

*From the Divine Office for the Sunday Before the Nativity*

*O cave of Bethlehem, prepare yourself to receive the Mother who bears Christ within her womb. O manger, receive the Word who destroys the sins of mankind. O shepherds, keep watch and then bear witness to the awesome wonder. O Magi, come from Persia and bring your gifts to the King. For the Lord has appeared from a Virgin Mother; yet she bowed to Him as a servant and spoke to Him within her heart, saying: "How were You conceived in me? How did You grow in me, my God and my Savior?" (Vespers)*

*O Virgin, contemplating the bright splendor of your conception, Abraham, the friend of God, together with Isaac, and Jacob, rejoices with the choir of chosen holy ones. They led the creation to encounter you in these times which cause our joy. For you bring joy to all in conceiving in your womb the One who once manifested Himself in Babylon, preserving from the flames the young men unjustly thrown into the fiery furnace, by a miracle surpassing understanding. Thus they celebrate the Child whom they see carried in your arms and glorify the Virgin nursing Him. (Orthros)*



**SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY  
DECEMBER 18, 2022**



**ANCESTORS OF CHRIST**



**Our Lady of Perpetual Help Melkite Catholic Church**  
**256 Hamilton St.**  
**Worcester, MA 01604**  
**Rectory: (508) 752-4174 Hall: (508) 755-2199**  
**Email: olphmelkite@gmail.com**  
**Rev. Bryan McNeil, Pastor**  
**Email: Brymc56@comcast.net Cell: (978) 314-1962**  
**Divine Liturgy: Sunday 10:00 AM**

### Antiphon (1st)

1: Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth, and sing praise to His name.

*Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Savior, save us.*

2: Say to God: How awesome are Your deeds! So great is Your power that Your enemies cringe before You.

*Be shafa'ati Walidatil Eelah, ya Mukhallisu, khallisna.*

3: Let all the earth worship You and sing praises to You; let it sing praises to Your name, O Most High!

*Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Savior, save us.*

### Entrance Hymn

**Priest: Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ!**

**People: O Son of God, who are risen from the dead, save us who sing to You. Alleluia!**

### Troparion of the Resurrection (Tone 3) pg. 39

Let all in heaven rejoice, and all on earth be glad, for the Lord has exerted power with His arm: By death He has trampled upon Death and has become the firstborn from the dead. He has delivered us from the bosom of Hades and has granted to the world great mercy.

### Troparion of the Ancestors of Christ (Tone 2)

Faith can accomplish great things. Through it, the Three Holy Children rejoice in the flames as if they had been in refreshing water, and Daniel in the midst of lions is like a shepherd among his sheep.

Through their intercession, O Christ God, save our souls.

### Patronal Troparion (Tone 1) Pg. 15

In giving birth, you have preserved your virginity and in falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Mother of God. You have passed to life being the Mother of Life. Through your intercession, save our souls from death.

### Kontakion of the Preparation of the Nativity of our Lord (Tone 3)

Today the Virgin is on her way to the cave where she will give birth to the Eternal Word of God in an ineffable manner. Rejoice, therefore, O Universe, when you hear this news, and glorify with the angels and the shepherds, Him who shall appear as a new Child being God from all eternity.

### **The Paramony of the Nativity**

Usually translated as vigil or eve, *paramony* actually refers to the *uninterrupted* nature of the Church's prayer on this day. During the day the lengthier Great Hours or Royal Hours are chanted.

**The Royal Hours** replace the ordinary First, Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours, served every day in Byzantine practice. They contain some different psalms as well as readings from both the Old and New Testaments. While for most of the year the Hours are "cell services" – without choral responses or accompanying ritual, meant to be served by monastics in their cells (or by anyone at work or at home), the Royal Hours are served solemnly in church with hymns, Scripture readings and ceremony, concluding with the Typika. The name "Royal Hours" comes from the practice of the Great Church in Constantinople. The emperor and his court would attend the Hours on these days, emphasizing their importance in the life of the Church.

The Royal Hours are served on the Paramony of Christmas, the Paramony of the Theophany and on Great and Holy Friday, which we might call the "Paramony of Pascha." In addition, some Greek Churches serve the Royal Hours on the Eve of Pentecost as well, but without fasting.

At the Christmas Royal Hours the following prophecies are read. Each one has found fulfilment in the Nativity of Christ:

*Micah 5:2-4* "But you, Bethlehem Ephratha, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel."

*Baruch 3:36-4:4* "Wisdom has appeared on earth, is at home with mortals... what pleases God has been revealed to us!"

