

The Shepherd

An Orthodox Christian Pastoral Magazine

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***Christ is Born !
Give ye glory !***

FROM THE FATHERS

"A STAR SHALL RISE out of Jacob, a man shall spring out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17). And what sort of star was this? Chrysostom and Theophylact affirm that it was not an ordinary star, like those we see every night, but a 'divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star.' Other stars had their origin at the creation of the universe, but this star was revealed only at the end of the ages, when the Word became incarnate. Other stars are fixed in the heavens, but this one was visible lower in the skies. Other stars move from east to west, but this one from the East southward to Jerusalem. Other stars are visible only at night, but this one shone like the sun during the day, far surpassing every other star in size and brilliance. Other stars (like the planets, sun and moon) move constantly with the vault of heaven; but this one moved sometimes, and at other times stood still, as Theophylact says: 'It moved as the Magi moved, and stood still as they rested.'"

Saint Demetrius of Rostov, 1651 - 1709 A.D.

"SUCH IS GOD'S MERCY and such is man's greatness, that God the Son Himself came down from eternity into time, from heaven to earth, from the throne of glory to the shepherds' cave, solely to save man, to cleanse him from sin and to lead him back to Paradise. 'I came forth from the Father,' where He had everything,' and am come into the world,' that could give Him nothing. The Lord was born in a cave, to show that the whole world is a dark cave that only He can illumine. The Lord was born in Bethlehem - the House of Bread - to show that He is the only Bread of life worthy of true men."

Saint Nicolas of Ochrid & Zhica, + 1956 A.D.

THE WORLD OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

"THERE WENT OUT a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed" (St Luke 2:1). "All the world" was the expression used to signify the whole Roman Empire. The order was for a census to be taken of all the countries under Roman rule. "And all went to be taxed, everyone to his own city." This was not the Roman way of taking a census, but would have been natural to the Jews, who were very careful of their genealogies and family lines. At this time the Jews were governed by a king of their own, Herod the Great, who though under the authority of Rome,

would carry out the Emperor's order for a census in the manner most acceptable to his Jewish subjects, that is, by having everyone enrolled in the place to which his family belonged.

Well before the time of Our Lord's birth in Bethlehem, Palestine had ceased to be just an isolated little land and had become part of the wider world. The Greek conquest by Alexander the Great about 330 B.C. had brought Palestine and other parts of the East into contact with Europe. Alexander boasted that he had brought about the marriage of East and West. Different racial traditions and ways of thought began to intermingle.

The Roman conquest by Pompey about 65 B.C. had made Palestine part of the Roman world, though its culture remained predominantly Greek. At the time of Our Lord's birth, the Roman Empire under the rule of Caesar Augustus was enjoying a period of unparalleled peace and security. Land travel had never been safer, and the seas had been cleared of pirates. Indeed, Augustus was hailed as "Saviour" by people exhausted by lawlessness and insecurity, and by the ever-present menace of wars and civil war with the resulting poverty, famine and slavery. A Greek inscription of 2 B.C. calls him: "Saviour of the whole human race, whose providence has not only fulfilled but surpassed our prayers, for land and sea enjoy peace, and the cities bloom under good government, internal peace and prosperity." Nobody considered that loyalty to their own gods precluded giving divine honours to Caesar - nobody, that is, except the Jews, who refused to burn incense to him or allow his standards into their Temple.

Three peoples exerted the chief influence throughout the Empire - the cultured Greeks with their universal language, the practical and organising Romans, who had welded together the nations, provinces and peoples into a single political unity, and the Jews, with their Bible, their monotheistic religion, and their hope of a Messiah. Pilate would one day write the inscription for the Cross in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

In the Eastern half of the Empire, Greek influence had long been paramount. Alexander the Great had carried Greek culture and ideas as far as India, while the great centres of Greek thought and learning at Antioch and Alexandria had eclipsed Athens in influence. (Alexandria, founded in 332 B.C. by Alexander the Great, together with Antioch, would become two of the five great Christian Patriarchates.) But although its influence had declined, Athens remained revered on account of its history, and the education of young Roman aristocrats was not considered complete until they had studied philosophy at Athens and rhetoric at the famous school on Rhodes. But in addition to being the greatest centres of learning and philosophy, Alexandria and Antioch were also thriving commercial centres, and merchants, seafarers, craftsmen and adventurers all helped to spread Greek culture as they journeyed along the great trade routes or came into contact with men of all nations in the markets, streets and cities.

The Greek was found everywhere, in the towns of Asia Minor, on the caravan routes of Mesopotamia, in the inns of Gaul and Spain, in the harbours of India. Mentally and physically restless, always inquisitive to learn about different peoples, willing to adapt to foreigners and socialise with them even though he might consider them inferior as "barbarians," in the original meaning of "those who did not speak Greek," he taught all nations to use his speech and Greek became the universal

language of the Empire. Latin was spoken in the West, Syriac in the East, Aramaic in Palestine and Syria, while other peoples of the Empire spoke their own languages, but all educated people would read and write Greek, while most others could understand it and speak it to some degree. Latin would remain the official language of Government, but Greek was the universal language, the language of world trade. St Paul, himself a Jew and a Roman citizen, from the Greek city of Tarsus, which was part of the Roman Empire, would have no language difficulties in speaking to Romans, Corinthians, cultured Athenians and rough tribesmen from Galatia.

