name *Emmanuel*, meaning "God is with us," also highlights a central claim of Matthew's Gospel -- that Jesus bears God's saving presence among us.

When Joseph wakes up, he does exactly as instructed in his dream. He takes Mary as his wife, and when she bears a son, he names him Jesus, adopting him as his own and grafting him into his royal family tree (1:24-25).

God With Us

A preacher might help hearers imagine how, through Jesus the Messiah, God is at work to renew and restore lives today, even in unexpected ways. A personal or communal crisis, for instance, may bring us to new clarity about faithfulness to God's call, as it did for Joseph. We may be led to rethink long-held rules and traditions that obstruct mercy and no longer serve God's purposes. We may be called outside our comfort zones and led down uncertain paths for the sake of God's mission.

Are we ready for the risks involved? We may be subject to criticism and even hostility when God's mercy moves us -- when, for instance, we risk reaching out to those on the margins. But then we are in good company, for Jesus was called "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (11:19). This Jesus, friend of sinners, is Emmanuel, "God with us" to heal and to save. What better company could there possibly be?



January 9 : First Martyr Stephen



Saint Stephen was a Jew, by race, and, as some say, a disciple of Gamaliel, the teacher of the Law mentioned in Acts 5:34 and 22:3. He was the first of the seven deacons whom the Apostles established in Jerusalem to care for the poor, and to distribute alms to them. Being a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, he performed great signs and wonders among the people.

While disputing with the Jews concerning Jesus, and wisely refuting their every contradiction, so that no one was able to withstand the wisdom and the spirit whereby he spoke, he was slandered as a blasphemer and was dragged off to the Sanhedrin of the elders. There with boldness he proved from the divine Scriptures the coming of the Just One (Jesus), of Whom they had become the betrayers and murderers, and he reproved their faithless and hardheartedness. And finally, gazing into Heaven and beholding the divine glory, he said: "Lo, I see the Heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God."

But when they heard this, they stopped up their ears, and with anger cast him out of the city and stoned him, while he was calling out and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then, imitating the long-suffering of the Master, he bent his knees and prayed in a loud voice for them that were stoning him, and he said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," And saying this, he fell asleep (Acts 6, 7), thus becoming the first among the Martyrs of the Church of Christ.

Tropar: For the struggles you endured for Christ God, a royal diadem crowns your head, O First Champion of Martyrs. For you refuted the folly of the Jews and beheld your Savior on the right of the Father. Ever beseech Him, therefore, for our souls.

Kondak: Yesterday the Master arrived in the flesh, today the servant departs from the flesh. Yesterday He who reigns was born. Today the servant dies for Him by stoning, the Protomartyr, the divine Stephen.

Saint Stephen in Christian Art

Representations of Stephen in Christian art vary somewhat between East and West; in Eastern iconography, he is usually shown in the robes of a deacon (though these would not have developed until later), and often swinging a censer (the container in which incense is burned), as deacons do during the Eastern Divine Liturgy. He is sometimes depicted holding a small church. In Western art, Stephen is often depicted holding the stones that were the instrument of his martyrdom, as well as a palm (a symbol of martyrdom); both Western and Eastern art sometimes depict him wearing the martyr's crown.

Saint Stephen's feast day is December 26 in the Western Church (the "feast of Stephen" mentioned in the popular Christmas carol "Good King Wenceslas," and the Second Day of Christmas) and December 27/Jan 9 in the Eastern Church.



Primate congratulates Ukrainians on Christmas

The head of the OCU, Metropolitan Epifaniy, said in his greeting message that in celebrating Christmas we do not just honor a historical event, but again remind ourselves that the Son of God was born not for the sake of Himself, but for us and for our salvation.

"During these holidays, I cordially greet all of you on Christmas and New Year. I greet the President, the Parliament and the Government of Ukraine. Our common heartfelt congratulations are extended to the courageous defenders of Ukraine-military personnel and all those who oppose aggression against our homeland, protect its independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. We ask God to protect you from all evil.

"Last year, many of our compatriots were released from captivity and unjust imprisonment, but, unfortunately, during these holidays, many more of our brothers and sisters are still under occupation, in captivity and in prison in a foreign land. We ask the Lord for mercy and care for all of you and we believe that the day of your liberation is coming.

"In the days of festive joy, from the bottom of our hearts let us raise our prayerful gratitude to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, for his mercy to us and for the blessings of God that we have received.

"Glorify the Son of God, who was born, in prayers and carols, sharing the joy in the circle of his family and with other people! But most of all we work to make our whole life full of good and love, to fulfill the call that the Savior makes to us: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5: 16)! Christ is born! Glorify Him! **Христос народився ! Славимо Його!**

+Епіфаній Митрополит Київський і всієї України, Предстоятель Православної Церкви України