

ORTHO Interparish Newsletter

...an educational forum of the Orthodox Catholic Archdiocese and Metropolitanate of America...

THE NATIVITY AND MANIFESTATION OF JESUS CHRIST

The authors of the Gospels give us ample opportunity to discover the truth regarding the birth of Jesus. When the Evangelist Luke accompanied Paul to Jerusalem in AD 56 or 57, one of the people whom he visited was James, a relative of Jesus and Bishop of the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 21: 17:8). At that time, if we may judge from the preface to his Gospel, Luke was already intensely interested in the facts regarding the life of Jesus. Whether Luke met Mary personally we do not know, but it is certain that he had access to information regarding our Lord's birth which ultimately could come from Mary alone. It is basically from her point of view that he relates. Matthew, on the other hand, tells the story more from the point of Joseph. But both Gospels agree that Jesus was not the son of a human father but was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born as the Son of God (cf Luke 1:35; Mt. 1: 18:26). In perfect keeping with this fact John opens his Gospel with the words: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten from his Father), full of grace and truth (John 1: 1-14).*

Infancy, Childhood, and Growth to Maturity

From Luke 2: 40-52 it is clear that Jesus' life from childhood to young manhood was normal but also perfect. In His life God's ideal for a perfect human life was realized at every stage. Although He lived in a humble home with Mary and Joseph, His life was at all times in complete agreement with the will of God, and from an early age He appears to have been conscious that He was the Son of God in a special sense.

From Luke 2:46-47, it is clear that from His childhood He made an intensive study of the old Testament Scriptures; and although Joseph probably died early and Jesus had to work hard as a carpenter in order to provide for Mary (Matthew 13: 55,56), He gave ample time to meditation on the Scriptures and to prayer.

Apart from the few details given regarding Jesus' childhood and the inferences to be made from the

Gospels regarding His life while growing physically, mentally, and spiritually to full maturity, the New Testament passes by in silence those years of preparation.

Baptism and Temptation

When Jesus (probably in AD 27) had reached the prime of life (about thirty years old, (Luke 3:23) He left Nazareth and was baptized by John the Baptist. By doing this He publicly accepted His messianic task as the Son of God and Savior who, sinless Himself, took upon Himself the guilt of His people.

God the Father showed His approval of His Son's action in deliberately identifying Himself with His sinful people by the descent of the Spirit "in bodily form like a dove" and by the heavenly voice which proclaimed: *"You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased"* (Luke 3:22). These words combining Ps. 2:7 and Is. 13:1, acknowledged Him as the Messiah but indicated that He was to fulfill His messianic calling in terms of the obedient and suffering Servant of the Lord.

With this assurance in His heart Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness of Judaea to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1). In order to vindicate His competence to be the Savior of men, He first had to prove His utter and unconditional obedience to His heavenly Father and His power to overcome the great deceiver. The temptation narrative is evidently set in contrast with the story of the fall in Genesis 3, thus, whereas Adam and Eve succumb to temptation in spite of their living under the most favorable conditions, Jesus overcomes although tempted under the most difficult circumstances. After forty days of physical and spiritual strain and privation in the wilderness, he was urged by all the concentrated cunning and power of the tempter to put His Father to the test or reject the path which the heavenly voice had marked out as His Father's will for Him. But Jesus resisted the most subtle temptations and remained steadfastly obedient to His Father's will. He emerged from His spiritual conflict as God's loyal Son and faithful Servant.

The Beginning of His Public Ministry

Having triumphed over the titanic onslaughts of the devil, Jesus actively embarked on the first stage of His public ministry, called His first disciple, revealed His divine power by changing water into wine, by performing miracles, by teaching Nicodemus spiritually revolutionary truths, and by bringing salvation even to the despised Samaritans (*John 1: 35-51; John 2: 1-11; John 2: 23ff; John 4: 1-42*).

Concentrated Teach and Ministry in Galilee

John the Baptist's imprisonment was the signal for Jesus to begin His ministry in Galilee, with the proclamation that the appointed time had come and the kingdom of God was at hand. When His claim in the synagogue of Nazareth to be the one through whom the messianic promises were to be fulfilled was rejected by His home town (*Luke 4: 16*) He made Capernaum His new headquarters. Probably for more than a year He now worked and taught in Capernaum and in other parts of Galilee, revealing His divine power over nature (*Mark 4: 35-41; Luke 4:14; 4:11; John 4:46-54*), over the world of spirits and demons, over the human body and over physical and spiritual diseases, and even over life and death (*Luke 7: 11-17; Mt. 8: 18-26*). He furthermore claimed to possess final authority over the eternal destiny of mankind, and in the Sermon on the Mount and other teachings He revealed His unique authority to proclaim the laws of the kingdom of God (*Mt. 5: 1 through 6: 29, etc.*).

