

December 16, 2018: The 28th Sunday after Pentecost (The parable of the Great Supper)

Epistle: Colossians 1:12-18:

Give thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Gospel: Luke 14:16-24:



Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot

come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’”

What a great honor! What a privilege to be invited to the Lord's Supper! How can I show my thankfulness to the Almighty God for including my name on the list of those invited to the Supper? What have I done to deserve this?

Ten days before the redeeming Feast of the Lord's Incarnation, the invitation of our Savior goes out to all people: *"Come, for all things are now ready!"* The emphasis is on the adverb "now." What does this "now" mean? This is a reference to a specific time in history. It is the time St. Paul the apostle calls "the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4). We can call it "God's moment." It is the time when God the Father decided to implement His eternal plan for the salvation of mankind; It is the time of the Lord's Nativity. It is "now" and not "then," before His Nativity, because "then" the door to the divine Supper/Banquet room was shut, the access was not possible. All those who lived before the first coming of the Lord, even the patriarchs and the prophets of the Old Testament fell asleep in the hope of hearing this invitation. Therefore, the Lord's invitation *"Come, for all things are now ready"* is addressed both to those who lived before His Nativity as well as to those who lived and will live after His Nativity. The Lord's invitation transcends time and generations. This being the case, its main characteristic is its permanence, meaning that it is just as valid today or a thousand of years from now as it was when Christ the Savior addressed it in person. It is a "now" addressed invitation.

The only question is this: How are we going to respond to the invitation? Are we going to invoke excuses like those from the above gospel reading? Do we get the message conveyed by this parable that by coming up with excuses we in fact exclude ourselves from the Lord's Supper? Even a delay could have the same tragic consequences because each day of inaction is a missed opportunity.

As Orthodox faithful we have the unique advantage of participating in the Lord's Supper (the Divine Liturgy) every Sunday and Feast day. And if we truly participate, meaning that if we prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Eucharist and strengthen our communion with Christ and His Church, not only do we respond positively to His invitation, but we actually pre-taste of His Supper here and now.

Fr. George Bazgan

Sunday Fellowship

**The following families are scheduled to look after
this Sunday's fellowship:**

**Dinică Ștefan & Suzana
Jurgea Eugeniu & Nicoleta
Mocanu Ștefan & Adriana**

Thank you all very much!

Altar boys for this Sunday:

**Alexandru Mustea
Alexander Ștefănescu**

Special Services during Advent

During the Christmas Fast, we'll have:

Vespers, every Saturday at 5:00 PM.

**Following the Vespers Service, Confession
will be heard for those who want to
prepare for Holy Communion.**

Bake Sale

**On December 14 and 15, the Ladies Auxiliary
will organize a BAKE SALE.**

**All of our ladies are kindly asked to bring their baked goods
to the Hall on Thursday, Dec. 13, between 5-7 PM.**

Thank you very much!

THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY

The traditional annual Christmas Party will be held on Saturday, December 22, at 6:PM, following the Vespers. The Sunday School children and the children from the Romanian Dance group of the Canadian-Romanian Society will present the program, followed by the arrival of Santa.

All children are welcome!

NEW YEAR'S PARTY

Would you like to celebrate the arrival of 2019 at the Romanian Center, in a traditional Romanian atmosphere?

Then contact Mariana Diaconu: 780-473-6711 or 780-660-4748 (texting only) for tickets (\$110/adults and \$20/children 7-14) and additional details.

Sorry, no refunds after December the 5th!

MEMBERSHIP / PLEDGE

The Board of Directors extends a warm appeal to all supporters of our parish, asking them to pay their membership as soon as possible.

This way we can ensure that we have the necessary funds to fulfill our financial obligations for the rest of the year.

We also encourage you to renew your financial pledge and be as generous as you can.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

A Christian's conduct in Church

Before I begin to address the topic of „church conduct,” it is important to address the question „Why do we come to church?”

