

The Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be Thy Name"

By Fr. Lawrence Farley

We continue in this series with our examination of the Lord's Prayer phrase by phrase, using Matthew's version of the Prayer. We turn now to the next petition: "Hallowed be Thy Name". To understand this petition we must first understand the Hebrew significance of a name.

In our culture, a name is simply a verbal tag, a number of syllables by which someone is specifically identified and differentiated from others. For us, a name hardly differs from a number: one may say (as in the Village), "You are Number Six", or "You are Lawrence" or "You are Barsanuphius". It hardly matters; the name is simply a label worn so that one can be picked out in a group. It was otherwise in the Old Testament, where a name embodied a person's essential nature. Thus one might be given a different name if one embraced a different destiny: Abram became Abraham when God called him to the father of a multitude, and Simon bar-Jonah became Kephias (or Peter) when the Lord called him to be His apostle.

God's Name also embodied His essential nature. When He revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush and told him that He was calling him to bring to Israel the message of impending liberation from Egypt, Moses foresaw that Israel would be sceptical and would ask, "What is His name?" (Exodus 3:13). This was not a request for a verbal identifier; they knew that He was the God of Abraham whom they had been worshipping. They were not asking for His verbal tag, but inquiring after His credentials and whether or not He had what it took to overcome the gods of Egypt and defeat the world's greatest superpower. In response God replied, "I am who I am"—i.e. His power was untrammelled and His acts were not conditioned by anyone. He could do whatever He pleased—including liberate Israel from Egypt. He was the great I Am. He had not manifested Himself with such power before (Exodus 6:3), but now He would.

God's Name, therefore, is identical with His power. We see this, for example, in the prokeimenon for Wednesday Vespers. One feature of Hebrew poetry is its parallelism, wherein the poet says something one way and then repeats it another way. Thus Psalm 54:1: "Save me, O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your might". Here it is clear that God's "name" is synonymous with His "might". Thus, the

Name we are to hallow is God's manifested reputation for power in the world, His ability to save His people.

And what does it mean to "hallow" something? The word "hallow" is quite archaic, and is scarcely used outside religious circles. Indeed the (possibly apocryphal) story is told of how a little boy heard the adults at church saying the Lord's Prayer and praying "Hallowed be Thy Name" and didn't understand what they could possibly mean. He had no clue what the word "hallow" meant, but he knew several children in his class at school by the name of "Harold". He thought that the adults were saying of God, "Harold be Thy Name" and concluded, not unnaturally, that God's Name must be "Harold". He had thought it was actually "Jehovah" or something like that, but felt on the basis of the Lord's Prayer that it must be "Harold". I suppose the story illustrates the danger of using archaic language—or perhaps of not enunciating clearly.

The word "hallow" is of course the Greek *agiazō*, meaning "to make *agios*, or holy, to sanctify". In other words, "hallowed be Thy Name" in this petition might be rendered, "may Your Name be sanctified". So: what does it mean to sanctify God's Name? One path to understanding it might be to turn it on its head and to ask first what it might mean to *profane* God's Name.

In Isaiah 52:5, the prophet accuses Israel of profaning God's Name by their sins. Israel had defected from their God and worshipped the idols and had ground the face of the poor, in every possible way flouting God's Law. For this God had abandoned them to their sins and allowed foreign oppressors to prevail over them, sending them into captivity. The nations had concluded from this that their God was a loser, and was too weak to defend His people from the nations who were supported and strengthened by their gods. Yahweh's power was despised by them, so that His Name was blasphemed among the nations. St. Paul later took up this accusation and levelled it at the Jews of his own day in Romans 2:24, saying that Jewish transgression of the Law resulted in Judaism and the Jewish God being despised among the nations of his time. Thus, one profanes the Name of God through one's sins, for the sins of religious people inevitably reflect upon the God whom they profess to serve.

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In the same way, our transformed life also reflects upon the God who we profess to serve. St. Justin Martyr happily pointed to the transformed life of murderous and aggressive people whose natures had been tamed by Christ: "We who formerly used to murder one another do not only now refrain from making war upon our enemies, but also willingly die confessing Christ" (*Apology*, chapter 39). In like manner St. Paul encouraged the thief to steal no longer, but to work so as to have something to give to those in need (Ephesians 4:28). In this way the world would see that God had so transformed the thief's heart that instead of taking other people's things, he was now giving away his own.

