

Holy Assumption Orthodox Church
Celebrating 125 years witnessing to the Apostolic Faith

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Marblehead, OH 43440

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***Holy Assumption Orthodox Church is a parish of the Orthodox Church in America,
Diocese of the Midwest***

DECEMBER 17, 2023

TWENTY EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

EPISTLE: Colossians 3:4-11

Brethren: When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

GOSPEL: Luke 14:16-24

The Lord told this parable, "A certain man gave a

great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said



Holy Forefathers

to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.' For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'"

Liturgical Schedule

MON. Dec 18	Martyr Sebastian at Rome, and his companions
TUE. Dec 19	Martyr Boniface at Tarsus in Cilicia, and Righteous Aglaïa of Rome
WED. Dec 20	<i>Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ</i> Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer, Bishop of Antioch
THU. Dec 21	<i>Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ; Virgin-Martyr Juliana of Nicomedia</i>
FRI. Dec 22	<i>Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ; Greatmartyr Anastasia</i>
SAT. Dec 23	Saturday before the Nativity; Holy Ten Martyrs of Crete
4:00 PM	VESPERS
SUN. Dec 24	<i>29th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST – Of the Holy Fathers</i> <i>Sunday before the Nativity of Christ</i> <i>Eve of the Nativity of Christ</i>

9:10 AM	HOURS
9:30 AM	DIVINE LITURGY Followed by Coffee Hour
4:00 PM	GREAT COMPLINE with Litya

MON. Dec 25 **NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**

9:40 AM	HOURS
10:00 AM	DIVINE LITURGY

FOR YOUR PRAYERS



Tony Monastra, 2119 Willow Cove Marblehead, OH 43440; Patti Owens, 311 Woodbridge Road, Vermilion, OH 44089; Basil Glovinsky, 1007 Glendale Drive, Port Clinton, OH 43452; Subdeacon Roger Pinta, P.O. Box 39, Middle Bass, OH 43446; Diane Tryon, 109 Joslyn Street, Arcadia, OH 44804; Ed & Irene Vangeloff, 454 Strouse Lane, Sandusky, OH 44870

DECEMBER CANDLE SPONSORS



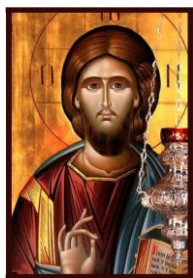
Altar Candles: Fr. Peter & Mat. Michelle, For Health and God's Blessings of Barbara Wroblewski, Matushka's mother and Michal Tomáš, Father's father (**\$50**); **Chandelier:** Jean Hileman – For

safe travel home for the Issler family (**\$50**); **Eternal Light & Icon Screen:** Jean Hileman - In loving memory of my father, William Pipenur (**\$25**); **Candles at the Cross:** Laura Kovach, Birthday blessings to Ben (**\$20**); **Candles at St. Sophia Icon:** For Safety and Health of Nicholas, Tikhon, Gleice, & Chloe (**\$20**)



DECEMBER REPOSED

1- Helen Elchisco (1990); **3-** Mary Hubicki (2013); **8-** Mary (Marika) Lefas (2019); **12-** Anna Bretz (2002); **13-** Joseph Mazurik (1986); **13-** Archimandrite Seraphim Oblivantseff (1954) Former Pastor; **15-** Michael W. Belenky (1971); **20-** Julia Brosojah Millie (1953); **20-** John Mazurik (2017); **20-** William Pipenur (2003); **21-** Mary Sennich (1985); **22-** Antonima Vecsey (1972); **23-** Steven Danchisen (1982); **24-** Alexandra Turkul (1980); **24-** John Bird No year Provided; **29-** Alexandra Dotsenko (1980); **30-** Rita Felenchak (1996); **31-** Jevgeny Cernonok (1980); **31-** Janice Timko (2021)



VIGILS FOR DECEMBER 10

- **1** Peace for Palestine

Susan Guzy 1 Special intentions

Laura Kovach 3 Birthday blessings to Tina. For health and/or healing of James W., Beverly S., Patti O., Tony M., Matushka Michelle, Hannah S., Barbara D., Pauline O., George K., Joe H., Margi H., Betty K., Ben F., Mark M., Dana M., Bodhi C., Sharon D., John D., and Karen D. Prayers for Keri and family

