

Parish Prayer List (Living)

Metropolitan Nicholas	Sharon	Bob	Reader Mark
Andrea	Amanda	Sherry	Joretta
Fr. Michael	Barry	Sean	Kristi
James	Nicholas B.	Karin	Andrea & Kirby
Nanette	Michael	Tatiana	Rachael
Michael	Helen	Susan K	

Parish Prayer List (Fallen Asleep)

Betty Pilja (+12/6) Mary Louise Blomeley (+12/10)
Josephine Urban (+12/15)

Thoughts from the Fathers

Praises (Lauds) of Nativity Matins, Tone 4 (by St Andrew of Jerusalem)

Make glad, O ye righteous; greatly rejoice, O ye heavens; ye mountains, dance for joy. Christ is born, and like the cherubim the Virgin makes a throne, carrying at her bosom God the Word made flesh. Shepherds glorify the new-born Child, magi offer the Master gifts. Angels sing praises, saying: 'O Lord past understanding, glory to Thee!' It was the good pleasure of the Father: the Word became flesh, and the Virgin bore God made man. A star spreads abroad the tidings: the Magi worship, the shepherds stand amazed, and the creation is filled with mighty joy. O Mother of God, Virgin who hast borne the Saviour, thou hast overthrown the ancient curse of Eve. For thou hast become the Mother of Him in whom the Father was well pleased, and has carried at thy bosom God the incarnate Word. We cannot fathom this mystery: but by faith alone we all glorify it, crying with thee and saying: O Lord past all interpretation, glory to Thee! O come, let us sing the praises of the Mother of the Saviour, who after bearing child still remained Virgin. Rejoice, thou Living City of God the King, in which Christ has dwelt, bringing to pass our salvation. With Gabriel we sing thy praises; with the shepherds we glorify thee, crying: O Mother of God, intercede for our salvation with Him who took flesh from thee!

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The Nativity of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, was born of the Virgin Mary in the city of Bethlehem during the reign of the emperor Augustus (Octavian). Caesar Augustus decreed that an universal census be made throughout all his empire, which then also included Palestinian Israel. The Jews were accustomed to carry out the

nation's census-taking according to ancestral-origins, tribes and family-relations. Every ancestral-origin and family-relation had its own designated city as its place of ancestry. The Virgin Mary and Righteous Joseph, descended from the family line of King David, had to go to Bethlehem (the city of David), to register their names on the census-list of Caesar's subjects. At Bethlehem they did not find a single place vacant at any of the city's inns. In the celebrated cave, used as a stable, amidst the hay and the straw, strewn about as food and bedding for the cattle, far from the hearth of home, amidst people that were total strangers, on the cold winter night, and in a setting deprived not only of worldly grandeur but even of the basic amenities -- was born the God-Man, the Saviour of the world. "I behold a strange and most glorious mystery, -- with awe sings Holy Church, -- Heaven -- the Cave; the Throne of the Cherubim -- the Virgin; the Manger -- the Crib, in which lay the placeless Christ God" (Irmos in 9th Ode of the Festal Canon). Without defilement having given birth to the Divine Infant the Virgin "wraps Him in swaddling cloths and places Him in the manger" (Lk. 2). But amidst the midnight stillness, when all mankind was shrouded in its deepest sinful sleep, the proclaiming of the Birth of the Saviour of the world was heard by shepherds, watching their flocks by night. And the Angel of the Lord came before them and said: "Fear not, for lo I proclaim ye tidings of great joy, which shalt be for all people, for this day is born unto you the Saviour, Which be Christ the Lord in the city of David". The humble shepherds were the first deemed worthy to offer worship for the salvation of mankind unto He That hath condescended to "the image of an humble servant". Besides the Angelic glad tidings to the Bethlehem shepherds, the Nativity of Christ by means of a wondrous star was made known to Magi "knowing the stars", and in the person of these Eastern wise-men all the pagan world, imperceptibly -- bent down upon its knees before the true Saviour of the world, the God-Man. Entering wherein the Infant lay, the wise-men Magi -- "falling down they worshipped Him, and opening their treasure they presented Him gifts: gold and frankincense and myrrh" (Mt. 2: 11).

In remembrance of the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, the feastday was established by the Church. Its very origin is related to the times of the Apostles. In the Apostolic Constitutions it says: "Brethren, observe the feastdays, and among the chief such the day of the Birth of Christ, which make ye celebration of on the 25th day of the tenth month" (from March, which in those days began the year). There also in another place it said: "Celebrate ye the day of the Nativity of Christ, in the which unseen grace is given man by the

birth of the Word of God from the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world".