The Lord Himself said the same thing about the power of a transformed life: "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Our changed lives inevitably reflect upon our God. And of course the greatest way to sanctify God's Name is to die for Him—when the world sees how the Christians are even prepared to lay down their lives for God, they will ask, "What kind of a God is this that His people will even die for Him?" This is how we sanctify the Name of God: by letting our light shine so before men that they will glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

This is our first and most important task as Christians. We may speak and preach all we like, but all will be in vain if by our lives we do not sanctify God's Name. It is as Nietzsche said: "I will believe in the Redeemer when His people look a lot more redeemed". It is a fair challenge. One bumper sticker I saw said, "Christians are not perfect, just forgiven". Nietzsche would have said this was a cop out, and he would have been right. If the Gospel cannot transform and heal the human heart, it will have no credibility in the world—and nor should it. We are called to be transformed, not just our own sake, but for the sake of the world.

We note finally that this first petition in the Lord's Prayer has to do with God's honour and glory, and not our own happiness and fulfillment. It is right that we pray for ourselves, and ask God for our daily bread, our daily forgiveness, and daily deliverance from the time of trial. But more important than our own welfare is God's glory, and thus we pray first for His Name to be sanctified, not for ourselves.

We all too easily imagine that we are the center of the universe—or at least of our own little universe, and that our happiness trumps everything else. For this happiness and goal we are sometimes prepared to sacrifice almost anything—even fidelity to marriage vows, and unborn children within the womb. We badly need to be knocked off our throne and driven to our knees, where we belong. This petition is a daily reminder that we are not the most important thing in the cosmos, and that our happiness comes second to God's honour. Ultimately our joy depends upon our recognition that God is the King, and we are His servants. Our name, reputation, and passing pleasure are as nothing compared to Him. It is His Name that we should strive to sanctify.

Greatmartyr Anastasia the "Deliverer from Potions", her teacher, Martyr Chrysogonus, and many with them

Commemorated on [December 22](#)

The Great Martyr Anastasia the Deliverer from Potions, a Roman by birth, suffered for Christ at the time of Diocletian's persecution of Christians. Her father was a pagan, but her mother was secretly a Christian. Saint Anastasia's teacher in her youth was an educated and pious Christian named Chrysogonus. After the death of her mother, her father gave Saint Anastasia in marriage to a pagan named Publius, but feigning illness, she preserved her virginity.

Clothing herself in the garb of a beggar, and accompanied by only one servant, she visited the prisons. She fed, doctored and often ransomed captives who were suffering for their faith in Christ. When her servant told Publius about everything, he subjected his wife to a beating and locked her up at home. Saint Anastasia then began to correspond secretly with Chrysogonus, who told the saint to be patient, to cleave to the Cross of Christ, and to accept the Lord's will. He also foretold the impending death of Publius in the sea. After a certain while Publius did indeed drown, as he was setting out with a delegation to Persia. After the death of her husband, Saint Anastasia began to distribute her property to the poor and suffering. Diocletian was informed that the Christians who filled the prisons of Rome stoically endured tortures.

He gave orders to kill them ***Con't Pg 13***

Metropolitan's Nativity Message Con't

As we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ in the flesh, and His baptism in the River Jordan, we call to mind the important roles that his mother, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and his Forerunner, John the Baptist, had in bringing about these events that manifested Christ to the world. For the Theotokos and the Baptist are indeed excellent examples for us, as we share their same calling to make Christ present in the world.

When Mary received the glad tidings that she was to become the Birth-giver of God, she humbly responded: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to thy word." She then visited her relative Elizabeth, who was six months pregnant, and when she greeted Elizabeth, the babe in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy. This babe, as we well know, was Saint John the Baptist, the Forerunner of Christ.

The importance of John the Baptist in the Gospels cannot be overemphasized. As the Forerunner of Christ, he not only proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, but also died a martyr's death for speaking the truth, foreshadowing that Christ, the Truth, would die for the Salvation of the world. In dying for the truth, John is not only the Forerunner to Christ, but also the Forerunner to all those who have died for Christ throughout the centuries, the countless martyrs who have struggled and been slain for Christ for more than two thousand years. Some Christians are still called to this level of witness, to this level of dying in martyrdom for the sake of Christ. The twentieth century saw more Christian martyrs than any century beforehand, in places such as Russia, Romania, and Turkey. The twenty-first in turn is seeing many Christian martyrs in places like Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Syria. We pray for strength and steadfastness for all Christians suffering persecution for the sake of Christ, and in turn we ask for the intercessions of those who have died martyr's deaths in witness of Christ.

