



ALL-MERCIFUL SAVIOR MISSION NEWSLETTER

meeting at: 4315 S. 1st Street, Suite F, Austin, Texas 78745 phone: 731-5920
mailing address: 1509 Cullen Avenue, Austin, Texas 78757
website: <http://www.allmercifulsavior.com>

29TH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST, JAN. 8, 2006

civil date / church date



THIS WEEK'S CALENDAR

Jan. 8 / Dec. 26	SUNDAY	29th of Pentecost.	Synaxis of the Theotokos. St. Joseph the betrothed. Service 10 a.m.
Jan. 9 / Dec. 27	Monday	<i>Fast-free</i>	St. Stephen, Archdeacon, Protomartyr.
Jan. 10 / Dec. 28	Tuesday	<i>Fast-free</i>	Holy 20,000 Martyrs of Nicomedia.
Jan. 11 / Dec. 29	Wednesday	<i>Fast-free</i>	Holy Innocents of Bethlehem slain by king Herod.
Jan. 12 / Dec. 30	Thursday	<i>Fast-free</i>	St. Anisia, martyr. St. Gedeon, new-martyr.
Jan. 13 / Dec. 31	Friday	<i>Fast-free</i>	St. Melanie of Rome, nun.
Jan. 14 / Jan. 1	SATURDAY		Circumcision of Christ.

* *Fast, OW* means that oil and wine are allowed that day. **Fast, FOW* means fish is also allowed that day.

DECEMBER 26

from the Prologue From Ochrid by St. Nikolai

1. The Synaxis of the Most-holy Theotokos

On the second day of the Nativity, the Christian Church gives glory and thanksgiving to the Most-holy Theotokos, who gave birth to our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. This feast is called "the Synaxis" because on this day all of the faithful gather to glorify her, the Most-holy Theotokos, and to solemnly and universally celebrate a feast in her honor. In Ohrid, it has been the tradition from ancient times that, on the eve of the second day of Nativity, Vespers has been celebrated only in the Church of the Most-holy Theotokos called the Chieftain [Èelnica]. All the clergy with the people gather together to glorify the Most-pure Mother of God.

2. The Commemoration of the Flight into Egypt

The wise men (astrologers) from the East, having worshiped the Lord in Bethlehem, were directed to return to their home another way by command of an angel. Herod, that wicked king, planned to slaughter all the children in Bethlehem, but God saw Herod's intention and sent His angel to Joseph. The angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream and commanded him to take the young Child and His Mother and flee to Egypt. Joseph did this. Taking the Divine Child and His Most-holy Mother, he traveled first to Nazareth (Luke 2:39), where he arranged his household matters, and then, taking his son James with them, went off to Egypt (Matthew 2:14). Thus the words of the prophet were

fulfilled: Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt (Isaiah 19:1). In old Cairo today, the cave where the holy family lived can be seen. Likewise, in the village of Matarea near Cairo, the tree under which the Most-holy Theotokos rested with the Lord Jesus, as well as a miraculous spring of water under this tree, are visible. After having lived for several years in Egypt, the holy family returned to Palestine, again in response to a command of an angel of God. Thus another prophecy was fulfilled: Out of Egypt have I called my Son (Hosea 11:1). Herod was dead and his wicked son Archelaus—a worthy successor of him in evil—sat on his bloodstained throne. Hearing that Archelaus was reigning in Jerusalem, Joseph returned to Galilee, to his town of Nazareth, where he settled in his own home. Herod's second son, Herod the Younger, who was somewhat less evil than his brother Archelaus, then reigned in Galilee.

3. The Venerable Evarestus

Reading the works of St. Ephraim the Syrian, Evarestus left the diplomatic service and became a monk. He was very strict with himself: he wore chains over his body and ate dry bread only once a week. He lived for seventy-five years and took up his habitation with the Lord in about the year 825.

4. Saint Euthymius the Confessor, Bishop of Sardis

Euthymius attended the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 783 and spent about thirty years in exile for his veneration of icons. During the reign of Emperor Theophilus the Iconoclast, he was flogged with bullwhips, at which time he died a martyr's death, in the year 840, and received a wreath of glory in heaven.

5. The Venerable Constantine of Synnada

Constantine was a Jew who converted to Christianity. During his baptism he touched a Cross to his head, and a miraculous imprint of the Cross remained on his head until his death. He died in Constantinople in the seventh century. Famous for his asceticism and many miracles, he prophesied the day of his death seven years beforehand.

