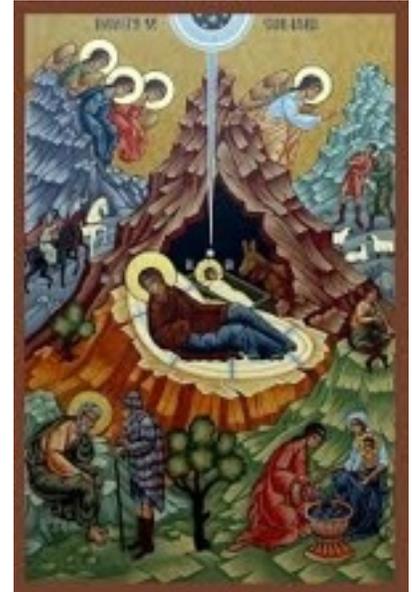


Week Five - Advent - the Coming of Christ

Next Sunday we celebrate the Forefathers. These are the Old Testament patriarchs, prophets and religious men and women. They are the ones who prepared the way for the coming of Christ. Through them God worked great signs. They are righteous men and women who responded to the call of God, served Him with devotion and many who anticipated the coming of Christ. We too during this period of preparation seek to respond to God's call. We lift our hearts in thankful prayer to God for His promises as we expectantly wait the celebration of the coming of Christ into our lives.



Who are these Forefathers?

1. Adam, Abel, Seth, Noah, Enoch and others of the earliest period of human history.
2. The Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons.
3. Women such as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachael, Miriam, Deborah, Ester, Ruth, Judith and others.
4. The Prophets Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Malachi and others down to John the Baptist.
5. Special persons such as Melchizedek, Job, David and others.
6. The three young men Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were rescued by God from Nebuchadnezzar's blazing furnace.

Read Daniel 3:19-30: The Three young men Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are celebrated in many hymns of the church. They refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image and were cast into a furnace of blazing fire. But miraculously the angel of God appeared to keep them safe from the fire. They were surrounded in the fire by divine light. This represents the mystery of the Holy Trinity and prefigures the presence of Christ in the Virgin's womb.

What was the king's response to the miracle?

How did the three men serve and trust God?

What kind of idols are we tempted to worship in our current society?

What are the risks we encounter when we refuse to be controlled by them?

How can we be like our forefathers and stand up for our Orthodox Christian faith in today's world?

Forefathers

In preparing for the coming of Christ take time to learn and share about the lives of our forefathers. Select at least one of the following to read and discuss within your family.

Abraham in Genesis 12-22: God made a covenant with Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, but He also asked him to sacrifice His son, which is prophetic of the Gospel.

Ruth in the book of Ruth: The book of Ruth points to God's plan of redemption and illustrates how God meets needs in large and small ways. Ruth is one of the most beautiful stories in the Old Testament.

David in 2 Samuel 5-7: David's story is one of perfection. He committed adultery and was responsible for the death of her husband. He confesses his sin and seeks forgiveness, but his life and kingdom face many difficulties. God forgave him and allowed him to remain king for many years restoring him to a fellowship with Him.

With small children read the stories about Noah in Genesis 6:9-8:22; Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 42-45; or Daniel and the Three young men in Daniel 3 and 6.

Experience the real Christmas

How can we experience the real Christmas? Think about these things.

1. The examples of the Forefathers remind us of the priority of seeking, believing in and serving God — always looking to Him for the fulfillment of our deepest hopes and desires.
2. The purpose of fasting is to live free from the bondage of excessive food and drink.
3. The singing of Christmas carols inspires us to anticipate Christmas as a spiritual banquet.
4. The preparation to receive Holy Communion awakens us spiritually and leads us to see how truly Christ is born in us.
5. Giving ourselves to others in need — our attention, our love, our time and our resources — puts flesh and blood on the meaning of Christmas.

Read Col 3:4-14: the Epistle reading for next Sunday of the Forefathers.