Jean Hileman 2 Health of Mary Jane Hileman, Special intentions

Sandy Martin 1 Special intentions

Darlene & Gabe Mazurik 1 Special intentions

Natalie Twarek 8 In memory of Don Kiser, Birthday blessings for Tina, For the health and recovery of Jim, For the health of Ruth, Health and healing for Father's dad Michal and Matushka's mom Barbara, For the health and recovery of Basil, Diane, Tony, Tom, and Rick, For the health of Bev, Roger, Ed, Irene, Father David, Marilyn, Pauline, Judy, Mimi, Tina, Ron, Carole, Gary, Sharon, Kurt, Leslie, Amber, Zach, Dottie, Jamie, Helen Lis and Tina's dad, Earl, Tom, Sonya, Margi & Joe, Betty, Jackie, MaryAnn & Bob, Chuck, Bodhi, Stella, Jake, Pat, Karen, special intentions

PRAYER LIST

Parishioners & Family: Patti Owens / Tony Monastra / Barbara Wroblewski / Michal Tomáš / Ruth / Basil Glovinsky / Dale / Sophie / Jeanne Smith / Carol / David Martin / Fred Soski / Chris Hannon / Subdeacon Roger Pinta / Ed Vangeloff / Irene Vangeloff / Diane Tryon / Sonja Rose / Ron Royhab / James Bargdill / John Beadle / Carole Conaway / Gary Conaway / Sharon Dietrich / Michael Glovinsky / Shirley Gresh / Joseph Habegger / Elaine Hileman / Betty Kovach / Helen Lis / Child Stella Miller / William Pipenur / Earl Rindfleisch / Helen Jean Rofkar / George Royhab / Marianne Royhab / Stephanie Royhab / Kathy Jacob / the child Bodhi Cassell / Gleice, her unborn baby & Chloe / Gabrielle and her newborn Josey / Carol / Debbie & Marco / Nora. **Other Requests:** Charles Schlett / Kathy Debevits / Maxwell Chaney / Sidharth Bijilani – friend of Subdeacon Roger and Debbie Pinta / Anthony / Archpriest David Lis / Bishop Matthias / Archpriest Emilian & Matushka Laryssa Hutnyan / Marge Dziama / Kurt Franck / Ben Franklin / Donald Gresh / Mark Ludvik / Marsha / Mark Masica / Robert Piznar / Valerie Ritzenthaler / William / Rick Rowe / Chuck Wiedenhoft / Chris. **Military:** Craig Cassell / Jake Ellithorpe / Jordon Fulton / Justin Issler / Tikhon / Nicholas / & All Military



ATTENDANCE

12/9 Vespers, 10 attending; 12/10 Divine Liturgy, 25 attending (2 Guests);



READERS LIST

Sunday Dec 17 – Jake
Sunday Dec 24 – Tim
Monday Dec 25 – Subdeacon Roger
Sunday Dec 31 – Ron



CLEANING SCHEDULE

Dec 18, Roddie
Dec 26, Natalie
Jan 2, Basil & Tim
Jan 8, Susan



SUNDAY OFFERING

Sunday, December 10, 2023

Tithe	\$1,355.00
Candles	\$ 41.00
Vigils	\$ 105.00
Donations	\$ 60.00
Holy Day Donation	\$ 100.00
Christmas Flowers	\$ 200.00
Liturgical Item Donation	\$ 45.00
Bistro 163 (Dec.)	\$ 225.00
Total:	\$2,131.00

May the Lord reward you for your financial and spiritual support!



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

17 – Tim Heffernan *; **21** – Ed & Irene Vangeloff Anniversary; **23** – Teri Cassell *; **25** – Darlene Mazurik *; **31** – Fred & Christi Soski Anniversary *



CHRISTMAS CONFESSION

During this Holy Season of the Nativity Fast we are sked to follow the disciplines of fasting, repentance, and almsgiving. As we are doing our best to take care of our bodies by fasting from certain foods, and our neighbor by offering our alms, we should not forget to prepare our souls by good confession, so we may welcome Our newborn King with our clean conscience. Therefore, we are inviting each of you to the Mystery of confession which is usually offered after each service of vespers, but we encourage you to make your confession anytime that is more convenient for you. Fr. Peter is available any day and any time of the day, or if you prefer, every Sunday after the Divine Liturgy. Just let Fr. Peter know when would be most the most convenient day and time for you.



CHARITY OF THE MONTH

“**Bistro 163**” is the charity we donate to for the month of December.



KITCHEN REPAIR

As we are planning to make some necessary repairs and updates to our kitchen, we are looking for some volunteers who would be willing to serve as “Kitchen Repair Committee.” If you have some good ideas about the repair, please see Fr. Peter or Ron Royhab and volunteer for the position on the committee. Thank you in advance for your consideration!



CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA PLANTS

There is still time for you to sponsor the poinsettia plants which will beautify our church for the Nativity Season. We also kindly ask for your prayerful consideration to sponsor liturgical wine, incense, and charcoal that we use during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The forms for sponsoring are located in the vestibule of the church. Thank you in advance for your generosity and care!



OTTAWA COUNTY HOLIDAY BUREAU

There is no Danbury Food Pantry distribution in December. Instead the Ottawa County Holiday Bureau – Danbury Unit will be distributing to those in need, vouchers to help with their needs. To help support this project, please make a check out to Danbury Holiday Bureau and mailed to 4941 East Harbor Rd. – Port Clinton, OH 43452.



REMEMBER YOUR PARISH

During this season of the year, we get so wrapped up shopping for Christmas gifts for our family and friends that we sometimes forget our Christmas gift to our Parish. *Please keep this in mind during this Christmas season!*



POPPYSEED AND NUT ROLLS BAKING – THANK YOU!

We wish to express our sincere thanks to the following parishioners who helped with Poppyseed and Nut Rolls baking for Christmas: Tina, Natalie, Bobbie, Roddie, Fred, Sandy, Fr. Peter, and Mat. Michelle. Sincere thanks are extended to Greg for baking his delicious breads and cinnamon rolls. May our Lord and God reward you all for your hard work and love for our church with His special blessings!



CHRISTMAS SALE – THANK YOU!

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Tina, Natalie, Greg, and Roddie for helping with the orders of our Christmas Sale yesterday. The gross income from the sale was **\$1,349.49**. May Our Lord reward you all for your time and energy with good health, peace, and happiness for Many Happy and Blessed Years!

UP-COMING EVENTS IN OUR PARISH – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

- Dec. 24th** Sunday before Nativity – Christmas Eve (*Sunday*)
- Dec. 25th** NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST (*Monday*)
- Dec. 31st** New Year’s Eve (*Sunday*)
- Jan. 1st** New Year 2024; Circumcision of Our Lord; St. Basil the Great (*Monday*)
- Jan. 5th** Eve of Theophany – “Svjat Vechur” Holy Night Supper (*Friday*)
- Jan. 6th** THEOPHANY (BAPTISM) OF OUR LORD (*Saturday*)
- Consider sponsoring a Sunday coffee hour following the Divine Liturgy





“SVJAT VECHUR” HOLY NIGHT SUPPER

Our Traditional “Svjat Vechur” Holy Night Supper will take place on **Friday, January 5th after Vespers**. We would like to invite you all for the supper and bring your family and friends along to share in the joy of the Nativity Season. To make sure that we have a seat for everyone attending, we kindly ask that you give us the count of the people attending. The sign-up sheet is located in the vestibule of the church. We also ask that you prepare your traditional Christmas Eve dishes to share with everyone.



Holy Prophet Daniel

Commemorated on December 17

The Holy Prophet Daniel is the fourth of the major prophets.

In the years following 600 B.C. Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians, the Temple built by Solomon was destroyed, and many of the Israelite people were led away into the Babylonian Captivity. Among the captives were also the illustrious youths Daniel, Ananias, Azarias and Misael.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon ordered that they be instructed in the Chaldean language and wisdom, and dressed them in finery. Handsome children of princely lineage were often chosen to serve as pages in the palace. For three years, they would be fed from food from the king’s table. After this they would be allowed to stand before his throne. Daniel was renamed Baltasar, Ananias was called Shadrach, Misael was called Mishach, and Azarias was known as Abednego. But they, cleaving to their faith, disdained the extravagance of court, refusing to defile themselves by eating from the king’s table and drinking his wine. Instead, they lived on vegetables and water.

The Lord granted them wisdom, and to Saint Daniel the gift of insight and the interpretation of dreams. The holy Prophet Daniel preserved his faith in the one God and trusted in His almighty help. He surpassed all the Chaldean astrologers and sorcerers in his wisdom, and was made a confidant to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Once, Nebuchadnezzar had a strange dream which terrified him (Daniel 2:1-6). He summoned magicians, sorcerers, and Chaldeans before him to interpret the dream. When they asked him what he had dreamt, the king refused to tell them. He said, “If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.” The Babylonian wise men protested that no magician or sorcerer could be expected to do this. Only the gods could reveal the dream and its meaning, they told him.

