

December 24

F. Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ

From the church hymns of this day: "Behold the time of our salvation approaches, O Cave, prepare; the Virgin draws near to give birth". "Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, who of the Holy Spirit has borne Life to the world for the deliverance of all"; "the choir of angels honors you with hymns, O radiant Mother who has not known wedlock, and rejoicing it dances at your birth giving, O All Pure One; rejoice, Hope of the Orthodox, rejoice, Advocate of those who sing to you". "The Lord now draws nigh and comes, the expectation of the nations and the salvation of the world: O City of Bethlehem, prepare the cave, and you shepherds with the magi make haste". "He comes to shine the light without evening on those who before were in darkness and peril". "Rejoice all the earth, behold, Christ draws nigh being born in Bethlehem: O sea, be glad, O assembly of prophets, dance for joy, seeing today the realization of your words, and all you righteous, rejoice!" "Christ in strange wise comes to His own; let us become strangers to sin, and let us receive Him who dwells in the souls of the meek".

Troparion, tone 4

**Mary once with aged Joseph,
Went to be registered in Bethlehem,
For they were of the seed of David,
And she was bearing in her womb the seedless offspring.
The time of the birth was at hand,
And there was no room at the inn,
But the cave showed itself a beautiful palace for the Queen.
Christ is born, that He may raise up the image that fell of old.**

*Holy Ven. Martyress Eugenia (and with her Protus, Hyacinth and Claudia,
who suffered for Christ in Rome during the reign of Emperor Gallienus about the
year 262*



The Roman maiden Eugenia was the daughter of the Alexandrian eparch Philip, protector of Christians "completed for the sake of their way of life and a philosophy". She "was very sharp and diligent in learning, comfortably understanding everything, and whatever she heard or read once, that she remembers well, as if written on copper sheets, having it in her heart". Possessing

beauty, Eugenia at the same time was distinguished "by chaste thoughts and virginal purity".

One of the most famous and well-born young men strenuously sought her hand, but she answered the proposal of her parents concerning marriage with him: "It is better for a man to be moral than it is for him to be noble, for it is to live with him, but not born of him". Other "bright young men born in glory and wealth" also sought the hand of Eugenia, but she, "loving chastity, fled from marriage", refused all, having decided "to remain in chaste virginity" forever. Casually having read through the book of the Epistles of the Holy Apostle Paul once, the wise virgin learned from them the true teaching of Christ.

Later she secretly left with two servants, Protus and Hyacinth, from her parent's home to one of the monasteries, where she changed into men's clothing, and asked the former Bishop Helenus of this monastery to enlighten them with Holy Baptism. In a wonderful vision it was revealed to the bishop, that the maiden Eugenia, and he "knowing that she willingly was to prevail in the likeness of a man, inasmuch as none knows this secret", and baptized all three of them and tonsured them into monasticism.

The parents of Eugenia, not looking with all diligence, could not open the residence of their daughter. They "with inconsolable grief" cried for her day and night, "often calling out her name and powdering their heads with ashes, falling to the ground from exhaustion and sickness of heart".

Meanwhile St. Eugenia living in a monastery succeeded in her monastic efforts. "For her words were humble, loving, meek and few, full of the awe of God and His advantage". She arrived in church before everyone and left after everyone else left. Everything she did she did humbly "in building: she comforted the afflicted, rejoiced with the rejoicing, flying into a rage with anger she subdued one with a word, proud of the paradigm of her humble way of life". For such a holy life the Lord granted her the gift of healing. Sts. Protus and Hyacinth, imitating their former lady, also succeeded in a virtuous life.

After three years passed the abbot of the monastery died. Under the unanimous and persistent request of the brethren and obeying her "commitment to Christ", St. Eugenia felt compelled to take upon herself the rule over the monastery. She was a high example for the monks, "continually laboring for all the brethren, carrying water, cutting fire wood, cleaning all the cells and serving all with much diligence", unfailingly attending all church services and herself living in the gatekeeper cell.

