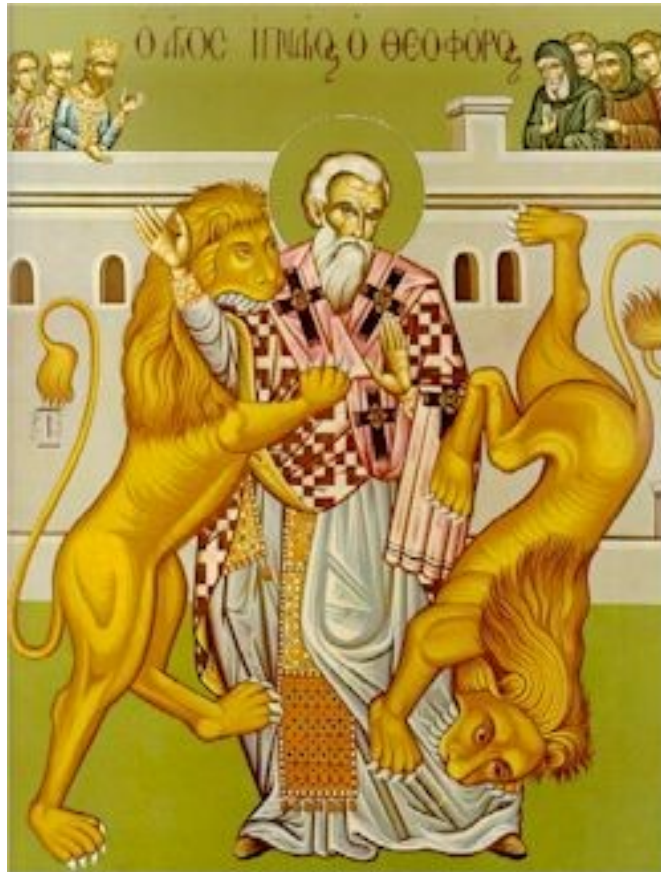


From the Divine Office for the Commemoration of St. Ignatius of Antioch (Dec. 20)

You were justly called the “God-bearer,” O blessed Ignatius; for when in His goodness the Lord took you into His arms to show you the wisdom of the greatest philosophy, you received the light of countless fires; and in the profound abyss of His divine brightness, you absorbed the streams of light like a sponge. Thus you followed in the footsteps of Christ, who called you. Ask Him, then, to save and enlighten our souls. (Vespers)

O living pillar and vibrant image, O God-bearing Ignatius: behold, your annual feast day has come, manifesting your teachings and your sublime deeds, your perseverance in the faith even to the shedding of your blood, and your blessed words of eternal renown, when you said, “I am the wheat of our God, and I will be ground by the teeth of wild beasts.” You were an imitator of the Passion of Christ; intercede now that our souls may be saved. (Orthros)



**SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY
DECEMBER 20, 2020**



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 (3rd)

1: Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; let us shout with joy to God our Savior.

O Son of God, who are risen from the dead, save us who sing to You, Alleluia

2: Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving and let us joyfully sing psalms to Him.

Khallisna Ya-Bnallah, Ya Man qama min baynil-amwaat, nahnu muranneemeena

Laka. Haleloueya.

3: For God is a great Lord and a great King over all the earth.

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

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 4, pg. 40)

The women disciples of the Lord, having learned from the angel the joyful announcement of the resurrection, and having rejected the ancestral sentence, proudly told the apostles: Death is despoiled. Christ God is risen, bestowing 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

Troparion of the Dormition (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 intercessions, save our souls from death.

Kondakion 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.