We come to church on Sundays (the Day of the Lord) in order to reaffirm our vocation as liturgical beings, to continue our spiritual growth and to strengthen our communion with Christ and His Church which began when we were accepted into the community of the faithful through the Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Eucharist (Communion).

For an Orthodox Christian, attending the Divine Liturgy is not only a privilege but an obligation as well. It is a privilege in as much as we, as members of the visible Church are called to bring the Eucharistic elements (bread and wine), be part of their transformation into the Body and Blood of Christ and then, partake of them in the form of the Holy Eucharist, all this in the context of the Divine Liturgy, the highest form of prayer we can offer to God. It is also our obligation to attend the Divine Liturgy, obeying thus one of the commandments of the Church.

In order to benefit the most from our presence in Church we must keep in mind a few rules:

- 1. Come to Church on time (before 10:00) in order to participate in the entire Divine Liturgy.**
- 2. If the service is already in progress, you must stop and see what is going on. If you came in during the Scripture readings (Epistle or the Gospel), you should wait at the back of the church until the reading is over and then, quietly, take your seat.**
- 3. Pick up the liturgical book and follow closely the service, reading all of the prayers.**
- 4. During the Divine Liturgy you are not allowed to move around or talk to other people. You can do that at the end, during the fellowship.**
- 5. Out of respect for the most important part of the Divine Liturgy, please refrain from walking in front of the Altar after the procession with the Holy Gifts.**

The theology of the Lord's Nativity conveyed by the Christmas Carols

Here we are, by the grace of our loving and merciful God, getting ready to celebrate once again the great Feast of our salvation, the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Every time this Feast day comes around, we cannot help but re-live happy memories of our childhood in connection to this joyous and festive season. And it seems that the older we get, the more sentimental we are. Whether we share those memories with our family members or friends or choose to descend within ourselves and travel alone the memory lane, this mental exercise is explained by the intensity with which we anticipated and then experienced Christmas in our innocent childhood, and also by the mystery that surrounds this great, unique and hard to fathom act of God's intervention for our salvation. Ever since the angels sang the first Christmas Carol { "*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men*" (Luke 2:14)} on the holy night of our Lord's Birth, Christians have followed their example, proclaiming from generation to generation, for over two thousand years, God's rich mercy, divine compassion and infinite love for mankind. Who among us doesn't remember teaming up with other children and going caroling from house to house, courageously contending with the deep snow and cold of the night? Although we did it for the treats or the money offered by every householder, nobody (not even our parents) told us that we were in fact repeating what the angels had done on the night Jesus was born: we were announcing to the world the fulfillment of God's promise to give His only-begotten Son for the salvation of the humankind. We were the angels of our time who brought great joy to the shepherds, homemakers, farmers, workers, teachers, priests, etc. of our communities. This is why we should encourage our children and grandchildren to continue this wonderful tradition of announcing and praising the coming of our Savior in our midst.

Let us now examine the content of some of the Christmas carols, passed down from generation to generation, and understand that they are not meaningless songs created at the spur of the moment, but rather thoughtful messages full of theological and doctrinal meaning, as most of all originate in Europe, where the Christian message was preached by the Apostles of the Incarnate Son of God.

Some of these carols start by establishing the setting (the backdrop) in which the Nativity of Christ took place: "*Silent night, holy night / All is calm, all is bright*" (Silent Night), "*O little town of Bethlehem / How still we see thee lie / Above the deep and dreamless sleep / The silent stars go by*" (O Little Town of Bethlehem), "*It came upon the midnight clear / That glorious song of old / From angels bending near the earth / To touch their harps of gold*" (It came upon the midnight clear). Oh, how beautiful and truthful words! Even though His coming was announced centuries before, by the prophets of the Old Testament, the Birth of our Lord and Savior takes place in the silence and calmness of the night, unnoticed by the world that was busy with its continuous wandering in the "*darkness and the shadow of death*" (Mathew 4:16). The image of the angels who are "*bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold*" speaks of the role of the angels who are God's messengers to the world. Besides the Nativity of Christ, they are also present at the most important moments in the history of our salvation: the Annunciation, the Lord's Passion and Resurrection, the Ascension into heaven, etc.

