

Sunday, Dec. 18, 2016: The Sunday before the Lord's Nativity (The Lord's genealogy)

Epistle reading: Hebrew 11: 9-10, 32-40:

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated - the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Gospel reading: Mat. 1:1-25:



This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the

father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Elihud, Elihud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah. Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah. Joseph

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

On major Feastdays, it is customary in the Orthodox Church, to have the event announced the Sunday before and then to conclude it the Sunday after. Such is the case with the Feast of the Lord's Nativity. The gospel is, first of all, establishing the historic reality of Christ's existence, according to His human nature, by presenting the book of genealogy, starting with prophet David all the way down to Joseph and the Virgin Mary.

In the second part, the gospel is relating to us the way the birth of our Lord and Savior actually took place. The mystery of Christ's conception, which caused confusion in the mind of Joseph, is revealed by the angel of the Lord who explains to him that he is part of the divine plan: *“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

In the incarnate Son of God, all the prophesis of the Old Testament are fulfilled: *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).*

Let us give thanks to our loving God for being faithful to His promise to send us a Savior, His only-begotten Son, the greatest gift, as the ultimate manifestation of His providence and infinite love for mankind!

Merry Christmas to all!

Fr. George Bazgan

THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY

The traditional annual Christmas Party will be held on **December 18** in the main Hall, following the Divine Liturgy and regular fellowship (**POT-LUCK**).
All children are welcome!

Special Thanks!

*We extend our special thanks to Mrs. **GEORGETA APOSTOL**, **GABRIELA DINCĂ** and **ADRIANA MOCANU**, who donated again the goodies for the children!*

Special Services during Advent

During the Christmas Fast, there will be
Vespers, every Saturday at 5:00 PM.

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

Fellowship on Christmas day

**This year, there will be a Pot-Luck fellowship
on Christmas Day.**

**Those who would like to attend are asked to
call Serban Stoleru at 780-483-6795**

MEMBERSHIP

**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 until the end of the year.**

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

The Sermon on line

**The Sunday's Sermon is being posted on line.
To access it, go to our parish's website (bisericaedmonton.org),
click on "Multimedia" and then on "Audio."**

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 talk to other people. You can do that at the end, during the fellowship.**

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