

Date: December 31, 2020

Subject: Sunday of the Fathers

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We bid a most desired farewell to 2020!

MATTHEW 1: 1-25

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon: And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud;

And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

This Gospel is read annually on the Sunday that precedes the Nativity of our Savior. Each year when we hear this Gospel being read, we groan as we listen to the priest or deacon struggling through a long list of names that nobody except a biblical scholar is able to pronounce. We wonder why are we subjected to such a boring text with only the last seven verses out of the overall twenty-five giving us “relevant information”. But if we consult an Orthodox commentary, we learn that acquainting ourselves with the

lives of Christ's ancestors provides us with very important and interesting facts about our Orthodox faith. Let us look at two of these.

VENERATION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, THE VIRGIN MARY:

The Orthodox Church greatly reveres and loves the Savior's mother. But many people do not and even find this veneration to be a major stumbling block to accepting the Orthodox Faith.

The truth that She gave birth as a virgin is rejected by non-Christians as something impossible to believe. But we have scriptural confirmation of this miracle that should remove any doubt. *Behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

The righteous Joseph was initially scandalized, thinking that his newly betrothed was guilty of adultery. He knew that if she would be accused publicly, she would be punished with death by stoning, according to the law of Moses. Therefore, he wanted to secretly send her away from his house. It took this revelation by the angel of God to convince him of her innocence. This incredible miracle did in fact happen, making the Mother of God someone most precious to us.

There are also non-Orthodox Christian believers who reject venerating Her. They suggest that She does not warrant veneration, since she was a normal person who had other children with Joseph after giving birth to the Savior. Their belief means that She, after giving a vow of virginity as a child living in the Temple and after giving birth to the Savior of the world, was capable of breaking Her vow and returning to a normal existence. They believe this despite the fact that there is no evidence to back up their belief in either Divine Scripture or Divine Revelation. Sadly, blasphemous belief prevents them from accepting Orthodoxy and converting to the true Faith.

One only needs to examine the role that the Mother of God played and will continue to play in the history of the Church until the end of the world. She is the most-pure Mother of all humanity. She was given this responsibility by her Son as He hung on the cross. The innumerable miracles done by the Virgin Mary throughout history are undeniable evidence that the Orthodox veneration is absolutely and without doubt warranted.

THE SAVIOR'S GREAT MERCY:

The Savior repeatedly stated that He came to save sinners. He stressed that His mission included all people, and rejected no-one. That does not mean that all people will be saved. Those that will be turned away, will be turned away not because Jesus rejected them but only because they rejected Jesus' mercy through the way that they insisted on living.

Two of the women listed in this genealogy were great sinners. There is nothing in Scripture to suggest that they even repented for their serious misdeeds. Tamar wanted to be included in the Savior's lineage. After her husband died without having children, she took off her widow's garb and disguised herself as a harlot. She seduced her father-in-law and through this union conceived twins, one of whom, through his father, became a direct ancestor of the Savior. Rachab was a prostitute by profession, but she greatly aided the Hebrew nation by hiding Hebrew scouts, which enabled Joshua to conquer the city of Jericho in the Hebrew quest to conquer the Promised Land.

We also have men in the Savior's line who committed serious sins. King David was an adulterer and guilty of murder. *David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias.* Urias was the man

whose death was arranged by the king. The child of the king's union with *the wife of Urias* was none other than King Solomon, a great womanizer who had many wives and concubines, built pagan temples for them, and prayed in these temples with them.

Despite committing great sins, these people are included in the Savior's line as an encouragement to us. It should remove from our minds and hearts any doubts that we may have in the great mercy that the Savior offers to us. His mission was to offer salvation to absolutely all people, no matter how sinful they may be. He calls out to us. If we accept His call, He will strengthen us with His Grace and will work with us for our correction. We will be rejected only if we refuse His call and remain steadfast in our sinful way of life.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, these are only two examples of the benefit that we can obtain from this Gospel passage. And once again, it shows us how important it is to not only read Scriptural texts, but to always read them together with Orthodox scriptural commentary. Therefore, let us devote much time in the new year to the thorough study of the Bible. This will greatly enrich us spiritually, and even more importantly, provide us with a map that we can follow all the way into the Kingdom of God. I greet all of you with the the upcoming holiday of our Savior's birth and wish all of you a most healthy and happy 2021.

With much love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar