

29th Sunday After Pentecost

Sunday After Nativity, Commemoration of the Holy Righteous Ones:



Joseph the Betrothed, David the King and James the Brother of the Lord

27 December / 9 January

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 4: When the women disciples of the Lord / learned from the Angel the joyous message of Thy Resurrection / they cast away the ancestral curse / and elatedly told the Apostles / death is overcome / Christ God is risen / granting the world great mercy.

Tropar of the Nativity according to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Tone 4): Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath shined upon the world the light of knowledge; for thereby, they that worshipped the stars were taught 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.

Tropar of the Holy Righteous Ones, Tone 2: O Joseph, proclaim thou the glad tidings to David, the ancestor of God, for thou hast seen a Virgin give birth; with the shepherds didst thou give glory; with the Magi didst thou worship; by an angel wast thou instructed. Entreat Christ God, that He save our souls!

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 4: My Saviour and Redeemer / as God rose from the tomb and delivered the earth-born from their chains / He has shattered the gates of hell, / and as Master, / He has risen on the third day.

Kondak of the Nativity according to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Tone 3): Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who is transcendent in essence; and the earth offereth a cave to Him Who is unapproachable. Angels with shepherds give glory; with a star the Magi do journey; for our sake a young Child is born, Who is pre-eternal God.

Kondak of the Holy Righteous Ones, Tone 3 (Spec. Mel: "Today the Virgin..."): Today the divine David is filled with gladness, and Joseph doth offer praise with James. They rejoice, receiving a crown through their kinship with Christ; and they laud Him that hath ineffably been born on earth, and cry aloud: O Compassionate One, save them that honour Thee!

One can learn all about King David, the son of Jesse, from the Book of Kings. and for holy James see October 23rd. Righteous Joseph is so named in the Gospel (Matt. 1:19), and for this, God entrusted the most holy Virgin to his protection and gave him great honour in the economy of human salvation. Although Joseph was of the royal lineage of David, he himself was a simple carpenter in Nazareth. He took the most holy Virgin from the Temple into his home at the age of eighty, and entered into rest at the age of a hundred and ten.

Matins Gospel VII

EPISTLE: Galatians 1: 11-19

11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. 14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

IT PLEASSED GOD ...WHO CALLED ME THROUGH HIS GRACE, TO REVEAL HIS SON IN ME, THAT I MIGHT PREACH HIM AMONG THE GENTILES

Christ says in another place, 'No one knows who the Son is, save the Father; and who the Father is, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son wills to reveal Him' (Luke 10:22). You observe that the Father reveals the Son, and the Son the Father; so it is as to Their glory, the Son glorifies the Father, and the Father the Son; 'glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You' (John 17:1,4). But why does he say, 'to reveal His Son in me,' and not 'to me?' It is to signify that he had not only been instructed in the faith by words, but that he was richly endowed with the Spirit, that the revelation had enlightened his whole soul, and that he had Christ speaking within him...The object, he says, of His thus specially revealing Himself to me, was not

only that I might myself behold Him, but that I might also manifest Him to others ...that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, thus touching beforehand on that great ground of his defence which lay in the respective characters of the disciples; for it was necessary to preach differently to the Jews and to the heathen.

St. John Chrysostom. Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 1. B#57, p. 11

for the 27th Sunday: Eph 6:10-17

GOSPEL: St. Matthew 2: 13-23

13 When the Wise Men had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. 14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt, 15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt I called my son. 16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, 18 In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not. 19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. 21 And he arose, took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

THAT IT MIGHT BE FULFILLED WHICH WAS SPOKEN BY THE PROPHETS, "HE SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE"

