



72<sup>nd</sup> Year

December 29, 2024

Pamphlet #52 (3735)

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## **THE SUNDAY GOSPEL (Matthew 2:13-23)**

### **The first persecution of Christ**

*When the wise men departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more." But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaos reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene."*

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## **PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM**

In the Gospel passage, which is read after the Lord's great Feast of Christmas, the Evangelist Matthew mentions that an Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and ordered him to take the newly born infant and His mother and to depart for Egypt, because Herod aims to seek Christ to murder Him.

Initially, we must say that the "polemical" disposition against Christ and the Church is not a new phenomenon. It always existed. Essentially, the Orthodox ethos is a crucifactory ethos. And it is truly impossible for us through our logic alone to express the wealth of the crucifactory path sent to us by God. The fact of this persecution, which is repeated throughout the history of the world, poses before us a question that often needs a categorical solution. How does someone react to the persecutions of this world? The saints and martyrs of the Church give the answer.

### **The revolution of consciences**

The people of God are not stoic and apathetic, nor necessarily voluntary fighters. They are usually humble personalities, who instead of becoming harder, or revolting against the time of the trial, abandon themselves to Christ with an unlimited trust. Christ then frees them from the pain and fills them with joy.

There also exists, however, another view of martyrdom. The persecution of the saints and the Christians places them in the front line, among those who become objects of abuse and oppression, and makes them have solidarity with each other. In this manner, Christian martyrdom takes on a particular importance in the great history of the struggle for man's rights, for respecting the person and the society of persons. Faith in Christ unto death necessarily goes through faith in the personal

conscience. Man is par excellence an image of God, he has heavenly roots, he is incomparably greater than the world and history, and for this reason, he is unchanging. When they kill him, he blesses his executioners, he addresses their conscience. He rejects violence in order to call upon the only revolution: the revolution of consciences. The protomartyr Steven reveals this to us also.

His non-submission in the name of conscience and faith, in the name of the highest personal freedom, proves that authority finds its boundaries in the mystery of the person. The teaching of the persecution is that God is man's freedom. The person is not of this world, and for this reason, he is able to change it. The Church's presence and witness free the world from fate, in order to give it a recourse to the powers and the fruits of the Spirit.

### **Witness of faith today**

This is the great message of those who are persecuted in the name of Christ by the "Herods" of each age.

Today, when the so-called New Age, within the era of globalization, is expressed as an authoritative presence, the testimony of our conscience takes on enormous dimensions that touch our present and our future, humanity and our civilization, our ethos and creativity, our witness and our presence as Orthodox Christians in the contemporary world. We Christians, rejecting every authority, are called to become bearers of the whole fulness of God, poor and free servants of Christ who establishes the freedom of the person.

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† F. A.

December 29, 2024: Sunday After the Nativity of Christ

Joseph the Betrothed; David the Prophet-King; James the Brother of God; the Holy Infants Slaughtered by Herod; Venerable Markellos; George of Nicomedia, Poet of the Canons.

2nd Tone – Eothinon: 5 – Epistle: Galatians 1:11-19 –  
Gospel: Matthew 2:13-23

NEXT SUNDAY: January 5, Sunday Before the Theophany  
Epistle: 2 Timothy 4:5-8 – Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

The Apostolic ministry wishes all the beloved readers of the Voice of the Lord Pamphlet a good and holy Twelve Days and a new year of 2025 blessed by the Savior Christ

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