After the death and resurrection of Christ the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit came to see these prophecies fulfilled in a decisive way by Jesus Christ, who delivers all mankind – not just the Jewish people – from its ultimate enemies, sin and death, not just foreign oppressors. Around the Old Testament prophecies of a deliverer, the apostles built their preaching of the true Messiah (Anointed One) of God, Christ Jesus the Savior. What we call the Old Testament was the Bible for the early Church as well as for Judaism and its prophecies shaped the presentation of the incarnation in the New Testament. As the following quotations show, the apostles considered these prophecies as clearly pointing to the coming of Christ:

- ***His Conception*** (Isaiah 7:14, cited in Mt 1:23) - “A virgin shall conceive and bear a son.”
- ***The Place of His Birth*** (Micah 5:2, cited in Mt 2:6) - “Bethlehem...out of you shall come a ruler...”
- ***The Flight into Egypt*** (Hosea 11:1, cited in Mt 2:15) - “Out of Egypt I called my son.”
- ***The Slaughter of the Infants*** (Jeremiah 31:15, cited in Mt 2:18) - “A voice was heard in Ramah...”
- ***His home in Nazareth*** (possibly Judges 13:5, cited in Mt 2:23) - “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

Other prophecies were frequently cited as pointing to Jesus as the Messiah:

- Numbers 24:17 - “a star shall come forth out of Jacob...”
- Isaiah 11:1 - “There shall come forth a shoot from the root of Jesse...”
- Isaiah 60:5-6 “...they shall bring gold and frankincense”

While there are no verbatim quotations of prophecies in Luke’s infancy narratives, there are allusions to Old Testament scriptures throughout. In Luke 1:17, for example, John the Baptist is described by the angel as going “before him in the spirit and power of Elijah.” This alludes to Malachi 4:5-6: “Behold I am sending to you Elijah the Thesbite before the great and notable day of the Lord comes.”

These allusions, and others throughout the Gospels, reflect the early Church’s belief that the entire Old Testament leads us to see Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Our Preparation Continues

From December 20 to 24 we observe a five-day “holy week” during which Christ’s birth seems ever closer. As we sing during those days, “Today the Virgin is on her way to the cave where she will give birth.”

This fore-feast of the Nativity culminates on December 24, the Paramony of the feast. 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, followed by the Typika and a more elaborate than usual Great Vespers, to which is attached the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil.

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. In some countries of Eastern Europe it culminates with a Holy Supper prior to the Liturgy. The same cycle of uninterrupted prayer is also prescribed for the Feast of the Theophany on January 5.

DIVINE LITURGY INTENTIONS

Today Those infected with the coronavirus and those who care for them
The people of Beirut
+Those who have lost their lives to the coronavirus
+Those who lost their lives in the Beirut explosion

CHRISTMAS DIVINE LITURGY

As you know, I previously announced that we would have one Divine Liturgy for the feast of the Nativity of Christ on December 24 at 5pm and no Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day. The Bishop has asked that there be ample opportunity for all those who wish to celebrate the festal Divine Liturgy. We will add a Divine Liturgy on Christmas Eve at 3pm. It will be the Vesper/St. Basil Liturgy.

It is imperative that you contact me in advance to let me know if you plan to attend. You can either email me at olphmelkite@gmail.com or call the rectory at (508) 752-4174. Please provide your name, how many people who are attending with you, and which Liturgy you want to attend. We sent an email to the email list and posted it on our Facebook page. Please pass this on to any parishioner you know who does not have either of these.

These are unusual times which require unusual measures. God willing, we will return to our normal schedule next year.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in this matter.



The Bishop's Appeal 2020 Building A Better Life On A Solid Foundation Through Faith & Family

As we prepare our hearts and our homes to receive the greatest gift in human history—the Nativity of Christ our God—let us not forget our Melkite Church by which Christ comes to our families and loved ones. **Please give a special end-of-year, tax-deductible gift to the Melkite Church** to support all the vital works of our Church in America, and for our suffering brothers and sisters.

Last Week's Collection

Regular	\$ 1,266
Candles	\$ 25
Christmas Flowers	\$ 310
Christmas Donations	\$ 45
Total	\$ 1,646

Remember the Melkite Church in Your Will: Give a lasting gift for future generations of Melkites and help to ensure that our beautiful Melkite heritage continues to grow and flourish for your children's children. Simply add the following statement to your last will and testament: *I hereby bequeath to the Melkite Eparchy of Newton the following sum:* \$ _____. Contact Bishop NICHOLAS personally to inform him of your generous bequest: 3 VFW Parkway, West Roxbury, MA 02132.