Yet certainly, not all Christians are called to be slain for Christ, to be beheaded like John the Baptist or many of the later martyrs. Neither are all called to be like the Baptist as public preachers or wandering ascetics. For those who do not have the Baptist's calling, another route is provided: the calling to live like the Virgin Mary. For while John made Christ known to the world, it was through the Virgin Mary that Christ came to be born in the flesh. She is the

Theotokos, the bearer of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the same way, Christians can "bear Christ" and make Him present. Instead of preaching God's works across hills and dales, we can keep them close and ponder them in our hearts (see Luke 2:19). By thus meditating on God's works, we will become authentically humble, gentle, and kind like Mary. And in this process of contemplating what Christ has done for us, we will gain boldness before Him in our private conversations with Him. Forging a personal relationship with Christ, we will have boldness to ask Him and His servants for what is needed, just as Mary His Mother did at the wedding in Cana.

These two great figures, John the Baptist and Mary the Theotokos, thus help us grapple with a perennial problem of Christians: how do we keep the winter feasts of the Nativity and Theophany meaningful throughout the year? The Church's calendar points us to the solution: the day after the Nativity of the Lord, December 26, is dedicated to the Lord's Mother, and January 7, the day after the Theophany of the Lord, is dedicated to the Lord's Forerunner. Hence the Church tells us that imitation of the Forerunner and the Theotokos are the keys to making Christ's winter feasts more than just a few days of celebration. The Baptist shows us the way of outward witness, of forceful and defiant objection to the falsehood propagated in the world, while the Theotokos shows us the way of inner stillness, of contemplation of the mystery of Christ. And Christians can imitate the lifestyle of either one, because ultimately both John and the Theotokos are doing the same thing: both are witnesses to Christ, and steadfastly remain eternal witnesses to His death and resurrection.

So, give glory to Christ on the feasts of His Nativity and Theophany, while honoring and magnifying in song the Theotokos and Mother of the Light, and praising the Baptist as is his due. For they reveal to us the different ways in which Christians can witness to Christ, and are our primary examples of how to live a Christian life, not only at this festal season of Nativity and Theophany, but throughout the entire year.

Christ is born! Glorify Him!
With love in the New-Born Christ,
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

Matthew 1:1-25 (*Gospel*)

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah.

Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us.'" Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord

commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

2019 NATIVITY MESSAGE OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP PAUL

For today I see equality of honor between heaven and earth, and a way for all those below to things above, matching the condescension of those on high. However great the heaven of heavens may be, or the upper waters which form a roof over the celestial regions, or any heavenly place, state, or order, they are by no more marvelous or honorable than the cave, the manger, the water sprinkled on the Infant and His swaddling clothes. For nothing done by God from the beginning of time was more beneficial to all or more divine than Christ's nativity, which we celebrate today.... The very Word of God from God emptied Himself in an indescribable way, came down from on high to the lowest state of man's nature, and indissolubly linked it with Himself, and in humbling Himself and becoming poor like us, He raised on high the things below, or rather, He gathered both things into one, mingling humanity with divinity, and by so doing He taught everyone that humility is the road that leads upwards, setting forth Himself as an example before men and holy angels alike.

(St. Gregory Palamas on the Nativity)

The Word of God, timelessly begotten of the Father, takes on our fallen human nature and raises it on high. But He didn't accomplish this through some great demonstration of His omnipotent power. He is born into this world owning nothing and having no home. He is born in a manger, in a cave. His humble beginning in time reveals the Incarnate Timeless One.

This is what happens at every Divine Liturgy. We are invited to a banquet to partake of the Incarnate One. We humbly partake of bread and wine now become His Body and Blood. This banquet is the theme of the Gospel of Luke read the 2nd Sunday before the Nativity. When people start making excuses for not attending, this is reported to the householder issuing the invitation.

Then the householder in anger said to his servant, "Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame." (Luke 14:21)

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Bishop Paul's Nativity Con't

St. Ambrose in commenting on this verse says, "He invites both good and evil to enter in order to strengthen the good and change the disposition of the wicked for the better. The saying that was read today is fulfilled, 'then wolves and lambs will feed together.'"

There are many interpretations of this gospel reading. Perhaps one way to look at it is to answer the invitation for both "good and evil" to come and embrace Him Who is born in the Cavern for our salvation. Once we behold the God-Man and see something of ourselves fulfilled in Him, then the invitation to the Eucharistic banquet becomes the fulfillment of that experience.