HYMN OF PRAISE

The Synaxis of the Most-holy Theotokos
At the border between night and sunny day,
The dawn is rosy, pink and dewy.
The crimson dawn thou art, O Virgin given by God,
Precursor of the day, rosy and glorious.
Thou didst correct Eve and restore her to Paradise.
Do not withhold thy help from us sinners.
Israel crossed dry-shod over the Red Sea;
A cool spring flowed from the rock in the wilderness;
The bush burned but was not consumed-
As the dawn resembles the crimson eve,
So thou, O Virgin, dost resemble those foreshadowings.
O thou whom the Church calls the Mother of God,
Unknown to sin, not given to sin,
O Most-pure Mother of our Savior,
Because of thy purity thou wast chosen by God,
To bring down the Eternal Creator to earth.
That is why thou hast authority to pray for us,
And we have the joy of hymning and glorifying thee!

REFLECTION

A story of the Divine Christ-child: When the holy family fled before Herod's sword to Egypt, robbers leapt out on the road with the intention of stealing something. The righteous Joseph was leading the donkey, on which were some belongings and on which the Most-holy Theotokos was riding with her Son at her breast. The robbers seized the donkey to lead it away. At that moment, one of the robbers approached the Mother of God to see what she was holding next to her breast. The robber, seeing the Christ-child, was astonished at His unusual beauty and said in his astonishment: "If God were to take upon Himself the flesh of man, He would not be more beautiful than this Child!" This robber then ordered his companions to take nothing from these travelers. Filled with gratitude toward this generous robber, the Most-holy Virgin said to him: "Know that this Child will repay you with a good reward because you protected Him today." Thirty-three years later, this

same thief hung on the Cross for his crimes, crucified on the right side of Christ's Cross. His name was Dismas, and the name of the thief on the left side was Gestas. Beholding Christ the Lord innocently crucified, Dismas repented for all the evil of his life. While Gestas reviled the Lord, Dismas defended Him, saying: This man hath done nothing amiss. (Luke 23:41). Dismas, therefore, was the wise thief to whom our Lord said: Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43). Thus the Lord granted Paradise to him who spared Him in childhood.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the purity of the Most-holy Mother of God:

1. On the immaculate purity of her body: passionless and disciplined by fasting;
2. On the immaculate purity of her heart, in which a sinful desire never dwelt;
3. On the immaculate purity of her mind, in which a sinful thought never dwelt.

HOMILY

on the Most-holy Virgin, the Theotokos

And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord (Luke 1:38).

Here indeed, brethren, is a true handmaid of the Lord! If a handmaid is she who exchanges her will completely for the will of her Lord, then the Most-holy Virgin is the first among all of the Lord's handmaids. If a handmaid is she who, with intent and with complete attention, beholds her Lord, then again the Most-holy Virgin is the first among the handmaids of the Lord. If a handmaid is one who meekly and quietly endures all insults and trials, awaiting only the reward of her Lord, then again and again the Most-holy Virgin is the first and most excellent of all the handmaids of the Lord. She did not care to please the world, but only God; nor did she care to justify herself before the world, but only before God. She herself is obedience; she herself is service; she herself is meekness. The Most-holy Virgin could in truth say to the angel of God: Behold the handmaid of the Lord. The greatest perfection, and the greatest honor that a woman can attain on earth, is to be a handmaid of the Lord. Eve lost this perfection and honor in Paradise without effort, and the Virgin Mary achieved this perfection and this honor outside Paradise with her efforts.

Through the prayers of the Most-holy Virgin Theotokos, O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

NEWS

- We are able to stay in our chapel another month.

Troparion, tone 8. O All-Merciful Saviour, Thou Luminary like the sun: | Through the light of Thy radiance grant us eloquence, | that with pure conscience we may sing praises on Thy feast all-divine, | glorifying Thee the only-begotten Son, and the consubstantial Spirit; | for Thou givest us peace and great mercy.

Kontakion, t. 4. I committed every abomination, O All-Merciful Saviour, | and fell into the pit of despair. | Yet I groan from the depths of my heart | and cry to Thee, O Word: | Hasten, O Merciful One, | and quickly help us, | for merciful art Thou!

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