

December 23

Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ

From the church hymns for this day: "Today the church rejoices, sings and adorns herself. Truly she celebrates the Forefeast of the Nativity of the Savior." "Christ is drawing near, the Star already shines, the heavenly multitude of the host of spiritual powers bows down". "Shake the sleep of laziness from your eyes, all the faithful, be vigilant in prayer, shun the temptation of the evil one, and with the shepherds behold the glory of Christ who comes to be born". "Let us spurn the passions of the flesh and let us abandon the delights of the world. Let us hold fast to thoughts of the wisdom of God, and let us worthily offer ourselves by our good deeds to the newborn Master". "Faith instead of gold, love as with myrrh, like the action of incense, let us offer to the Creator, who came for us all".

Ten Holy Martyrs of Crete: Theodulus, Saturninus, Euporus, Gelasius, Eunician, Zoticus, Pompeius, Agathopus, Basilides, and Evaristus



They suffered for Christ during the persecution of Decius. These Holy martyrs came from different cities on the island of Crete, but with a single determination they confessed themselves Christians and have endured terrible tortures for their faith, after which they were beheaded by the sword. In the church hymns all these holy martyrs are called out by name and are hymned as "the ten called by God, and the ten-rayed lamp" and "unshakeable pillars". Their relics subsequently were transferred to Rome.

Kontakion, tone 4

**The noble struggle of the martyrs
Shines forth as the morning star,**

**Shedding brilliant light for us
On the One who was born in the cave //
To Whom the virgin gave birth without human seed.**

(Text tr.: Holy Myrrh-bearing Women Monastery)

Epistle: Ephesians 6:10-17; sel. 233. **Gospel:** Luke 21:12-19; sel. 106.

Venerable Paul, Bishop of Neo-Caesarea

For his glorious good deeds in life, he during the reign of the Emperor Licinius was revealed a confessor for Christ: he was branded on the arm with a heated iron and then he was banished to imprisonment on the Euphrates River. During the reign of Constantine the Great the Venerable Paul was present at the First Ecumenical Council. He died in the fourth century.

Venerable Niphon, Bishop of Cyprus

Born in Paphlagonia, he received a better education and in youth spent a rather dissolute life. Then, having understood his sinfulness, he repented, and accepted monasticism and so pleased the Lord with his ascetical struggles, that he was granted the ability of insight and of wonder working. For most of his life he was in a struggle with demons and always won over them with the help of God. "With penetrating eyes" the Venerable Niphon saw how souls are separated from bodies as the angels carried the righteous souls through the air, and as the forces of darkness detained them, finding in them various sins. He heard how the angels asked the guardian angel, whether they precisely committed those sins which their spiteful spirits accused them, and if the angel answered that they precisely committed these sins but that they were wiped out by tears of repentance. And then the angels uttered the following words, comforting for those who repented of their sins: "all those who repent of their sins with tears, through God's mercy, can receive a pardon, and those without penance will die being judged by God". The Venerable One also saw with what joy the evil demons in Hades attracted the embittered sinners who died without penance to Gehenna, and with what bitter tears the guardian angel poured out in regard to this. At an old age the Venerable Niphon arrived in Alexandria and there, through a special revelation, was elected bishop of Constantia, Cyprus. He "with much diligence" oversaw the flock of Christ and was "like a true father to the orphans and widows, an infirm benefactor and unmercenary physician, and

performed various miracles". After a short pastorate, St. Niphon peacefully died in fourth century.

Venerable Niphon, monk

He was a monk from his youth, and he so succeeded in good deeds, that he received from the Lord the gift of insight. The date of his ascetical struggles is not exactly known.

St. Nahum, Enlightener of Bulgaria (see June 20).

Repose of St Theoctistus, Archbishop of Novgorod

St. Theoctistus became the archbishop of Novgorod from being the rector of the Novgorod Annunciation Monastery and after eight years of managing his episcopate, during which he built two temples in Novgorod, he again left for the quiet life in the Annunciation Monastery (in 1786 he was returned to a parish church). He died in 1310. His relics now repose in the St. George Monastery; where they have become glorified by miraculous healings.

St. David of Dvin

Having a Persian father and an Armenian mother, he suffered for converting to Christ in the year 693 and was buried in the city of Etschmiadzin.

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp., (Kharkov, 1900) p 0467
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