About two hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Hebrew Bible had been translated into Greek. This was the great Septuagint Bible of Alexandria (the version of the Old Testament used by the Orthodox Church). The Septuagint was the version used by St Paul, and in nearly every case by the four Evangelists, when using quotations from the Old Testament; and like the New Testament writings when they appeared, the Septuagint could be read by anyone, Jew or Gentile alike, who could read.

Greek civilisation at its height had been characterised by the perfection of the intellect and imagination, worked out in all forms of art, poetry, drama, philosophy, athletics, trade and colonisation. Roman strengths lay in law, organisation and determination in the undeviating cause of world conquest. Roman rule had brought peace and world unity. Instead of the previous many separate nations, the iron fist of Roman military might had broken down frontiers and brought about what amounted to a single kingdom ruled by the Caesar. The great Roman roads criss-crossed the Empire making travel unrestricted, as would be seen by the journeys of St Paul, and Roman warships guarded the seas.

Augustus boasted that he had found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble. Grand and splendid buildings were everywhere - villas, amphitheatres, harbours, bridges, temples, baths and aqueducts. With wise laws, the greatest professional armies ever known, wealth, magnificence and world domination, the Empire was at the height of its imperial power and pride, a real kingdom of this world.

The Jews had been scattered throughout the world by events in their nation's history. The downfall of the Ten Tribes of the northern Kingdom of Israel came when the King of Assyria took and destroyed Samaria, the main Israelite city in 721 B.C. Thousands of inhabitants from the city and surrounding countryside had been taken away into exile, and in their place the Assyrian king had settled other captives from his own land. Over time, these Gentiles intermarried with the Israelites who remained, to form a mixed race known as the Samaritans. The next twenty years would see many of the exiles travelling to Egypt, Syria, and Greece, setting up colonies and trading.

Over a hundred years later, the southern Kingdom of Judah had fallen to the Babylonians, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple, and the Great Exile, when once more thousands were taken away as captives, this time to Babylon, with mainly the poorer people left to weep over their ruined homeland. At the end of the Captivity only a minority had opted to return and rebuild Jerusalem and restore their national home. The vast majority remained to settle where they were, or, as before, had moved out to other nations to trade.

By the time of Christ's birth, Jews were firmly established in every part of the Roman Empire, growing in power and commercial influence. Every large city had its

Jewish colony, the greatest being in Babylon and in Alexandria, where the Jews formed almost half the population. Their numbers made them feared, their wealth made them envied, and their social and religious exclusiveness aroused the dislike and resentment of their Gentile neighbours. Augustus confirmed the privileges granted to them by Pompey and Caesar, exempting them from military service and ensuring that their religious scruples were treated with due deference. So long as the imperial cult was observed (although not by the Jews, although they were willing to pray for the Emperor) the Caesars were very tolerant, and gave legal protection to established national cults and religions, including Judaism, with Augustus even rebuilding the temples of foreign deities.

The Acts of the Apostles affords us a glimpse of the wide dispersion of the Jews, when at Pentecost there were worshippers who had come up to Jerusalem from all over the Empire and beyond. "Parthians and Medes and Elamites Cretans and Arabians" (Acts 2:9-11).

In Palestine itself the Jews were in a minority. The population was roughly divided between Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles, many of the last being of Greek ancestry, whose forebears had followed in the wake of Alexander the Great and built many towns and splendid cities. The great cities of the Decapolis were predominantly Greek.

Samaria was much in sympathy with Greek tendencies and generally speaking favourable to Herod. It seems that Samaria provided a fair proportion of auxiliaries for the Roman army. The Samaritans spoke an impure Hebraic language. They had their own temple on Mount Gerizim, honoured only Moses as a prophet, accepted only the Pentateuch as their Scriptures, observed the rite of circumcision, the Sabbath and the yearly festivals, and rejected the traditions of the Pharisees and the Jewish priesthood. There was deep traditional antagonism between the Jews and the Samaritans - the "Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" - and the Jews avoided going through Samaria and tried not to speak to them. Our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan doubtless caused shock and outrage among many of His listeners, and His conversation with the Samaritan Woman at the well went against all the conventions.

Galilee of the Gentiles, or of the Nations, to the north of Samaria, was thickly populated by a mixture of races. Phoenicians, Arabians and Greeks and Syrians lived there alongside Jews, who despite being in regular contact with their Gentile neighbours remained faithful to their religion and the Law, although they were looked down on by their strictly orthodox Judaeans brethren, both for their "uneducated" accent and their supposedly more liberal religious views. Galilee was consequently very cosmopolitan and more Greek would be heard on the shores of the Sea of Galilee than in the streets of Jerusalem. Bethsaida, the hometown of the fishermen Apostle brothers, Simon (Peter) and Andrew, had a population that was more than half Gentile. One brother, Simon, had a Semitic name; the other brother, Andrew, a Greek name.

