



On the eighth day of the Feast of the Nativity, which also happens to be the beginning of the civil New Year, the Church celebrates the Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His receiving of the name Jesus, which means Saviour.

The Church's Liturgy tells us that Jesus underwent circumcision in order to fulfil the Law of Moses. In being circumcised, Jesus Christ identifies completely with sinful human beings, showing the divine humility that even submits to the high priest's knife. And, in submitting Himself to the Law, He frees us from the law and from the ritual that was based on the law. As the Church chants at Matins on this day:

“Circumcision has ceased, for Christ was circumcised of His own will, granting the nations remission of sins, and saving them by grace.”

### ***Readings and saints for this week:***

**Monday:** Hebrews 11:17-31; Luke 14:25-35  
20,000 Martyrs of Nicomedia; Martyr Glycerus

**Tuesday:** Hebrews 2:11-18; Matthew 2:13-23  
Holy Innocents; Abbot Marcellus

**Wednesday:** James 1:1-18; Mark 11:22-26  
Great Martyr Anysia; Gideon the New

**Thursday:** James 1:19-27; Mark 11:27-33  
Apodosis of Nativity; Righteous Melania

**Friday:** John 10:1-9; Colossians 2:8-12; Luke 2:20-21, 40-52  
Circumcision of Jesus Christ; Basil the Great

**Saturday:** Hebrews 5:4-10; John 3:1-15  
Forefeast of Epiphany Begins; Pope Sylvester



**27 December 2015 is the  
Sunday after the Nativity of Christ**

**Matins Gospel:** John 20:11-18

**Epistle:** Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60

**Gospel:** Matthew 2:13-23

#### **Resurrectional Apolytikion:**

Let us worship the Word, O ye faithful, praising Him that with the Father and the Spirit is co-beginningless God, Who was born of a pure Virgin that we all be saved; for He was pleased to mount the Cross in the flesh that He assumed, accepting thus to endure death. And by His glorious rising, He also willed to resurrect the dead.

#### **Seasonal Kontakion:**

On this day the Virgin beareth the Transcendent in essence; to the Unapproachable, the earth doth offer a small cave; Angels join in choir with shepherds in giving glory; with a star the Magi travel upon their journey; for our sakes is born a young Child, He that existed before the ages as God.



## ***Evangelion***

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27 December 2015

### **The Light Shines in the Darkness**

On Christmas day we celebrated the coming of Christ who shines as a Light in our world. Saint John tells us in his Gospel that Jesus Christ is the true Light who enlightens everyone who comes in to the world. (1:9) This celebration of light continues until the Great Feast of the Theophany on 6 January, when we commemorate Christ's baptism in the Jordan, which is also known as a feast of light.

However, today's Gospel reminds us of less pleasant events around Christ's birth. Indeed, having celebrated the joyful tidings of His birth, and the peace that He brings to all people, the Church's Liturgy reminds us at this time of the reality of suffering in our world. Today we commemorate Saint Stephen, the first martyr whose death is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (6-7). Tomorrow we commemorated the twenty thousand martyrs of Nicomedia who refused to worship idols. And on Tuesday we commemorate the holy children who were slaughtered by King Herod in his attempt to put to death the newborn Christ.



As we are celebrating the joy of Christmas, we are given this rather sober reminder that Jesus Christ was rejected on earth from His very first days. His birth brought joy to many, but the true Light which had shone into the world also brought opposition, for there are those who prefer darkness to the Light. There is nothing sentimental about the message of Christmas, for Christ's birth set in motion a series of events that will ultimately lead to His great victory over the forces of darkness in His death and resurrection. The Light continues to shine in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

The truth has come! God is made manifest! He is born of the Virgin, enlightening those who sit in darkness, for the salvation of the world.

From Vespers of the feast of the Holy Innocents

# Homily on the Nativity of Our Lord

by Saint Peter Chrysologus

A virgin conceived, bore a son, and yet remained a virgin. This is no common occurrence, but a sign; no reason here, but God's power, for He is the cause, and not nature. It is a special event, not shared by others; it is divine, not human. Christ's birth was not necessity, but an expression of omnipotence, a sacrament of piety for the redemption of men. He who made man without generation from pure clay made man again and was born from a pure body. The hand that assumed clay to make our flesh deigned to assume a body for your salvation. That the Creator is in His creature and God is in the flesh brings dignity to man without dishonour to Him who made him.



