

December 20

C. Forefeast of the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ

From the church hymns for this day: "Bethlehem prepare, Eden is opened for all, Make ready Ephratha", "listen, mountains and hills, and lands around Judea", "and the trees of the forest, rivers and seas and everything that breathes leap for joy": "for see, the Son and Word of God the Father comes to be born of a maiden who knows not man". "People, let us celebrate the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ, and let us turn our mind toward Bethlehem, let us raise up thoughts and with spiritual eyes gaze upon the Virgin, who goes into a cave to give birth to the Lord of all". "Let us cast away from us the sleep of idleness, and with wakefulness of soul let us prepare for Christ Who is brought to birth of a pure Maiden". "Rejecting all the defilement of passion, let us take up a prudent disposition worthy of the coming of Christ"; "let us be humbled in spirit, that by good deeds we may exalt Him who is being born".

Troparion, tone 4

**O Bethlehem prepare,
Eden is opened for all,
Make ready Ephratha:
Because the tree of life has flowered in the cave from the Virgin.
For Her womb is revealed a noetic paradise,
Which is the divine garden;
Eating from it we shall live; we shall not die as did Adam.
Christ is born
That He might restore the image which before had fallen.**

Kontakion, tone 3

**Today the Virgin comes to the cave
To unspeakably give birth to the Preeternal Word.
Hearing this, dance, O inhabited world!
And with angels and shepherds,
Glorify Him who willed to be made manifest a little Child, the Preeternal God.**

Refer to the Typicon (Ustav): If the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ falls on Saturday.

Refer to the Typicon (Ustav): At Compline for the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ, in the Three Ode Canon, at the Eighth Ode we sing: "Let us praise, bless", and we sing the Irmos of the 8th Ode, both choirs together, and a prostration. After "It is truly meet" and after "Our Father", we sing the Kontakion of the Forefeast: "Today the Virgin". From December 20

until January 14, until the Leavetaking of the Feast of Holy Theophany, we do not sing from the Octoechos, except on Sunday alone, when we sing the Resurrection service. We do not sing the Polyeleon, except for a major saint. In Matins there are verses after the two Kathismas. In Vespers we sing the ordinary Kathisma. We say the Sessional Hymns for the Forefeast and the Afterfeast. In Matins, at "God is the Lord", sing the Troparion of the Forefeast twice, "Glory:" the Troparion for the Saint, "Both now and ever" the Troparion for the Forefeast; and the usual Kathismas, and the Sessional Hymns of the Forefeast and readings. There are two Canons: one for the Forefeast, with 8 Irmosi in the First Tone, and one for the saints with 6 Irmosi in the same tone. From this day "we sing to the Lord" in song and do not read until the Leavetaking of the Feast of Holy Theophany.

Refer to the proper chapter in the Ustav and the Menaion: If the Sunday of the Holy Fathers falls within the Forefeast that is on December 20, 21, 22, or 23.

Refer to the Typicon: Concerning the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ it is necessary to know that the Forefeast begins on December 20. Although it is the Fast, there are no prostrations in church.

Holy Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer



As the "brightly shining lamp of the church", "the pillar of patience and the rule of courage and the confirmation of faith", he was the disciple of the Holy Apostle John the Theologian and the second (after St. Evodius) Bishop of Antioch. He ruled his own flock for 40 years, showing himself an example of a highly virtuous life. He was the first to establish antiphonal singing in the church. During the Dometian persecution, the holy shepherd "with the rudder of prayer and fasting, with indefatigableness in doctrine and zealousness of spirit, counteracted the turmoil in order that none would sink from lack of courage or inexperience", and from his side he expressed full readiness to accept the crown of martyrdom. This was his desire, and to his sincere joy it was soon fulfilled. During the reign of Trajan, St. Ignatius for his confession and propagation of the Christian faith was sent to Rome in fetters where for the entertainment of the people he was given to be torn apart by wild beasts in the Coliseum in the year 107. On the way to Rome, St. Ignatius wrote seven epistles. He was called God-bearer because in his childhood, according to tradition, he was taken into the hands of Jesus Christ Himself. But also because he became so used to feeding his heart with the memory of the sweet name of Jesus Christ, that this deep spiritual seal with sensitive images was stamped on this bodily organ and when, after his martyr's death, when his heart was cut asunder, the name of Jesus Christ was seen alphabetically represented in it. See Jan. 29.

Kontakion, tone 3

**The light-bearing day of your radiant ascetic struggles
Proclaims beforehand to all Him who was born of a Virgin;
For thirsting lovingly to delight in Him,
You hastened to be eaten by wild beasts:
For this you were called God-bearer, O All-wise Ignatius.**

Epistle: Heb. 4:14-16, 5:1-6; sel. 311. **Gospel:** Mk. 9:33-41; sel. 41.

St. Philogonius, Bishop of Antioch

Before becoming a bishop he was a lawyer in Antioch and through his own righteousness in court he did a lot of good for widows and orphans. After the death of his wife, he was elected bishop and, possessing a scientific education, he successfully defended Orthodoxy from the attacks of the Arians. During the persecution of Licinius, St. Philogonius was revealed as a confessor of Christ. He died in the year 324.

Neomartyr John

He was from the village Mariais on the island of Thasos. In adolescence, upon a false accusation of reviling the Mohammedan religion and his refusal to accept Islam, he was beheaded by the Turks in Constantinople in the year 1652.

Novodvorskii (New Palace) Icon of the All-holy Theotokos

This wonderworking icon was written by Metropolitan St. Peter during his residence in the Volyn region in the monastery founded by him on the natural boundary of the New Palace, on the Rati River. Now it is found in the Surazhitsky Monastery, Chernigov Diocese.

Novgorod Icon of the All-holy Theotokos

It was found in 1301 in Novgorod Seversk, Chernigov Diocese.

Repose of St. Daniel, Archbishop of Serbia

St. Daniel was born in Serbia, the son of rich and famous parents. Aspiring to asceticism, he accepted monasticism in the Konchulsk Monastery. From here he went to Mt. Athos where he became the Hegumen of the Hilandar Monastery. In 1325, Daniel was elected Archbishop of Serbia and most successfully deflected the attacks of the Pope of Rome. Serbia is obliged to St. Daniel for the construction of many churches and cultivation of vineyards. He died in 1338.

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 463-4
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