While revealing His supreme authority as the promised Christ, during this period Jesus also revealed His love and sympathy for those in physical or spiritual distress. He repeatedly declared that He had come to seek and to serve those who were lost, and He exercised the divine prerogative of forgiving sins (*Lk. 5: 20-26; 7: 48-50*).

Out of His much wider group of followers He chose twelve special disciples whom He systematically taught and trained to be His apostles (*Mt. 10: 1-4; Lk. 6: 12-16*).

The authority with which He taught His hearers and His refusal to be frightened by enemies among the Jewish rulers and Pharisees, added to His many miracles of healing and other manifestations of His power over the created order (*Lk. 4: 33-41; Mk. 5: 1-41*), caused Jesus to become tremendously popular among the masses of Galilee. This popularity reached its peak in the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (*Mt. 14: 13-21*), and this clear proof of His messiahship made the masses decide to crown Him King (*John 6:15*).

The Training of the Twelve Apostles

After Jesus had refused to be crowned as an earthly Messiah the crowds and even many of His wider circle of disciples left Him (*John 6: 26,27*). He withdrew to the territory belonging to Tyre Sidom and Caesarea Philippi, but could never really escape the public eye. When He again came near the Sea of Galilee, He once more healed and helped many in distress and for a second time miraculously fed the crowds because He had compassion on the multitude. Then, withdrawing from the crowds again, he sought solitude with His disciples and asked them the crucial question: "*But whom say you that I am?*" (*Mt. 16:15*). After Peter, speaking for all the apostles had openly confessed, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" Jesus determinedly began to prepare His disciples for the terrible shock awaiting them in Jerusalem. But at the same time he clearly and repeatedly taught that the victory would ultimately be His, and that His followers thus need not fear.

His self-revelation to His disciples culminated in His transfiguration on the mountain when His three closest followers saw Him in divine glory (*Mt. 17: 1-13; Mk. 9: 2-10; Lk. 9: 28-36*). Because He came to fulfill both the Law and the Prophets, Moses (typifying the Law) and Elijah (representative of the Prophets) appeared with Him in glory before He finally started on the way to Jerusalem to suffer death for men's salvation. Once again the voice of God from heaven declared Jesus to be His beloved Son to whom all should pay heed (*Lk. 9:35*).

Mounting Antagonism

Having been revealed to His disciples and acknowledged by them as truly the Son of God Jesus now prepared them more deliberately than ever for their future task as foundation members of His Church. He taught them many truths, both directly and in the form of parables, and continued to reveal His divine power and authority by healing the sick and the blind, and relieving others in distress.

The opposition toward Him among the Jewish rulers and religious leaders grew steadily worse. Every possible method and scheme was tried to ensnare Him, to break His continuing influence on the masses, and to find a reason to have Him handed over to the Roman authorities for execution. All His solemn warnings addressed to His enemies, all His penetrating teaching which aimed at bringing them to a change of heart, all His works of benevolence in healing the sick and even raising the dead to life only inflamed the majority of Pharisees, scribes, and other Jewish leaders with greater hatred against Him (*John 11: 46-53*).

The Last Week in Jerusalem

Having openly entered Jerusalem as the Messiah amid cheering crowds, Jesus drove the money changers and traffickers in sacrificial animals from the outer court of the Temple and so revealed His claim to messianic authority. The end was now drawing near. Jesus relentlessly exposed the hypocrisy of his persecutors, as He taught in the Temple court during those fateful days, and prophesied what would happen to the people of Judaea, to Jerusalem, and to the Temple in the impending times of distress. He warned His followers regarding the dangers awaiting them, foretold what was in store for the world and the Church (Lk. 21:25-27), and predicted that world history would culminate in His return in majesty to reveal His divine might over all the powers of darkness and usher in His eternal kingdom (Mt. 24: 29-31; 25:31-46).

On the eve of His passion, as a final preparation of His apostles for the great task awaiting them, Jesus washed their feet, teaching them an urgently needed lesson in humility, announced that Judas was going to betray Him, and at the Last Supper (Mt. 26:26-29) instituted the Eucharist, and prayed for all His followers.

Then followed His final and utter self-surrender to the will of his Father (Mt. 26: 39-46). His sacrificial and vicarious suffering reached its climax on the cross, when, at the end of the three hours of darkness he cried with a loud voice: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 10:45, etc.). Having voluntarily offered himself up as the Lamb of God, His task was now completed. Before commending His spirit into the hands of His Father, He announced triumphantly "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30).

Burial, Resurrection and Ascension

After His death, He was no longer in the power of His enemies. His body was taken down from the cross and buried in a new tomb in a garden. His promise to rise from the dead was soon fulfilled, and as the risen Christ and living Lord He personally dispelled His followers' fears and doubts. For forty days he repeatedly appeared to them, opened their minds to understand the Old Testament Scriptures, and promised the Holy Spirit to comfort, guide, and empower them to act as His witnesses -- starting at Jerusalem and traveling all over the world (Acts 1:8). Having assured them once more that all power had been given to him in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28: 18) He commissioned them to make disciples of all the nations (Mt. 28: 19). After He had promised to be with them always, even to the end of the world (Mt. 28: 20) He ascended into heaven ...with hands lifted up, blessing them.