As to the fact that the prophet had foretold it, the apostles themselves in many places call Him a Nazarene. Was not this then, one may say, casting a shade over the prophesy touching Bethlehem? By no means: rather this very fact was sure greatly to stir up men, and to awaken them to the search of what was said of Him. Thus, for example, Nathanael also enters on the inquiry concerning Him, saying, 'Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?' For the place was of little esteem, or rather not that place only, but also the whole district of Galilee. Therefore the Pharisees said, Search and look, for out of Galilee arises no prophet' (Jn. 7:52). Nevertheless, He is not ashamed to be named even from thence, signifying that He does not need any of the things of men; and His disciples He also chooses out of Galilee ...For this cause He does not chose for Himself so much as a house (Cf. Matt. 7:20) ...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 only to virtue. For why do you pride yourself on your country, when I am commanding you to be a stranger to the whole world? (so He speaks); when you have leave to become such that all the universe will not be worthy of you? For these things are so utterly contemptible, that they are not thought worthy of any consideration, even amongst the philosophers of the Greeks, but are called externals, and occupy the lowest place.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily IX on Matthew II, 6, 7. B#54, pp. 58, 59.

This [Christmas] night bestowed peace on the whole world; so, let no one threaten; this is the night of the Most Gentle One - let no one be cruel; this is the night of the most Humble One - let no one be proud. Now is the day of joy, - let us not revenge; now is the day of good will, - let us not be mean. In this day of peace let us not be conquered by anger ... Today the Bountiful impoverished Himself for our sake; so, the rich one, invite the poor to your table. To-day we received a gift, for which we did not ask; so let us give alms to those, who implore us and beg. This present day cast open the heavenly door to our prayers: let us open our door to those who ask our forgiveness.. Now the Divine Being took upon Himself the seal of humanity, in order for humanity to be decorated by the seal of Divinity.

St. Isaac of Syria. Christmas Sermon, from Tree of Life, Vol. 6 No.4, 1989.

for the 31st Sunday: Luke 18:35-43

Saints of the week

27 December / 9 January — Third Day of the Feast of the Nativity - Fast-free period - St Stephen, Protomartyr and Archdeacon - He was a kinsman of the Apostle Paul and one of those Jews who lived in a Hellenic milieu. Stephen was the first of the seven deacons

whom the holy apostles ordained for the service of the poor in Jerusalem. This is why he is called the Archdeacon—the first, or chief, of them. By the power of his faith, Stephen worked many wonders among the people. The wicked Jews disputed with him, but were always confounded by his wisdom and the power of the Spirit who acted through him. Then the shameful Jews, adept at calumny and slander, stirred up the people and leaders against this innocent man. They slandered Stephen, saying that he had blasphemed against God and against Moses, and quickly found false witnesses who supported their assertion. Then Stephen stood before the people, and all saw his face 'like the face of an angel': that is, his face was illumined by the light of grace as was the face of Moses when he talked with God. Stephen opened his mouth and spoke of God's manifold works and marvels, performed in the past for the People of Israel, and of the people's manifold transgressions and opposition to God. He especially denounced them for the slaying of Christ the Lord, calling them 'betrayers and murderers' (Acts 7:52). While they ground their teeth, Stephen looked and saw the heavens open and the glory of God, and spoke to the Jews of what he saw: 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God' (7:56). Then the malicious men took him out of the city and stoned him to death. Among his murderers was his kinsman Saul, later the Apostle Paul. At that time, the most holy Mother of God was standing on a rock at a distance with St John the Theologian, and witnessed the martyrdom of this first martyr for the truth of her Son and God, and she prayed for Stephen. This happened exactly a year after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. St Stephen's body was taken secretly and buried by Gamaliel in his own ground. He was a Jewish prince and a secret Christian. Thus this first of Christ's martyrs made a glorious end and entered into the Kingdom of Christ our God. Our Holy Fathers, the Martyrs Theodore and Theophanes the Branded.

