

*The Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
Of North America*

*The Diocese of Eagle River and the Northwest
Antiochian Orthodox Church of the Annunciation*

كنيسة البشارة الأرثوذكسية الأنطاكية

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Sunday December 20th, 2015

Tone 4 / Eothinon 7

Sunday before Nativity of Christ (Sunday of the Genealogy)

الأحد قبل الميلاد (أحد النسبة).

Sunday Services:

Vespers on Saturday 6:00 PM, Sunday Matins 9:30 AM

10:45 AM Divine Liturgy

RESURRECTIONAL APOLYTIKION IN TONE FOUR

Having learned the joyful message of the Resurrection from the angel the women disciples of the Lord cast from them their parental condemnation. And proudly broke the news to the Disciples, saying: Death hath been spoiled; Christ God is risen, granting the world Great Mercy.

APOLYTIKION OF THE FOREFEAST OF THE NATIVITY IN TONE FOUR

(Joseph was amazed**)**

Be thou ready, Bethlehem, Eden hath opened unto all. * Ephratha, prepare thyself, for now, behold, the Tree of Life * hath blossomed forth in the cave from the holy Virgin. * Her womb hath proved a true spiritual Paradise, * wherein the divine and saving Tree is found,

* and as we eat thereof we shall all live, * and shall not die as did Adam. * For Christ is born now to raise the image that had fallen aforetime.

APOLYTIKION OF SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY IN TONE TWO

Great are the accomplishments 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, save our souls.

- Now sing the apolytikion of the patron saint or feast of the temple.

KONTAKION OF PREPARATION OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY IN TONE THREE

(The original melody**)**

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.

الطروباريات:

(للقِيامة – باللحن الرابع):

إن تلميذات الرب تعلمن من الملاك، الكرز بالقيامة البهج، وطرحن القضاء الجدّي، وخاطبن الرسل مفتخراتٍ وقائلات، سبي الموت وقاه المسيح الإله، ومنح العالم الرحمة العظمى.

(لتقدمة عيد الميلاد – باللحن الرابع)

استعدي يا بيت لحم، فقد فُتحت عدن للجميع، تهيأي يا إفرائا، لأن عود الحياة قد أزهري في المغارة من البتول، لأن بطنها قد ظهر فردوساً عقلياً، فيه الغرس الإلهي، الذي إذ نأكل منه نحيا، ولا نموت مثل آدم، المسيح يولد، منهضاً الصورة، التي سقطت منذ القديم.

(لأحد النسبة – باللحن الثاني):

عظيمة هي تقويمات الإيمان، لأن الثلاثة الفتية القديسين قد ابتهجوا في ينبوع اللهب كأنهم على ماء الراحة، والنبي دانيال ظهر راعياً للسباع كأنها غنم، فبتوسلاتهم أيها المسيح الإله ارحمنا.

ترتل طروبارية القديس شفيح الكنيسة

(للبشارة – باللحن الرابع)

اليوم رأس خلاصنا، وإعلان السر الذي منذ الدهور، لأن ابن الله يصير ابن البتول، وجبرائيل بالنعمة يبشّر، فلذلك ونحن معه لنهتف نحو والدة الإله، إفرحي أيتها الممتلئة نعمة الرب معك.

القتدق:

اليوم العذراء، تأتي إلى المغارة، لتلد الكلمة الذي قبل الدهور، ولادة لا تفسر ولا يُنطق بها، فإفرحي أيتها المسكونة إذا سمعت، ومجدي مع الملائكة والرعاة، الذي سيظهر بمشيئته طفلاً جديداً، وهو إلينا قبل الدهور.

The Epistle:

Blessed are Thou, O Lord, the God of our fathers.

For Thou art justified in all that Thou hast done for us.

The Reading is from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews. (11:9-10, 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. 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.

الرسالة

مبارك أنت يا رب إله آبائنا،
لأنك عدل في كل ما صنعت بنا.

