

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
www.orthodoxbutler.org

ADDRESS: 400 S. Sixth Avenue, Butler, PA 16001

PASTOR: Rev. Bogdan Gabriel Bucur

CONTACT: Tel. : 724.287.6893 (church); 412.390.8208 (priest);
E-mail: frbogdan@orthodoxbutler.org

SUNDAY BEFORE NATIVITY

21 December 2014

TONE 3 — Sunday before the Nativity. Virgin Martyr Juliana of Nicomedia, and with her 50 men and 130 women (304); Martyr Themístocles of Myra in Lycia (251); Repose of St. Peter, Metropolitan of Moscow and Wonderworker of All Russia (1326).

FIRST ANTIPHON

It is good to give praise unto the Lord, and to chant unto Thy Name, O Most High! Refrain: Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! To proclaim in the morning Thy mercy, and Thy truth by night! (R.:) Upright is the Lord our God and there is no unrighteousness in Him (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)

SECOND ANTIPHON

The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength and hath girt Himself! (R.:) O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead: save us who sing to Thee, "Alleluia"! For He established the world which shall not be shaken! (R.:) Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days! (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son and Word of God ...)

AT THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ! O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, save us who sing to Thee: "Alleluia"!

TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION (Tone 3): Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad, for the Lord hath done a mighty act with His own arm; He hath trampled down death by death, and became the first-born from the dead; He hath delivered us from the depths of Hades, granting the world great mercy.

TROPARION OF THE FOREFEAST OF THE NATIVITY (Tone 2): Make ready, O Bethlehem, for Eden hath been opened for all. Prepare, O Ephratha, for the tree of life hath blossomed forth in the cave from the Virgin. For her womb did appear as a supersensual paradise, in which is planted that holy Vine. If we should eat thereof we shall live and not die as Adam of old. Christ shall be born, raising the image that fell at the beginning!

TROPARION OF THE FOREFATHERS (Tone 2): Great are the accomplish-ments of faith; for the three holy youths rejoiced in the fountain of flames as though at waters of rest. And the Prophet Daniel appeared a shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep. Wherefore, by their pleadings, O Christ God, have mercy on us!

TROPARION OF SAINT ANTHONY (Tone 4, Russian): Like the zealous Elijah thou didst become, and followed John the Baptist in his upright ways. A dweller in the wilderness, thou didst steady the world by prayer. O Father Anthony, intercede with Christ our God for our souls' salvation.

KONTAKION FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE NATIVITY (Tone 3): Today the Virgin cometh to the cave where she will give birth in an ineffable manner to the Word Who is before all the ages. Rejoice, therefore, O universe, when thou hearest it heralded: Glorify Him, with the angels and the shepherds, Who chose to be seen as a new-born babe, the God Who is before all the ages.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

*Prokeimenon: Thou, O Lord, shall keep us and preserve us.
Save me, O Lord, for the godly man has failed!*

The Reading is from the Epistle to the Hebrews

(Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40) Brethren: by faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac, and he who had

received the promises was ready to offer his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac descendants shall bear your name." He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, and he received Isaac back as a symbol. By faith regarding things still to come Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and "bowed in worship, leaning on the top of his staff." By faith Joseph, near the end of his life, spoke of the Exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his bones. By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; he chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, and put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy!—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Since this is a letter addressed "to the Hebrews", we may think that it evokes the ancestors of the Hebrew nation in the way that every nation on the face of the earth remembers its founders and heroes with a measure of reverence and thankfulness. But this is not so: beginning with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, continuing with Joseph, then Moses, the judges and kings and prophets of Israel, our readings evokes here the ancestors *of our Christian faith*. This is a very important element: even though we do not belong to Israel by blood, through Jesus Christ we are adopted into the people of God, and we count Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as our ancestors—as ancestors of our faith. These are, as the same Epistle says (Heb 12:1), the "great cloud" of witnesses to the Christian faith.

Let us note, first of all, that what is praised in all these ancestors is not their individual qualities (bravery, wisdom, piety, perseverance, etc) but a certain ever-expecting intimacy with God, which we call *faith*. What is faith? It is, says the same

Epistle, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” In other words, faith is the foundation under everything that makes life worth living; faith is our handle on what we can't see. The ancestors were living in faith—looking forward towards Christ, even though He had not yet come in the flesh: “Abraham looked forward” says the text, and “Isaac was regarding things still to come.”