28 December / 10 January — Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ - Fast-free period - The 20,000 Holy Martyrs of Nicomedia - In the time of the wicked Emperor Maximian Hercules, the Christian faith flourished in Nicomedia, and spread from day to day. At one time the Emperor, staying in the city, came to know of the large number of Christians, and he was greatly enraged and devised a means of slaughtering them all. The feast of the Nativity of Christ was approaching, and the Emperor, discovering that all the Christians gathered in the church on this feast, ordered that, on that day, the church be surrounded by soldiers and set alight. When all the Christians were assembled in the church after midnight and the glorious celebration was beginning, the soldiers surrounded the church so that no-one could leave, and the Emperor's envoy went into the church and told the Christians of the Emperor's command that they either immediately offer sacrifice to idols or all be burned to death. Then the archdeacon, a courageous soldier of Christ, aflame with divine zeal, began to encourage the people, reminding them of the Three Holy Children in the furnace in Babylon. 'Look, my brethren,' he said, 'at the table of sacrifice in the Lord's altar, and understand that our true Lord and God will now sacrifice on this; so shall we not lay down our lives for Him in this holy place?' The people were fired with enthusiasm to die for Christ, and all the catechumens were baptised and chrismated. The soldiers then set fire to the church on all sides and the Christians, twenty thousand of them, were burned in the flame singing the glory of God. The church burned for five days, and a smoke with a fragrant and intoxicating smell rose from it, and a marvellous golden light was seen around it. Thus these many men, women and children died gloriously and received wreaths of eternal glory in the Kingdom of Christ. They suffered and were glorified in the year 302.

Our Holy Father Simon the Outpourer of Myrrh

Saint Maughold: Died c. 488. Said to have been a brigand or pirate, who was converted to the Faith by Saint Patrick, who sent him as bishop to the Isle of Man as expiation for his sins. Maughold is traditionally honoured as the Apostle of the Isle of Man

Saints Romulus & Conindrus: Died c. 450. Romulus and Conindrus were among the first preachers of the Good News on the Isle of Man. They were contemporaries of Saint Patrick

Tropar of Ss Romulus and Conindrus Tone 4: By your holy preaching, Romulus and Conindrus,/ the Holy Name of Jesus was first heard in the Isle of Man./ As Heaven rejoices at the extension of the Orthodox Faith,/ pray, most holy fathers, that we may use our lives in Christ's service/ for the salvation of our souls.

29 December / 11 January — Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ - Fast-free period - The 14,000 Holy Children in Bethlehem - When the wise men from the East failed to return to Jerusalem from Bethlehem to tell Herod about the new-born king, but, at the angel's command, returned to their home another way, Herod was as furious as a wild beast, and commanded that all the children of two years and under in Bethlehem and its surroundings be killed. This terrible command of the king's was carried out to the letter. His soldiers cut off some of the children's heads with their swords, dashed others on the stones, trampled some of them underfoot and drowned others with their own hands. The weeping and lamentation of their mothers rose to heaven: 'Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children' as had been prophesied (Jer. 13:15; Matt. 2:18). This evildoing towards the hordes of innocent children came to pass a year after the birth of Christ, at a time when Herod was trying to find the divine Child. He sought Zacharias's son, John, meaning to kill him in the belief that John was the new king. When Zacharias refused to hand John over, he was killed in the Temple on Herod's orders. St Simeon the Host of God was also killed, and went to God soon after the Presentation in the Temple. Slaying the children in Bethlehem, Herod then turned on the Jewish elders, who had revealed to him where the Messiah would be born. He killed Hyrcanes the High Priest, and seventy elders from the Sanhedrin, and thus they who conspired with Herod to kill the new baby King came to an evil end. After that, Herod killed his own brother and sister and wife, and three of his sons. Finally, God's punishment fell on him: he began to tremble, his legs swelled, the lower part of his body became putrid and worms came out of the sores, his nose became blocked and an unbearable stench spread around from it. At the time of his death, he remembered that there were many captive Jews in prison, so, that they should not rejoice at his death, he ordered that they all be slaughtered. Thus this

terrible ruler lost his inhuman soul and was given to the devil for eternity. Our Holy Father Marcellus; Our Holy Fathers Mark the Gravedigger and Theophilus the Weeper.