فصل من رسالة القديس بولس الرسول إلى العبرانيين ٩: ١١-١٠ و ٤٠: ٣٢

يا إخوة بالإيمان نزل إبراهيم . في ارض الميعاد نزوله في ارض غريبة، وسكن في خيام مع اسحق ويعقوب الوارثين معه للموعد بعينه، لأنه انتظر المدينة ذات الأسس التي الله صانعها وبارئها وماذا أقول ايضاً؟ انه يضيق بي الوقت إن أخبرت عن جدعون وباراق وشمشون ويفتاح وداود وسمونيل والأنبياء الذين بالإيمان هزموا الممالك وعملوا البر ونالوا المواعد وسدوا أفواه الأسود وأطفأوا حدة النار ونجوا من حدّ السيف وتقوا من ضعف وصاروا أشداء في الحرب وكسروا معسكرات الأجانب، وأخذت نساء أمواتهن بالقيامة وعذب آخرون بتوتير الأعضاء والضرب ولم يقبلوا بالنجاة ليحصلوا على قيامة أفضل، وآخرون ذاقوا الهزء والجلد والقيود ايضاً والسجن، ورجموا ونسروا وامتنحوا وماتوا بحدّ السيف وساحوا في جلود غنم ومعز وهم معوزون مضايقون مجهودون (ولم يكن العالم مستحقاً لهم)، وكانوا تائهين في البراري والجبال والمغاور وكهوف الأرض. فهؤلاء كلهم، مشهودا لهم بالإيمان، لم ينالوا المواعد، لأن الله سبق فنظر لنا شيئاً أفضل أن لا يكملوا بدوننا.

The Gospel

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to St. 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.

الإنجيل

فصل شريف من بشارة القديس متى الإنجيلي البشير ١: ١-٢٥

كتاب ميلاد يسوع المسيح ابن داود ابن ابراهيم. فابراهيم ولد اسحق واسحق ولد يعقوب ويعقوب ولد يهوذا وإخوته، ويهوذا ولد فارص وزارح من تامار، وفارص ولد حصرون وحصرون ولد آرام وأرام ولد عميناداب وعميناداب ولد نحشون ونحشون ولد سلمون وسلمون ولد بوعز من راحاب وبوعز ولد عوبيد من راعوث وعوبيد ولد يسي ويسي ولد داود الملك. وداود الملك ولد سليمان من التي كانت لأريّا وسليمان ولد رحبعام ورحبعام ولد أبيّا وأبيّا ولد آسا وآسا ولد يوشافاط ويوشافاط ولد يورام ويورام ولد عزّيا وعزّيا ولد يوتام ويوتام ولد أحاز وأحاز ولد حزقيّا وحزقيّا ولد منسى ومنسى ولد آمون وآمون ولد يوشيا ويوشيا ولد يكنيا وإخوته في جلاء بابل. ومن بعد جلاء

بابل يكنيا ولد شالنتيل وشالنتيل ولد زربابل وزربابل ولد أبيهود وأبيهود ولد ألياقيم وألياقيم ولد عازور وعازور ولد صادق وسادوق ولد أخيم وأخيم ولد أليهود وأليهود ولد ألعازر وألعازر ولد مئان ومئان ولد يعقوب ويعقوب ولد يوسف رجل مريم التي وُلد منها يسوع الذي يُدعى المسيح. فكل الأجيال من ابراهيم الى داود اربعة عشر جيلا ومن داود الى جلاء بابل اربعة عشر جيلا ومن جلاء بابل الى المسيح اربعة عشر جيلا. اما مولد يسوع المسيح فكان هكذا: لما حُطبت مريم امه ليوسف وُجدت من قبل ان يجتمعا حُبلى من الروح القدس. وإذ كان يوسف رجلها صديقا ولم يُرد ان يُشهرها، همّ بتخليتها سرا. وفيما هو مفكر في ذلك اذا بملاك الرب ظهر له في الحلم قائلا: يا يوسف ابن داود، لا تخف ان تأخذ امرأتك مريم، فان المولود فيها انما هو من الروح القدس. وستلد ابنا فتسميه يسوع، فانه هو يخلص شعبه من خطاياهم (وكان هذا كله ليتم ما قيل من الرب بالنبي القائل: ها ان العذراء تحبل وتلد ابنا ويُدعى عمانوئيل الذي تفسيره الله معنا). فلما نهض يوسف من النوم صنع كما أمره ملاك الرب. فأخذ امرأته ولم يعرفها حتى ولدت ابنها البكر وسماه يسوع.

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

The following is an excerpt from The Winter Pascha, by Fr. Thomas Hopko

The gospel reading for the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday before Christmas is "the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham," taken from the gospel according to St. Matthew. This genealogy lists the generations of people from Abraham to David, to the Babylonian captivity of the people of Israel, to the birth of Jesus. It is a selected genealogy, ending in the appearance of "Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ" (Mt 1:16). It differs from the genealogy presented in St. Luke's gospel which begins with Jesus "being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph," and goes back all the way not simply to Abraham but to Adam (Lk 3:23-38).