Palestine acted as a sort of bridge between the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. Two great Roman roads ran through the country: the "way of the South," along which came caravans laden with supplies and luxury goods from Egypt, and the "way of the Sea," along which Roman governors and magistrates travelled on the way to

their provinces in the East. Judaea remained characteristically Jewish. Jerusalem was not in sight of either of the Great Roads. It was more provincial in outlook. Greek was understood, but pious Jews refused to speak it if they could avoid doing so. However, many Greek and Roman words had inevitably found their way into the Jewish vocabulary and there were Hellenistic synagogues in Jerusalem, that is, synagogues for Jews from the Dispersion, who spoke Greek but could not understand Aramaic.

At this time the only serious discontent with the Roman government was in Palestine. In Galilee it was chiefly economic, in Jerusalem it was more of a religious protest. The burden of taxation was almost unbearable being twofold - religious and civil - each system designed without any regard for the other. Roman rule meant not only Roman peace, but Roman taxation, regular and systematic. The Roman poll-tax required a periodic "enrolment" or census, such as the one for which Joseph and Mary travelled to Bethlehem, as a preliminary to levying. In addition there were custom taxes on all imports and exports, a water tax, city tax, house tax, road tax, salt tax - the list was seemingly endless. The Gospels give us some idea of how thoroughly detested the local tax-collectors (publicans) were as traitors who had taken up lucrative work in the service of an alien power and who cheated their fellow-countrymen. But unpopular as these taxes were, they were standard in all provinces and not in themselves unjust, since they paid for the benefits of peace, the defence of the province, security, law and order, good roads and much else.

Only the Jews had to bear, as a sacred duty, the additional burden of religious taxation. Since the Exile, religious dues had been greatly increased for the upkeep of the priests and numerous Temple servants. Apart from the tithe and Temple tax, there were dues in connection with the sin-offering, the thank offering, the shewbread, the redemption of the first-born, fruit, olives, grain and honey, and even on small herbs - "Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin" (Matt. 23:23). To pay these taxes was, however, for a Jew a part of his religious duty, quite different from the enforced demands of an occupying, pagan power, which became ever more resented. Some turned to armed violence, there were frequent revolts and insurrections, and the aggressive guerrilla warfare waged against the Romans by the Zealots resulted in the country being placed for lengthy periods under martial law, which in turn fuelled further resentment.

There was also considerable dissatisfaction with Herod the Great, regarded as a puppet of Rome. Herod seems to have been possessed of an almost dual personality. On the one hand he was an able statesman and a cultured man, who declared himself more Greek than Jew. He fostered commerce and art and embarked on grandiose building schemes (which, of course, added yet another tax burden). On the other hand he was an oriental despot of the worst kind, and committed acts of unspeakable cruelty.

After the Battle of Actium Herod, who had made the mistake of backing Mark Antony, paid a hurried visit to the victor, Octavian (Augustus) on the island of Rhodes to demonstrate his loyalty and secure his position. (A king of the Jews met a Roman Emperor on a Greek island). To honour his patron, Herod had Samaria renamed Sebaste, after the Greek name of Augustus, and he built the new city of Caesarea in honour of the same Emperor. He also rebuilt the Jerusalem Temple, together with a theatre for Greek and Roman entertainment, and an amphitheatre, where games in

honour of Augustus were celebrated. This particularly infuriated the religious Jews who abhorred the thought of naked athletes.

Herod had his own coins minted with Greek inscriptions. Together with Roman coins bearing the Emperor's image and Latin inscriptions, these had to be changed for shekels by the Temple money-changers lest they profane the Temple Treasury. Notices in both Greek and Latin were posted at regular intervals in the Temple, warning Gentiles not to venture beyond their own outer court into the sacred enclosure. One day St Paul would be nearly killed by a fanatic crowd who wrongly suspected him of having taken a Gentile into the holy place.

When it came to keeping his throne, Herod was paranoid. The Massacre of the Infants at the first Christmas was entirely in keeping with his character. He had killed a large number of the Sanhedron at his accession, executed the old high priest Hyrcanus and murdered both his wife, Mariamne, and her mother. Near the end of his reign he also had three of his own sons executed for imagined treason, which caused Augustus to remark that he would rather be a sow of Herod's than a son. Little wonder that Herod was "troubled" by the question of the Magi: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" - and knowing Herod's terrible reputation for criminal violence, little wonder that "all Jerusalem was troubled with him."

The Roman world of the first Christmas might be a political and cultural unity, but the Golden Age of Greece had passed. Athens was living on its past reputation. The old spirit of earnest enquiry and devout religious fervour had gone. Novelty alone seemed to attract men's minds. Men had "gone up into Olympus and found no gods there." Likewise, while Caesar could maintain the peace, he could do nothing to halt the increasing spiritual bankruptcy of the Empire that lay beneath the proud exterior. The Roman religions contained a multitude of gods, including oriental deities in whose service orgies and vice received the sanction of religion. There was too much reliance on slavery. In the gladiatorial entertainments there was cruelty of a kind quite unknown in even the most licentious of the Greek theatres. Morals and family life were in decline.

