

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2022
SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

Genealogy of Christ

Every year before Christmas we read the genealogy of Christ from St. Matthew's Gospel, and for many year I asked myself, Why? Why have we got to read all these names that mean so little to us, if anything at all? And then I became more perceptive of what they convey to us.

For one thing, they are the people to whose family the Lord Jesus Christ belongs through His humanity. They are relatives of His, and this should be enough for us to find their names deeply moving: Christ is of their blood, Christ is of their family. Each of them, thinking of the Mother of God, can say, 'She is a child of our family', and of Christ, 'He also is a child of our family, although He is our God, our Savior, the very Divine Presence in our midst'. Furthermore, some names stand out: names of Saints, heroes of the spirit, and names of sinners.

The Saints among them could well teach us what it means to believe; not simply to have an intellectual faith, a world-outlook which coincides, as far as it is able, with God's vision, but a faith which means a complete trust in God, an unlimited faithfulness to Him, the readiness, because of what we know of God, to give our lives for what He stands for, for what He is. In this context, think of Abraham whose faith was tested to the utmost. How difficult we find it to give to God something of ours: but Abraham was asked to bring as a blood-offering his own son -- and he did not doubt God. And Isaac? He surrendered without resistance, in perfect obedience to his father, and through him -- to God.

We can remember the struggle of Jacob with the Angel in the darkness, as we at times struggle for our faith, for our integrity, for our faithfulness, in the darkness of the night, or the darkness of doubt, in the darkness that seizes us at times on all sides.

But, we can also learn something from those who in history, in the Bible, appear to us as sinners. They were frail, this frailty conquered them, they had no strength to resist the impulses of their bodies and of their souls, of the complex passions of men. And yet -- and yet, they believed in God passionately. One of them was David, and one of his Psalms expresses it so well: "From the deep I cry unto Thee..." From the depths of despair, of shame, from the depths of his fall, from the depths of his alienation from God, from the darkest depths of his soul

he still cried to God. He does not hide from Him, he does not go away from Him, it is to Him he comes with this desperate cry of a desperate man. And others, men and women have this same concreteness as, for instance, Rahab the harlot -- and so many more.

Do we, when we are at the darkest point of life, when we are wrapped in all the darkness that is within us do we, from within this darkness, come to God and say: It is to You, O Lord, I cry! Yes - I am in darkness, but You are my God. You are the God Who created the light, and the darkness, and you are within the darkness as You are within the blinding light; You are in death as You are in life; You are in hell, as You are on the Throne; and from wherever I am I can cry to You.

And then, there is a last thing I would like you to think about. To us these people are names; of some of them we know a little from the Bible, about others we know nothing. But, they all were concrete human beings, men and women like us, with all our frailty and all our hope, all the wavering of the will and all the hesitations, all the incipient love that is so often marred, and yet remains light and fire. They are concrete and real, and we can read their names with the feeling that, Yes -- I don't know you, but you are one of those who are of the family of Christ, concrete, real, who through all the vicissitudes of life, inner and outer, belong to God. And we ourselves can try and learn, in the concreteness of our lives, whether we are frail or strong at a given moment still to be God's own.

So let us reflect on this genealogy, let us next time we come to hear it receive it with a spark in our eyes, with a warm feeling in our hearts; but this will be possible only to the extent to which Christ becomes more and more real to us and when it is in Him, through Him that we discover them all -- real, living, our own and God's own.

Amen **Metropolitan ANTHONY (Bloom) Christmas 1987**

GREAT VESPERS

LORD I CALL: Six stikhera of the Resurrection in tone 2 (spiral bound Vespers book, followed by three of the ancestors of Christ

Ancestors, tone 6:

The memory of the forefathers radiates to the ends of the earth;
Filled with light, it shines forth rays of grace.
For Christ, the Sun most bright, shines on high, from afar;

The stars gather and shine together with Him;
The God-man's birth is revealed to be in Bethlehem.
So let us all in faith reverently extol His birth!//
Let us dance for joy in praise!

Adorned with the glory of divine communion Adam exults today;
With him, Abel leaps in gladness and Enoch rejoices;
Seth dances for joy, and Noah with him.
The venerable Abraham sings with the patriarchs;
From on high Melchizedek beholds a father-less birth.
And so, as we celebrate the divine memory of the forefather of
Christ,//
let us pray that our souls may be saved.

The three youths wise in God,
Who shone in the furnace with joy,
Proclaimed the birth of Christ on earth.
For the Lord who descended like precious dew,
Saves unscorched her who gave Him birth,
Preserving her undefiled and enriching her with divine gifts.
Therefore Daniel, pleasing to God, rejoices in gladness,
For he clearly foresaw the stone from the unquarried mountain.//
With boldness he now intercedes for our souls.

GLORY... Ancestors, Tone 6:

Daniel, the man of desires, beheld You, O Lord,
The stone cut without human hands from the mountain.
Thus he foretold that You would take flesh without seed,
O Word of God, born of the Virgin,//
The changeless God and Savior of our souls!

***NOW AND EVER... the Dogmatikon in tone 2 (spiral bound
Vespers book)***

OLD TESTAMENT READINGS

The Reading from the Book of Genesis: Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is

north of Damascus. So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him. Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all. **Gen. 14:14-20**

The Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy: 'See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers - to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - to give them and their descendants after them.' "And I spoke to you at that time, saying: 'I alone am not able to bear you. The Lord your God has multiplied you, and here you are today, as the stars of heaven in multitude. May the Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are, and bless you as He has promised you!' "So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes. Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring it to me, and I will hear it.' **Deu.1:8-11, 15-17**

The Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy: "Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it. The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of

Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name. He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. **Deu.10:14-21**

APOSTIKHA: All stikhera of the Resurrection in tone 2 (spiral bound Vespers book)

GLORY... Ancestors, Tone 2:

Rejoice, O honored Prophets,
who laid well the foundation of the Law of the Lord,
and were revealed as firm and unshaken pillars of faith!
You became indeed the mediators of Christ's new covenant.
Since, therefore, you have been taken up into heaven,//
intercede with Him to grant peace to the world and salvation to our
souls!

NOW AND EVER...the Theotokion of the Resurrection in tone 2:

A new miracle surpasses all ancient miracles!
Who knows of a Mother who gave birth without a man,
who carried in her arms her Creator?
This birth is the will of God!
Since you carried Him as an infant in your arms, O most pure one,
and since you possess motherly boldness before Him,
do not cease praying for us who honor you,//
that He may be bountiful and save our souls!

TROPARIA

Resurrection, tone 2

When You descended to death, O Life Immortal,
You slew hell with the splendor of Your Godhead.
And when from the depths You raised the dead,
all the powers of heaven cried out://
"O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to You!"

Ancestors, Tone 2

Great are the accomplishments of faith,
For the three holy youths rejoiced in the flames as though at the
waters of rest,

And the prophet Daniel appeared
A shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep.//
So by their prayers, O Christ God, save our souls!

Resurrection Dismissal Theotokion, tone 2

All beyond thought, all most glorious,
are your mysteries, O Theotokos.
Sealed in purity, preserved in virginity,
you were revealed to be the true Mother who gave birth to the True
God.//

Entreat Him to save our souls.

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