*Isaiah 7:10-16* "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

*Isaiah 9:6-7* "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; the government will be upon His shoulder and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

### **A Day of Fasting**

The Paramony is a strict fast day. Many people don't eat anything until the evening. This is why the Divine Liturgy is not served until the end of the fasting day, when it is joined to a more elaborate than usual Great Vespers. As on other fast days, the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil is prescribed for Christmas Eve.

In the fullest observance a special service of Great Compline with a Litia for the feast ends the day. Sometimes this leads directly into the Orthros and Divine Liturgy of December 25. The same order is also prescribed for the Eve of the Theophany. In some countries of Eastern Europe the Paramony culminates with a Holy Supper of twelve vegan courses representing the apostles. In the Balkans wheat pies and kutia (boiled wheat) are popular on this day.

*Come, O Bethlehem, and prepare a birth-place with the most precious manger and the God-bearing swaddling-bands, in which our Life was wrapped. Come, O Joseph, and register yourself with Mary! Christ our God breaks asunder the bonds of death, enfolding men in incorruption.*

*Prepare yourself, O Bethlehem! Adorn yourself well, O manger! The Truth has come! Receive Him, O cave! The shadow has passed away, and God has appeared to men through the Virgin, assuming our form and deifying our flesh. Wherefore, Adam is restored, and cries out with Eve: Blessing has appeared on earth to save our race!*

### DIVINE LITURGY INTENTIONS

**Today**                    **HS Anthony Poti**  
+**James Rahall.** Requested by Lisa Jagielski & Antoinette Arraj  
+**Alice Esper**

**Dec 25**                    **Our Families and Friends living and deceased**

**Today's Coffee Hr. is hosted by Andy & Jocelyn Aulo**

**There will be no Coffee Hr. next week**

Please remember in your prayers: George Arraj, Jr., Ron Abraham, Peter Abraham, Vi Gazal, Robert Ghiz, Sadie Mirante, Archie Opatka, Katherine Thomas, Charlotte Stockhaus, Ruth Welsh, Richard Abraham, Sr., Daneil Sarrouf, Bob Lynch, Michael Mooradian, Michael McNeil, Jeff McNeil, Wyatt Willian Rahall, and the people of Ukraine.

If there are people for whom you would like me to pray, please reach out and give me their names. Part of our vocation as Christians is to pray for each other, especially when someone is sick or suffering in any way.

### SECOND COLLECTION & CALENDARS

**Next Sunda, there will be a second collection for Christmas.**

**Also, the 2023 calendars will be available starting next weekend. Please pick one up at the rear of the church. We will not do a general mailing of calendars. If you know someone who would like a calendar and can't get to church, please let me know and I will send them one.**

### Last Week's Collection

Weekly	\$1,446
Candles	\$ 26
Coffee Hr.	\$ 60
Christmas Flowers	\$ 150
Stole	\$ 225
Bookstore	\$ 10
Christmas Offerings	\$1,300
Memorials	\$ 295
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,512</b>

**God bless you for your generosity!**



**Welcome to any visitors we have with us this morning! We are happy to have you worship with us.**

**Please join us downstairs in the church hall for the coffee hour so that we can get to know each other better and answer any questions you may have about the parish or the Melkite Church.**

### CHRISTMAS FOOD/TOY DRIVE

Our Christmas Food & Toy Drive ends today. There are two bins in the narthex: one for new, unwrapped toys/gifts and one for non-perishable food items. We will deliver the items after the Divine Liturgy today. All are welcome to come!

God bless you for your generosity in helping our brothers & sisters who are having a difficult time making ends meet!

### LITURGICAL SCHEDULE FOR THE NATIVITY & THEOPHANY

**TUE 12/20, 6PM Anointing Service**

**SAT 12/24, 4PM Nativity Vespers/Liturgy of St. Basil**

**SUN 12/25, 10AM Nativity Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom**

**SUN 1/1, 10AM Divine Liturgy - Sunday before Theophany/Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord**

**THU 1/5, 6PM Great Vespers—Feast of Theophany**

**FRI 1/6, 6PM Divine Liturgy-Feast of Theophany followed by the Great Blessing of Water**

## Sunday before the Nativity of Christ

FROM DECEMBER 20 TO 24 we observe a five-day “holy week” during which Christ’s birth seems ever closer. This fore-feast of the Nativity culminates on December 24, the Paramony of the feast. During these days we focus on how the birth of the long-expected Messiah is at hand. As we sing during those days, “Today the Virgin is on her way to the cave where she will give birth to the eternal Word of God in an ineffable manner.”