There are many purposes for presenting the genealogy of Jesus in the gospels, chief among which is the affirmation that Jesus, being in truth the Son of God, as all the gospels testify, has come "in the flesh" as a real human being. This affirmation was critically important in the time of the apostles and the first Christian generations because, unlike today, the temptation of the early period of Christianity was not to deny Jesus' divinity, but to deny His real and authentic humanity.

As a matter of historical fact, the first Christian heretics were those who said that Jesus was some sort of divine being (how this was explained had many variations and versions) who only appeared to be a true man, but was not really one since "flesh and blood" were taken to be intrinsically degrading if not downright evil. Thus the apostle Paul had to insist that in Jesus, who belongs to the Jews "according to the flesh" (Rom 9:5), the "wholefulness of deity dwells *bodily*" (Col 2:9), and that it is the same Jesus who died and was buried and raised in the flesh as a real man, who is Messiah and Lord.

The genealogies in the gospels of Saints Matthew and Luke are made to and from Joseph. This is not to give the impression that Jesus came from Joseph's seed. Both gospels are absolutely clear on this point. Jesus is born from the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. The point is rather that Joseph is Jesus' father according to the law, and it is from the father that one's lawful descent is to be traced. Jesus' legal father is "Joseph, son of David," the legal husband of Mary (Mt 1:20).

One other important point is made in listing the human generations which led to the birth of Jesus. This is the fact that God is faithful to His promises even though His chosen people are often not faithful. Among the people from whom Jesus came are both sinners and heathens. In a word, Jesus comes not only from the

righteous and holy, but from the wicked and sinful. And He comes not only from Jews, but from Gentiles. The names of the four women specifically mentioned in St. Matthew's list-- Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba)-- were noted, not to say notorious, Gentiles, including one of David's own wives, the mother of Solomon. The point to be seen here is one beautifully made in an early Christian hymn quoted in the Bible in the second letter to Timothy:

If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him; If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful-- for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Tim 2:11-13)

أحد النسبة

تُهَيِّئْنَا الكَنِيسَةَ لَعِيدِ مِيلَادِ رَبِّنَا يَسُوعَ الْمَسِيحِ بِتِلَاوَةِ نَسَبِ السَّيِّدِ الْمُنْحَدِرِ مِنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمِنْ دَاوُدَ إِلَى السَّحَابَةِ مِنَ الشُّهُودِ الْمَشْهُودِ لَهُمْ بِالْإِيمَانِ كَمَا نَقَرْنَا فِي رِسَالَةِ الْيَوْمِ وَصَوْلًا إِلَى يَوْسُفَ وَالْعِذْرَاءِ مَرْيَمَ الْأُمِّ الْبَتُولِ. عند قراءة هذا النص، تتساءل العقول عن موضوع يُشكك البعض وهو علاقة البتول بيوسف. مريم كانت مُعدّة حسب الشرع لكي تصبح زوجة ليوسف. كانت مخطوبة له، والخطبة زواج قانوني بلا مساكنة. وكان الرجل يأخذ الفتاة إلى بيته يوم الزفاف. اذن كانت مريم منفصلة عن يوسف ولكنها معتبرة زوجة له حسب القانون. لما حبلت مريم بالطفل يسوع كان يحقّ ليوسف أن يشكّ في أمرها لأنها لم تكن متزوجة فعليًا. لهذا جاءه قول الملاك ليُزيل كل شك. لذلك أيضا أخذها يوسف إلى بيته حتى يحميها من القضاء لأن الشريعة كانت تحكم على امرأة حبلت وهي بعد مخطوبة ان تُرجم بالحجارة. وكما يروي الإنجيل، أخذ يوسف امرأته، أي استدعاها إلى بيته، وأقامها فيه ولم يعرفها إطلاقًا، لم يتصل بها.

