



Sunday Bulletin December 30, 2018
Greek Orthodox Church of the
Annunciation

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**Rev. Dr. Michael Bahlatzis, Presiding Priest-
Proistamenos**



Epistle Reading Galatians 1:11-19

Brethren, I would have you know that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

Gospel Reading Matthew 2:13-23

When the wise men departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more." But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaos reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Message from Fr. Michael....

Dearly Beloved Faithful in the Lord:

"St. Basil and the Vasilopita Tradition"

Happy New Year! I pray that this year of 2018 brings you "all good things that come from above." spiritual prosperity and good health. On January 1st, we will celebrate the feast day of St. Basil the Great. He was one of the greatest fathers of the Orthodox faith. He was also one of the most compassionate of clergy, during his time. He was one of the first to establish an orphanage for children. St. Basil the Great was born about the end of the year 329 in Caesarea of Cappadocia, to a family renowned for their learning and holiness. His parents' names were Basil and Emily. His mother Emily (commemorated July 19) and his grandmother Macrina (Jan. 14) are Saints of the Church, together with all his brothers and sisters: Macrina, his elder sister (July 19), Gregory of Nyssa (Jan. 10), Peter of Sebastia (Jan. 9), and Naucratus. Basil studied in Constantinople under the sophist Libanius, then in Athens, where also he formed a friendship with the young Gregory, a fellow Cappadocian, later called "the Theologian." Through the good influence of his sister Macrina (see July 19), he chose to embrace the ascetical life, abandoning his worldly career. He visited the monks in Egypt, in Palestine, in Syria, and in Mesopotamia, and upon returning to Caesarea, he departed to a hermitage on the Iris River in Pontus, not far from Annesi, where his mother and his sister Macrina were already treading the path of the ascetical life; here he also wrote his ascetical homilies. About the year 370, when the bishop of his country reposed, he was elected to succeed to his throne and was entrusted with the Church of Christ, which he tended for eight years, living in voluntary poverty and strict asceticism, having no other care than to defend holy Orthodoxy as a worthy successor of the Apostles. The Emperor Valens, and Modestus, the Eparch of the East, who were of one mind with the Arians, tried with threats of exile and of torments to bend the Saint to their own confession, because he was the bastion of Orthodoxy in all Cappadocia, and preserved it from heresy when Arianism was at its strongest. But he set all their malice at naught, and in his willingness to give himself up to every suffering for the sake of the Faith, showed himself to be a martyr by volition. Modestus, amazed at Basil's fearlessness in his presence, said that no one had ever so spoken to him. "Perhaps," answered the Saint, "you have never met a bishop before." The Emperor Valens himself was almost won over by Basil's dignity and wisdom. When Valens' son fell gravely sick, he asked Saint Basil to pray for him. The Saint promised that his son would be restored to health if Valens agreed to have him baptized by the Orthodox; Valens agreed, Basil prayed, and the son was restored. But afterwards the Emperor had him baptized by Arians, and the child died soon after. Later, Valens, persuaded by his counsellors, decided to send the Saint into exile because he would not accept the Arians into communion; but his pen broke when he was signing the edict of banishment. He tried a second time and a third, but the same thing happened, so that the Emperor was filled with dread, and tore up the document, and Basil was not banished. St. Basil adhered to an ascetical way of life. He fell asleep in the Lord on the 1st of January, in 379 at the age of forty-nine. His writings were filled with wisdom. These writings were

gifts which set forth the doctrines concerning the mysteries both of the creation (see his Hexaemeron) and of the Holy Trinity (see On the Holy Spirit). Because of the majesty and keenness of his eloquence, he is honoured as "the revealer of heavenly things" and "the Great." St. Basil is also celebrated on January 30th with St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom.

(The reading above is actually through the courtesy of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery)

On St. Basil's feast day, the annual family celebration of the Vasilopita occurs. This original event which happened in Cappadocia of Caesarea in the last half of the fourth century is continued in the homes of Orthodox faithful annually.

The Greek word Vasilopita is directly translated as "Sweet Bread of Basil". When the Vasilopita is prepared, a coin is baked into each loaf. Sweet flavoring is added to the bread which symbolize the sweetness and joy of life everlasting. Sweetness also symbolizes that the hope we have, going into the New Year, will be filled with the sweetness of life, health, freedom, and joy for all who participate in the Vasilopita Observance.

When the observance begins, usually on New Year's Day, the bread is traditionally cut by the senior member of the family, in the home, or the priest at the Church. The person who receives the portion of the Pita which contains the coin is considered Blessed for the New Year.

Each portion of the Vasilopita are distributed as follows: The first portion is cut in remembrance of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The second is for the Holy Mother of our Lord, The Theotokos and Virgin Mary. The third is for St. Basil the Great, the other portions are cut for the members of the family beginning with the most senior in age. Portions may also be cut for the Church, the house, the traveler, the visitor and the poor.

St. Basil the Great, who was a bishop, wanted to distribute money to the poor in his Diocese. However, Basil desired to maintain the dignity of the poor. He did not want his good intentions to appear as charity. so as not to offend anyone. Therefore, he asked some women to bake sweetened bread, in which he arranged to place gold coins. This would allow families, in cutting the bread, to nourish themselves and at the same token, pleasantly give such individuals some economic relief through their discovery of coins baked into the bread.

May the sweetness of the Vasilopita rub off onto you throughout this New Year and may our Lord hear our prayers through the intercessions of the Theotokos and St. Basil, for that gold coin that St. Basil offered is symbolically in each of us. Prayerfully, I remain

In His service,
+Fr. Michael

Saints and Feasts Commemorated

Sunday after Nativity



On the Sunday that falls on or immediately after the twenty-sixth of this month, we make commemoration of Saints Joseph, the Betrothed of the Virgin; David, the Prophet and King; and James, the Brother of God. When there is no Sunday within this period, we celebrate this commemoration on the 26th.

Saint Joseph (whose name means "one who increases") was the son of Jacob, and the son-in-law - and hence, as it were, the son - of Eli (who was also called Eliakim or Joachim), who was the father of Mary the Virgin (Matt. 1:16; Luke 3:23). He was of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David, an inhabitant of Nazareth, a carpenter by Trade, and advanced in age when, by God's good will, he was betrothed to the Virgin, that he might minister to the great mystery of God's dispensation in the flesh by protecting her, providing for her, and being known as her husband so that she, being a virgin, would not suffer reproach when she was found to be with child. Joseph had been married before his betrothal to our Lady; they who are called Jesus' "brethren and sisters" (Matt. 13:55-56) are the children of Joseph by his first marriage. From Scripture, we know that Saint Joseph lived at least until the Twelfth year after the birth of Christ (Luke 2:41-52); according to the tradition of the Fathers, he reposed before the beginning of the public ministry of Christ.

The child of God and ancestor of God, David, the great Prophet after Moses, sprang from the tribe of Judah. He was the son of Jesse, and was born in Bethlehem (whence it is called the City of David), in the year 1085 before Christ. While yet a youth, at the command of God he was anointed secretly by the Prophet Samuel to be the second King of the Israelites, while Saul - who had already been deprived of divine grace - was yet living. In the thirtieth year of his life, when Saul had been slain in battle, David was raised to the dignity of King, first, by his own tribe, and then by all the Israelite people, and he reigned for forty years. Having lived seventy years, he reposed in 1015 before Christ, having proclaimed beforehand that his son Solomon was to be the successor to the throne.

The sacred history has recorded not only the grace of the Spirit that dwelt in him from his youth, his heroic exploits in war, and his great piety towards God, but also his transgressions and failings as a man. Yet his repentance was greater than his transgressions, and his love for God fervent and exemplary; so highly did God honour this man, that when his son Solomon sinned, the Lord told him that He would not rend the kingdom in his lifetime "for David thy father's sake" (III Kings 12:12). Of The Kings of Israel, Jesus the Son of Sirach testifies,