The silence of the night is interrupted by the choir of the angels who bring the **good tidings** to the whole world. Christ is announced as the new-born **King** and **the Son of God**. According to His human nature He descends from the line of David the King: "*Hark! The herald angels sing / Glory to the new-born King!*" (Hark the herald angels sing), "*Glad tidings of great joy I bring / To you and all mankind*" (While shepherds watched their flocks), "*From God our heav'nly Father / A blessed angel came / And unto certain shepherds / Brought tidings of the same / O tidings of comfort and joy*" (God rest You merry Gentlemen), "*To you, in David's town, this day is born of David's line / The Saviour who is Christ the Lord*" (While shepherds watched their flocks)

As foretold by the Old Testament prophets, Christ is **born of the Virgin Mary**. His divinity is **“veiled in flesh”** and His name is **Emmanuel** as indicated by the archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation: **“Christ, by highest heav’n adored / Christ the everlasting Lord / Late in time behold Him come / Offspring of the Virgin’s womb / Veiled in flesh the God-head see / Hail th’Incarnate Deity / Pleased as Man with man to dwell / Jesus, our Emmanuel”** (Hark! The herald angels sing), **“Silent night, holy night! / All is calm, all is bright / ‘Round yon Virgin Mother and Child”** (Silent night).

The Child born in Bethlehem is the **Son of God**; He is the **Saviour of the world** and the **Incarnate Word of God**: **“Silent night, holy night / Son of God, loves pure light”** (Silent Night), **“God rest you merry gentlemen / Let nothing you dismay / Remember: Christ our Savior / Was born on Christmas Day /...How that in Bethlehem was born / The Son of God by name”** (God rest you merry gentlemen), **“Yea, Lord, we greet Thee / Born this happy morning / Jesus to Thee be glory giv’n / Word of the Father / Now in flesh appearing”** (O come, all ye faithful).

Some of the Christmas carols mention the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, offered by the **three Wise Men**, which represent the Three ministries of Christ: king, God and a Man who is to suffer and die: **“Then enter’d in there wise men three / Full rev’reently upon their knee / And offer’d there in His presence / Their gold and myrrh and frankincense”** (The first Noel), **“Born a Babe on Bethlehem’s plain / Gold we bring to crown Him again / King forever, ceasing never / Over us all to reign / Frankincense to offer have I / Incense owns a Deity nigh / Prayer and praising, all men raising / Worship Him, God on high / Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume / Breathes a life of gathering gloom / Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying / Sealed in the stone-cold tomb”** (We three kings of Orient are).

Messiah came to bring **peace** to every soul and **reconciliation** between God and His masterpiece, man: **“Peace on earth and mercy mild / God and sinners reconciled”** (Hark! The herald angels sing). He liberated us from the **the fear of death** and brought **salvation** to the whole world: **“Now ye need not fear the grave, Peace! Peace! / Jesus Christ was born to save”** (Good Christian men rejoice); **“Jesus Christ was born for this: He hath ope’d the heav’nly door / and man is blessed ever more”** (Good Christian men rejoice).

The holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church see the birth of Christ as the Feast of **our own spiritual birth** and the **re-creation** of man. This idea is expressed by one of the Christmas carols in these beautiful words: **“Mild he lays His glory by / Born that man may never die / Born to raise the sons of earth / Born to give them second birth”** (Hark! The herald angels sing).

There are no better words to conclude our attempt to explore the rich theological content of the Christmas carols than the ones we find in **“O little town of Bethlehem,”** which is not only a Christmas carol but also a prayer:

“O Holy Child of Bethlehem / Descend to us we pray / Cast out sin, and enter in / Be born in us today / We hear the Christmas angels / The great glad tidings tell: / O come to us, abide in us, our Lord Emmanuel.”

Fr. George Bazgan