30 December / 12 January — Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ - Fast-free period - The Holy Martyr Anysia - Born in Salonica of wealthy and eminent parents, she was brought up in the Christian faith. She was orphaned young, and gave herself over to pondering on God and prayer in her own home. Fired with the love of Christ, she often said: 'Oh, how false is the life of youth, for you either create scandal or are scandalised. Better is age, but oh, I am seized with sorrow at the length of time that separates us from heaven!' She sold her goods and gave away the proceeds to the poor, and herself lived from the labour of her own hands. She kept strict fasts, slept very little and always wept in prayer. When sleep overtook her, she said to herself: 'It is dangerous to sleep while the enemy keeps vigil.' At that time, the wicked Emperor Maximian issued a decree that any man was free to kill Christians when and where he came across them, without trial or sentence. This holy maiden once went out into the street to go to church. It was the day of a pagan festival of the sun. A soldier saw her fairness of face and went up to her with impure lust, asking her name. She made the sign of the Cross and said to him: 'I am Christ's handmaid, and I'm going to church.' When the impudent soldier came closer and began to speak as one deranged, she pushed him away and spat in his face. The soldier aimed a blow at her with his sword, and ran her through under the rib. This holy maiden suffered in 298 and was buried by Christians, and was crowned with a wreath of glory by God in the heavenly Kingdom. A church was built over her grave. Our Holy Mother Theodora of Constantinople; The Holy Apostle Timon; Our Holy Mother Theodora of Caesarea; Our Holy Father, the Martyr Gideon;

St. Egwin, bishop of Worcester, (717), founder of Evesham Monastery - Our holy father Egwin was born of royal stock in the region of Worcester. When he came of age, he left the world and embraced the monastic life, wherein he soon achieved a high standard of excellence. He was ordained through all the degrees of the priesthood; and in 693, on the repose of the bishop of Worcester, he was elected to the Episcopal see by all the clergy and the people, and with the assent of King Ethelred of Mercia and the archbishop of Canterbury. In this exalted position he showed himself to be a pattern of all virtue: a father of orphans, a protector of widows, a righteous judge of the oppressed and comforter of the afflicted. And by his powerful preaching many were converted from paganism or from an evil way of life. The righteous, however, must expect tribulation in this world, and malicious tongues began to war against the saint. He decided to travel to Rome and put his case before the highest tribunal in the West. But before leaving, and although he was innocent of the charges brought against him, he imposed a severe penance upon himself both for his own sins and for the sins of his people. He locked his feet in iron fetters and threw the key into the river Avon. Thus bound, he set off on the arduous journey to Rome. As he and his companions were passing through an arid region of the Alps, they began to thirst. Those among his companions who did not acknowledge the bishop's sanctity asked him mockingly to pray for water as Moses once did in the desert. But others, who did believe in him, rebuked the unbelievers and asked him in a different tone, with true faith and hope. The Saint prostrated himself in prayer to the Lord with his companions. On arising, they saw a pure stream of water gush forth out of the rock; whereupon everybody, believers and unbelievers alike, gave heartfelt thanks to God Who is wondrous in His saints. When they arrived in Rome and had prayed in the church of St. Peter, the Saint told his companions to go down to the river Tiber and see if they could catch a fish. They did as he said, and to their delight caught a medium-sized salmon which they brought to the holy father. When he saw it he gave thanks and ordered them to slit it open. Great was their astonishment when they found inside the fish the key which the Saint had cast into the river Avon. News of the miracle spread throughout Rome, and from all sides the faithful came to seek the holy man's blessing. Pope Constantine, who had heard of Egwin's arrival, the great labours of his journey and the miracle of the key, did not allow the Saint to prostrate before him, but himself asked his blessing. And for the rest of his stay in Rome he treated him with great respect, celebrating the Divine Liturgy with him and having many private talks together. The case against the Saint was examined and annulled, and he returned to England laden with honor. The people greeted him with joy, and by the decree of the archbishop he was restored to the see from which he had been dismissed. King Ethelred, too, received him with love, ready to fulfill whatever the Saint might petition. One of the Saint's first requests was to be granted the pastureland beside the Avon where he had thrown the key into the river. One of the king's shepherds had once had a vision at this same spot, in which a Virgin of extraordinary splendour appeared holding a hook in her hands and chanting psalms in the company of two other virgins, when the shepherd told this to the Saint, he turned it over in his mind for a long time, praying to God with vigils and fasting. Then, early one morning, after the Saint and three companions had spent the whole night in prayer, they set out barefoot to the spot, chanting, psalms and hymns. Parting company with the others, St. Egwin fell to the earth with tears and groans. On arising from his prayer, he saw three virgins, of whom the middle one was most wondrous to behold, shining in light and surrounded by an ineffable fragrance. In her hands she held a book, and a cross which shone with a golden radiance. When Egwin realized that this was the Most Holy Mother of God, she, as if approving his thought, blessed him with the cross and disappeared. This vision gave the Saint to understand that it was God's will that this place, later called Evesham, should be dedicated to the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary. And he determined to build a church there in accordance with a vow he had made during a period of especially fierce temptation. So he bought the land and carried out the task to completion, endowing the foundation with many gifts solicited from the kings of England. At his request, the Pope granted his undertaking independent status which was confirmed by a council of the English Church held at Alcester in 709. In 711 the Saint retired from his see and devoted himself exclusively to the government of his monastery at Evesham. With fastings and vigils, with tears and groans, he poured out his prayer to the Lord, and was accounted worthy of many visitations of the angels and the saints. He was particularly devoted to the Mother of God, whose praises were always on his lips. Already rich in years and Divine Grace, he fell ill in the monastery which he had founded, and, feeling the approach of death, he called together the brethren and said: "Most reverend and beloved sons, I beseech you, be zealous in observing the commandments of God, and keep the vows which you made to Him. For it is written: 'Make your vows and pay them to the Lord.' And as the Apostle says: 'Follow peace and holiness, without which none will see the Lord.'" Then, having commended them to the Father and having partaken of the Body and Blood of the Lord, he departed this life on December 30, 717. Great was the sorrow of the

