

The Confessor's Tongue for December 6, 2009

26th Sunday after Pentecost; St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

December 6: St. Nicholas

St. Nicholas was born in about the year 280 during the reign of Emperor Valerian in the city of Patara in the province of Lycia of noble, wealthy and pious parents, Theophanes and Nonna. The grace of God revealed to them signs from his very childhood. Later as an adolescent he displayed an inclination for strict abstinence and the solitary life. He abandoned temporal amusements and distractions, frequently visited the temples of God and enjoyed studying the Holy Scriptures under the direction of his uncle Nicholas, Bishop of Patara. By the request of the latter, St. Nicholas was given over to the service of the Lord by his parents and on reaching maturity he was ordained a presbyter. In this capacity St. Nicholas led an even stricter ascetic life. He continually attended vigils, fasts and prayer, and more and more perfected himself in the virtuous life. During a journey of his uncle to the Holy Land, St. Nicholas directed the Patara flock, but after his uncle returned he was sent to Jerusalem and while on the way he twice calmed a storm through his prayers. After he returned home, he, through the special inspiration of God, was transferred to the city of Myra. And soon because of his holy life he was elected bishop there and was for all an example of indestructible faith and burning zeal for it, of deep piety and immeasurable humility, meekness and gentleness, of praiseworthy purity and chastity and great abstinence, of truly Christian philanthropy and of deep concern and compassion for the unfortunate. His clothes were simple, his food was Lenten. The door of his house was open for everyone, and all day he practiced his calling by deed, always attentively listening to all requests which came to him. During the reign of Diocletian he was imprisoned together with other Christians until the reign of Constantine the Great, "suffering hunger and thirst in an overcrowded prison".

In 325 he participated in the First Ecumenical Council and showed his special burning zeal for the defense of Orthodoxy and the disgust at the false teaching of Arius. As for his own deep truly Christian love, the hierarch of Myra, Lycia during his life was known as the father for orphans and the comforter of sufferers. Being glorified by the Lord with the gift of wonderworking, St. Nicholas "performed many great and glorious wonders on earth and at sea, helping those in trouble, and saving them from drowning, and carrying them from the depths of the sea to dry land, delighting in captivity and bringing them into his house, delivering them from bonds and prisons, interceding for them from visitation of the sword, and freeing them from death, giving healing many times to many: sight to the blind, walking to the lame, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb; enriching many of the latter suffering in infirmity and poverty, giving food to the hungry, and to everyone in

need being a ready helper, showing himself a warm defender and quick intercessor. And now to everyone who calls on him he helps and delivers from trouble. The great wonderworker is known in both the East and the West, and all the ends of the earth know his good deeds". St. Nicholas died in very old age in the year 342 in Myra, where he was buried....

S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274pp. (Kharkov, 1900). P 405. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © 12/17/04. All rights reserved.

The Feast of Renewal: Teaching on the Weeks Preceding Nativity St. John of Kronstadt

We are approaching, beloved brethren, the world-saving feast of the birth in the flesh of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. For several days before the feast, the holy Church already celebrates this wondrous mystery in the spiritual hymns of her daily services [starting December 20]. These hymns remind us of our divine birth-right, and the squandering of our sonship through sin; of its restoration through repentance; of our common spiritual kinship; and of the spirit of love and care for one another.

And in order that we celebrate this feast of God's limitless love and His extreme condescension not in a worldly, but in a spiritual manner, let us briefly consider the following:

Have you preserved the spiritual birth from God which we each received in Baptism? Are you always heedful of your Divine sonship and the sacred treasure of the Spirit which you acquired in Baptism? Have you grown closer to God through faith and love, like His beloved children? Have you loved one another as befits children of God? Have you despised evil and all-destructive sin? Have you loved truth and every virtue?

Why did God become man while remaining God? What does God's incarnation require of us? Having set forth these two questions, I shall answer the first with the words of the Archangel to Joseph, the betrothed of the Holy Virgin: God became man to save *His people from their sin* (Matt. 1:21). For this reason, He is called Jesus, which means "Savior." And so, it was for our salvation that the Lord came to earth and became man, for the regeneration in us of the image of God which had fallen. The Son of God became the Son of Man in order to make us sons of God who were called the children of wrath and worthy of eternal damnation. In the words of the Apostle John the Theologian: "That we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1); "Now God became man that He may make Adam a god" (Sticheron for the Praises of Annunciation).