Subsequently St. Eugenia, being slandered for an infringement of chastity, resulted her being in court before her father and here she revealed the secret of her flight, after which both her father and her mother Claudia converted to Christ. Later her father became a bishop and died as a martyr.

After the death of her father St. Eugenia together with her mother and servants moved to Rome and here again converted many notable maidens to Christ and convinced them to always remain virgins.

During the persecution of Emperor Gallienus, St. Eugenia together with Protus and Hyacinth were beheaded by the sword for their faith in Christ. St. Claudia and the noble maiden Basilla, who believed in Christ, received the same crown of martyrdom. All their relics repose in Rome. In the church service dedicated to Martyr Eugenia, the Martyr Basilla is also mentioned, but the names of other martyrs are not.

Refer to the chapter in the Typicon (Ustav) and Menaion: If December 24th falls on the Sunday before the Nativity of Christ.

Ven. Monk Nicholas

He was born a Slav and served as regiment commander during the reign of Emperor Nicephorus. Wonderfully rescued in the war against the Bulgarians in 811, Nicholas accepted monasticism and so pleased the Lord with exploits that he was granted the gift of insight. He died in the Ninth Century.

Ven. Antiochus

He was born near Ancyra, Galatia (in Asia Minor) and practiced asceticism as a monk in the Monastery of St. Sabbas in Palestine. He witnessed the destruction and devastation of Jerusalem and the Palestinian monasteries by the Persians and Saracens (about the year 614). He died about the year 635. He left a remarkable edifying composition called the "Pandect".

Ven. Aphrodisius, disciple of the Ven. Sabbas the Sanctified, died in the Sixth Century.

Martyr Ahmed Kalphas (i.e. architect)

He was born a Turk, but after wonderful visions converted to Christianity and for this he received a martyr's death by his fellow tribesmen in Constantinople in the year 1582.

*S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 468-9
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Eve of the Nativity of Christ

The eve precedes the feast of the Nativity of Christ, as well as that of His Baptism, witnessing to the special importance of following the celebration. Since ancient times the Orthodox Church performed the Royal Hours on the Eve (see about them in Section II). The Royal Hours begin and are done before the open Royal Doors. In the center of the temple the gospel is previously placed on the Analogion, meaning that now the Savior will not be hidden any more in the darkness of a cave, but will radiate to all nations. There is a censuring before the reading of the gospels in each hour. This censuring will recall the frankincense with myrrh brought from the east by the Magi for the newborn King of the Jews. In the First, Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours the holy church will recall the prophecies and events relating the Nativity of the Savior in the flesh to the newly born King of the Jews, a descendant of David. With the reading of the prophecy the holy church connects in the Hours the words of the Apostle Paul and the Evangelists witnessing their fulfillment of the prophecies ¹). The sacred readings are accompanied with solemn hymns with explanatory readings.

It is usual to serve on the eve before the feast of the Nativity of Christ, an undoubtedly ancient practice. By intention of the Holy Church the eve of the Nativity of Christ is a day of extra preparation for worthily meeting the feast of the Nativity of Christ. "Come, O faithful," the Holy Church appeals in the hymns of this day, "inspired by God let us arise, and behold the divine condescension from on high, that is made manifest to us in Bethlehem and cleansing our minds let us offer virtues in our way of life"; "come, let us quickly hasten to Bethlehem for the worship of the Magi, bearing the fruits of our most respectable deeds as gifts ²). For an even worthier preparation for meeting the Great Feast, the Holy Church on this day, called the *sochelnik* [*eve of both the Nativity and the Theophany of Christ*], strengthens the prior 40-day fast and on the day of the eve prescribes the strictest fasting ³). Forbidding the taste of fish, the Holy Church prescribes the eating of "koliva with honey" only in the evening after the end of the service that recalls the ancient custom, when announced, that those intending to be baptized on the feast of the Nativity of Christ are prepared for the Sacrament by fasting and after the baptism partook of honey, a symbol of sweet spiritual gifts. ⁴).