So let us all come to the Cave to greet the One Who will "strengthen the good and change the disposition of the wicked for the better." Let us come to see the Church as the place where the polarities of life are reconciled and united in the New Adam, Jesus Christ, born into this world for us men and for our salvation.

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

With love in Christ, the unworthy
+PAUL, Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest

VIGILS- 12/15/19

Laura Kovach (3) Health of Joe H, Joe R, Margi, Maureen, Lisa, Mark, Dana, Chuck, Julia, Betty, Bohdi, Steve, Margi; In memory of Stephanie's grandmother, Marika; Safe travel for family

Sandy Martin (1) Special intentions

Jim Mazur(2) Health of family and friends

Darlene, Nick & Gabe Mazurik (1) Special intentions

Ron & Bobbie Royhab (3) For health and healing of Eileen, Marianne and Heidi

Twarek (7) In memory of Stephanie's grandma; Health and recovery of Tom Twarek; Health and recovery of Matushka Melania, Chuck, Steve, Bohdi, Joe, Margi; Health of Betty, Nancy, Heidi, Judy, Liz, Christine, MaryAnn and Bob, Joe, Sonya, Julia, Diane, Stella, Ron, Jake, Helen; Special intentions; Special intentions; Special intentions

Greatmartyr Anastasia Con't

all in a single night, and for Chrysogonus to be sent to him at Aquileia. Saint Anastasia followed her teacher at a distance.

The emperor interrogated Chrysogonus personally, but could not make him renounce his faith. Therefore, he commanded that he be beheaded and thrown into the sea. The body and severed head of the holy martyr were carried to shore by the waves. There by divine Providence, the relics were found by a presbyter named Zoilus who placed them in a coffer, and concealed them at his home.

Saint Chrysogonus appeared to Zoilus and informed him that martyrdom was at hand for Agape, Chione and Irene (April 16), three sisters who lived nearby. He told him to send Saint Anastasia to them to encourage them. Saint Chrysogonus foretold that Zoilus would also die on the same day. Nine days later, the words of Saint Chrysogonus were fulfilled. Zoilus fell asleep in the Lord, and Saint Anastasia visited the three maidens before their tortures. When these three martyrs gave up their souls to the Lord, she buried them.

Having carried out her teacher's request, the saint went from city to city ministering to Christian prisoners. Proficient in the medical arts of the time, she zealously cared for captives far and wide, healing their wounds and relieving their suffering. Because of her labors, Saint Anastasia received the name Deliverer from Potions (Pharmakolytria), since by her intercessions she has healed many from the effects of potions, poisons, and other harmful substances.

She made the acquaintance of the pious young widow Theodota, finding in her a faithful helper. Theodota was taken for questioning when it was learned that she was a Christian. Meanwhile, Saint Anastasia was arrested in Illyricum. This occurred just after all the Christian captives there had been murdered in a single night by order of Diocletian. Saint Anastasia had come to one of the prisons, and finding no one there, she began to weep loudly. The jailers realized that she was a Christian and took her to the prefect of the district, who tried to persuade her to deny Christ by threatening her with torture. After his unsuccessful attempts to persuade Saint Anastasia to offer sacrifice to idols, he handed her over to the pagan priest Ulpian in Rome. ***Con't 14***

Greatmartyr Anastasia Con't

The cunning pagan offered Saint Anastasia the choice between luxury and riches, or grievous sufferings. He set before her gold, precious stones and fine clothing, and also fearsome instruments of torture. The crafty man was put to shame by the bride of Christ. Saint Anastasia refused the riches and chose the tools of torture.

But the Lord prolonged the earthly life of the saint, and Ulpian gave her three days to reconsider. Charmed by Anastasia's beauty, the pagan priest decided to defile her purity. However, when he tried to touch her he suddenly became blind. His head began to ache so severely that he screamed like a madman. He asked to be taken to a pagan temple to appeal to the idols for help, but on the way he fell down and died.

Saint Anastasia was set free and she and Theodota again devoted themselves to the care of imprisoned Christians. Before long, Saint Theodota and her three sons accepted a martyrdom. Her eldest son, Evodus, stood bravely before the judge and endured beatings without protest. After lengthy torture, they were all thrown into a red-hot oven.

Saint Anastasia was caught again and condemned to death by starvation. She remained in prison without food for sixty days. Saint Theodota appeared to the martyr every night and gave her courage. Seeing that hunger caused Saint Anastasia no harm whatsoever, the judge sentenced her to drowning together with other prisoners. Among them was Eutychianus, who was condemned for his Christian faith.