The chief religious influence of the Jews on the heathen world came from those in the Dispersion. Everywhere the Jew went his religion went with him, and everywhere among the pagans there was spread the Jewish hope of a coming Messiah, who would establish a new Golden Age. Many of the more thoughtful pagans were attracted to the high moral teachings of the Jewish religion, with its belief in One God, Who had entered into a covenant with His people and Who, instead of being the personification of human passions or even an example of vice, demanded holiness, righteousness and justice.

Some Gentiles became proselytes with full rights in the synagogue, but a greater number felt unable to commit themselves fully to a whole new way of life in which they had not been reared, while others were unwilling to undergo circumcision, considered a barbaric practice by the Greeks and Romans. These "God-fearers" or "devout men," like the centurion in the New Testament, remained on the fringes of the synagogue while sharing the monotheistic faith. It was St Paul's practice to go first to the synagogues to preach on his missionary journeys and the "God-fearers" would later listen readily to St Paul and his fellow-workers.

Other Gentiles treated the Jews with aversion and contempt, which was duly returned. The Jews kept to their Law, were bound in affection to Jerusalem and abhorred the temples and images in the proximity of their synagogues and the frequently licentious festivities of pagan worship. Their religion demanded social separation. While they could transact business and debate with Gentiles, they could not eat with them. Proselytes were sometimes unfortunately caught in the middle, being regarded with wariness and suspicion by the Jews and despised by their fellow Gentiles.

In spite of their exclusiveness, the Jews of the Dispersion were influenced by Greek civilisation. They spoke Greek in daily life and also in worship because Hebrew had become less and less known. After the translation of the Great Septuagint Bible they could read their Scriptures in Greek. In Alexandria, the new cultural centre of the Roman world, the Jews encountered Greek, and especially Platonic, philosophy in the vast lecture rooms and Great Library. They understood that the ancient Greek philosophers had been religious, pious and god-fearing men, who had attained the highest possible human ideas regarding virtue and the "unknown God," for Whom they clearly yearned, and that their philosophy contained elements of the truth. In Alexandria, Reason met Revelation. The Jew Philo of Alexandria (b. 20 B.C.) was the greatest exponent of the blending of Judaism and Greek Philosophy, the reconciling of Plato's thoughts with Mosaic revelation. He linked the Jewish concept of the Word and Wisdom of God with the Divine Reason or "Logos" of Greek philosophy. The Christian Church would later identify Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, as the personal Word and Wisdom of the Father. Philo's influence can be seen in the book, Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Solomon. Full of the Greek spirit, the book has Wisdom as a separate entity with its own independent existence. Platonic ideas manifest themselves in the extolling of the virtues of self-control, understanding, righteousness and courage, and Socratic thought shows in the identification of virtue with knowledge, and wisdom as essential for the righteous life.

While striving to keep to the Law and the lofty ethical teachings of their religion, at the same time the Jews found their outlook being broadened by these contacts with people of all nations and by Greek philosophy. Still looking to Jerusalem as their Holy City, they could not remain exclusive, like those in Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem. The more thoughtful of them, following the prophets of old, wanted a religion, a God, for all men, not just for Israel, and a Messiah whose coming would bless all mankind. So different ideas of the Messiah were emerging. Some saw him as a purely national leader who would throw off the hated Roman yoke and usher in a Golden Age of peace and material plenty, with the Chosen People exalted above all the rest. Others were beginning to hope for One, Who would somehow be a Saviour for all men. Much popular literature had been written in the interval between the Old Testament Scriptures and the birth of Our Lord, such as the Book of Enoch, stirring the ever-growing hope and expectancy of the Messiah. When St John the Baptist appeared with his call to repentance because the Kingdom of God was at hand, immediately "all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not" (Luke 3:15).

When Augustus reigned alone upon earth,
the many kingdoms of men came to an end:
and when Thou wast made man of the pure Virgin,
the many gods of idolatry were destroyed.
The cities of the world passed under one single rule;
and the nations came to believe in one Sovereign Godhead.
The peoples were enrolled by the decree of Caesar,
and we, the faithful, were enrolled in the Name of the Godhead,
when Thou, our God, was made man. Great is Thy mercy: glory to Thee.

(Hymn from Vespers of the Nativity)

Neither the Emperor who ordered the census, nor the king who enforced it, could possibly have guessed that he was helping to complete the foreordained and foretold purpose of God as to the place of the Messiah's birth. But Christians see the providence of God in a divine shaping of history to prepare the world for the coming of Christ.

At the time of the first Christmas, Roman rule has ensured peace and a one-world government, and Roman roads had made travel unrestricted, so paving the way for the later spreading of the Gospel. At this period only in history, Greek was spoken throughout nearly all the civilised world. The richest language the world has ever known, a "theological" language, it was capable of expressing the highest thoughts and feelings and was therefore suited to convey Christian ideas and the Gospel of Christ both through the spoken word and the written words of the New Testament. Alexandrian Judaism had assimilated the best thoughts of Greek philosophy to the service of the revealed religion. The Jews had clung stubbornly to the monotheistic faith and created the eager expectation of a coming Messiah.

