

Week Six - Advent Series - the Coming of Christ

On the Sunday before Christmas we remember the ancestors of Christ. These are all those from Adam to Joseph who the Gospel includes in the genealogy of Christ. This gives us a sense of His birth and fulfillment of the hopes of all humanity.

In the Gospels there are two genealogies in Luke and Matthew. It is the one in Matthew that we read on Sunday.

Read Matthew 1:1-17

Who are the main ancestors of Christ?

What women are mentioned in the genealogy?

What is Jesus called in Vs 16 & 17 and what is the meaning of this name?

Read Luke 3:23-38

How old was Jesus when He began His work?

Who is named first in Luke's genealogy?

Who is named last and what is he called?

The ancestry of Jesus shows that the Lord completely identifies with the human race with all their failing. He becomes a part of us.

Can you recognize some of the sinners in His ancestry?

With the coming of Christ is the beginning of a new age, a new generation and we belong to it as Christians. We are now part of the age of fullness and completion. God has a plan for all creation and for the salvation of humanity through the birth of Christ. He prepared for this event as recorded in the Old Testament.

How are you seeking to find out what God's plan is for your life within His grand plan for the world's salvation?

What does Christmas mean to you in terms of God's plan for your life?

What are some ways in which we can know God's will for our personal lives?

How can you help others share in the new life of Christ?

Meditation

What needs to be clearly understood is that the ancestors of Jesus were not all just and holy men. Amongst them are also sinners; those who have committed incest, adultery, murder; and alien woman; the names of Judas, of Tamar, or David and Ruth are filled with spiritual significance. Jesus wanted to be linked with all that and to all those. He wanted to clear a way for Himself through the sins and crimes of men. And so it is with history of each one of us that He takes upon himself and overcomes.

The Year of Grace of the Lord, p 58.

Why Scripture is so important

You should have noticed the differences in the two genealogies in Luke and Mathew. This tells us they each compiled their genealogy independently from source available to them. The key to them is that they are intended to emphasize the reality of Christ's humanity and the fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation. The Bible is a spiritual book and not a history text. It concentrates of giving us spiritual truths about God, man, life and morality. It is less concerned about strict consistency of places names and details. It is important to reflect on the Orthodox teaching of Tradition.

1. The Bible is a collection of religious books chosen by the Church to lead us to the true understanding of the mystery of the living God but does not include everything about this mystery. God and life are much bigger than any book. The main concern of the Bible is to tell us about God and how He has arranged for our salvation giving us guidance about how to live in union with Him.
2. The Orthodox way of life and the Church are based on the life of Jesus Christ and not on a particular book. We must always look to Christ as the foundation of our Christian life. We seek to know Him in all its mystical aspects.
3. When we consider the origin of the universe, what is most significant about the Biblical account is the everything visible and invisible is created by God. This is a God who has also revealed Himself to us through Abraham, Moses, the Prophets and most clearly in Christ. The scientist will uncover many clues about the way in which God has created the world. Each new discovery is but an uncovering of His truth. In science there is always an element of mystery as scientists try to explain the nature of creation. What is important is to be clear that it is God who is behind this mystery we call life and that we need to value life as a precious gift from Him.
4. Regarding truth, we Orthodox Christians rely on a broad and rich consensus of Church teachings about God and our salvation. Secure in these truths we can lead a life in union with Christ and well as develop a full intellectual life. Because of this vision of Scripture, Tradition and the current life of the Church we are free from a literalist view of the Bible and a fundamentalist understanding of the authority of the Bible. We do this while honoring the Bible's essential truth.

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17

What has Timothy instructed about truth and faith in vs 14?

What has Timothy known since he was a child?

What are they able to do?

What particular benefits come from the reading and use of Scripture?

What is the overall value of Scripture for Christianity?

Read Deuteronomy 10:14-21: This is one of the Vespers readings for the Sunday before Christmas.

What belongs to the Lord?

What does the Lord demand?

Who are of special concern to the Lord?

How are we to relate to the Lord?

Write all of verse 21

How often do you read the Bible?

What ways has the reading of the Bible helped you?

Prayer

Remembering the ancestors of Christ, O faithful, let us sing praises to Christ, our Redeemer. Being great and mighty, the Lord magnified them among all the nations working through them signs and miracles. He appointed for us a staff of power Mary, the Holy Theotokos, from whom Christ was born. Let us praise Him Who gives life to all and salvation to our souls. Lord glory to You!

Adapted Vesper hymn for Feast of the Ancestors of Christ.

Reference: *A Year of the Lord Liturgical Bible Studies* by Theodore Stylianopoulos

Icon of the Nativity

The icon of the Nativity tells the story of Christ's birth and shows that all creation is taking part in His birth. The angels give thanks with their song; the heavens give the star; the Wise Men give their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The poor, humble shepherds give their praise and amazement; the earth gives the cave, and humanity gives the Virgin.

This Holy Icon has many scenes. First, it stresses the importance of the Theotokos, who is placed in the center and is the largest figure in the icon. The Christ Child, in the center of the icon, is in swaddling clothes and is lying in the manger. In the background is the dark cave where He was born. In the cave are an ox and a donkey guarding the newborn Babe. The Gospels do not speak of the ox and the donkey, but all icons of the Nativity include these animals because the animals fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 1:3, *"The ox knows his master, and the donkey his master's crib; but Israel does not know me, and the people have not regarded me."* The long ray of light from the star points directly to the cave. It teaches that this bright star is an astronomical happening, and is a messenger from heaven announcing the birth of Jesus.

On the left hand side of the icon are the Wise Men, who were led by the star, riding horses to bring their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus. The Wise Men are of various ages. These details teach that regardless of age and appearance, the Good News was given to each and everyone.

Opposite the Wise Men is the scene with the humble shepherds. An angel proclaims the glad tidings. A young shepherd plays a reed instrument. This scene reveals that the music of the humans was added to the hymn of the angels. Across from the shepherd's scene is the heavenly choir of angels. They are giving glory to God. The angels serve two purposes in the Nativity of Christ. They give glory to God and announce the good news to all mankind.

In the lower right hand corner are the two women Joseph brought to take care of the Christ child. They are bathing Him just as any baby is bathed showing the humanity of Jesus.

Opposite the bathing sits a sad and worried Joseph. He is not part of the central group the Christ Child and the Theotokos. Joseph is not the natural father and is troubled and despondent. There is an old man talking to Joseph. This is Satan who is tempting Joseph and disturbing him. Satan is telling Joseph that virgin birth is impossible. He's telling Joseph that he's a fool if he believes this. This story comes to us from Holy Tradition. The sad Joseph shows us not only his personal predicament, but the dilemma of all mankind the difficulty of accepting that which is "beyond words or reason."

The tree, which is in the middle of the lower part of the icon, is a symbol of the Tree of Jesse. This tree refers to Isaiah 11:1-2, *"But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him."* King David was often mentioned as the son of Jesse and Jesus was from the House of David.



From goarch.org