The king ordered all the wise men of Babylon to be executed. When they sought Daniel and his companions to put them to death, Daniel asked that the king’s sentence not be carried out. He said that he could tell the king what he dreamt, for it had been revealed to him in a vision. Daniel was brought before the king and was able to reveal not only the content of the dream, but also its prophetic significance. After this, the king elevated Daniel to be ruler of the whole province of Babylon, and the chief of all the wise men.

During these times King Nebuchadnezzar ordered a huge statue to be made in his likeness. It was decreed that when people heard the sound of trumpets and other instruments, they should fall down and worship the golden idol. Because they refused to do this, the three holy youths Ananias, Azarias and Misael were cast into a fiery furnace. The flames shot out over the furnace forty-nine cubits, felling the Chaldeans standing about, but the holy youths walked in the midst of the flames, offering prayer and psalmody to the Lord (Daniel 3:26-90).

The Angel of the Lord appeared in the furnace and cooled the flames, and the young men remained unharmed. This “Angel of Great Counsel,” as he is called in iconography, is identified with the Son of God (Daniel 3:25, Isaiah 9:6). In the first Canon for the Nativity of the Lord (Ode 5), the Church sings: “Thou hast sent us Thine Angel of Great Counsel.” The emperor, upon seeing this, commanded them to come out, and was converted to the true God.

Under King Baltasar, Saint Daniel interpreted a mysterious inscription (“Mane, Thekel, Phares”), which had appeared on the wall of the palace during a banquet (Daniel 5:1-31), foretelling the downfall of the Babylonian kingdom. Under the Persian emperor Darius, Saint Daniel was slandered by his enemies, and was thrown into a den with hungry lions, but they did not touch him, and he was not harmed. The emperor Darius then rejoiced over Daniel and ordered people throughout his realm to worship the God of Daniel, “since He is the living and eternal God, and His Kingdom shall not be destroyed, and His dominion is forever” (Daniel 6:26).

The holy Prophet Daniel grieved deeply for his people, who then were undergoing righteous chastisement for a multitude of sins and offenses, for transgressing the laws of God, resulting in the grievous Babylonian Captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem: “My God, incline Thine ear and hearken; open Thine eyes and look upon our desolation and that of Thy city, in which Thy Name is spoken; for we do not make our supplication before Thee because of our own righteousness, but because of Thy great mercy” (Dan 9:18). Because of Daniel’s righteous life and his prayers for the people’s iniquity, the destiny of the nation of Israel and the fate of all the world was revealed to the holy prophet.

While interpreting the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar, the holy, glorious Prophet Daniel spoke of a great and final kingdom, the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ (Dan 2:44). The prophetic vision about the seventy weeks (Dan 9:24-27) speaks about the signs of the First and the Second Comings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and is connected with those events (Daniel 12:1-12).

Saint Daniel interceded for his people before King Cyrus, who esteemed him highly, and who decreed freedom for the Israelite people. Daniel himself and his fellows Ananias, Azarias and Misael, all survived into old age, but died in captivity. According to the testimony of Saint Cyril of Alexandria (June 9), Saints Ananias, Azarias and Misael were beheaded on orders of the Persian emperor Chambyses.

Saint Daniel and the three holy youths are also commemorated on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, and on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers (Sunday before the Nativity).



The Three Holy Youths: Ananias, Azarias and Misael

Commemorated on December 17

The Holy Youths Ananias (“God is gracious”), Azarias (“whom God helps”), and Misael (“Who is what God is?”) were companions of the Holy Prophet Daniel. They were chosen to serve in the king’s palace with Daniel (Daniel 1:6) and were all from the tribe of Judah. They gave Ananias the Chaldean name Shadrach (“royal”), Azarias the Chaldean name Abednego (“servant of Nego”), and Misael the Chaldean name Meshach (“guest”). They were thrown into a fiery furnace when they refused to worship the golden idol set up by King Nebuchadnezzar, but the angel of the Lord preserved them (Daniel 3:25).

The Seventh and Eighth Odes of the nine Biblical Odes at the back of the Psalter are taken from The Song of the Three Holy Youths (found in the Septuagint text of the Old Testament used by the Orthodox Church).

The Three Holy Youths and the Prophet Daniel are also commemorated on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and the Sunday of the Holy Fathers.



7 Main Christmas Hymns and Their Meaning

Prepared by Anastasia Parkhomchik

Many in the West have met Christmas and are well into Christmastide. For the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church, Christmas is just around the corner. We hear its approach in the chants sung at our churches. As the Feast of the Nativity is coming nearer, we hear more of the Christmas Stichera, Triparia and Irmoses. What do they say? In this piece, we take a close look at the seven best-known chants of the Nativity and their message to us.