brethren and all the people. But during the burial of the Saint, sorrow at his departure was mixed with joy at his triumph. After his burial many miracles proved that St. Egwin had obtained great favour with the Lord. On praying to him, the blind were given their sight, the deaf their hearing, the sick in body and soul were healed. And so his fame spread throughout the country, and many came to his tomb to seek his intercession. Once a penitent, grieving over a serious crime he had committed, bound himself with a number of iron fetters. He vowed that he would not loose himself from them until God had shown him that he was loosed from the fetters of his sins. He dragged himself to several shrines of the saints, and after diligent prayer and fasting all but one of the fetters broke loose. The ninth fetter was fastened more tightly than the others, so that the flesh around began to swell. In hope of being released also from this one, the unfortunate man travelled to Rome, to the tombs of the holy Apostles. There, after heartfelt prayer, he was told in his sleep: "Go to England and seek the place of the blessed bishop Egwin, and when you have given him due veneration, you will obtain mercy," Joyfully, the penitent set off on his journey, and, arriving at the church of St. Egwin, spent several days there in prayer and fasting. One day, after the brethren had chanted the third hour and celebrated the Divine Liturgy, the ninth fetter snapped with such force that all the brethren heard it, and the penitent himself was thrown some distance as if by the hand of a man. When the brethren ascertained the truth of the miracle, they rejoiced and gave glory to God.