It was a world in which men of mixed races and cultures had been brought together. Across the Empire went men from Asia, Africa and Europe. Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Socrates and Plato, soldiers, merchants, administrators, civil servants, captives and slaves had all taken part in building the bridge between East and West, unknowingly "preparing the way of the Lord." And then, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son" (Galatians 4:4).

Contributed by Mrs Miriam Lambouras of Broadstairs, Kent.

Adapted from
**"THE HOUSE OF GOD
AND THE CHURCH SERVICES"**

By the Priest N. R. Antonov

Continuation

The Second Supplicatory Litany. After the blessing at the end of the consecration, we begin to prepare the faithful to receive Holy Communion. So the second supplicatory litany is intoned. In this instance two special petitions are inserted into the litany:-

- a) For the precious Gifts offered and hallowed, let us pray to the Lord.

b) That our man-befriending God, Who hath accepted Them upon His holy and noetic altar above the heavens for an odour of spiritual fragrance, will send down upon us in turn the Divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit, let us pray.

As the litany is being intoned, in his secret prayer, the priest beseeches the Lord to "deem us worthy to partake of this sacred and spiritual table with a pure conscience, unto remission of sins, unto forgiveness of offenses, unto communion of the Holy Spirit, unto inheritance of the kingdom of the heavens."

At the end of the litany and his prayer, the priest exclaims: "And vouchsafe, O Master, that with boldness and without condemnation, we may dare to call upon Thee, the Heavenly God, as Father and to say." And so the Lord's Prayer is introduced. During it, the deacon stands before the Royal Gates, and he wraps his orarion crosswise across his chest. He does this both so that he can help the priest in administering the Holy Mysteries without his orarion in any way impeding his movements, and so that he represents the Seraphim who stand about the Throne of God and cover their faces with their wings in reverence (Es. 6:2-3). The priest then blesses the people with the "Peace" and the deacon calls upon them to bow their heads unto the Lord while the priest reads a prayer for them. In this, he asks that the Lord might sanctify them and deem them worthy to partake of the Holy Gifts without condemnation.

The Elevation of the Holy Gifts. Then the priest reverently takes the Holy Lamb in his fingers and raises it slightly above the diskos, saying, "The Holies are for the holy." This means that the Holy Gifts might only be imparted to those who are holy. The faithful, aware of their own sinfulness and their unworthiness before God, respond, "One is holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen." These words emphasise that it is in Christ only that we are holy, and thus they remind us of our unity in Christ.

The Communion of the Clergy. The priests and the deacons receive the Holy Gifts within the sanctuary, and they receive the Body and the Blood separately as did the Apostles and the first Christians. During their communion, the choir chants an appointed verse, called the Communion Hymn. Oftentimes, they either read other prayers or psalms at this point or chant other appropriate hymns, so that all the clergy have time to receive without feeling hurried and time to prepare the Gifts for the faithful. The faithful receive the Body and Blood together in a spoon, and so this preparation entails putting the small portions of the Holy Body from which the faithful will partake in the chalice so that they are steeped in the Blood.

The Communion of the Laity. Then the Doors are opened, so that the chalice might be brought out to the people. The opening of the Doors represents the opening of the Saviour's tomb that the women and the apostles might see the evidences of the Resurrection. The bringing out of the chalice represents the Saviour's appearances after His resurrection. The deacon exclaims, "With fear of God, with faith and love, draw nigh," and the people approach to receive. The choir chants, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us." Usually on behalf of the communicants the priest recites a prayer here, one found in the preparatory prayers before Communion, which begins "I believe, O Lord, and I confess." Then as each comes up to the chalice he imparts the Holy Mysteries to

them. As they commune the choir repeatedly chants, "Receive ye the Body of Christ; taste ye of the Fount of Immortality." After the communion of the people, the priest returns to the Holy Table with the chalice, and then tips into it those particles which in the prothesis were cut out commemorating those for whom prayers had been asked. Their being submerged in the Holy Blood represents that it is by Jesus Christ and His Blood that they are cleansed of their sins and passions. Then he blesses the people with the words: "Save, O God, Thy people and bless Thine inheritance." We are called His "inheritance" because of our adoption into Christ Jesus, and because we have been transfigured by His Blood and His Passion (see 1 Ptr 2:9). The chanters respond with the hymn: "We have seen the true Light. We have received the Heavenly Spirit. We have found the true Faith, in worshipping the indivisible Trinity; for He hath saved us."