"All, except David and Hezekias and Josias, were defective" (Ecclus. 49:4). The name David means "beloved." His melodious Psalter is the foundation of all the services of the Church; there is not one service that is not filled with Psalms and psalmic verses. It was the means whereby old Israel praised God, and was used by the Apostles and the Lord Himself. It is so imbued with the spirit of prayer that the monastic fathers of all ages have used it as their trainer and teacher for their inner life of converse with God. Besides eloquently portraying every state and emotion of the soul before her Maker, the Psalter is filled with prophecies of the coming of Christ. It foretells His Incarnation, "He bowed the heavens and came down" (Psalm 17:9), His Baptism in the Jordan, "The waters saw Thee, O God, The waters saw Thee and were afraid" (76:15), His Crucifixion in its details, "They have pierced My hands and My feet They have parted My garments amongst themselves, and for My vesture have they cast lots" (21:16, 18). "For My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink" (68:26), His descent into Hades, "For Thou wilt not abandon My soul in Hades, nor wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption" (15:10) and Resurrection, "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered" (67:1). His Ascension, "God is gone up in jubilation" (46:5), and so forth. As for James, the Brother of God, see October 23.

Anysia the Virgin-martyr of Thessaloniki

This Saint, who was from Thessalonica, was the daughter of pious and wealthy parents, After their death, she passed her life in virginity, serving God by means of good deeds. One day, as she was on her way to church, a pagan soldier approached her and asked her to accompany him to the temple of the idols, but she refused. When he began to drag her with him, she spit in his face and confessed Christ. Filled with anger, he thrust his sword into her side and slew her, in the year 299, during the reign of Maximian.

Apolytikion for Afterfeast of the Nativity in the Fourth Mode

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath shined the light of knowledge upon the world; for thereby they that worshipped the stars were instructed by a star to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high. O Lord, glory be to Thee.

Apolytikion for Sun. after Nativity in the Second Mode

O Joseph, proclaim the wonders to David, the ancestor of God. Thou hast seen a Virgin great with child; thou hast given glory with the shepherds; thou hast worshipped with the Magi; and thou hast been instructed through an Angel. Entreat Christ God to save our souls.

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Gideon the New Martyr of Mount Athos

FATHER MICHAEL REQUESTS...that we, as a faithful community keep the following individuals in our prayers: Lilly Kashou, Issam Kashou, Suzanne Vaishnani, daughter of Ted Simon, and Presbyteria Magdalena Michalopoulos. Please notify Fr. Michael if you have anyone else who should be included for special prayers. May they be under the grace and tender watch of our Lord.

There will be NO Sunday School classes on the following dates:

Sunday, December 30th

Remaining Christmas Season Services

Tuesday, January 1, 2019 - New Year's Day
Feast of St. Basil the Great and the Circumcision of the Lord
Orthros 9 am Divine Liturgy 10 am

Saturday, January 5, 2019 - Eve of Theophany of our Lord
Orthros 9 am Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom 10 am

Sunday, January 6, 2019 - Theophany of our Lord
Orthros 9 am Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great 10 am
Great Blessing of the Waters at the conclusion of the Liturgy
Cutting and raffling off of the Vasilopita during the coffee hour fellowship

Wisdom of the Fathers

Nathanael too enters ... saying, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" ... Nevertheless, He is not ashamed to be named even from thence, signifying that He needs not ought of the things of men; and His disciples also He chooses out of Galilee.

St. John Chrysostom Homily 9 on Matthew 2, 4th Century

At His birth [He] is laid in a manger, and abides in an inn, and takes a mother of low estate; teaching us to think no such thing a disgrace, and from the first outset trampling under foot the haughtiness of man, and bidding us give ourselves up to virtue only. For why do you pride yourself on your country, when I am commanding thee to be a stranger to the whole world?

Whether you are an Orthodox Christian, or this is your first visit to an Orthodox Church, we are pleased to have you with us. **Although Holy Communion is reserved for baptized and chrismated (confirmed) Orthodox Christians, all are invited to receive the "ANTIDORON" (blessed bread) which is not a sacrament, but is a reminder of the "agape feast" that followed worship in the early Church.** After the Divine Liturgy this morning, please join us in the Church Hall for fellowship and refreshments. We hope that you will return often to worship with us, to grow in Christ and in our Orthodox Faith. For any spiritual, religious, or sacramental matters, please contact Fr. Michael (607) 795-1474. For any building, facility or church property issues, please contact the Parish Council President or a member of the council. Deadline for suggestions for the bulletin is 12:00 noon on Thursday.