In the morning (at 8 o'clock) on the Eve the Royal Hours are served. After midday (at 1:00 after noon), the liturgy of St. Basil the Great is served, only if the Eve does not fall on Saturday or Sunday, when the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is served at the usual time, and the liturgy of St. Basil the Great is done on the feast. The Royal Hours in that case are already transferred to the preceding Friday, according to what is written about them: "the choir of holy angels", the Symbol of faith is read and at the end of Hours are Psalm 33 "I will bless the Lord", "It is truly meet" and the Dismissal. At Vespers after reading the Paramoia ⁵), there is a Little Litany and its

exclamation: "For holy art Thou, O our God". If we continue on to the Vesper Liturgy, "O Lord, save the pious" is exclaimed, we sing the "Trisagion", the Epistle and the Gospel is read and continues with "the rest of the order of the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great". If the Vespers is served separately from the liturgy, (i.e. when the Eve falls on Saturday or Sunday) the "Trisagion" is not sung after it for the reason that after a Vespers the Liturgy does not follow any more as in the similar case and explanation in the Ustav (Typicon) for January 6: "We do not sing the Trisagion, because the Divine Liturgy is not served". The same reason will apply to the "O Lord, save the pious". On a broader scale the service on the Eve of Christmas (with the exception of the Theophany blessing of waters) is done according to the same pattern as on the Baptism of Christ (as in antiquity the Nativity of Christ as we shall see below was celebrated together with His Baptism). That is why it is said (see page 13) in relation to the eve of the Baptism of the Lord the serving of the Royal Hours, Vespers, and Liturgy have the same meaning in relation to the eve of the Nativity of Christ (in the same place see about lentils and the explanation of the Ustav: "there is no fast"). On the eve if it falls on Saturday or Sunday, after the dismissal of Vespers, but if the eve will be on other days of the week, then after the dismissal of the liturgy, a large candle is placed in the center of the church; the clergy, both choirs standing together, sing the Troparion: "Thy Nativity, O Christ our God", then "Glory, Both now and ever" and the Kontakion: "Today the Virgin". "And we enter the refectory, and we eat food cooked with oil and we do not eat fish; we drink wine, thanking God". If the Eve falls on Saturday or Sunday then "we enter the refectory, and we eat fully (that is we satisfy our hunger); we do not eat fish, but with the sap of a tree, drawn out and boiled, or kutiya with honey; we drink wine in the glory of God; in poor countries we drink beer".

Royal Hours: First Hour) **Paramoia:** Mic. 5:2-4. **Epistle:** Heb. 1:1-12; sel. 303. **Gospel:** Mt. 1:18-25; sel. 2. Third Hour) **Paramoia:** Baruch 3:36-38, 4:1-4. **Epistle:** Gal. 3:23-29; sel. 208. **Gospel:** Lk. 2:1-20; sel. 5. Sixth Hour) **Paramoia:** Is. 7:10-16, 8:1-4, 8-10. **Epistle:** Heb. 1:10-14, 2:1-3; sel. 304. **Gospel:** Mt. 2:1-12; sel. 3. Ninth Hour) **Paramoia:** Is. 9:6-7. **Epistle:** Heb. 2:11-18; sel. 306. **Gospel:** Mt. 2:13-23; sel. 4.

Vespers: **Paramoia** 1) Gen. 1:1-13. 2) Num. 24:2-3, 5-9, 17-18. 3) Mic. 4:6-7, 5:2-4. 4) Is. 11:2-10. 5) Bar. 3:36-38. 6) Dan. 2:35-36, 44-45. 7) Ex. 9:6-8. 8) Ex. 7:10-16, 8:1-4, 8-10. *Liturgy:* **Epistle:** Heb. 1:1-12; sel. 303. **Gospel:** Lk. 2:1-20; sel. 5. **If the Vespers is served separately from the liturgy (on Saturday or Sunday):** **Epistle:** Gal. 3:15-22; sel. 207. **Gospel:** Mt. 13:31-36; sel. 53.