31 December / 13 January — Apodosis of the Nativity of Christ - Fast-free period - Our Holy Mother Melanie the Roman - Born in Rome of devout and very wealthy parents, she was forced by them to marry a young nobleman, Pinian. She was taken very seriously ill in giving birth to her second child, and told her husband that she would be healed only if he vowed before God to live with her in future as brother and sister. Her husband agreed and Melanie, in her deep joy, was healed. When it pleased God to take both children to Himself, they agreed to sell all their possessions and give the proceeds to the destitute, the Church and the monasteries. They travelled through many lands and cities, everywhere doing good works. They visited famous spiritual guides in Upper and Lower Egypt, and received much instruction and inspiration from them. During all that time, Melanie lived in strict fasting, fervent prayer and the reading of the Holy Scriptures. She followed the practice of reading the Scriptures right through, the Old and New Testaments, every three years, living with her husband as with a brother and fellow-ascetic. Going to Alexandria, they received the blessing of the Patriarch, St Cyril. After that, they went to Jerusalem and settled on the Mount of Olives. There Melanie became an anchoress, and gave herself completely to pondering, fasting and prayer. She lived thus for fourteen years, after which she came out, to help others to salvation, and founded monasteries for men and women. At the invitation of her kinsman, the senator Volusianus, a pagan, she went to Constantinople and brought him to the Christian faith (something that Blessed Augustine, whom Volusianus knew, had been unable to do). She then returned to the Mount of Olives, where she went to God in 438, at the age of fifty-seven.

Holy and Righteous Joseph, King David and James the Lord's Brother - commemorated on the Sunday after the Nativity of Christ. One can learn all about King David, the son of Jesse, from the Book of Kings. and for holy James see October 23rd. Righteous Joseph is so named in the Gospel (Matt. 1:19), and for this, God entrusted the most holy Virgin to his protection and gave him great honour in the economy of human salvation. Although Joseph was of the royal lineage of David, he himself was a simple carpenter in Nazareth. He took the most holy Virgin from the Temple into his home at the age of eighty, and entered into rest at the age of a hundred and ten. Our Holy Father, the Martyr Zoticus, Protector of the Poor; Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid.

1 / 14 January — The Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ - Fast-free period - On the eighth day after His birth, the divine Child was taken to the Temple and duly circumcised according to the Jewish Law that had been observed from the time of Abraham. At this time He was given the name Jesus, the name announced to the most holy Virgin by the Archangel Gabriel (Luke 1:31). The Baptism of the New Covenant was prefigured in the Circumcision of the Old Covenant. The Lord's Circumcision shows that He took true human flesh upon Himself, not its semblance as heretics later taught of Him. The Lord was truly circumcised, desiring thus to fulfil all the Law, which He Himself had given through our forefathers and the prophets. Fulfilling all the ordinances of the Law, He superseded them by Baptism in His Church, for, as the Apostle declares: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature"(Gal. 6:15). (In the Church Calendar, this Feast of the Lord has neither Forefeast nor Afterfeast.)

St Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea - was born in the reign of the Emperor Constantine, in about 330. While still unbaptised, he spent fifteen years in Athens studying philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy and other contemporary secular disciplines. Among his fellow-students were Gregory the Theologian and Julian, later the apostate emperor. When already of mature years, he was baptised in the Jordan together with his former tutor Evulios. He was Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia for nearly ten years, and died at the age of fifty. A great champion of Orthodoxy, a great torch of moral purity and zeal for the Faith, a great theological mind, a great builder and pillar of the Church of God, Basil fully deserved his title "the Great". In the Office for his Feast, he is referred to as a bee of the Church of Christ, bringing honey to the faithful but stinging those in heresy. Many of the writings of this Father of the Church have survived—theological, apologetic, on asceticism and on the Canons. There is also the Liturgy that bears his name. This Liturgy is celebrated ten times in the year: on January 1st, on the Eves of Christmas and the Theophany, on every Sunday in the Great Fast with the exception of Palm Sunday, and on the Thursday and Saturday in Great Week. St Basil departed this life peacefully on January 1st, 379, and entered into the Kingdom of Christ. Martyr-Prince Wistan of Mercia.

