

Dec. 28, 2014: The Sunday after the Lord's Nativity (The flight into Egypt)

Epistle reading: Gal. 1, 11-19:

"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother."

Gospel reading: Mat. 2, 13-23:



"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent

forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more."

Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

First, let us focus on the first two sentences of the Epistle reading: *"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ."*

St. Paul the Apostle makes clear to his readers from two thousand years ago, as well as to all readers of every generation throughout the two millennia, the fact that the Gospel is God's message communicated to the people under the divine inspiration. Being of divine origin, the Word of God (Gospel) is infallible and permanent, meaning that it is applicable (valid) for every generation until the second coming of Christ.

When I say that the message of the Gospel is valid for every generation I don't mean that it has to be presented (manipulated) in such a way as to accommodate the whim of every generation but rather that each generation must conform itself to the Gospel.

The Gospel reading for this Sunday is about the Holy family's flee to Egypt in order to avoid the destruction of the newly incarnate Son of God by Herod the king: *"Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."*

I would like to draw a comparison between Herod's rage against the Son of God and some of our contemporaries who share in the same kind of rage against Christianity and against God and display their diabolic determination to destroy the divine inspired Word of God (the Gospel) and any notion of God from schools, the minds and practices of the people. Sadly, some of our **contemporary herods** are the politicians who invoke a self-imposed political correctness in order to achieve their goals. The result is a secularized society and a desacralized individual, devoid of any sense of personal responsibility, discernment and moral values, practically a robot who behaves under the influence of unprecedented violence spewed out by the Hollywood movies and the videogames available to the youngest of our children. No wonder then, that from time to time we hear about demonic outbursts from such individuals who kill innocent people without any remorse and respect for life.

Following the example of the Holy Family, let us take refuge under the protection of the One, Holy, Catholic (Universal) and Apostolic Church, where the whole family (parents and children) can grow spiritually in the infinite love of God the Father who gave His only-Begotten Son for the salvation of mankind!

Fr. George Bazgan

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE FEAST OF THE LORD'S NATIVITY 2014

† NICOLAE

by the mercies of God

Archbishop of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas

*To our beloved Clergy and faithful Orthodox Christians,
peace and joy from Christ the Lord, and from us a hierarchical blessing.*

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him" (Matthew 2:1-2).

**Very Reverend Fathers,
Beloved Faithful,**

On this glorious feast I too proclaim the wondrous Nativity in Bethlehem of Judea, and I invite you to worship with understanding the One who was revealed as God and man. At a certain time and place God came down to earth. The Magi from the East understood the vision of the star, and desired to receive the revelation and to be partakers in this great event. It is fitting that we too with them should discover its meanings.

The coming of the Messiah had been foretold by the Old Testament prophets. The Prophet Isaiah reveals that the Messiah will be born of the seed of Jesse, the father of King David: "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Is. 11:1). Jeremiah says, "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth" (Jer. 23:5). The precise location of this raising up of the Messiah is told by the Prophet Micah: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel" (Micah 5:1). This prophecy was known and invoked by the "chief priests and scribes of the people," called by Herod to inform him about the birth of the "King of the Jews," in the words of the Magi. A foreigner among the Jewish people, knowing little thus about the prophecies, Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him, at the Magi's question: "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." The prophecies existed but they were forgotten and poorly understood. The Jews and their learned men were living in darkness and ignorance. Although members of the chosen people, *chosen* to give the Savior to the world, they did not comprehend the fulfillment of these prophecies. The wise and comprehending came to make clear the signs of the times and to worship the Messiah, thus fulfilling yet another prophecy: "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him" (Ps. 71:10-11).

Together with St. John Chrysostom we wonder: "How could the Magi know through the star that Christ is the King of the Jews?" For He was not the king of any earthly kingdom.... And He had nothing with Him that looked like a kingdom, no lance or shield, no horses or asses, nor any other such things" (The Sixth Homily on Matthew). Then the

great preacher asks what was their motive in coming to worship Him: “After they had entered on so long a journey, and worshipped, and thrown all into confusion, they went away immediately. And what sign at all of royalty did they behold, when they saw a shed, and a manger, and a child in swaddling clothes, and a poor mother? And to whom moreover did they offer their gifts, and for what intent?”

The answer is given to us by this same father, John Chrysostom, who challenges us to understand the way God works. With the wise, with those who comprehend the mysteries of the heavens, God works through a sign. The luminous star was understood by the Magi as a revelation of God to them. But this wondrous movement of the star did not only involve their knowledge, but God Himself. “In my opinion,” continues St. John Chrysostom, “this was not only because of the star, but of God Himself, Who moved their souls, just as He did with King Cyrus when He caused him to free the Jews from bondage.” Thus the revelation of God is accomplished, working through signs that can be understood by the human being, but also revealing Himself to the soul, calling it to the fulfillment of those things that have been understood by the mind.