The Fathers Before Christ

THE LITURGICAL PREPARATION for the feast of Christ's Nativity intensifies today with the Sunday of the Genealogy, which commemorates those who were Christ's physical ancestors.

The Sunday of the Genealogy accelerates the countdown to the feast of Christ's Nativity. During the Nativity Fast we celebrate the memorials of several Old Testament prophets – Obadiah (Nov. 19), Nahum (Dec. 1), Habbakuk (Dec. 2), Zephaniah (Dec. 3), Haggai (Dec. 16), and Daniel (Dec. 17). Today we reflect on how the entire Old Testament period has been a preparation for Christ and how we are called to be ready for His ultimate triumph.

Prophecies of the Messiah

It is appropriate today to reflect on what the Scriptures tells us preceded the Incarnation. The following timeline and reading guide may be helpful in doing so. All the dates older than 1000 BC are approximate.

Before Time – The Word was with God before anything material came to be (John 1:1-4). It is through this eternal Word that our material creation comes into being.

The Pre-History of the Israelites before 4000 BC – The creation of our universe, the human race falls away from communion with God, life on earth as we know it begins (Genesis 1-3). Genesis actually contains two creation stories. The first (Gen 1:1-2:3) is a version of an older Babylonian myth re-edited to teach that creation is by the will of the only true God, not the result of warring gods and demons. It is cast in the form of a single week to promote the character of the Sabbath as a day of rest. Its narrative (creation begins with a burst of light followed by the creation of the planets, etc.) harmonizes with the modern Big Bang theory and subsequent discoveries.

Genesis continues with the story of the creation and the fall of Adam and Eve. This tragic story concludes with these words addressed to the serpent: "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head while you strike at his heel*" (Gen 3:15). Many Fathers saw this as the first heralding of the Messiah's victory over sin and death (the "proto-gospel"). Satan's seeming defeat of Christ on the cross is but a striking of His heel while Christ's striking at his head is His ultimate defeat of Satan. It would take countless generations – from the beginning of humanity, through the years of both Old and New Testaments and the subsequent history of this age – for this event to be fulfilled.

Before 3000 BC – Sin prevails and increases, illustrated by Cain and Abel and Lamech, Noah and the Great Flood, (Gen 4-9). According to Jewish tradition, God makes a new covenant with Noah after the flood. Man is committed to observe the seven Noahide Laws prohibiting idolatry, murder, theft, sexual immorality, blasphemy, and the eating of meat with its blood (i.e. while the animal is still alive). They are also enjoined to establish courts of law.

The Prophets Read in the Church

At the time of the Hebrew kingdoms (the six or seven hundred years before Christ) prophets were periodically calling the people to trust in God despite the troubles of their nation. Despite conflicts with the Philistines or the Assyrians, and even in the midst of defeat and exile by the Babylonians and occupation by the Romans, the prophets encouraged the people to trust in God who would provide a deliverer.

Prokimenon

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

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

Verse: 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 of praise and glorious forever.

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

People: And Your name is worthy of 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.

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

Gospel: Matthew 1:1-25, Sunday Before the Nativity of our Lord – The Genealogy

Special Petitions for the Ecumenic Prayer (Inserted after the third petition)

- For all your people who have proven positive with the coronavirus, that they may be restored to full health and offer you their praise and thanksgiving, we pray to you, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For all those who have died as a result of the coronavirus that they may be granted rest with the Saints and the mercy of God in the Heavenly Kingdom, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For doctors, nurses, and all in health care, risking their lives to minister to those afflicted with the coronavirus, that they remain safe, and in good health as they serve others, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For all your people in Lebanon who were hurt during the disastrous explosion, that they may be restored to full health, and for those who died that they may be granted rest among the Saints, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For peace throughout the Middle East, especially in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.