2 / 15 January —St Sylvester, Bishop of Rome - Fast-free period — - Born in Rome, he was skilled from his early years in secular learning and in Christian doctrine, and his life was always governed by the precepts of the Gospel. He made good use of the tuition of a priest, Timothy, whose death for the Faith he witnessed, and, seeing the example of his teacher's self-sacrifice, nourished himself in that same spirit for the rest of his life. He became Bishop of Rome at the age of thirty, and reformed certain Christian customs; abolishing, for example, the Saturday fast that had up to that time been the rule among some Christians, and decreeing that only Great Saturday and those Saturdays that fall within fasting seasons should be so observed. By his prayers and miracles, he was instrumental in the conversion and baptism of the Emperor Constantine and his mother, Helena, and assisted Queen Helena in the finding of the Holy Cross. He governed the Church for twenty years, and, finishing with honour his earthly life, entered into the heavenly Kingdom in the year 335.

Our Holy Father Seraphim of Sarov - He was one of the greatest Russian ascetics and wonderworkers, with profound spiritual discernment. Born in 1759, he departed this life in 1833. He was distinguished by a great humility. When being praised by all the world, he referred to himself as "the poor wretch Seraphim"; St Theodota; Our Holy Father Ammon of Tabennisi; in Wales,

St. Seiriol - (born c.494) (*Latin-Serialanus, English-Serial*) St. Seiriol the Fair was a younger brother of Kings Cynlas of Rhos and Einion of Lleyrn. He entered the religious life and lived in a small hermitage on the Eastern Peninsula of Ynys Mon (Anglesey). His two ruling brothers later decided this humble residence was far too lowly for their Royal brother and founded an important monastery around his cell. Thus, Seiriol became the first Abbot of Penmon Priory. His hermitage and holy-well can still be seen there today. Seiriol became a great friend of St. Cybi who lived at Caer-Gybi on Ynys Cybi (Holy Island) on the far side of Ynys Mon (Anglesey). The two would often walk several miles to meet up for prayers at the Clorach Wells in Llandyfydog in the centre of the island. This journey with his back to the sun allowed St. Seiriol's complexion to remain so fair that he was given the epithet of "Gwyn". In old age, Seiriol retired to Ynys Lannog (Priestholm), just off the coast from Penmon. It became known as Ynys Seiriol in his honour, though it is now better known as Puffin Island.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

SAINT BASIL THE GREAT

You, Who, gave the Law to the world and to man,
You, the Law-giver, placed Yourself under the Law,
Others, you enjoined by imposition - Yourself, voluntarily.
That is why on the eighth day, in the flesh, You were circumcised.
In fulfilling the Law, with a new one You replaced it:
Circumcision of the flesh, was replaced with a spiritual one.
That impure passions we cut off from ourselves
And with a spirit pure, to gaze upon You.
That, with the spirit, the will of the body to cut and to constrict,
Your will, O Savior, by the spirit we fulfill it -
To this circumcision, the saints learned,
Their fiery example, to us, they left.
Wonderful Basil, to a glowing ray, similar,
To such circumcision, generations, he teaches.
To Basil, be glory, Your servant, great
Great, because of You, humble and constrained He became.
That is why he became great, and Great,
He remained.

REFLECTION

Why is it necessary to listen to the Church and not listen to one man who thinks against the Church, even though he might be called the greatest thinker? Because the Church was founded by the Lord Jesus Christ, and because the Church is guided under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. Because the Church represents the realm of the Holy, a grove of cultivated fruit trees. If one rises up against the realm of the Holy, it means that he is unholy and why then listen to him? "The Church is an enclosure," says the all-wise John Chrysostom. "If you are within, the wolf does not enter; but if you leave, the beasts will seize you. Do not distance yourself from the Church; there is nothing mightier than the Church. The Church is your hope. The Church is your salvation. The Church is higher than the heavens. The Church is harder than stone. The Church is wider than the world. The Church never grows old but always renews itself."