Very Reverend Fathers, Beloved Faithful,

In the guidance of the star, in the worship of the Magi, in their offering gifts to the Baby Jesus, we see the work of God with His creation. The Messiah came “in the fullness of time,” fulfilling the prophecies. Yet it was not the “scribes of the people” who recognized and received Him joyfully, but foreigners who knew how to interpret the signs of the times. The Messiah was born in a poor manger even though He was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The ignorance of those known as “scribes” made possible the discovery of the wisdom of the Magi, who brought Him royal gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Their human wisdom brought them to a spiritual wisdom, for God, St. John continues, “desired to call them by the sight of a star, that He might raise up their minds above their own thoughts. For after He had directed and guided them, and brought them to the manger, He no longer spoke to them through a star, but through an angel,” cautioning them to return to their own country by another route. The star was the means of this journey toward spiritual things, toward their personal discovery of God through the angel. And this encounter with God transformed them into apostles. St. John assures us that once they had proclaimed the Messiah before Herod, they arrived back in their own country as heralds of the Savior and teachers of their own fellow countrymen.

For us too, the spiritual journey of the Magi is an invitation to understand with our mind and our heart the realities in which we live. It is fitting that we should use wisdom like the Magi to discern the signs of the times. It is right that we should understand the revelation of God and desire to receive it and be partakers in the presence of God in the world. It is proper that we should offer our gifts to Christ the King, who comes to save us. It is right that we should desire to become His apostles, like the Magi, in this world estranged from God, lacking in love, and incomprehending of the divine message. And our proclamation cannot be any other than that of the angels to the shepherds in Bethlehem: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14). We who receive Christ the Messiah who is born in the wretched manger should proclaim peace and understanding to the world. This proclamation is full of meaning for our world,

troubled by war and the persecution of Christians. The Lord's Nativity will thus be for us an occasion for renewed hope in God's help and protection.

I extend to you a brotherly embrace in Christ the Lord, with my wish that you enjoy the holy days of Christmas, New Year's Day, and Theophany in health, peace, and spiritual joys!

Many Years!

Your brother in prayer to God, desirous of every heavenly good,

† NICOLAE

Chicago, the Feast of the Lord's Nativity, 2014

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!

NEW YEAR'S PARTY

Would you like to celebrate the arrival of 2015 at the Romanian Center, in a traditional Romanian atmosphere?

Then contact Liviu Sasu at 780-489-5381 for tickets (\$100/adults and \$20/children 7-14), and additional details.

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 780-473-0029.

MEMBERSHIP

**We remind you that the membership contribution hasn't changed in the last few years:
\$100/person (\$200/couple).**

We encourage everyone to pay their membership as soon as possible!

Keep in mind that \$35 of each membership goes to the Archdiocese.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Membership or Contribution?

Spiritually speaking, we become members of the Church (the mystical body of Christ) when we receive the Sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Communion, which unite us with Christ (*"Do you unite yourself unto Christ? I do"*). Saint Paul the apostle says: *"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?"* (I Cor. 6:15). So, since we are united with Christ, we are also united with the Church, His body, which He Himself established.

The Church is a divine-human institution, established by Christ, the Son of God, who was God (divine) and Man (human) at the same time and in the same person. The mission of the Church is to teach, sanctify and lead her faithful to salvation: *"And Jesus came and spoke to them (the apostles), saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Church as a human institution/community was established on the day of the Pentecost, when three thousand people were baptized: *..."and that day about three thousand souls were added to them"* (to the apostles) (Acts 2:41).

From the very beginning, the Church was supported materially by her faithful/members, as we read in the same Book of Acts: *"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need"* (4:32-35).

Since **the churches in North America and their priests don't receive any material support whatsoever from any government**, it is imperative that those who have been accepted into the community of the faithful (the Church) as spiritual members, contribute with their time and money, thus reaffirming their membership to the divine-human institution, the Church, and assisting her to continue her mission in the world.

It is for the reason of this double membership (spiritual and material) that the term **membership** is the appropriate one as opposed to **contribution**.

Fr. George Bazgan

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, Christmation 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. We should to come to Church on time (before 10:00) in order to partake of the entire Divine Liturgy.
2. If the service is already in progress, we must stop and see what is going on. If we came in during the Scripture readings (Epistle or the Gospel), we should wait at the back of the church until the reading is over and then, quietly, take our seats.
3. We should pick up the liturgical books and follow closely the service, reading all prayers.
4. During the Divine Liturgy we are not allowed to talk to other people. We can do that at the end, during the fellowship.

Fr. George Bazgan