The prisoners were put into a boat which went out into the open sea. The soldiers bored holes in the boat and got into a galley. Saint Theodota appeared to the captives and steered the ship to shore. When they reached dry land, 120 men believed in Christ and were baptized by Saints Anastasia and Eutychianus. All were captured and received a martyr's crown. Saint Anastasia was stretched between four pillars and burned alive. A certain pious woman named Apollinaria buried her body, which was unharmed by the fire, in the garden outside her house.

In the fifth century the relics of Saint Anastasia were transferred to Constantinople, where a church was built and dedicated to her. Later the head and a hand

of the Great Martyr were transferred to the monastery of Saint Anastasia [Deliverer from Potions], near Mount Athos.

Bishop Paul's Travel Schedule

Dec 20-22: St. Thomas/Theotokos Unexpected Joy, Springfield & Ash Grove, MO - Ordination of Seminarians Matthew McDonald and Deacon Ephrem Tauck to the Diaconate and the Priesthood

Dec 24-25: Holy Trinity Cathedral, Chicago, IL - Festal Services for the Nativity

Dec 29-30: St. Panteleimon, Summit, IL

Jan 4-6: Holy Trinity Cathedral, Chicago, IL - Services for Theophany

10 Holy Martyrs of Crete Commemorated on [December 23](#)

The Ten Holy Martyrs of Crete: Theodulus, Saturninus, Euporus, Gelasius, Eunician, Zoticus, Pompilus, Agathopus, Basilides and Evaristus suffered for Christ during the third century under the emperor Decius (249-251). The governor of Crete, also named Decius, fiercely persecuted the Church, and arrested anyone who believed in Christ. Once, ten Christians were brought before him from various cities of Crete, who at the trial steadfastly confessed their faith in Christ and refused to worship idols.

For thirty days they were subjected to cruel tortures, and with the help of God they all persevered, glorifying God. Before their death they prayed that the Lord would enlighten their torturers with the light of the true Faith. Since pain did not influence them, the saints were beheaded.

Saint Paul of Constantinople (November 6) visited Crete about a hundred years later. He took the relics of the holy martyrs to Constantinople to serve as a protection for the city, and a source of blessings for the faithful.

**Eve of the Nativity of our Lord
Commemorated on [December 24](#)**

In Slavic practice, on the eve of the Nativity of the Lord, the liturgical services consist of the Royal Hours with the Typika, Vespers, and the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great. At Vigil in the evening, Great Compline is followed by Matins.

If the Nativity falls on Sunday, however, the Royal Hours with the Typika are read on the preceding Friday. On Friday evening, the office of the Forefeast, December 24. The Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom is served on Saturday morning. At Vigil in the evening, Great Compline is followed by Matins. On Sunday morning, the Liturgy of Saint Basil is celebrated.

If the Nativity falls on a Monday, Royal Hours with the Typika are read on Friday December 22. On Saturday evening and Sunday morning we follow the order for the Sunday before the Nativity with the office of the Forefeast for December 24. On Sunday morning the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom is served. Vigil on Sunday evening consists of Great Compline is followed by Matins. On Monday morning the Liturgy of Saint Basil is celebrated.

On the eve of the Nativity, instead of three readings from the Old Testament at Vespers, there are eight readings (from Genesis, Numbers, Micah, Isaiah, Baruch, Daniel, and two more readings from Isaiah). The entrance is made with the Gospel.

At the end of Liturgy the priest places a lighted candle in a candlestick in the center of the church. Then the troparion and kontakion of the Feast are sung. At Vigil on the evening of the twenty-fourth, Great Compline is followed by Matins.

**The Adoration of the Magi: Melchior, Caspar,
and Balthasar**

Commemorated on [December 25](#)

The Nativity of Christ was revealed to the Magi by a wondrous star. Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Theophylactus, commenting on Saint Matthew's Gospel, say that this was no ordinary star. Rather, it was "a divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star." Saint Demetrius of Rostov says it was a "manifestation of divine energy" (Narrative of the Adoration of the Magi). Entering the house where the Infant lay, the Magi "fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Mt. 2:11).

**Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God Sec-
ond Day of Christmas**

Commemorated on [December 26](#)

The Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos: On the second day of the feast, the Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos is celebrated. Combining the hymns of the Nativity with those celebrating the Mother of God, the Church points to Mary as the one through whom the Incarnation was made possible. His humanity—concretely and historically—is the humanity He received from Mary. His body is, first of all, her body. His life is her life. This feast, the assembly in honor of the Theotokos, is probably the most ancient feast of Mary in the Christian tradition, the very beginning of her veneration by the Church.