العقبة الأولى في هذه الآية هي عبارة «حتى». الكلمة اليونانية المستعملة هنا، مثل الكلمة العبرية، تُحدّد ما جرى إلى انتهاء فترة زمنية محددة ولا تعني بالضرورة أن ما حدث بعد تلك الفترة نقيض ما كان. العبارة لا تحمل معنى المضارع بل الماضي. نجد أمثلة كثيرة في الكتاب المقدّس عن استعمال «حتى» مثلًا نقرأ أن نوحًا فتح طاقة في الفلك بعد أن هدا الطوفان وأرسل الغراب «فخرج الغراب مترددًا حتى تشفت المياه على الأرض» (تكويين ٨: ٧). أما العقبة الثانية في الآية فتكمن في العبارة «ابنها البكر». هذا لا يعني ما يزعمه البعض أن ليسوع إخوة وهو البكر. المعنى واضح في النص الأساسي انه «الأول والوحيد». الابن البكر يُسمّى كذلك لأنه المولود الأول ولو لم يولد أحد سواه.

وبناء عليه فإن التساؤلات حول هذا النص ليس لها موضع وهي ليست شرعية لأن الكتاب المقدّس لم يتكلم إطلاقًا عن أولاد كانوا لمريم بعد ميلاد يسوع. الكتاب يتحدث عن ميلاد يسوع ولم يتحدث عن شيء آخر. لفظة إخوة يسوع لا ينحصر مدلولها بإخوة له من أمّه لأن كلمة إخوة كانت تشمل عندهم الأنساب الأقرباء. والكنيسة المقدسة اعتبرت دائمًا في ما تسلّمته من الرسل ان مريم بقيت عذراء في ولادتها وبعد ولادتها.

ما علينا أن نقبل به من ناحية العقيدة هو أن مريم بقيت عذراء قبل الولادة وفي الولادة وبعد الولادة. ليس في الكتاب المقدّس شيء ضد هذا. هذه هي الحقيقة الواضحة، وهذه هي عقيدتنا. وما يهّمنا من الأمر اليوم هو أن مريم الفتاة العذراء كانت ذروة القداسة واستوعبت السيد وكانت له أمًا، وكانت بواسطته أمًا لنا جميعًا.

جاورجيوس مطران جبيل والبترون وما يليهما (جبيل لبنان)



❖ Church Announcements

- ❖ **Memorial Service today:** for Mr. Chamoul Hanna. Our condolences to his wife, sons, and daughters, specially to Ninosh Ashor and his wife Bana Hanna. May his memory be eternal.

**Services for the Nativity of Christ: Thursday December 24th: The Hours at 10 AM.
Thursday December 24th: Vespers at 3 PM. On Friday December 25th: The
Nativity of our Lord- Orthros 10 AM followed by the Divine Liturgy at 11 AM.**

“Christ is born, glorify him”

المسيح وُلِدَ فَمَجِّدُوهُ

- ❖ **Christmas Community get together:** Father George and Khouryia Manal would be honored to invite all of our dear community family to their new home in NW (maps will be provided at church) on December 27th from 4 PM. **No gifts please. Only your love is all we ask for.** You may bring with you a dish to share, sweets, or drinks. Please, speak to Khouryia Manal.
- ❖ **New Year Eve Liturgy:** We will celebrate the Feast of the Circumcision of Christ and St. Basil with Liturgy at 3 PM. There will be a service of thanksgiving for the New Year. May the New Year bring peace and health to all of your loved ones.
- ❖ **Visit this link for education and encouragement:** <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/faithencouraged>, and ancientfaith.com.
- ❖ **Planning ahead:** January 6th the Feast of Theophany, there will be services on Tuesday January 5th and the 6th. **More information on the time to follow. Father will be visiting all the homes of our parishioners to bless it.**
- ❖ **Orthodox Christian Mission Center:** A true community is one that produces bishops, priests, deacons, and monastics. Do you feel called to go and evangelize other nations? OCMC is planning many short term mission trips (2 weeks). There are mission trips to: Alaska, Albania, Guatemala, Kenya, Indonesia, Mexico, and Uganda. Visit OCMC.org for more information or talk to Father.
- ❖ **Visit this website:** <http://www.antiochian.org/nativity> for more articles on the Nativity.

The Nativity Fast: The Nativity Fast starts on November 15th and continues until December 24th at midnight. It is as follows: Fish is permitted on Saturday and Sunday. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays no meat, poultry, dairy products, cheese, fish, Olive Oil or alcohol are permitted. On Tuesdays and Thursdays alcohol and olive oil are permitted. **From December 21-24,** these are strict fast days. If you have any question or if you are taking medications, please speak to Father.

