

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, DECEMBER 18/31, 2006

HEB. 11: 9-10, 17-23, 32-40

ST. MATTHEW 1: 1-25

by

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Gospel: *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;

And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;

And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;

And Jesse begat David the king; and David the King begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;

And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias;

And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias;

And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias;

And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon;

And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel;

And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor;

And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud;

And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;

And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, Who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall Save His people from their sins.

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called His name JESUS.

Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Emmanuel. [Esaias VII. 14 (The Septuagint – LXX)]

Sunday before the Nativity of Christ –

St. Matthew wrote the first Gospel in Hebrew for Jewish believers. His initial thrust illustrates Christ's lineage from Abraham and David. He recalls the Gospel from his first-hand knowledge of the Lord. He didn't just contemplate the Lord or see visions of Him in his mind. St. Matthew saw Him in the flesh! This contrasts with the holy prophets, who didn't see the Lord but "contemplated things (shown them) by the Holy Spirit, and hence they referred to them as visions";...¹

He begins his Gospel speaking of the book of the generation, which he had witnessed. He initially places David before Abraham because David was better known to the Jews, "being more recent... and because he was more illustrious on account of his kingdom".² For of the kings, David had pleased God first and God promised him that Christ would come from his seed. This is why Jesus is called the Son of David. David symbolised a type of Christ:³

David, indeed, acted as an image and type of Christ; for as David became king in place of Saul, who was an odious outcast from God, so also did Christ come and take flesh after Adam had lost the authority and kingship which he had enjoyed; Christ, Who was anterior to the first (Adam), became the second Adam and inaugurated His reign among us.⁴

Then, he begins the genealogy with Abraham because (a) he (Abraham) was the father of the Jews, and (b) he received God's promise that from his seed would flow the blessings of the nations of the earth:

Christ, then, is that seed of Abraham in Whom all of us from among the Gentiles, who aforesaid were accursed, have been blessed.⁵

St. Matthew traces the genealogy according to the male line, as was the custom. He does the same thing in giving the genealogy of Joseph and not of Mary, the Theotokos.⁶ Joseph did not give his seed to Mary because His birth was seedless [not of man] and thus he had no 'share' in the birth of Christ. St. Matthew gives the genealogy of the Virgin when he gives Joseph's:

And yet, by giving the genealogy of Joseph, Matthew gave her genealogy as well. For it was the law that a woman was not to be taken as a wife by a man who was of a different tribe and who was not of her father's lineage. This being the law, it is obvious that Joseph's genealogy includes that of the Theotokos, for she was of the same tribe and the same lineage.⁷

St. Matthew calls Joseph, Mary's husband, "as being her betrothed, just as he called her both the betrothed and the wife (of Joseph), because it was customary to use those terms even before a marriage was consummated".⁸

Joseph and Mary, the Conception...-

Joseph was chosen by God to be Mary's protector in times of hardship and to avoid notice by the evil one, who "had heard that the Virgin would conceive and was keeping the Virgin under his surveillance".⁹ In order to fool the devil, Joseph betrothed Mary appearing publicly as her spouse "but not so in actual deed".¹⁰ The Gospel states that "before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit". This means the Virgin conceived before Joseph and she had any "physical relations".¹¹ Physical relations do *not* mean *sexual* relations.

Joseph displayed his righteousness and compassion in considering divorcing her in secret. He intended for her to avoid the exposure and punishment decreed by the law for the adulteress. His "great goodness" in this circumstance showed Joseph to be "above the law, and *already* (emphasis supplied) living in a manner superior to the decrees of the law". Additionally, he knew she had been conceived of the Holy Spirit. When he found her to be with child, he pondered whether to divorce her secretly because "he no longer dared to take as a wife her who had been deemed worthy of such grace".¹²

God sent an angel to Joseph in a dream to show him what to do. Because of his faith and righteousness, he believed the angel was of God. God's word to Joseph resounds triumphantly through the ages:

... Joseph, thou *son of David* (emphasis supplied), fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.¹³

Fearing not to take her means to take her into his house as her protector. He was not to leave her defenseless. The angel is telling him that she has not been corrupted by anyone, she is his betrothed, his wife. It is as if the angel is saying to Joseph he should *rejoice* because not only has there been no unlawful union but her conception is wondrous and divine.¹⁴

The angel foretells that Mary will bear a son, and Joseph is to call Him Jesus. Mary is bringing Christ into the world for its sake. Jesus comes to save His people, all, including the Gentiles. He will not come to save us from our enemies, but from our sins. Since God alone forgives sins, "it is clear that it is God who will be born".¹⁵ This was not a new resolution of God to bring the Son into the world to save it. God had spoken through the prophets.¹⁶

Why did God decree that Mary was to be a virgin?

