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Homily at the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday before the Nativity 2024



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros
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December 22, 2024
Saint John's Greek Orthodox Church
Blue Point, Connecticut

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I rejoice to be with you for the Divine Service today, which is the very special Sunday before Christmas. Saint John's is a wonderful and vibrant community, and the very busy Sunday that we have today says it all! We have a Christmas Pageant, four Chrismations, an Artoklasia, a Forty Day Blessing, and prayers for two couples recently engaged! All this right before Christmas! Very busy indeed.

Our Gospel reading for this Sunday before the Nativity of our Lord is very busy as well. Today, we hear the annual recitation of the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Matins, we heard the list of the Lord's ancestors as found in the Gospel of Saint Luke. Then, in the Liturgy, we hear the other genealogy from the Gospel of

Saint Matthew.

There are many reasons for the two versions – some that relate to Judaic Law, others that define the Person and the purpose of our Lord. But I want to share with you something that is more basic.

But today's readings remind us of the incredible human history that preceded the Birth of the Savior, a history of good, and of bad.

The deeper meaning here, is that our salvation in Christ does not occur in a vacuum. There were concrete human beings who lived and died, and from whom the Lord was descended. Their stories are found in the Books that make up the Old Testament, but these are not sanitized versions of the human experience. They are filled with the same realities of life and death that persist in the modern world. They remind us of the authentic and true humanity of the Lord. He may have been perfect, but His ancestors were not.

Therefore, when we look to our own families, our own communities, and the Γένος from which we descend, we do not have to idealize them. We can, and we should, accept our forefathers and foremothers for who, and for what, they were. Recognizing their faults is not necessarily opposed to praising their virtues.

The honesty that such considerations breed is healthy for our own self-assessment of who and what we are. And we must remember that future generations will look back on us and hold us to account. Being in this great historical flow is a good thing, especially if it keeps us in a realistic humility about ourselves. As the Philosopher Heraclitus said:

Πάντα ῥεῖ – “Everything flows.”

There is wisdom in seeing one's life as part of something much greater. Today's genealogies of the Lord Jesus demonstrate just how much He loved us. For He took up a particular lineage of humanity, in a particular place, at a particular time, for the sake of everyone, everywhere, and for all time.

This humbling of His Godhead to enter into the stream of human history is the essential fact of His Incarnation. The fruit of His Incarnation, that was planted on the Day of the Annunciation, is revealed at the Feast of the Nativity, in the Birth of the Christ Child. But He is not alone.

He is with His Holy and Virgin Mother. He is with His earthly guardian Joseph, who played the part of a father. He has a family!

And more than a current family, He has ancestors – good and bad. Just like us.

Beloved Parishioners of Saint John's:

We are all part of God's family – every single one of us – good and not so good. And outside the walls of this beautiful Church, we are part of the larger human family, those we know, and those we do not know, just like that great river of our individual ancestors, flowing through time.

Therefore, let us not withhold our embrace and welcome from anyone. They are part of us, and we are part of them. When they fall short, let us be present to support them, and to help them. And when they succeed and advance, let us greet their good fortune with happiness and generosity.

In closing, I pray that these Holy Days of the miracle of the Nativity, will lead you all to understand how much you are loved by the Heavenly Father, and how much you are part of His Family.

May He grant unto us all a blessed Feast of Christmas, and a safe, prosperous, and healthy New Year of 2025.

Amen.

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