The hope that One would come to deliver God’s people from their enemies is found throughout the Old Testament. In Numbers 24 we read a prophecy of Balaam, “*I see a star that rises out of Jacob, a stem that springs from Israel’s root; one who shall lay low the chiefs of Moab, shall bring devastation on all the posterity of Seth*” (v.17). The “star rising out of Jacob” is a way of saying “a descendant of Jacob.” As we read in Matthew’s genealogy, Jesus was a descendant of Jacob.

This expected one was clearly a national leader who would deliver the Israelites from their enemies. Jewish people expected this kind of savior throughout their history. Some Jews, however, looked for more. They read God’s promise to David to mean that the kingdom of his son Solomon would endure forever: “*When your days are ended, and you are laid to rest beside your fathers, I will grant you for successor a son of your own body, established firmly on his throne. He it is who shall build a house to do my name honor. I will prolong forever his royal dynasty*” (2 Sam 7:12-13). As we read in Matthew’s genealogy, Jesus was a descendant of David.

The prophets deepened the Jews’ understanding of just who the Messiah would be. We read in Isaiah 40, “*Tell the cities of Juda, See, your God comes! See, the Lord God is coming, revealed in power, with his own strong arm for warrant; and see, they come with him, they walk before him, the reward of his labor, the achievement of his task, his own flock! Like a shepherd he tends them, gathers up the lambs and carries them in his bosom*” (vv. 10, 11). The promised One is the Lord Himself, our Good Shepherd.

### The Tree of Life

Every day during the fore-feast of the Nativity we sing the following troparion: *Bethlehem, make ready for Eden has been opened for all. Ephrata, be alert for the Tree of Life has blossomed forth from the Virgin in the cave. Her womb had become a spiritual Paradise, wherein the divine Fruit was planted – and if we eat of it we shall live and not die like Adam. Christ is coming forth to bring back to life the likeness that had been lost in the beginning.*

Like much of our liturgical hymnody, this troparion incorporates a theme drawn from the writings of the Church Fathers: “*The Fruit of righteousness and the Tree of Life is Christ. He alone, as man, fulfilled all righteousness. And with His own underived life He has brought forth the fruits of knowledge and virtue like a tree, whereof they that eat shall receive eternal life, and shall enjoy the tree of life in paradise, with Adam and all the righteous*” (St Hippolytus of Rome, Commentary on Proverbs).

In the Genesis story of creation the Tree of Life was the giver of immortality from which fallen man could not be allowed to eat (see Gen 3:22). Were he to do so, Genesis suggests, sin would live forever. For us, however, Christ is the source of our immortality. He is the Tree of Life and, sinners though we are, we are called to eat of this Tree and live forever.

We also find the Tree of Life in the last chapter of Revelation. There the Tree is in the center of the New Jerusalem, the ultimate Paradise. For St Augustine and other Fathers, “Paradise is the Church, as it is called in the Canticles...the Tree of life is the holy of holies, Christ...” (St Augustine, *The City of God*). Christ, at the heart of the Church, gives us life through the Holy Spirit who works in the Church.

In our troparion Christ is called the Fruit planted in the spiritual paradise of the Virgin’s womb. As Mary’s cousin Elizabeth proclaimed – with countless generations after her – “*Blessed is the Fruit of your womb!*” (Lk 1:42)

### Prokimenon

**Reader:** Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our fathers, and Your name is worthy praise and glorious forever

**People:** Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our fathers, and Your name is worthy praise and glorious forever

**Reader:** For You are just in all You have done to us, and all Your works are true and Your ways right.

**People:** Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our fathers, and Your name is worthy praise and glorious forever

**Reader:** Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our fathers,

**People:** And Your name is worthy praise and glorious forever.

### Epistle: Heb. 11:9-10; 32-40

### Alleluia Verses

O God, our ears have heard, our fathers have declared to us the deeds You did in their days, in the days of old.

**Verses:** The just cried out, and the Lord heard them, and He delivered them from all their trials.

### Gospel: Mt. 1:1-25, Sunday Before the Nativity of our Lord - Genealogy

#### FINANCIALS

<u>11.2022</u>		<u>YTD (10.2022-11.2022)</u>	
Income	\$7,444	Income	\$13,339
Expenses	\$9,614	Expenses	\$14,526
Net	(\$2,170)	Net	(\$ 1,187)

**We are currently running a small deficit due to the painting work. When the work is complete, the funds will be transferred from savings to cover the expense. We received the donation of a used refrigerator for the hall kitchen from a local Dunkin Donuts franchisee. We also received a monetary donation to cover the cost of stripping, cleaning, and waxing the floors in the hall, kitchen, stairways, and sacristy. There have also been a number of people working hard to keep the hall, kitchen, and church clean. Also, thanks to all who have decorated the hall for Christmas! It is wonderful to see so many folks doing so much for the parish!**

**God bless you for your generosity!**