



HOLY ASSUMPTION MONASTERY

DECEMBER 2020 NEWSLETTER



Dear Friends,

“When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:4,5)

Have you ever wondered why Christ chose to be born in a cave in 1st century Bethlehem? No doubt the answer is multi-faceted, but certainly the MAIN reason that Christ was born in the place and time had to do with the one chosen to be His mother. God had been working through the millennia to prepare a people to know Him, and then finally the one was born who “was able to bear the divinity of the Godhead without being consumed.”

This is a mystery, most of which I’ll never understand, but I DO understand this – when I’m in a bad place, I find it hard enough to be in the presence of a truly good person, who shows me my sins just by being good and loving. How holy would you have to be to be in the presence of God Himself and not be destroyed by such love and goodness? So, in the fullness of time, the holy maiden was born who would bear our Lord. But that fullness of time (and place) didn’t look like much on the outside. Technology was primitive, Bethlehem was a backwater, Judaea was under oppressive Roman rule ... Yet then and there, God came into our world, and it has never been the same.

We’re in hard times now, but the Gospel, the good news, is that this very moment can be the fullness of time for US – the time for Christ to be born in OUR hearts. If we allow Him to be born in OUR hearts, our neighbors may allow Him to be born in THEIR hearts, and on and on. But whatever happens in our country, we can rest assured that Christ did come in the fullness of time and did transform the world forever. So, we can sing confidently with the angels, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!”

with love in Christ,

Mother Melania and the sisters

ZOO UPDATE - Goodbye, Balou ☹️



We are very sad to report that we had to put Balou down earlier this month due to kidney failure. He was the most emotional of our cats - very sweet and affectionate, but also the most likely to take a swipe at you if touched the wrong spot. Fortunately, the sweet and affectionate side was nearly always ascendant and that's what we will remember the most. So, goodbye, Balou. You were a sweetie!

But zoo life goes on --



and life is comfy.



Well, maybe not THAT comfy.



Life will be comfy when I get out of jail.



Life IS comfy in our little underwater paradise.

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Zoom Talk - the Fasts of St. Martin and St. Philip



Retreat in time of Zoom!!

The time of preparation for the Feast of the Nativity known in the West as “Advent” and in the East as “St. Philip’s Fast” provided the theme for the retreat reflections offered for the monastery community on November 14 by Fr. Anthony Roeber. Fr. Anthony began by reminding everyone that the Feast of the Nativity on December 25 began as the result of a belief by some ancient chronologists that the creation of the world, the Incarnation, and the Crucifixion all occurred on March 25. Dating The Nativity of the Son of God in the flesh on December 25 followed logically from that belief and tying the Nativity into the story of the Incarnation and redemption explains why Fr. Thomas Hopko emphasized the importance of seeing Christmas as the “winter Pascha.”

But the observation of a time of preparation for the Nativity was not universal in the West. The repose of the revered St. Martin of Tours (316? -397?) occurs on November 11 in the West and in the areas of today’s France, western Germany and Spain a time of preparation was known in the 400s, but not in Rome itself. The full 40 days’ observation varied in both severity, in the kinds of food from which one fasted, and in length until Pope St Gregory the Great in the 6th century shortened the period to four weeks. The daily readings for the season have always relied heavily on the Book of Isaiah, especially the “Book of Emmanuel” Chapters 6-12. Although the theme of the coming or “Advent” of the Lord in judgment at the end of time opens the season, that somber warning to be prepared and repent gradually gives way to the more joyful promises of the Messiah culminating in the great or “O” Antiphons of daily Vespers sung from December 17-24, the basis for the popular hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