What Orthodox People Do: Every time we prepare for a major feast, we fast, we spend more time in prayers, we give alms to the poor, we repent from our sins by going to confession. Father is reminding everyone to go to confession before the Nativity of our Lord (Christmas). As Orthodox Christians during the fast we refrain from parties and all kind of worldly celebrations to concentrate on repentance and prayers.

UPCOMING DATES TO PUT ON YOUR CALENDARS

❖ **Christmas Play:** will be December 20th at St. Demetrius Greek Church from 4-8 PM. Tickets are \$15 adults, and \$10 for children. Please, print the flyer that you received in your email, cut out the ticket stub in the bottom right hand corner, fill it out with the number of adults and children. Give it to Mirna with your payment to reserve your seats. Space is limited so buy your tickets this week!

➤ **New Year's Party: 2016 NEW YEAR'S PARTY, December 31, 2015.**

St. Stephen's Ukrainian Church Hall: 4903—45 St. SW, Calgary, AB.

Cocktails 6:30 pm, Dinner 8:00 pm

Prices: Adults \$70, children 6-10 Yrs. old \$35, Under 5 Yrs. Free.

Please see Hafiz or any parish council member for tickets.

The Purpose of Fasting

The purpose of fasting is to focus on the things that are above, the Kingdom of God. It is a means of putting on virtue in reality, here and now. Through it we are freed from dependence on worldly things. We fast faithfully and in secret, not judging others, and not holding ourselves up as an example.

- Fasting in itself is not a means of pleasing God. Fasting is not a punishment for our sins. Nor is fasting a means of suffering and pain to be undertaken as some kind of atonement. Christ already redeemed us on His Cross. Salvation is a gift from God that is not bought by our hunger or thirst.
- We fast to be delivered from carnal passions so that God's gift of Salvation may bear fruit in us.
- We fast and turn our eyes toward God in His Holy Church. Fasting and prayer go together.
- Fasting is not irrelevant. Fasting is not obsolete, and it is not something for someone else. Fasting is from God, for us, right here and right now.

- Most of all, we should not devour each other. We ask God to “set a watch and keep the door of our lips.”

❖ **Giving back to God:** Everything we have belongs to God. If we come to church every few weeks or months and give only a few dollars, how can our church continue paying its bills? Give regularly and consistently. Give a portion of your income back to God. Look at the suggested guide below.

Guide to Proportionate Giving

Annual Income	10%	8%	6%	4%	3%
\$25,000	2,500	2,000	1,500	1,000	750
\$35,000	3,000	2,800	2,100	1,400	1,050
\$40,000	4,000	3,200	2,400	1,600	1,200
\$50,000	5,000	4,000	3,000	2,000	1,500
\$60,000	6,000	4,800	3,600	2,400	1,800
\$70,000	7,000	5,600	4,200	2,800	2,100
\$80,000	8,000	6,400	4,800	3,200	2,400
\$90,000	9,000	7,200	5,400	3,600	2,700
\$100,000	10,000	8,000	6,000	4,000	3,000
\$120,000	12,000	9,600	7,200	4,800	3,600
\$150,000	15,000	12,000	9,000	6,000	4,500

Stewardship Part 2: Offering our best By Archbishop Mark

A few weeks ago, I offered some comments on God as Creator of all things visible and invisible. All that exists has the Lord God as its source including us. With this in mind, there is nothing we can offer to God that does not already belong to Him, with the exception of our “free will.” Thus, while we belong to Him, we must freely choose to surrender ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice.

The first reference to an offering to God is found in Genesis 4:1-8. “Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, ‘I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord.’ Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came about in the course of time (literally, at the end of days) that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his

flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up (literally, surely you will be accepted)? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.’ Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”

One will readily notice that the passage makes reference to the Lord regarding—or, better said, accepting—Abel as well as his offering unto the Lord and that Cain and his offering were not. This should raise a red flag for us. Why would God be pleased with one and his offering, but not with the other and his offering? A careful reading and examination of the passage will disclose why. When we look at Cain’s offering, the literal reading is, he brought of the fruit of the ground at the end of days. The implication is that at the end of the time of harvest he brought what was left. He was not offering the first and choicest of the fruits—i.e., his very best—but that which was left at the end of the season. Having a tomato garden, I know the tomatoes at the beginning of the season are absolutely beautiful, plump and tasty. Those at the end of the season often are of a much poorer quality, with blotches, splits, cracks and holes. Many are simply not even edible. Thus Cain was not offering his very best to God, but after he himself enjoyed the best for himself, he offered the very poorest quality of the produce to God. One could almost say he ate the corn and offered to God the husks!