What is our true life?

What kind of desires must a Christian put to death?

What kind of things must a Christian get rid of?

What is God daily seeking to do with Each Christian?

What are the qualities of the new self?

Based on this reading what are some steps you might take to celebrate a real Christmas this year?

Read Luke 14:16-24 the Gospel lesson of Sunday of the forefathers.
What happened just before Jesus told the Parable of the great Feast?

What did the host send his servant to tell his guests?

What were the guests' excuses for not going to the feast?

Whom did the host then invite to the feast?

Why do you think people who are sick, suffering or in want may respond to the invitation of God's love more often than those who have everything going for them?

What is the meaning of Christmas for those who are sick, lonely or poor? List one thing you can do this Christmas season to share the love and joy of Christ with someone in need.

The Song of the Three Young Men

We praise you, O Lord, the God of our Fathers. May Your glorious, holy name be held in honor forever.

Refrain: Praise the Lord and honor Him for ever.

May hymns be sung to Your glory forever and may Your holy presence be praised without end. (Refrain)

May you be praised as You sit on Your royal throne. May You be praised in the dome of the heavens. May hymns be sung to Your glory forever. (Refrain)

Praise the Lord all creation, skies above, sun and moon and all the stars of heaven. (Refrain)

Praise the Lord all winds, fire and heat, nights and days, ice and cold, frost and snow, lightning and storm clouds. (Refrain)

Let the earth praise the Lord. Praise the Lord mountains and hills, trees and plants, valleys and meadows, seas and lakes, all rivers and springs of water. (Refrain)

Praise the Lord all birds of the air, cattle and wild animals, whales and fishes, and all moving creatures. (Refrain)

Praise the Lord all people of the earth, young and old, rich and poor, mighty and weak, and all faithful people. (Refrain)

Praise the Lord priests of the Lord, servants of the Lord, and all who are humble and holy. (Refrain)

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good and His mercy lasts forever. (refrain)

Praise the Lord all who worship Him, praise God and give Him thanks, for His mercy lasts forever. (Refrain)

Prayer of Azariah:

O Lord, the God of our Fathers,
We praise and adore You;
May your name be honored forever.
You have treated us as we deserve.
In everything You have done to us
You are always honest,
and when You bring us to judgment,
You are always fair....
We come to you with repentant hearts
and humble spirits. Accept
Our repentance as our sacrifice
to You today, so that we may obey You
with all our hearts.
No one who trusts You will ever
be disappointed. Now with all our hearts
we promise to obey You and to worship You.
O Lord, treat us with kindness and mercy,
let us never be put to shame; rescue us
with Your mighty hand; bring honor to Your
name. Let all people know that You alone
are Lord and God and that You rule
in majesty over the whole world.

Meditation:

The Lord Himself has said that He came to call not the righteous but the lost to salvation. His coming at Christmas is especially significant for the afflicted, destitute and hopeless in spirit, health or circumstance. Let us turn to the God of all comfort in time of suffering and distress. When the three young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the blazing furnace they “started walking around in the flames singing hymns to God, and praising Him as Lord.” In whatever circumstance we may find ourselves, let us fix our eyes on God, praise Him as Lord, confess our sins to Him and commit our lives to Him in complete obedience. He is near to uphold us with His mighty grace in the most trying moments.

Prayer:

Rejoice, O faithful, and make ready for the feast of the birth of Christ. The king of kings comes to live with His servants. Behold a most wonderful mystery: the cave will become a heaven; the Virgin the throne of God; the manger a room where Christ the Savior will be laid in swaddling clothes. Come, people slow of heart, cast away the veil of sin that lies upon your heart; recognize the Maker Who comes to dwell among us. Let us make ready to praise Him and say: Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our Fathers, Who is born of a Virgin! Praised and glorified is Your name forever! Amen
Adapted for Hymn of Forefeast of the Birth of Christ.