O the unutterable love of God! O the unspeakable compassion of the Lord! And He, the Most Holy, did this: He deified mankind in His chosen ones, cleansed them from all evil both of soul and body, sanctified, glorified, led them from corruption to everlasting life, made them worthy to stand in blessedness before the awesome throne of His glory. And He deified us also, brothers and sisters: He gave us a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit, sanctified us, made us His sons, gave us the promise of eternal life and eternal blessings, surpassing all telling and imagining. And in confirmation, as a surety of the future blessings, He gave to us, still here on earth, the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts: God "hath sent for the Spirit of His Son into your heart, crying, 'Abba, Father'" (Galatians 4:6) writes the Apostle Paul.

And so, my brethren, the feast of the Nativity of Christ reminds us that we are born of God, that we are sons of God, that we have been saved from sin that we must live for God and not for sin; not for flesh and blood, not for the world which lies in evil (I John 5:19), not for earthly corruption, but for an inheritance incorruptible... reserved in heaven the Lord Himself will give you a sign, behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

You are preparing yourselves to meet the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, you must ask yourselves: Have you preserved the spiritual birth from God which we each received in Baptism? Are you always heedful of your Divine sonship and the sacred treasure of the Spirit which you acquired in Baptism? Have you grown closer to God through faith and love, like His beloved children? Have you loved one another as befits children of God? Have you despised evil and all-destructive sin? Have you loved truth and every virtue? Have you loved immortal and eternal life prepared in a land which will not pass away and to which we are called by Him who now has come to our corrupt earth? These are questions which we must ask ourselves now and decide; not only with our minds, but above all, with our hearts and our very deeds.

In general, we should not allow ourselves to celebrate any Christian feast without seriously considering: What is its meaning and what is its purpose? What is our responsibility towards it? We must know the Christian meaning behind every feast. Then the feast will become profitable for our souls; salvation. Otherwise, the enemy of our salvation will snatch us and turn the feast of God into a feast of the flesh, of lawlessness, as so often happens [i.e., through overeating and drinking, etc.]. Having resolved the first question: Why did God become man? let us look at the second question.

What does the incarnation of God require of us?

It requires us to remember and hold in sacred honor the fact that we are born of God; and if we have sullied and trampled upon this birthright with our sins, we must restore it by washing it with tears

of repentance; we must restore and renew within us the image of God which had fallen and the union with God of blessedness, truth, and holiness, which has been destroyed.

The incarnation of the Son of God requires from us, above all, mutual love, humility, that we help and serve one another; for how can we not love one another when we see the love of God for us? How can we not be humble, seeing such humility, such voluntary condescension for our sake of the Son of God? How can we not help one another in every possible way, when the Son of God Himself came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life as a ransom for many? (Matthew 20:28). Like the wise man, let us brothers also prepare gifts for the new-born King. Instead of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, let us bring Him the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Amen.

December Namedays

6 Aleksandr Nicholas Sancer, Nicholas Thayer

7 Ambrose Leif Pierson (St. Ambrose of Milan)

13 Lucia Lydia Sancer

Sunday of Holy Forefathers: Reader Benjamin Joseph

(Derek) Sancer, Chloe Rebecca Stokes, Nancy Rachel

Saito, Daniel Birthisel

Sunday After Nativity: Joseph Birthisel

December Birthdays

5 Alexander Sancer

7 Nancy Saito

11 Lydia Sancer

16 Emmanuel Lyda (05)

28 Nathan Brouillette

31 Leah Cole

From St. John Chrysostom

Whensoever then we commit some little fault or even negligence, let us not overlook that little; since this, being disregarded, quickly becomes great.

Let us not therefore give up in despair; for to fall is not so grievous as to lie where we have fallen; nor to be wounded so dreadful as after wounds to refuse healing. *Homily 8 on I Corinthians*

Upcoming Events 2009-2010

15 November Nativity Fast begins.

22 December, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Holy Unction served.

24 December, Thursday, 5:30 p.m. Nativity Eve Vigil, 7:30 p.m. Holy Supper.

23 January, 2010, North Texas Orthodox Mission (NTOM) Pre-Lenten Retreat at Holy Trinity with Fr. Joseph Honeycutt, 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

13 February 2010, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers, Great Lent Begins.

26-27 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits.

4 April 2010, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!