On the other hand, we are told that Abel brought of the firstlings of the flock. He brought young healthy lambs and their fat. So in contrast to Cain, Abel offers the first and the best, not an old goat that was gasping for breath.

There are several important points to observe from this passage. One is able to offer to God from how he makes his living, from the work of his hands—i.e., livestock if one is a shepherd, or produce if one is a farmer. What we offer is a direct reflection of our attitude towards God. The idea of offering the “first fruits” is intimately intertwined with the concept of offering our very best to God, before we decide what we will keep for ourselves. It is the basic acknowledgement that it all comes from Him and belongs to Him. Thus what we offer is an expression of our gratitude for all of His bountiful blessings. Certainly, whatever is offered should be the very best, and not simply what is left over or unusable. Abel offered his very best as an expression his gratitude, as he recognized God had blessed him with the increase of his flocks. Cain on the other hand gave begrudgingly and only after he had already enjoyed the very best for himself. The offering was unacceptable because it was not offered with a proper disposition and certainly was not worthy of offering to God.

If we love, honor and respect someone, do we not want to offer our very best? If one invites his or her priest to dinner after Theophany or a loved one, he does not clean out the front of the refrigerator and look

for all the old food from the back to serve his guest. One would not dig through the freezer for something that has been in there entirely too long. One would likely make a special trip to the store and search for the freshest and best ingredients.

As we ponder our own offerings, do we offer God the first fruits of our labors, or what we have left after we have consumed the best portion for ourselves? Offering the “first fruits” is an act of worship and a conscious decision to give the very best to God before we decide what we will keep for ourselves. It all belongs to Him. Does our giving reflect our love, honor, respect and gratitude for God’s manifold blessings in our lives? Are we like Cain? Or, are we like Abel?

As we move through Scripture, we will note that the offering of the “first fruits” was one-tenth of that with which God had blessed them. And the offering was to be without spot or blemish.

من تعليمنا الأرثوذكسي: الميلاد والفقراء

التلميذ: تعلمنا ان عيد الميلاد هو مناسبة لمساعدة الفقراء وتقديم ما يجعلهم يعيدون ويفرحون كالملايس والحلويات. ما علاقة هذا بيسوع؟

المرشد: عيد الميلاد يعلمنا أن نحب الفقراء ونخدمهم ليس لمجدنا الشخصي أو من أجل خدمة اجتماعية كما يقولون. اذا بقينا على هذا الصعيد، نبتعد كل البعد عن معنى العيد الحقيقي. قبل كل شيء، فلنتوجه نحو يسوع المسيح لأنه وحده يعلمنا أن نحب الفقراء حقا حبا بالإنسان كما أحبه هو وبذل نفسه من أجله. يسوع المسيح، في الواقع، هو الأول بين الفقراء. ولم يفتقر أحد مثله كليا وطوعا.

التلميذ: لذلك ولد في مذود، وهو المكان الذي يوضع فيه طعام الحيوانات. أليس كذلك؟

المرشد: طبعًا وهذه قمة التواضع. علينا ألا ننسى أبدًا انه الأقوم الثاني من الثالوث، ابن الله. وانه «أخلى ذاته» كما تقول الرسالة إلى أهل فيليبي، وصار هذا الطفل المولود المستلقي على القش قرب الحيوانات. هكذا بدأ حياته على الأرض عندما أخذ صورتنا الانسانية ورُفض من الكل: لم يكن له موضع في المنزل فُولد في المذود. ومن رفض إلى رفض، اضطر ان يهرب إلى مصر.

التلميذ: ما معنى «أخلى ذاته»؟ لا أعرف هذا المقطع من الرسالة إلى أهل فيليبي.

المرشد: عبارة «أخلى ذاته» تعني «أفرغ»، وتعبّر عن قمة تنازل الله حتى صار إنسانا من أجلنا. اسمع سأقرأ لك بضع آيات من فيليبي ٢: ٦-٨ حيث يتكلم بولس عن المسيح فيقول: «... إذ كان في صورة الله... أخلى ذاته آخذا صورة عبد، صائرًا في شبه الناس، وإذ وُجد في الهيئة كإنسان، وضع نفسه وأطاع حتى الموت، موت الصليب». هذا مقطع أساسي يلخص في كلمات كل التدبير الخلاصي: تجسد ابن الله وموته على الصليب من أجل خلاص البشر.