1) **In the First Hour:** Psalms 44 and 45 prophesies about the Divinity and eternal kingdom of the Savior, Who "is beautiful with goodness beyond the sons of men", Who is the strength and eternal King of truth, the Lord, and that "the Lord of Powers is with us, our Helper is the God of Jacob". The Paramoia of First Hour contains the prophecy of Micah about Bethlehem, as the birthplace of the eternal King of truth and peace. The Epistle reading speaks of the incomparable majesty and superiority of the Son of God before the Angels. The Gospel pericope narrates the conception and birth of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.

In the Third Hour: Psalms 66 and 86 contains David's prophetic song about the coming salvation of all the nations in serving the true God and of the future glory of Zion. In the Paramoia Prophet Jeremiah (see Sept. 28) prophesied that the Savior is "our God", Who "appeared on earth and lived among men". The Epistle reading announces our adoption by God "through faith in Jesus Christ". The Gospel pericope announces the good news about Joseph and Mary's travel for the purpose of the national census from Nazareth to Bethlehem and here about the pre-natural birth of the Savior.

In the Sixth Hour: Psalms 71 and 131 contain prophesies of the offering of gifts and the adoration of peoples of the Savior as if He were God. In the Paramoia Isaiah proclaims the prophecy of the Immaculate Virgin, the Mother of Emmanuel. The Epistle reading glorifies the divine eternal glory of the Savior as the Son of God. The Gospel pericope announces the good news of the worship of the newly born King of the Jews by the Magi.

In the Ninth Hour: Psalms 109, 110 and 85 David proclaims the prophecy of the Divinity, eternal priesthood and kingdom of Jesus Christ. In the Paramoia Isaiah also proclaims the prophecy of the Divinity, an everlasting kingdom both prophetic and priestly serving the Savior. The Epistle reading is about the true incarnation of the Savior. The Gospel pericope speaks about the exodus to Egypt and the return to Nazareth of Joseph and the Virgin Mary with Jesus Christ.

2) "Meeting the day of the Nativity of our Lord," teaches St. Ambrose of Milan, "let us cleanse ourselves, brethren, from any filth of sins, let us fill our treasury with His various gifts so that on that holy day we would comfort travelers, ease the grief of widows, and clothe the poor". "Let us hasten to be versed in the faith, vested in mercy and well-equipped in the paradigm of our life in the sight of the Lord. Whoever among us more sincerely loves Christ; let us more brightly adorn ourselves in the observance of His commandments so that He may see that we truly believe in Him, appearing in such magnificence during His celebration and that the higher the rejoicing the more that spiritual purity would ripen in us. Beforehand let us chasten our hearts, let us clear our conscience, let us consecrate our spirit, and in purity and uprightness let us meet the coming All-holy Lord so that we may celebrate the birth of the One who was born from the Immaculate Virgin as His undefiled servants. Whoever will be revealed on this day as unclean and profaned, that person does not honor the Nativity of Christ; that although the body is present at the celebration of the Lord, his spirit is far from the Savior.

Where the profane cannot have dialogue with the Holy, the stingy with the Merciful One, and the corrupted one with the Virgin and if he who is unworthy enters such a dialogue then he causes more reviling because he does not know this himself. Wishing to seem earnest, he is actually impudent like that person mentioned in the gospels, who, being invited to a wedding banquet dared to enter the holy assembly, not having put on wedding garments".

