

Dec. 30, 2018: 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

Sunday Fellowsh

There will be NO FELLOWSHIP this Sunday

Altar boys for this Sunday:

**Arkin Gabriel Corbu
Arsenie Gavriş**

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!***

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.

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

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

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.

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*" (Matthew 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’rently 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

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. 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.**