The Last Showing of the Gifts. During this hymn, the priest censes the Holy Gifts and repeats the verse, "Be Thou exalted above the heavens, O God, and Thy glory above all the earth," thus indicating that the transfer of the Gifts to the Prothesis represents the Ascension. He gives the deacon the diskos (paten), which is now empty, and he holding it high by his forehead, takes it to the prothesis. The priest silently says, "Blessed is our God," as he signs the antimension with the chalice, and then turning to the people, with the chalice he blesses the people, ending the sentence, "Always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages." This reminds us of our Saviour's promise to be with us always even unto the completion of the age (Matt. 28:20). When they saw the Saviour ascending into the Heavens, the Apostles fell down and worshipped Him, praising the Lord. And we, the Christians, do the same for we bow as we are signed by the chalice, and while the Gifts are being transferred to the proskomidi, a hymn is chanted: "Fill my mouth with Thy praise, O Lord, and fill my lips with joy, that I may hymn Thy glory and Thy majesty all the day long. We thank Thee, O Christ our God, that Thou has deemed us worthy to partake of Thy Body and Blood unto remission of sins and unto life everlasting. Preserve us without condemnation, we pray, since Thou art good and the Friend of man."

The Thanksgiving Litany. As the Gifts are being transferred the deacon censes them, making a cloud with the incense, just as the Lord was taken up on a light cloud until He was hidden from the eyes of His disciples (Acts 1:9). Then the Thanksgiving Litany begins: "Upright! Having partaken of the divine, holy, immaculate, immortal, heavenly and lifecreating, fearful Mysteries of Christ, let us worthily give thanks unto the Lord. - Help us, save us.... - Having asked that the whole day may be perfect, holy, peaceful and sinless, let us commend ourselves and one another and all our life to Christ our God." During this, the priest folds the antimension, and takes up the Gospel Book. He ends the litany with the exclamation, "For Thou art our hallowing and unto Thee do we send up glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages." As he invokes the names of the Three Persons of the Trinity, he makes the sign of the Cross over the antimension with the Gospel Book and the lays it down. With these rites, the Liturgy ends, and the priest turns towards the people, and says, "In peace, let us depart." That is, he invites them peacefully to leave the church, and they respond, "In the Name of the Lord," signifying that they leave remembering the Lord. This reminds us that we should not simply break out of church like a huddle of children breaking out of school at the end of a long day, and begin

talking and chatting. We should leave quietly, in peace, and "in the name of the Lord," bearing His name with us as we go out into the world again as His witnesses.

The Prayer beyond the Ambon. After this the priest comes out of the sanctuary, and stands before the ambon, where he reads the prayer which for this reason is called the Prayer Beyond the Ambon. In this he again asks the Creator to save His people and bless His inheritance, to preserve the fullness of His Church, to sanctify them that love the beauty of His house, to grant peace to the world, to the churches, to the priests, and to those in authority and to all people. Thus the prayer sums up all that we prayed for in the litanies. At the end of this Prayer, we entrust ourselves to the will of God, with the thrice repeated words, "Blessed be the name of the Lord, from henceforth and forever more." Then, properly, although it is often omitted or read during the communion of the clergy, we read the thanksgiving psalm (Ps. 33): "I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Properly during this psalm the antidoron (blessed bread) is distributed to the faithful as is done in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, but as this psalm is more often than not omitted and to maintain good order, this is more commonly done after the dismissal. The antidoron is from the prosphora from which the Lamb was originally taken. It is cut into small pieces to be distributed to the faithful. It is given as a blessing to those of the faithful, who have not partaken of the Holy Mysteries, and hence its name, which means "instead of the Gifts." Thus those who could not partake of Holy Communion are granted, as it were, to partake of the crumbs that fall from the sacramental Table.

The Last Blessing. The priest then blesses the people for the last time, "The blessing of the Lord and His mercy come upon you, by His divine grace and love for man, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages." Finally, turning to the people, the priest makes the dismissal, in which he begs the Lord, in that He is good and the Friend of man, to save and have mercy upon us through the intercessions of His all-pure Mother and of all the Saints. Then, in many churches, the choir sings a "Many Years" for the authorities and the hierarchs.

(Here Fr Antonov includes a paragraph, which simply lists the parts of the Liturgy of the Faithful, which he has explained above. We omit it.)

...to be continued with "The Symbolical and Moral Significance of the Various parts of the Liturgy of the Faithful"

THE COMING MONTH

CHRISTMAS DAY falls this year on a Wednesday, and so on the Tuesday we have the reading of the Royal Hours, in each of which there is an Old Testament reading, an Epistle and a Gospel. The Liturgy appointed for that day, that of St Basil the Great, is attached to Vespers, and it contains eight Old Testament readings as well as the Epistle and Gospel. Thus the Church insures that we have a sound Scriptural basis to our understanding of the festival and its significance. Because Vespers has already been served, the Vigil Service begins with Great Compline. This is a service which is usually only used in Great Lent, but that fact itself gives us pause for thought. So often we think of tripping into even our church celebrations as if we were going to a party or a fair. The penitential associations of Great Compline remind us that we can only approach the Christ-Child by putting off the "old man" and by renewing ourselves in

knowledge after the image of our Creator (see Colossians 3:5-17). How beautiful and timely this reminder is! So often we think our observance of the Lord's Nativity should be going to the Liturgy on that day and then enjoying a festive meal with our fellows. Those who do this, besides having omitted the Vigil, have not even yet begun to approach the nub of the thing. They are like the people who jostled our Saviour as He made His way to raise up the daughter of Jairus. They thronged and pressed upon Him, but of only one did the Saviour ask, "Who touched Me?" Because that one, whom we now know as Saint Veronica, touched with faith. She alone received healing; she alone was granted comfort, and she alone was granted peace. So it is with our church-going and even with our partaking of the Holy Mysteries, many of us leave this meeting with the Saviour just as we came in, without healing, without comfort, with no peace. We have attended a liturgical event, have perhaps enjoyed a folkloric celebration, but, having made no effort to do more than this or to put off the old man, we remain unchanged. The use of Great Compline at this, one of the most important feasts of the year, reminds how we should approach its celebration.