3) The Metropolitan of Moscow Philaret stated the following reasons of the extra fast on the Eve of the Nativity of Christ: The pattern of the fast before the Nativity of Christ is similar to the fast before Pascha. The pattern of the Evening (sochel'nik) of the Nativity is that of Great Saturday. The extended fast of Great Saturday together with Great Friday, is the exact fulfillment of the words of the Lord: "When the bridegroom (that is matrimonial sons) is taken away from them, then they will fast in that day" (Mk. 2:20). Besides the extended fast on the Forefeast days it is useful to enter the spiritual celebration of the feast in the soaring of the spirit, instead of the burden of the flesh. As to this last reason, the day before the Nativity of Christ is composed the same as the day of Great Saturday, especially by the way, that on both days, in ancient times, many were baptized, and for them diligent prayer and fasting of the general Church was necessary for their good deeds and that the worship service of the Sacrament of Baptism so filled up the days, that the time of acceptance of food therefore was necessary in the evening. Our ancestors in order to continue the fast of Christmas Eve and when the worship service ended early enough, having piously remembered the star as the announcement of the nativity of Christ, declared this canon: One does not eat until the appearance of the stars. (Collection of Opinions and Responses of Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow Vol. 7, page 136).

4) Among the Russian people from of old there is a pious custom on Nativity Eve of fasting until late in the evening, up to the appearance of stars, when they begin the Nativity meal. In Great Russia this evening meal agrees with the Typicon (Ustav) of the holy church and usually has a modest character.

But in Little Russia it is accepted to be treated abundantly on this evening, and out of this abundant treatment the meal, ordinarily, is called a rich kutiya on Christmas Eve in Little Russia. Besides the kutiya (boiled wheat in honey or rice sugar or other grains), there is also as a necessary addition to this meal "stewed fruit" (decoction), i.e. dried plums, pears, cherries, apples and other fruits, boiled together in water. Before the beginning of the meal little lamps (lampadki) and wax candles are lit, prayers are said, the table is covered with hay or straw, and then the whole family begins to eat abundantly. In the opinion of some, the eating of the appointed dishes means to express symbolically the birth (the decoction is usually cooked in regard to the birth of a child) and the death of the Savior (the kutiya is cooked for a funeral); the straw and hay means to remind one of the birthplace of the Savior and the manger into which he was put after His birth. After the evening meal godchildren go to their godfathers and godmothers, congratulate

them on the feast, bring them kutiya, pies and then they receive a meal and money in addition. If for some reason or other the godmother or godfather is not present in the village the godchildren visit their relatives with congratulations. In the evening they go caroling.

In antiquity on Christmas Eve our ancestors were used to festive pagan carols, about which the Council of the Hundred Chapters thus says: "On the Eve of the Nativity of Christ men and women and maidens gather for nocturnal splashing games and licentious conversation, both in demonic songs and in dancing and skipping, and in impious deeds". In the opinion of some, the pagan celebrations of carols led to the beginning and contemporary custom of caroling, which in some places of Russia occurs during all the holy days. Originally having close ties with a pagan feast "with impious deeds", caroling with the passage of time little by little lost its pagan character; and when the memory of carols for the pagan feast was lost among the people, the people warbling songs in honor of the feast fell into disuse, and were replaced by new carols composed in strictly Christian spirit.

In the southwest, during the time of the Latin-Polish rule, defenders of Orthodoxy attached especial significance to the Christmas spiritual songs, and the order of caroling was found in the establishment of church brotherhoods, but the proceeds from this singing went into the brotherhood treasury. This contributed to the establishment and the wide circulation of the custom of caroling. It is still fresh in the memory, when students of our spiritually-educational institutions, the future server of the Church himself had hand-written collections of Christmas spiritual songs (from the so called "Bogoglasnik (Divine Hymnal)") and sang these songs on the feast of the Nativity of Christ.

In the present time, where the custom of caroling continues to exist, it in most cases has lost its religious-churchly character and has become quite indecent and offensive for Christian feelings. Following the songs of a religious character it is possible to hear droll puns and indecent secular songs. It is easy to see filthy scenes and pictures. It is easy to hear ugly shouts and din that even the very songs glorifying the Nativity of Christ developed into many gritty distortions.

