

down any joy whatsoever, surrounding the feast with forgetfulness, so that it can be forgotten together with so many other feasts...

The Church insists giving to the feast of Christmas the spiritual dimension which befits it, just as with this feast we intensely hear the invitation: "Christ [comes] from heaven, respond. Christ [is] upon the earth, be ye elevated"! The perspective of heaven is verified. The domination of the earth ceases. All those, who through various diverse historical happenstances, kept the flame of faith in the heavenly homeland unquenched which the Creator God has prepared, in order to restore us eternally, are justified.

Brethren, always but especially today our Church projects the expectation of the heavenly homeland, as a way of life and the guarantee of genuine faith. Let us not allow the forms of the present world trap us, but as passersby and sojourners let us precede on this earth, realizing that the way we will handle the time of our life here, the priorities which will characterize it, but also the choices we will make, are the criteria for the rendering of citizenship in the Kingdom of the Heavens.

Archimandrite I. N

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2015 SUNDAY BEFORE NATIVITY, Forefeast of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Ignatius the God-Bearer, Bishop of Antioch, Our Righteous Father Philogonius, Bishop of Antioch, Holy Father John of Kronstadt, John the New Martyr of Thassos.

TONE OF THE WEEK: Fourth Tone

EOTHINON Seventh Eothinon

EPISTLE St. Paul's Letter to Hebrews 11:9-10; 32-40

GOSPEL Matthew 1:1-25

NEXT SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2015 SUNDAY AFTER NATIVITY, Stephen, Archdeacon & First Martyr, Theodore the Confessor, Brothers Theophanes and Poietus, Afterfeast of the Nativity, Theodore, Patriarch of Constantinople

EPISTLE: Acts of the Apostles 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60

GOSPEL: Matthew 2:13-23



63RD YEAR DECEMBER 20, 2015 PAMPHLET # 51 (3264)

THE HEAVENLY HOMELAND

Today's Sunday which precedes Christmas, is full of names. Both in the Epistle, especially however, in the Gospel Reading, a multitude of names of people are presented who preceded the Lord Jesus and despite the variety of the journey of each one's life, they are characterized by the common component of expectation of the Savior and Deliverer and Benefactor of humanity. And this expectation of everyone, had a common ground on which faith was being developed!

So for this reason, and with this word "faith" today's Epistle Reading sets out, proclaiming that which should prevail in our journey toward Christmas. And this because without faith you don't meet Christ, you don't celebrate Christmas! The devil's battle is crafty and his plotting is refined, in every feast of our Church, especially however at Christmas, when a myriad of many other things are promoted, not however, the feast and its spiritual content. Thus, prevailing is the business stigma of the days, the consuming perspective, the methodical cultivation of emotions, anything whatsoever that can make us "spend the feasts beautifully", without reference to the dawning sun of righteousness and the world-saving dimension of his coming.

St. Paul's Letter to Hebrews 11:9-10; 32-40

Prokeimenon. Grave Mode

Daniel 3.26,27

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers.

Verse: For you are just in all you have done

BRETHREN, by faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundation, whose builder and maker is God.

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets - who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The faith of Abraham

Why does the Epistle Reading begin with a reference to the faith of Abraham? In order to show not so much, the content of faith, what he believed, but the quality of his faith, how he believed! And

Abraham, in the way he believed, is a unique example for our age. How did Abraham believe? He believed in a self sacrificing way and for this reason with his whole soul, completely. Proof, is the way of his life. And in an age during which the wider family played the primary role for the individual's safety and the survival, Abraham obeying God, went out of his homeland's boundaries and the guarantee of his clan "not knowing where he is coming", without knowing where God is leading him! It sufficed for him that He was going before him.

"He awaited..."

Why does Abraham feel and behave that way? Because he realized that "the land of promise" is not defined by time and place! As "land of promise" Abraham understood the place from where the foolishness of Adam exiled us to. So for this reason also, Paul stresses that Abraham awaited the city having the foundations, whose craftsmen and creator is God". Abraham lived in the perspective of the heavenly homeland, the true city of God, that which had unshakable foundations, not with static conditions of engineering and architecture, but with divine conditions, as a genuine construction of the Almighty God. In other words, in that city whose existence does not depend on corrupt and altering things, such as wealth or power, but is based unshakably on the eternal God!

Abraham would not settle for the earthly and temporal things, when he could claim the heavenly and the eternal ones. So for this reason also, the specific manner of faith is projected by our Holy Church today, in order for us to understand the real perspective of the coming feast. We cannot celebrate Christmas settling for the secular, inner worldly perspective of the celebration. We treat Christmas unjustly when we celebrate it in this way, basing the whatsoever joy on the feast's Christmas lights, which just as they are taken down after the end, they will also take