

Dec. 23, 2018: 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 Feastsdays, 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 prophesies 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

Sunday Fellowship

There will be NO FELLOWSHIP on this Sunday

Altar boys for this Sunday:

**Matthew Cotfasa
Arsenie Gavris
Arkin Gabriel Corbu**

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

The Ladies Auxiliary of our parish would like to extend their
heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all the ladies who brought baked goods
for the Bake Sale, which was a success!

Thank you all 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!

CHURCH SERVICES FOR CHRISTMAS

December 25: Divine Liturgy at 10:00.

December 26: Divine Liturgy at 10:00.

December 27: Divine Liturgy at 10:00.

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR MESSAGE

**The Board of Directors and the Ladies' Auxiliary
of our parish extend to all members and supporters
of our Church their best wishes for a
MERRY CHRISTMAS and a healthy, peaceful and
HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

HOUSE BLESSING

**On January the 6th we celebrate the Epiphany (Theophany), the
Baptism of our Lord and Savior. Following the Divine Liturgy and the
Greater Blessing of Water, Fr. George will begin the blessing of homes.**

**Those who are interested, please sign in the sign up sheet
or call Fr. George at 473-0029.**

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!

**PASTORAL LETTER
AT THE FEAST OF THE LORD'S NATIVITY, 2018**

† **IOAN CASIAN**
by the mercies of God
Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Canada

*To our beloved clergy and Orthodox Christians,
peace and joy from Christ the Lord, and from us hierarchical Blessings.*

*“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in
time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last
days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed
heir of all things, through whom also
He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1, 1 – 2).*

**Most Reverend Fathers,
Beloved Faithful,**

From the words of St. Paul we understand that all the events of the Old Testament constituted a dialogue of God with man through the prophets *"at various times and in various ways."* This dialog has found fulfillment in *the Son's words*, beginning with His birth in time, according to the flesh, from the Virgin Mary. The great Apostle speaks of a progressive preparation of humanity that has been completed at the *"fullness of time."* God is giving man time to hear and embody His healing word.

We can ask ourselves: Why did man need this time for progressive preparation? Father Dumitru Stăniloae reveals to us the meaning of this preparation:

The Prophet was giving man the faith as a certainty about the existence of God and was communicating His will. Man felt God's interest in his destiny and His closeness to him in the birth and support of his faith..¹

Through the prophets, God begins to restore man's faith in His existence, which is the foundation of the renewed human life. God also reassures man of the reality of the dialogue with Him and His constant interest in him. Thus, God restores the vertical dimension of the human word through the Word of God, the Logos. Through His Son, God liberates man from the secular horizontality of drifting away from Him, in order to elevate him by the vertical power of His word. Faith in God was becoming the foundation of restored human life and ethos.

But what is the concrete purpose of this dialogue? St. Basil the Great says: *God in the flesh; not of limited acts, like the prophets, but having His humanity articulated and united to Himself, and turning to Himself, through the body that is related to us, all humanity.*²

According to the great Cappadocian, the word of God has a concrete purpose - the realization of His union with all humanity. The word, although essential in any relationship, ultimately remains a preparatory element, necessary but still insufficient, that awaits further concrete fulfillment. The words of the prophets were preparatory, necessary in re-establishing the

¹ *Jesus Christ or the restoration of man.* Ed. Omniscope: Craiova 1993, p 98

² *Homily at the Holy Nativity of Christ* (p 30) in St. Basil the Great. *Unknown Homilies & Two Sermons on Baptism.* Ed. Doxologia: Iași 2012

paradisiacal relationship of man with God. The words of the prophets, beyond their *boundaries*, were preparing an *unlimited fulfillment*, which was the union of the divine and human natures through the Incarnation. *God's kinship* with all humanity, the expression of the perfection of the relationship between God and man, was the sought endpoint, and the *dialogue* was the necessary means to bring the whole into unity with God.

The great Cappadocian Father tells us why this unity between the divine and human natures was necessary: *Learn the mystery! For this is why God is in the flesh, to destroy in Himself death that had hidden within.*³

The ultimate goal of this restoration through the Incarnation was the victory of the deified man over the ultimate enemy that was abiding in his own nature - death. It represented the expression of the creature's failure to achieve deification to which it had been called and from which it fell away by disobedience and which had affected the ethos of man. The absurdity of the nonsense of the death of man destined for eternity was abolished.

What does this victory by the incarnation of Christ imply?

*Learn that this is why God is in the flesh, - says St. Basil the Great - because He has to sanctify this cursed body, to strengthen the weak, to familiarize with Him the one alienated from God, to raise to heaven that which had fallen from paradise.*⁴

When God restores, He does it in a harmonious, integral and perfect way. In Christ, the *inner-spiritual*, at the same time as the *outer-personal and relational unity of man*, is progressively re-established; the human body is restored through the immeasurable and perfect holiness of the Body of Christ; the weakened nature is strengthened against the assaults of sin and passions that have diminished its initial vigor; man is reintroduced into the natural and familiar presence of God; and eventually man is raised and placed in heaven - the space and time of God's full communion with man.

*Indeed, with Him (n.n. - Christ), man and mankind have a majestic walk on a new foundation of life - says Archim. Mitrof. Vasile Vasilachi. It is a heavenly path of man with God. It is a universal call of all mankind to a new and great unity, to union with the One and the same God. He calls us to shake off all the ideologies and human doctrines that separate us, thus forming one and the same kingdom of God, on one and the same earth, under one and the same divine shadow.*⁵

In the end, God restores the unity of all around Him. In Christ, the passionate laceration that tormented the human existence is abolished, being replaced by the harmonious unity of the whole divine-human. The path to eternity is reopen to man by the preparation through the divine word and the fulfillment in the Incarnation.

Beloved faithful,

We are at the end of an important year for all of us. It is the *Homage Year of the Unity of Faith and as a Nation* and the *Commemorative Year of the Great Union of 1918*. On the occasion of the *Second Congress of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Canada* (June 29 – July 1), we had the opportunity to present the overall situation of our Diocese and of the Romanian presence in Canada, as well as the missionary needs and pastoral priorities that result from it in the spirit of unity and love of faith and nation.

³ ibidem p 31

⁴ ibidem p 31

⁵ *What Lord's Nativity brings us.* (p 223 – 224) in *The Threefold love of God, of the Church and of the Nation.* Theological Collection "Word of Life": New York, 1990

At the symposiums dedicated to the Centennary of the fullness of the Romanian soul (Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton) we had the opportunity to reflect on the role and the contribution at the Great Union of 1918 of various personalities, such as: *Metropolitans Vladimir Repta, Nicolae Bălan and Pimen Georgescu, Patriarch Miron Cristea, Bishops Roman Ciorogariu, Ioan Ignatie Papp* and others. These were the people who wrote a new history, inspired by the living faith and the efforts of the forefathers. Through their ministry and endeavor, through art and culture which they promoted, the Church has kept alive the flame of the living faith, of the Romanian language and culture. The Church, through its clergy and believers, knew how to confront the vicissitudes of time in order to keep alive the hope of the final victory. And this was possible with the certainty of eternal life alone.

We received as gifts the holy relics of *St. Constantine Brâncoveanu* and *St. Gregory the Teacher, St. Andrew Saguna* and *St. Irodion of Lainici* as the foundations of a strengthened unity between the Mother Church and the parishes of our Diocese in Canada. The saints are the living testimony, by word and deed, of the faith in God.

The year 2018, rich in commemorating so many important events, was crowned by the consecration of the *National Cathedral* on November 25, which marked the fulfillment of a more than a century dream of the Romanian people. It is the visible expression of both faith in God and national unity as well as the perseverance of *a hardworking and faithful people*. The year 2018 meant a tangible transition from word to deed, the embodiment of a much-desired ideal.

Just as the word of the prophets has found its fulfillment in the Incarnation of the Son of God, in the same way, in today's society, where realities such as: disfunctioning, inequality, injustice, violence and superficiality are still present, we are expected to find the proper, edifying and unifying word, able to encompass the eternal values of the redeeming Christian faith. Through honesty, truth, generosity, goodness and beauty, the word can restore the values upon which man can build his life in a harmonious and truthful way.

At this festive moment, I would like to thank everyone – *the priests and deacons, monks and simple believers* - members of our parishes, missions and monasteries who have worked hard throughout this year for a more efficient mission, for better organization and functioning, for deeper knowledge, better approach and resolution to the issues we face, in the hope to spread the Word of God to all mankind.

On the occasion of the Nativity of the Lord, New Year and Epiphany, I extend to you all the most sincere thoughts of unity, harmony, joy, peace and blessing in our Lord Jesus Christ!

Many Years!

Your brother in prayer to God, desirous of every blessing

† **IOAN CASIAN**

Saint-Hubert/Montreal, 2018

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