In the 2nd Century St. Clement of Alexandria indicates that the day of the Nativity of Christ is 25 December. In the 3rd Century St. Hypolitus of Rome makes mention concerning the feastday of the Nativity of Christ, and designates the Gospel readings for this day from the beginning chapters of Saint Matthew. It is known also, that during the time of persecution of Christians in the year 302 by Maximian, 20,000 Nicomedia Christians were burned in church on the very feastday of the Nativity of Christ (Comm. 28 December). In that same century, but after the persecution when the Church had received freedom of religion, we find the feastday of the Nativity of Christ observed throughout all the Universal Church. And this is evidenced from the works of St. Ephrem the Syrian, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. John Chrysostom and other fathers of the Church of the 4th Century concerning this feastday. St. John Chrysostom, in a sermon from the year 385, said that the feast of the Nativity of Christ is very ancient. In that same century at the place of the Bethlehem Cave, made famous by the Birth of Jesus Christ, the Equal-to-the-Apostles empress Helen caused the Church of the Nativity to be erected. In the Codex of the emperor Theodosius from 438, and of the emperor Justinian in 535, is promulgated as law the universal celebration of the day of the Nativity of Christ. It is in this sense, truly, that Nicephoros Kallistos, a writer of the 14th Century, says in his history that the emperor Justinian in the VI Century established the celebration of the Nativity of Christ throughout all the world.

In the 5th Century the Patriarch of Constantinople Anatolios, in the 7th -- Sophronios and Andrew of Jerusalem, in the 8th -- Saints John of Damascus, Cosma of Maium and the Patriarch of Tsar'grad Germanos, in the 9th -- the Nun Cassia and others of names unknown, all these wrote sacred hymns for the feast of the Nativity of Christ, which are still sung by the Church to the glory of this radiant festal event.

However, during the first three centuries, when persecutions hindered the freedom of Christian Divine-services, in certain places in the East -- in the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Cyprus -- the feastday of the Nativity of Christ was combined together with the feastday of the Baptism of Christ on 6 January, under the in-common term "Theophany" [which means "Manifestation of God"]. This arose from the view that Christ was baptised at a later time on His birthday, as suggested by St. John Chrysostom who, in one of his sermons on the Nativity of Christ,

says: "it is not that day on which Christ was born which is called Theophany, but rather that day on which He was baptised". Towards suchlike a viewpoint also it is possible to consider a nuance in the words of the Evangelist Luke who, speaking about the Baptism of Jesus Christ, testifies, that then "Jesus being incipient [incipiens, arkhomenos] upon His thirtieth year" (Lk. 3:23). The celebration of the Nativity of Christ together with the Theophany in certain of the Eastern Churches continued to the end of the 4th Century, and in some until the 5th or even the 6th Century. Even today we see the ancient conjoining of the feasts of the Nativity of Christ and Theophany in the order of services in the celebration of these feasts. For both -- on the eve-day preceding the feast, there is a similar tradition among the people, that on the festal eve-days the fast ought to be kept until the stars appear. The order of Divine-services on the eve of both feastdays and the feastdays themselves is done the same.

The Nativity of Christ from of old was numbered by the Church among the Twelve Great Feasts, in accord with the Divine witness of the Gospel in depicting these festal events as the greatest, most all-joyful and wondrous. "Behold, I proclaim unto you glad tidings, -- said the Angel to the Bethlehem shepherds, -- of great joy, for all mankind. For unto you this day is born the Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this for ye is the sign: ye will find the Infant wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. Then suddenly with the Angel was a multitude of the heavenly hosts, glorifying God and saying: Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good-will to mankind. Those hearing of this were awestruck at the sayings of the shepherds concerning this Child. And the shepherds themselves returned back, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen" (Lk. 2: 10-20). Thus the Nativity of Christ, an event most profound and extraordinary, was accompanied by the wondrous tidings to the shepherds and the Magi about the universal rejoicing for all mankind, -- "for the Saviour is Born!", by the Angelic proclamation of glory to the new-born Saviour, by the worship to him by shepherds and wise-men, by the reverent awe of many, hearkening to the words of the shepherds about the new-born Child, amidst glory and praise of Him by the Shepherds.

In accord with the Divine witness of the Gospel, the fathers of the Church also depict the feast of the Nativity of Christ as most profound and universal and joyous feast.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Mesyatseslov of Saints Live of the Moscow Patr. texts,trans by Fr. S. Janos.