

December 18-24

Sunday before the Nativity of Christ of the Holy Fathers

In the services of this week are glorified the Old Testament saints, from whose human family came our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore in the Gospel appointed for this Sunday is read the "genealogy" of Jesus Christ. Together with these on this Sunday, as well as on the Sunday of the Forefathers (see Dec. 11), are commemorated all those living in faith and all the Old Testament saints who have come to the Savior, who are listed in the Epistle reading for this Sunday.

In the church hymns for this day the Holy Church primarily sings "of the beginning fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", "together with the Three Youths, who quench the fiery flames with the dew of the Spirit" and "the physical images of the hidden mysteries of God revealed to the world", and the prophet Daniel, who, "foretold the birth of the Christ from a virgin" and "foresaw that the cruel world would be counted among those with deep spiritual peace by the coming of Christ, having sometimes stopped the mouths of lions in the pit".

Together with this the Holy Church in the hymns for the present day as well as for the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ, exclaims: "Come let us all faithfully celebrate the Nativity of Christ", "Skip, O hills and mountains; Dance, O prophets who spoke of God! Clap your hands, O peoples and nations! The salvation and the enlightenment of all draw near. He comes to be born in the city of Bethlehem"; "The never setting Sun arises from the bedding of the Virgin to enlighten all those under the sun. Let us hasten with chaste eyes and pure deeds to meet Him." ¹⁾

Troparion, Tone 2

**Great are the accomplishments of faith.
For the Three Holy Youths rejoiced in the flames
As though at the waters of rest.
And the prophet Daniel appeared,
As a shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep. //
So by their prayers, O Christ God, save our souls.**

On December 18-19; Kontakion, Tone 6

**O thrice blessed Ones,
You did not worship the image made by man.
But armed with the invisible power of God,**

**You were glorified in a trial by fire.
From the midst of unbearable flames you called on God,
Crying: “Hasten, O compassionate One.
Speedily come to our defense, //
For You are merciful and able to accomplish everything that You will.”**

On December 20-24; Kontakion, Tone 1

**Be glad, O Bethlehem. Prepare yourself, O Ephrata.
The lamb is on her way to give birth to the Chief Shepherd
She carries in her womb.
The God-bearing forefathers beholding Him will rejoice, //
And with the shepherds, they will glorify the Virgin nursing Him.**

Epistle: Gal. 3:8-12; sel. 205. **Gospel:** Luke: 13:18-29; sel. 72.

The Sunday of the Holy Fathers falls on a date between December 18 and 24. (See Dec. 11.). The services are not identical on all these dates: It is different when this Sunday falls on December 18 and 19; and different when it falls on December 20, 21, 22, and 23, that is, the days of the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ; and it is different when it falls on a day, when it is the Forefeast and a major Saint is celebrated (Refer to the Typicon (Ustav) for December 21); and finally, it is different when it falls on the last day of the Forefeast, on December 24.

When the Sunday of the Holy Fathers happens to fall on this date, we sing fewer hymns for the Resurrection, than we do on the dates from December 20-23. At Great Vespers not all the appointed Resurrection Stichera are sung on “Lord, I call”, and in Matins the Canon; but we sing only the hymns for the Sunday of the Holy Fathers and the Forefeast. At Matins in the Canon we sing all the Irmoi for Great and Holy Saturday: “Of old Thou didst bury the pursuing tyrant beneath the waves of the sea.” (except instead of the Irmos for the Sixth Ode: “Jonah was caught but not held fast”, we sing: “Beholding the sea of life”) with special Troparia, two in each Ode. Concerning the singing the Canon of the Holy Fathers on December 24, the Typicon (Ustav) notes: “Because there are seven Troparia following the two for the Resurrection, the Canon of the Resurrection is not sung”. (Ustav for December 24).

Paramoia: 1) Gen 14:14-20. 2) Deut. 1:8-11, 15-17. 3) Deut. 10:14-21. **Matins Gospel** follows the Sunday order. **Epistle:** Heb. 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40; sel. 328. **Gospel:** Mt. 1:1-17; sel. 1.

¹). The Old Testament righteous men named in the church hymns are known as the Holy Forefathers, and in the hymns for the Sunday of the Holy Fathers the following names are not specifically mentioned (see page 453): Barak, Gideon, Deborah, Eleazar, Esther, Jael, Jephthah, Job, Joses, Judith, Nathan, Olda, Horus, Ruth, Sampson, Solomon and the Lesser Prophets. Of the names which are not mentioned in the hymns for the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, the only names mentioned in the hymns for the Sunday of the Holy Fathers are the names of the sons of Noah, *Japheth* and *Shem*.

*S.V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed. 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp.461-2.
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