In the Orthodox practice, the festival is kept for a full week, with the first three days, being observed as high festival. The second day is dedicated to the All-holy Theotokos, to the one who gave birth to God, and the third day is the feast of St Stephen the Protomartyr and Archdeacon. It reminds us what our response to the incarnation of God the Word must needs be: to love Him and to be faithful unto Him even unto death. It reminds us also that, in the words of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, "Winter (this present life) is bitter, but Paradise is sweet." It reminds us of the crowns and the glory that are prepared there for those who bear witness even unto death. The holy Prophet Esaias says of that reward: "Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside Thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him" (Es.64:4).

May our celebration of the feast be such that at the end we are granted that ineffable joy.

NEWS SECTION

ROCA-MP TALKS

A DELEGATION comprising three Bishops (Archbishop Mark, Archbishop Hilarion and Bishop Kyrill) and two priests from the Russian Church Abroad visited Moscow in November, where they were received by the Patriarch, Aleksii II, and members of the Moscow Synod. While in Russia, they also visited Saint Sergius' Monastery and Diveyevo. The delegation is to report its impressions to the the All-Diaspora Clergy Conference to be held in Nyack, New Jersey, between 8th and 12th December. Immediately after that conference, there will be a Sobor (full assembly) of the ROCA hierarchs, at which questions regarding the possible rapprochement between the Patriarchate and the Church Abroad will be addressed. At the time of our going to press, reactions to these moves are extremely mixed, some denying the possibility of there ever being a union, others at the far end of the spectrum advocating a swift and complete union, and many more expressing disquiet over various issues and hoping that any agreement will not be precipitate.

ROCA's OLDEST PRIEST

PROTOPRESBYTER ELIAS WEN, the oldest clergyman in the Russian Church Abroad, turned 107 on 19th November. Father Elias was born in China in 1896. At the age of seven he converted to Orthodoxy at the Chinese Orthodox Mission in Peking. From 1905, he studied at the Mission school, and from 1916 in the Seminary. Fr Elias was ordained to the diaconate in 1924, and to the priesthood in 1931. From 1946, he was the rector of the Cathedral of the Most Holy Mother of God, "Surety of Sinners," built by Saint John (Maximovitch) in Shanghai. In 1949, Fr Elias was forced to leave China because the communists came to power. He served in Hong Kong from 1949 until 1957, then moved to San Francisco, where he has been a staff clergyman of the Cathedral of the Mother of God, "Joy of All who Sorrow." Until the age of 100, Fr Elias conducted all the Sunday and feastday services at the Cathedral, and sang on the kliros daily, morning and evening. It has been difficult for Fr Elias to make the trip to the Cathedral the last few years, so the Cathedral clergy visit him and administer the Holy Mysteries to him at home. Fr Elias walks unaided, his mind is sound, but he has some difficulty with his sight and hearing. In the words of Fr Elias, the greatest punishment for him is being unable to sing on the kliros on a daily basis.

PUTIN MEETS POPE

PRESIDENT PUTIN of the Russian Federation had an audience with Pope John Paul II on 5th November, and was shown the reputed Kazan Icon of the Mother of God which is kept in the Vatican library. He later told reporters that he saw his task in helping steps towards unity [between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic] The previous month he had met senior hierarchs of the Russian Church Abroad in New York City and had been instrumental in arranging for the Synodal delegation to visit Patriarch Aleksii II. It is reported that while in America, on TV, he was asked if he were a believer and replied that he believed in man. It appears from these contradictory evidences that, although his intentions might be good and his personal faith sincere, he uses religion as a politician, with a certain "economy" with regard to the truth.

FATIMA'S INTER-FAITH FUTURE

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS have long held the greatest reservations about the alleged apparitions of the All-holy Virgin at Fatima. However, until recently it was a Marian shrine accepted by Roman Catholics and consonant with their theology. In October this year, though, an Interfaith Congress was held there, "inspired," it is reported by the Vatican and the United Nations. The Shrine is to be developed "into a centre where all the religions of the world will gather to pay homage to their various gods" (The Portuguese News 1/11/03). The Congress which comprised Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, African Pagan and, deplorably, Orthodox delegates (unnamed) was addressed by the Shrine's rector, Monsignor Luciano Guerra. A Hindu representative, Anshok Ansraj, said that in the Far East millions of Hindus were "getting positive vibrations" from visiting Marian shrines. Monsignor Guerra naively suggested that the fact that the shrine was at a place which bore the same name as Mohammed's daughter indicated that it should open out to people of other faiths! PN reports that "for the first time in the 86-year history of Fatima all of the Pagan and Christian delegates were invited to participate in the Ecumenical (sic) celebrations." "The delegates agreed that religious shrines, including Fatima, should be revamped every 25

years to reflect modern day trends and beliefs." One wonders whether these people, who profess to be Christian teachers and leaders, have reflected upon the Biblical truths: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6), and "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).