The answer is easy. Holy Scripture (The Septuagint, LXX) is clear to those who believe. Scripture states "Behold, a Virgin shall be with child." Mary's virginity was to be a *sign, something extraordinary*. The Jews alter Scripture [and, by inference so does anyone] by maliciously contending that prophecy refers to a "young woman" rather than "virgin". Bl. Theophylact [and all the Fathers of Christ's True Church] states that regardless "whether the text reads 'young woman' or 'virgin, it should be understood in either case that it is a virgin who will give birth so that the event may be a miraculous sign".¹⁷ The translator of Bl. Theophylact's Explanation of St. Matthew adds this interesting footnote:

Note: the Hebrew text of Isaiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran in 1947 does confirm the accuracy of the Septuagint reading of ‘virgin’.¹⁸

The Virgin is bringing forth a Son, Who is to be called Emmanuel, interpreted as God with us. The prophet had stated that “They” who shall call Him Emmanuel means that His events and deeds will show Him to be God. There is no contradiction between the Lord’s name of Jesus, meaning Saviour, and Emmanuel, which He will be called – “Scripture gives this as His name, which He acquires from the event.”¹⁹

Joseph awakened and faithfully did the angel’s bidding by taking Mary as his wife. “And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: And he called His name JESUS.” Let us be ‘crystal clear’ what St. Matthew means here. Joseph *never* had sexual intercourse with Mary. Here are the Bl. Theophylact’s exact words [and thus the words of the Fathers of the True Orthodox Church]:

‘Until’ here does not mean that before the birth he did not know her and afterwards he did, but that *he absolutely never knew her* (emphasis supplied).

...

So you must understand here ‘until’ she brought forth to mean, neither before the birth nor after the birth did he know her.²⁰

Nor did the Ever-Virgin Mary have any other children. The term “her firstborn son” does not mean that later she had a child or children. St. Matthew means that Christ was her *only* child: “For Christ is both the ‘firstborn’ by having been born first and the ‘only begotten’, in that he had no brother.”²¹ St. James the Just of Jerusalem was Joseph’s son by an earlier marriage, and thus he was not a natural brother to Jesus, although he is referred to as the brother of the Lord. “Only begotten” in the context used “refers to the *single* (emphasis supplied) birth giving of the Holy Virgin, and not, as in the Creed, to the relationship of God the Son to God the Father.”²²

We learned a lot in this Gospel, about Faith, righteousness, obedience to God. In particular, the relationship between the Ever-Virgin and her protector and betrothed, Joseph, is set straight. As Orthodox Christians, each day we face the contemporary world’s ‘doubting Thomases,’ who find it sometimes easy to believe in the demonic spirits of Halloween but ‘pooh-pooh’ the Virgin Birth. Perhaps they do not explicitly consider that by doubting it they do not believe it. This is quite a serious matter. They disagree with Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. Thus, they disagree with God. Let’s proclaim with faith and zeal the upcoming birth of our Lord through the pure vessel of Mary. Let us also honour and respect patriarch Joseph who although not contributing his seed pledged his undying faith and righteousness to protecting Mary and thus served God.

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 691 and see Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Matthew Vol. I* in the series, Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 13.

² *id.*, p. 14 and see Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 692.

³ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴ Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 692.

⁵ *id.*, pp. 692-693 and Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁶ "She who gave birth to God." *id.*, see fn 11 at p. 17 The Church has commanded us to use this name, which "expresses the most profound mystery of theology and the awe and reverence in which Christians hold the Most Holy Virgin". Commanded by a decree of the Third Ecumenical Council, Ephesus, in 431 A.D.

⁷ *id.* and see Ciuba, *op. cit.*, pp. 700-701.

⁸ *id.*, p. 701 and see Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁹ *id.*, p. 18.

¹⁰ *id.* Joseph was also considerably older, perhaps being over 80 at the time.

¹¹ *id.*

¹² *id.*, p. 19.

¹³ St. Matthew 1: 20.

¹⁴ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁵ *id.*

¹⁶ *id.*, p. 21, Bl. Theophylact citing Is. 7: 14.

¹⁷ *id.*

¹⁸ *id.*, see fn 19.

¹⁹ *id.*

²⁰ *id.*, pp. 21-22.

²¹ *id.*, p. 22.

²² *id.*, , fn 23.