Six days of post-feast bring the Christmas season to a close on December 31. At the services of all these days, the Church repeats the hymns and songs glorifying Christ's Incarnation, reminding us that the source and foundation of our salvation is only to be found in the One who, as God before the ages, came into this world and for our sake was "born as a little Child."

Father Alexander Schmemmann, *The Services of Christmas* (1981)

**Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen
Third Day Of Christmas**

Commemorated on [December 27](#)

The Holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen was the eldest of the seven deacons, appointed by the Apostles themselves, and therefore he is called "archdeacon." He was the first Christian martyr, and he suffered for Christ when he was about thirty. In the words of Asterias, he was "the starting point of the martyrs, the instructor of suffering for Christ, the foundation of righteous confession, since Stephen was the first to shed his blood for the Gospel."

Filled with the Holy Spirit, St. Stephen preached Christianity and defeated Jewish **Con't Pg 16**

Third Day of Christmas Con't

teachers of the Law in debate. The Jews maligned Saint Stephen, saying that he had uttered blasphemy against God and against Moses. Saint Stephen came before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest to answer these charges. He gave a fiery speech, in which he recounted the history of the Jewish nation, and denounced the Jews for persecuting the prophets, and also for executing the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ (Acts ch. 7).

During his speech, Saint Stephen suddenly saw the heavens opened and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God. The Jews shouted and covered their ears, and rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city and stoned him, but the holy martyr prayed for his murderers. Far off on the heights stood the Mother of God with the holy Apostle John the Theologian, and She prayed fervently for the martyr. Before his death Saint Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Then he joyfully gave up his pure soul to Christ.

The body of the holy Protomartyr Stephen, left to be eaten by beasts, was secretly taken up by the Jewish teacher Gamaliel and his son Habib, who buried Stephen on his estate. They both believed in Christ, and later received holy Baptism. Saint Stephen is also commemorated on August 2 (Translation of his relics) and on September 15 (Uncovering of his relics in the year 415).

The Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ

Commemorated on [December 25](#)

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, was born of the Most Holy Virgin Mary in the city of Bethlehem during the reign of the emperor Augustus (Octavian). Caesar Augustus decreed that a universal census be made throughout his Empire, which then also included Palestinian Israel. The Jews were accustomed to be counted in the city from where their family came. The Most Holy Virgin and the Righteous Joseph, since they were descended from the house and lineage of King David, had to go to Bethlehem to be counted and taxed.

In Bethlehem they found no room at any of the city's inns. Thus, the God-Man, the Savior of the world, was born in a cave that was used as a stable.

"I behold a strange and most glorious mystery," the Church sings with awe, "Heaven, a Cave; the Virgin the Throne of the Cherubim; the Manger a room, in which Christ, the God Whom nothing can contain is laid." (Irmos of the 9th Ode of the Nativity Canon).

Having given birth to the divine Infant without travail, the Most Holy Virgin "wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger" (Luke 2:7). In the stillness of midnight (Wisdom of Solomon 18:14-15), the proclamation of the birth of the Savior of the world was heard by three shepherds watching their flocks by night.

An angel of the Lord (Saint Cyprian says this was Gabriel) came before them and said: "Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). The humble shepherds were the first to offer worship to Him Who condescended to assume the form of a humble servant for the salvation of mankind. Besides the glad tidings to the Bethlehem shepherds, the Nativity of Christ was revealed to the Magi by a wondrous star. Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Theophylactus, commenting on Saint Matthew's Gospel, say that this was no ordinary star. Rather, it was "a divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star." Saint Demetrius of Rostov says it was a "manifestation of divine energy" (Narrative of the Adoration of the Magi). Entering the house where the Infant lay, the Magi "fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Mt. 2:11).

The present Feast, commemorating the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, was established by the Church. Its origin goes back to the time of the Apostles. In the Apostolic Constitutions (Section 3, 13) it says, "Brethren, observe the feastdays; and first of all the Birth of Christ, which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month." In another place it also says, "Celebrate the day of the Nativity of Christ, on 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 second century Saint Clement of Alexandria also indicates that the day of the Nativity of Christ is December 25. In the third century Saint Hippolytus of Rome mentions the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, and appoints the Gospel readings for this day from the opening chapters of Saint Matthew. ***Con't Pg 17***