ARCHBISHOP GREGORIOS IN GOZO

THE ORTHODOX HERALD of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain, no 178-179, contains a three page report on the visit in July to the Republic of Malta of Archbishop Gregorios, where he represented His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch at the seventeenth centenary celebrations of the martyrdom of St George, held in Gozo. Sadly at several points in these celebrations, the Archbishop participated in ecumenical services, and greeted the RC Archbishop of Malta, Monsignor Joseph Mercieca, with the "kiss of peace," during the celebration of the Mass - an act which moved the congregation to break into spontaneous applause. He also participated in a three-hour long procession with a relic of the Great Martyr. Only the most rabid fanatics would decry our treating Christians of other denominations with kindness and consideration, but such does not require us to abandon the patristic teachings which forbid inter-confessional prayer. And in view of the slipping away of modern Catholicism in recent years (see paragraph above), one might have hoped that the Archbishop had not been required to act in this way.

NEW CATECHUMEN

ON SUNDAY 16th November, Helen Oliver of Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex, made her vows as a catechumen at the Liturgy at the Convent of the Annunciaton, Willesden. Helen is named after the holy Peer of the Apostles Helena, the mother of St Constantine the Great, who is traditionally linked with Essex. We ask the faithful to pray that she may progress in faith, life and spiritual understanding and so ready herself for the holy illumination of Baptism.

*WE GREET all our readers and supporters
on the most blessed feasts of our Saviour's Nativity and
of His Baptism in Jordan. May their joyous messages
enlighten your hearts and minds and sustain you in the Coming Year.*

BROOKWOOD NEWS

TWO BAPTISMS: On Saturday 2nd/15th November, the infant son of Eduardo and Anna Colmenares-Michailovsky, also Eduardo, was baptised at Saint Edward's Church. The Colmenares-Michailovskys live in Venezuela and because of the dedication of our church to St Edward, a Christian name handed down in their family, they visited us some years ago. Now they are working in Azerbaijan, and finding Brookwood about halfway between Venezuela and Azerbaijan, they asked if their baby could be baptised in the Shrine Church of his name saint. The godparents were Daniel Scrochi and Tatiana Colmenares-Michailovsky.

On the very next day, Sunday 3rd/16th November, Leah, the daughter of Stuart and Elena Matthews of Newbury, was baptised at Saint Edward's. Her godparents are

Ekaterina Narlieva and Yordanka Grigorova. Leah is named after the Old Testament righteous one, the wife of the Patriarch Jacob. Both mysterions were celebrated by Father Peter Baulk, assisted by Hierodeacon Sabbas. God grant that the newly illumined infants be kept in the faith of a pure confession, in all godliness and in the fulfilling of the commandments of Christ all the days of their lives.

VISITORS: Among recent visitors to the Brotherhood, on 8th November we had Fr Chrysostom MacDonnell, the pastor of the Antiochian parish of Saint Edward in Athelhampton.

On 13th and 14th November, Fr Hieromonk Justin of Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, visited us again, and went with Frs Alexis and Sabbas to the Convent of the Annunciation on 14th for the Liturgy for the feast of Sts Cosmas and Damian and to meet Mother Vikentia and the Sisters there.

On that day, having contacted us earlier to make arrangements, our constituency Member of Parliament, Humfrey Malins, visited the Brotherhood, looked at the church, and stayed for coffee with Father Nippon and the other brothers.

NEW ICON CARDS: Recently we have had some new icon cards printed, copies of the icon of the Holy Martyrs Sergius and Bacchus, which was donated earlier in the year to our church by Andreas Stratis. We are indebted to Mrs Helena Lawani of Broadbottom for her help in getting these produced.

PRACTICAL TIP

IF ONE takes up a sport or hobby or some other interest, one usually spends time and effort in learning about it, obtaining the necessary equipment or materials, even going through a training course, so that one becomes competent in this new field of endeavour. It is only with regard to the Faith, that people seem to think that they can benefit simply by turning up to a church service every month or so, and do nothing else. Twice in the last few weeks, on separate occasions, Orthodox Christians have told your present writer that they really know very little about their faith as if this were something normal. Both had been Orthodox longer than this writer. This really is to no benefit. If you know little about your Faith, apply yourself to learn. There are innumerable books on Orthodoxy published now (some not so good as others), buy and read these. Go to catechism classes. Ask questions about points you do not understand. Find out how to keep the fasts. Obtain prayer and service books, and use them. Listen attentively to the content of sermons and not just to judge "how well he spoke, "or having only one concern,"that it does not go on too long." Do not just be content to be a dead member, otherwise you will find that you have no part in Him that is alive, Who has risen from the dead.