So the life of Jesus Christ as Man among men on this planet ended triumphantly.

These apostolic words provide a fitting conclusion to His earthly ministry: "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

Homily No. 1, December 24, 1946; Archbishop George Augustine, Church of the Holy Eucharist, Atlanta, Ga.

The Teaching of Jesus Christ

Preserved in a harmonious doxology of Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture

The teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ is preserved in the main in the four Gospels, as well as the oral Tradition of the Apostles, which preserved the Christian Faith before the advent of New Testament Scripture. The beginning of gospel writing, as we might expect, coincides with the end of the first Christian generation. As those "who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (Lk. 1:2) were removed by death, the necessity of a permanent written record of their witness was more acutely felt than before. It is just at this point that 1st and 2nd century tradition places the beginnings of gospel writing, and rightly so; all four of our canonical Gospels are probably to be dated within the decades from AD 60 - 100. We need not suppose that the transmission of the apostolic witness had been exclusively oral before this time (AD 60). Some at least of the "many" who, according to Luke 1:1 had undertaken to draw up an orderly account of the evangelic events, may have done so in writing before AD 60. Except for Paul's earlier epistles no document of an earlier date has survived except insofar as it has been incorporated in our written Gospels. Outside the Gospels the rest of the New Testament contains comparatively few direct references to His teaching, yet the Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation corroborate its essential content as preserved in both Holy Tradition and the Gospel records. The message of these New Testament documents and of other early Christian writings of the 1st and 2nd centuries is based on the teaching of Jesus. These writings thus serve as important, although indirect, sources. All attempts to prove that the apostles and especially Paul proclaimed a gospel contrary to the teaching of Jesus have completely failed. There is an essential unity between the teaching of our Lord and that of Paul and the early Church.

The supposed clash between the teaching of Jesus as

preserved in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and His teaching as presented in the Gospel of John is also only apparent. It is undoubtedly true that the Gospel of John gives more attention to the "metaphysical" teaching of Jesus and preserves many discourses in which our Lord spoke very directly and intimately regarding His own Person and His relationship to God. There is a difference of accent and emphasis; but the teaching of Jesus in the four Gospels is basically the same.

Each of the Evangelists had his special purpose in view and made his own selection from the teachings of Jesus to suit that purpose. In this way the Gospels supplement but do not contradict one another. Together they give a wonderfully complete report regarding the essential teaching of Jesus Christ. When we study the rest of the New Testament and the life and teaching of the early Church, we see how firmly early Church doctrine and practice are based on Christ's teaching as preserved in the four canonical Gospels.

In Holy Tradition, the formation and preservation of the New Testament, which, together with the Old Testament, we find formed the all-sufficient Word of God which proclaims Jesus as the center of all things ...one with the Father and with the Holy Spirit.

The truth of our Lord's teaching is, finally, attested and established in the life of Orthodox believers and of the Church by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thus His promises recorded in John 15:26 and John 16: 13-15 continue to be fulfilled, together with His words in John 14:25: *"These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you."*

WORTH QUOTING

"Wherever the bishop is, there let the people be, as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church". (St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107 AD) AD) in a letter to Polycarp of Smyrna, and to the church in Philadelphia).

"The true teaching of the Church is that handed down by the Apostles and held from them by unbroken tradition and succession. It is that of the mother-churches that can trace their bishops back to the beginning. The rule of faith is the present living magisterium of the Church." (St. Irenaeus of Lyons, AD 140-203) 'Rule of Faith' Book 111, 1-3)

Pastoral

On December 2, 2003, **Ciro Jesus Albuerne** was ordained to the office and rank of Sub-Deacon by Archbishop George Augustine, assisted by Archpriest Nelson Maiquez, pastor of St. Lazarus Church, Miami, Fl. Sub-Deacon **Ciro** is assigned to St. Lazarus Church.

A long time personal and ecclesastical friend of Archbishop George Augustine and our Archdiocese and Metropolitanate, Bishop John Noble died in retirement September 21, 2003 at Vista, Ca.

Calendar

December 9, 12, 16, 1946: A total of 33 converts to Orthodoxy received the Sacrament of Chrismation administered by Fr. George Hyde (Later Archbishop George Augustine c 1957) forming the charter-founding membership of Holy Eucharist Parish, Atlanta, Ga.

July 1, 1946: Bishop John Kazantks (Orthodox Church of Greece) ordained the Rev. George Hyde to the Holy Priesthood, with assignment to Holy Eucharist Parish, Atlanta, Ga.

December 24, 1946: First liturgy of Holy Eucharist Parish officiated by Fr. George Hyde (later Archbishop George Augustine).

Holy Eucharist was the second of only two Orthodox congregations in Atlanta in 1946....the other being a congregation of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.

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