Why then, man, are you so worthless in your own eyes and yet so precious to God?

Why render yourself such dishonor when you are honored by Him?

Why do you ask how you were created and do not seek to know why you were made?

Was not this entire visible universe made for your dwelling? It was for you that the light dispelled the overshadowing gloom; for your sake was the night regulated and the day measured, and for you were the heavens embellished with varying brilliance

of the sun, the moon and the stars. The earth was adorned with flowers, groves and fruit; and the constant marvelous variety of lovely living things was created in the air, the fields, and the seas for you, lest sad solitude destroy the joy of God's new creation.

And the Creator still works to devise things that can add to your glory. He has made you in His image that you might in your person make the invisible Creator present on earth; He has made you His legate, so that the vast empire of the world might have the Lord's representative. Then in his mercy God assumed what He made in you; He wanted now to be truly manifest in man, just as He had wished to be revealed in man as in an image. Now He would be in reality what He had submitted to be in symbol.

And so Christ is born that by His birth He might restore our nature. He became a child, was fed, and grew that He might inaugurate the one perfect age to remain forever as He created it. He supports man that man might no longer fall. And the creature He had formed of earth He now makes heavenly; and what He had endowed with a human soul He now vivifies to become a heavenly spirit. In this way He fully raised man to God, and left in Him neither sin, nor death, nor travail, nor pain, nor anything earthly, with the grace of our Lord Christ Jesus, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever, for all the ages of eternity. Amen.

How is He contained in a womb whom nothing can contain? How can He be held in the arms of His mother who remains forever in the bosom of His Father? It is according to His good will, as He knows and as He desires! For being without flesh, He of His own good will has been made flesh; And He who is has for our sake become what He was not. He has shared our nature without departing from His own. Desiring to fill the world on high with citizens, Christ has undergone a twofold birth!

From Matins of the Feast of the Nativity

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## Saints David the Prophet and King, Joseph the Betrothed, and James the Brother of the Lord

Today, on the Sunday after Nativity, the Church commemorates three members of Christ's earthly family: the Prophet and King David, Saint Joseph, the Betrothed of the Virgin, and the Apostle James, the Brother of the Lord.

**King David** lived about a thousand years before the birth of Christ and was the greatest of the Kings of Israel. He prefigured the Messiah who was awaited as the "Son of David." However, King David is not simply the ancestor of Christ. As a shepherd, he prefigures Jesus the Good Shepherd. As King, he announces the royalty of Christ. As an adulterer and murderer he provides a model of the penitent sinner. And as the author of the Psalms, he has provided the basis of the Church's prayer book with which countless generations have expressed their deepest longings and also found the revelation of the coming Messiah.

**Saint Joseph** played an important but somewhat background role in our salvation history, being the one to whom the care of the Holy Theotokos was entrusted. A carpenter by trade, he was a widower with seven children from his first marriage, and was chosen as the protector of the Virgin Mary. He was not warned of her virginal conception and so was dismayed when he learnt of her pregnancy. However, an angel of the Lord revealed to him that Christ had been conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-25). An angel likewise warned him to flee with the Infant Christ and His Mother to Egypt to escape Herod's plans to kill him. Although Saint Joseph played a somewhat background role, he presents us with an important example of trustworthy devotion.

**Saint James the Brother of the Lord** was the head of the first Christian community in Jerusalem. In his epistle to the Ephesians (1:19), Saint Paul tells us that after his conversion experience on the road to Damascus he went to Jerusalem to consult with Saint James. And in the Acts of the Apostles he is clearly shown as presiding over the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). He is the author of the New Testament epistle that bears his name and which challenges believers to live authentic Christian lives. Saint James was martyred by being thrown from the peak of the temple around 62 A.D. and survived for long enough to pray "Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they do" before being clubbed to death.