Thus, we look back on these ancestors of our faith, and we find them looking forward to the same God-made-man Whom we worship. They did not receive what was promised, because God intended “that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” That is, God has kept Israel waiting until the nations would also be called to the banquet table of the Kingdom.

Christmas is upon us, the time when we celebrate “the beginning of our salvation”: the One who showed himself and spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the One who met Moses at the burning bush, the One who gave the Law to Israel, who spoke to his people through the prophets, is now before our eyes. As the Kontakion of Nativity proclaims, “for our sake *the eternal God* was born as a little child!”

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew

(Matthew 1:1-25) The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa, and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and

Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, Who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ were fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His Name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called His Name Jesus.

The first part of today's Gospel reading consists of a long recitation of names: a genealogy reaching from patriarch Abraham to Jesus. What could be less interesting (read: more boring) for us today, who usually don't know much about our ancestors three generations removed? For early Christians, however, this must have been extremely important. We see the same kind of genealogy occurs in the Gospel of Luke; this means, evidently, that there was an audience, a readership (a "market"!) for such information. Indeed, to the ancients, who and what you are is disclosed first and foremost by who your parents, grandparents, and ancestors were.

Let us then take a closer look at the names. We note that most are males. This is not surprising, as women were, generally in the Ancient Middle East, not considered as legal entities. The genealogy begins with Abraham: this is in order to show that Jesus is truly a descendant of the patriarch, truly a member of Israel. It mentions king David: this is also significant, as it means that Jesus is legitimately called "Messiah" or "Christ" (since this was, according to the Scriptures, this must be an heir of the Davidic line).

It is surprising to discover that a few women actually *are* mentioned in the genealogy of Christ. Even more surprising is the fact that all four (leaving out the mother of the Lord) are less than immaculate characters: two prostitutes, one foreigner (a problem in Israel), and one adulterous! All of a sudden the ancestry list of Jesus, although populated with figures such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, or David, looks less than ideal. Why does the Evangelist insist on publicizing these embarrassing details—especially since *he does not have to* mention any women at all? It is not oversight, for sure. There must something of significance here!

The reason for listing all those less-than-ideal ancestors of the Lord is we learn something quite crucial: Christ took on the flesh of fallen humankind, he tasted our weakness, He came to save *sinner*s. In other words, He came for us.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24:

9am: service of Royal Hours of Nativity

6pm: Ninth Hour and Vespers Divine Liturgy, followed by parish potluck

- **Next Saturday, 27 December:** NO VESPERS!
- **Next Sunday, 28 December:** Matins (9:15 am), Divine Liturgy (10 am).

Sunday, 11 January, 1:30 pm: Outdoor Blessing of the Waters. After Liturgy, we will gather at Lake Arthur in Moraine State Park, joining all Orthodox in our area (including the nuns at Transfiguration Monastery). The blessing of waters “expands” our celebration of Theophany by bringing the blessing of the Jordan to all of creation.

Sunday, 18 January: Feast of Anthony the Great. As we did in previous years, we will be hosting our brothers and sisters from the other two Orthodox parishes, donate the collection to the nuns of Transfiguration Monastery (since they are the followers of Saint Anthony, “the father of monasticism”), and learn something about how the life and teachings of Saint Anthony can help us today. Our speaker will be **Dr. Timothy Becker**, a student of the Fathers and an ardent seeker for the fullness of Truth, who received his doctoral degree after working with one of the very important Orthodox scholars today, Fr. John McGuckin.

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Rick and Seba (Michaels), Bill and Ann, Ron, George (Georgiades), Christine (Abraham), Jim, Tony, Samantha, Luke (relatives of Dollie's), Norma, Richard (Michaels), Victoria (Frank's mother), Richard (Johns), Bill, Ed, Peter, Georgia and Scot, Sam, Karen (Joanna's mother), Diane, Sula, Dollie, Dolores (Bingham), Karyn, Ignatius and Amy, John, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka, Benjamin, John, Janet, Craig, Christy (relatives of Jean). Shea and Katie (and newborn Judson), Timothy and Carolyn – seeking for the true faith.

DEPARTED: Phyllis (Seba's sister), Angeliki, Metropolitan Philip; Joe and David Sipos; Bill (Georgia's father-in-law), Glenn (Jean's grandson); Stella, Edmund (Ed's uncle), Richard, Dolores Patricia (Thompson), Leatrice (Totin), Ed (Joanna's grandfather), Joseph (Rose's father), Fred (Dollie's uncle), Bob (Diane's father), Michael, Gabriel, Hilda (Chris Abraham's mother).