In other places during Christmas-tide the custom of visiting houses with a star and a cave has come into being. The star is made out of leather, pasted over with yellow and oily paper. On one side is represented the Divine Child, and the other side is with the adoration of the shepherds or the magi before Him. The whole circle of the star is bordered with a fringe of yellow paper and led around with cut out pieces of paper similar to rays of light. The star is usually brought in the house and they sing various verses in honor of the Nativity of Christ. This cave is something like a movable puppet theater whose purpose serves to represent the story of the Nativity of Christ, the adoration of the shepherds and the magi and the killing of the Bethlehem children. But, usually, there is a lot of mixture of the biblical with the vulgar in these representations. On the stage suddenly from here and there terrible snakes will fly, hissing and coiled, personifying the flight into

Egypt of the Mother of God with the Baby Jesus and Joseph the Betrothed. Alongside a dancing bear acts out the killing of the babies by Herod, etc.

It is understood by everyone that the pastor of the Church in whose parish the custom of caroling exists in this or that form should improve the practice, so to say, that this custom actually serves the glorification of Christ and becomes the decent custom of choral congratulations on the Christian feast. The pastor should forbid and remove from use all that is indecent for the Christian feast and offends the holiness of the feast. He must encourage the carolers, that they behave decently and that they themselves do not fall into coarse buffoonery and filthy cynicism. It is necessary to convince them of bringing gifts for the use of the needy, for the adornment of the temple and for its present needs, but not for empty entertainment and revelry. It is necessary to prohibit the singing of secular songs, and also to allow the chanting of spiritual songs only if they sing them correctly, without any abnormal distortions of these songs.

By the way, the "Kholm Orthodox Brotherhood" (in 1882) collected these devout songs, living on the lips of the South Russians in the Kholmite, Galician and Lithuanian countries, and printed them with an index of the melodic pattern (napev) of the music, and in the main place in this edition were the songs for the Nativity of Christ, such as they were in the ancient "Bogoglasnik (Divine Hymnal)". There are collections and individual zealous men for this effort in which there also are songs for Christmas: "Spiritual hymns" by Fr. Chrysanthus Sakovich and the "Widow's Mite" by the founder of the Altai mission, Archimandrite Macarius (Tserkovnyia Vedomosti [Church News] 1895, 42).

5) Eight Paramoea are read at Vespers. The first tells about the creation of the world and with that inspires us that the newborn King of the Jews Jesus Christ is That One, "in Whom is all that will become".

The second one proclaims the prophecy of Balaam of the glory and might of the kingdom of Christ.

The third one contains the prophecy of Micah, that Christ "will reign on Mount Zion, from henceforth, even for ever, will come from Bethlehem to be the ruler in Israel, whose going forth is from the beginning, from everlasting".

After these Paramoea the Royal Doors will be opened and the reader exclaims the Troparion: "Thou was secretly born in a cave, but heaven proclaimed Thee, as if speaking through a star, O Savior, and it brought to Thee Magi, who worshipped Thee with faith: have mercy upon them and us". Then the reader proclaims special verses from Holy Scripture, but the singers sing the ending words of the Troparion ("and brought to Thee Magi... ". After the exclamation by the reader: "Both now and ever", and singing of the end of the Troparion by the singers "the Reader recites the entire Troparion, and he himself sings its ending".

The fourth Paramoea proclaims the words of the Prophet Isaiah about the fertile world in the kingdom of Christ, in which "the wolf shall graze together with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid".

The fifth one is the same as that in the Third Hour.

The sixth one contains the prophetic vision of Daniel about the kingdom of Christ which "shall never be destroyed".

After these six Paramoia the reader (in front of the open Royal Doors) exclaims the Troparion "Thou hast shone forth from a Virgin, O Christ, Thou noetic Sun of Righteousness, and a star shows Thee contained in a cave, O Uncontainable One. Thou hast led the Magi to worship Thee, and joining them we magnify Thee: O Life-giver, glory to thee". Then he proclaims the special verses from Holy Scripture following the same order as after the third Paramoia and then sings the final words of the Troparion ("and brought to Thee Magi...").

The seventh Paramoia is the same as that in the Ninth Hour, and the eighth one is the same as that in the Sixth Hour.

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 469-72.
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