The eastern Church recognized (for example in the sermons of St. John Chrysostom in Antioch by the 380s,) the reasons behind the celebration of the Nativity on December 25. That custom then spread during the next century to Jerusalem and Constantinople. But the period of preparation in the East did not develop the use of daily readings from Isaiah as had been the case in the West. And the 40-day period of preparation was dated from the Feast Day of St. Philip the Apostle (November 14) instead of the commemoration of St. Martin of Tours. Instead of a reliance upon the Book of Isaiah, the eastern Church commemorates a number of Old Testament Prophets during this season of preparation (Obadiah, November 19; Nahum, December 1; Habakkuk December 2; Zephaniah, December 3; Haggai, December 16; Daniel and the Three Youths, December 17). The two Canons of the Nativity sung from November 21 onward also draw on the Book of Isaiah for the many names given to Christ in those odes. The Royal Hours on the Sunday of the Forefathers also draw heavily on Isaiah Chapters 7,8,9, and 11. Just as in the West, the eastern Advent discipline is more relaxed in the first weeks, with an increasing strictness as the Feast of the Nativity draws nearer. Although little is known of the Apostle Philip’s life and ministry, traditions from the second century located his martyrdom in Heliopolis (modern Turkey) with his relics translated first to Constantinople, and finally in the 6th century to Rome and the Church of Sts. Philip and James the Less, renamed later and known today as the Church of the Apostles.

In the question period that followed, Fr. Anthony explained that the custom of celebrating the Nativity and Theophany together persisted into the late 300s in the early Church but gradually the two events in the history of salvation acquired their own feast days within the Roman Empire. The exception was that of the Armenian Apostolic Church that had emerged in that kingdom in the early 300s.

We are grateful to Fr. Anthony for this reminder of the unity in diversity that binds us to each other in Christ. We look forward to his next talk, and we hope to have many more!

A BITTERSWEET THANKSGIVING DAY



What do you mean I was supposed to make turkey?

One of the hardest things about COVID restrictions is being unable to provide hospitality. For the first time since the year we arrived, we ate Thanksgiving dinner alone. That was the bitter part. But the sweet far exceeds the bitter. We still having a monastery after the recent fires and are staying healthy in these times of COVID. Our friends are always there for us, even in these tough times. But most important, even though we can't show hospitality to our friends, we CAN celebrate the Divine Liturgy together - and Christ's Body and Blood is THE one meal that matters. So, we are deeply grateful to God for His blessings. We don't know what the next year will bring, but we know Who will bring it. May we all follow Him in these tough times, and increase in gratitude towards the One Who came down from heaven to share our sorrows and give us His joy.

JESSE TREE

For the past three years, we have been doing a Jesse Tree during the Nativity Fast. This western Advent custom consists of reading Old Testament passages that prophesy the coming of Christ and hanging on the Jesse Tree ornaments illustrative of these passages. We have come to love this tradition as it helps us to understand Christ's coming better and to prepare with joy to meet Him.



Mother Melania practicing her elocution skills

Our Jesse tree received an unexpected visit from the potato chip elf!



ST NICHOLAS HOUSE UPDATE

We are participating in Giving Tuesday this year, in order to raise funds for our St. Nicholas House project. Friends have joined together to raise a \$10,000 matching grant. If we can raise at least that much on Giving Tuesday, we will be over \$250,000 - one fourth of the way to our \$1,000,000 goal. Also, our friends Ed and Sara Kozel and Kate Stanley have donated the lovely sign shown on the left. Located outside the current St. Nicholas House, the sign explains the how and why of our project. Thank you to all who have donated so far and to all who plan to donate. God bless you!



*A little to the right.
No, a little to the left ...*

NEW AUDIO-VIDEO SYSTEM

Ever since the COVID shutdown started, we have been very aware of the need to upgrade our audio-video system. First, we replaced our cell phone camera with a REAL one. After that, we turned our sights to mics and speakers that would allow the 'parishioners' standing outside to hear the services clearly. Now, through the help of generous friends, we have a fully functional audio-video system (well, as functional as our lack of technical prowess allows!). Special thanks to Michael Laher and his parents Don and Lucia, Fr. Edward Henderson, Fr. Lawrence Margitich, Timothy Danford, and Catalin and Laura Cosavanu. God bless you all!



Wired for sound

CALENDAR

SUNDAYS - Hours/Divine Liturgy at 9:40AM/10:00AM

THURSDAY DEC 24 (Christmas Eve) - Royal Hours 7:00AM; Vespers Liturgy 1:00PM; Vigil 9:30PM

FRIDAY DEC 25 (Christmas) - Divine Liturgy, 12:00AM

ZOOM RETREAT

SATURDAY DEC 12, 10:00AM-12:00PM - Bishop DANIEL, *Walking to Bethlehem*