“Christ is born — glorify Him.”

Christ is born, glorify Him!

Christ comes from heaven, go to meet Him! Christ is on earth, be exalted!

Sing to the Lord, all the earth,

and praise Him in gladness, O people,

for He has been glorified!

This prominent Irmos is a part of the opening chant of the Christmas canon that brings us to the atmosphere of the feast and gives us a foretaste of its joy days before it comes. We begin to hear it at Church as early as one month before the great feast. It is sung for the first time at the all-night vigil on the feast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple. They are also performed as Katavasias in the evening of the Saturdays preceding commemoration of the most venerated saints. A Katavasia is a distinct type of Irmos completing every eighth ode of a canon.

The length of the period of preparation sets the Nativity of Christ apart from all the other great holidays and underlines its special significance. As Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann observes, Nativity begins the coming together of God and the world, and of Christ and man. It is the feast of the basic Christian truth about the incarnation of Christ and the deification of man.

The writer of this Irmos was Saint Cosmas of Maiuma, a hymnographer. He was inspired by the Homily of Saint Gregory the Theologian, and most notably by these lines, “*Christ is born – Glorify Him! Christ from heaven, go out to meet Him. Christ on earth; be exalted. Sing unto the Lord all the whole earth; and that I may join both in one word, Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad, for Him Who is of heaven and then of earth. Christ in the flesh, rejoice with trembling and with joy; with trembling because of your sins, with joy because of your hope.*”

Prepare, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all!

Prepare, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all! / Adorn yourself, O Ephratha, for the tree of life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave! / Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the Divine Fruit: / If we eat of it, we shall live forever and not die like Adam. / Christ comes to restore the image which He made in the beginning!

This Troparion is of the forefeast of the Nativity of Christ, sung from 2 to 5 January (20 – 23 December, old style). With its bright images and instructive allusions to the narrations from the book of Genesis about the life of the first people in Eden, it brings home to us the basic message of the feast of the Nativity. It compares Bethlehem to Eden, the Garden of God that He had planted in the East and where He put the man He had formed (Genesis 2:8). The Christ born of the Virgin is compared to the tree of life by the fruit of which the first people could live forever. This narration is more than a creative metaphor. Many church fathers – of whom John Damascene was one – also used this comparison, underlining that by eating from the tree of life, people were keeping God in their sight. When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost their ability to see God and became mortal. With His coming, Christ returned to us this ability and returned us to eternal life.

We worship Your Birth, O Christ!

*Today He Who holds the whole creation in His hand is born of a Virgin.
He Whose essence none can touch is bound in swaddling-clothes as a mortal Man.
God, Who in the beginning fashioned the heavens, lies in a manger.
He who rained manna on His people in the wilderness is fed on milk from His mother's breast.
The Bridegroom of the Church summons the wise men;
the Son of the Virgin accepts their gifts.
We worship Thy birth, O Christ.
We worship Thy birth, O Christ.
We worship Thy birth, O Christ.
Show us also Thy Holy Theophany!*

This Sticheron is sung on the eve of the Nativity after the Royal Hours, when, in the reading of the Ninth Hour, we recall His suffering and death on the Cross.

This text helps us make sense of the Nativity of Christ, a mystery of God and a challenge to comprehend. The eternal and all-powerful God and Creator of the Universe came into this world as a defenceless infant, dependant on people for all his vital needs. The Sticheron also draws a clear connection between Theophany and the Nativity, two feasts that were celebrated as one in the ancient Church.

Also noteworthy is the allusion to the hymn sung on the Great Friday, "We worship Your Passion, O Christ: Show us also Your glorious Resurrection!" The order of the services on the eves of the Nativity and the Theophany is modelled on the service of the Great Friday. The Royal Hours are followed by the Typica in lieu of the Divine Liturgy. The similar sequencing of the services on these two feasts underlines the interconnectedness of the Nativity of Christ and His death on the Cross and the indivisible link between these two events. The immortal Son of God came into this world to die as a human and redeem the sins of the people.

What shall we offer You, O Christ?

*What shall we offer Thee, O Christ,
Who for our sakes hast appeared on earth as a man?
Every creature made by Thee offers Thee thanks:
the Angels offer a hymn; the heavens, a star;
the Wise Men, gifts; the shepherds, their wonder;
the earth, its cave; the wilderness, a manger,
and we offer Thee a Virgin Mother!
O Pre-eternal God, have mercy on us!*

This hymn is one of the opening Stichera of the vespers of the eve of the Nativity. It adds a key emphasis to the rest of the service, Notably, that people are called to respond to the gifts that God bestows on them. His ultimate gift to us is the coming to the world of our Savior Who redeemed the sins of mankind with His suffering and death on the Cross and gave us eternal life.

How shall we do in return? Saint John of Shanghai and San-Francisco gave this answer in one of his sermons. "O man! He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8). To the Lord lying in the Manger, we offer our worship and praise and also some good deed."

Also, in this Sticheron, we find a beautiful description of the Mother of God. The Most Holy Virgin, exceeding in greatness all the powers of the angels, is the gift from all of mankind to the Lord, the best it could offer.

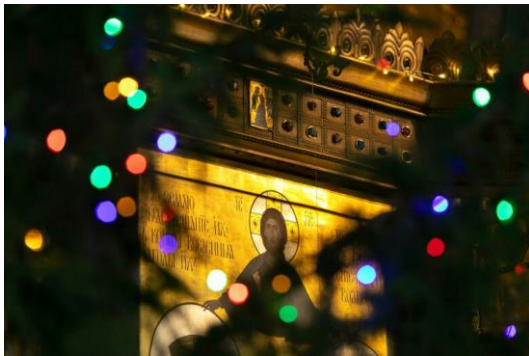
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth be peace!

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace! Today Bethlehem receives Him Who reigns forever with the Father. Today Angels glorify the newborn Babe in hymns worthy of God: "Glory to God in the highest, // and on earth, peace, goodwill to men!"

This Nativity Sticheron repeats the lines of the evangelical song from the Gospel of Luke (2: 13-14). We hear it at the all-night vigil of the feast of the Nativity of Christ. It follows the Gospel readings with the narrative of the Angel's disclosure to the Righteous Joseph that Mary who was pledged to be married to him was pregnant through the Holy Spirit and would give birth to Christ, the Saviour of all people.

Its solemn text shows us the connectedness between the Nativity as a historical event that happened at a particular time and place and its universal significance for all people, of all generations.

It also proclaims a unity of three levels of existence -the world of heaven, where our Triumite God dwells in eternity, the world of the Angels, and the human world on earth. These worlds were separate when he came, but the Nativity of Christ restored their connectedness.



Troparion to the Nativity of Christ

*Thy Nativity, O Christ our God,
has shone to the world the light of wisdom!
For by it, those who worshipped the stars,
were taught by a star to adore Thee,
the Sun of Righteousness,
and to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee.*

It is common to contrast faith with rational knowledge. This fourth-century Troparion puts forth the same idea that was advocated by Christian apologists of the first centuries, namely, that faith and reason are inextricably linked. Augustine Aurelius expressed the same proposition in his fifth-century maxim: "Understand to believe, and believe to understand." The Troparion speaks of the Magi, the worshippers of stars, who were taught by the star of Bethlehem to adore the Star of Righteousness, the true God. Aware that the Magi knew the prophecies about the soon-to-come birth of the Great King and believed in the omens from the stars, the Lord brought them to the Lord Jesus Christ who would say to them, "I am the way and the truth and the life." He would declare that the reason He was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth.

This Troparion refers to Christ as the sun, and it is not coincidental. When the feast of the Nativity was beginning to be observed separately from the Theophany, there was still a Pagan tradition in Rome to celebrate the feast of the invincible god of the sun on the day of the winter equinox. Perhaps by celebrating the Nativity at approximately the same time, the early Christians were drawing the attention of the Pagan people from the adoration of a celestial body, the Sun, to the worship of Christ, the spiritual Sun that never sets.

Kontakion to the Nativity of Christ

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, / and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One. / Angels with shepherds glorify Him; / The wise men journey with a star, / Since for our sake the Eternal God was born as a Little Child!

This Troparion is another well-known hymn of the Nativity written in the 5th to 6th centuries by Saint Romanos the Melodist. In its text, we encounter a characteristic question, how could God, too big for the Universe, be born from the womb of the virgin? Or find shelter in a modest cave?

But the text in its familiar form represents less than a tenth of the original hymn. Roman the Melodist had a preference for long works. The text that we know as the Kontakion of the Nativity was merely an introduction to another 24 verses whose initial letters made the acrostic Τοῦ ταπεινοῦ Ῥομανοῦ ὁ ὕμνος («Hymn of the Humble Romanos»).