

Sun of Righteousness

Christ is the Sun of Righteousness. This is a prophetic title from the Old Testament. Just as the sun appears to start the day messiah's coming marks the dawn of a "new day" for the people of God. The bright light of the sun chases away the forbidding darkness of the land, light is symbolic of the good and the darkness the work of evil.

Sun worship festivals were common in pagan culture during the dawn of Christianity. In fact, Saturnalia was celebrated the last week of December throughout the Roman Empire. This was the festival to the Sun God Saturn. This great public festival is largely the reason the Church at Rome choose to place the celebration of the Nativity of Christ in this same time of December. The Church saw the good elements of the people's worship of the sun and transferred these to the Sun of Righteousness. The acknowledgement of the power of nature in the dawn of the new day, the gift giving to our friends and neighbors and the celebration of life itself all were part of this pagan festival week. Just as Paul tells those worshiping the "unknown God" in Acts all about Jesus Christ, the Church asked Romans to reconsider their worship of the sun and transfer this to the Sun of Righteousness.

The prophet Malachi proclaimed the coming of the Messiah as the Sun of Righteousness in Chapter 4:1-3. He proclaims that the Sun of Righteousness will bring justice to the land that will burn like an oven over the evil doers. This image foreshadows the place of punishment that awaits those who are not just in this life when they pass to the next. Some Patristic writers describe the next life as Theoria, the concept that St. Augustine called the "Beatific Vision". A place where we commune in the presence of the Face of God. Warmth and peace emanate from this vision. Some have said that there is no created place of damnation, but rather we all experience this Sun of Righteousness coming from God, but for those not living a just life this burns like fire to purify our nature. If we submit and repent we are purified, if we deny and resist we burn. Paul describes the experience as being saved as through the fire on the day of judgement, when fire will judge the strength of the house we have built by the deeds of our life. When that day comes, will we be basking in the peace of God or burning in the denial of our sins?

"A Light shall spring forth from the root of Jesse, as the prophet full of light has foretold. For we see a Virgin giving birth, in a way beyond nature, to a most precious rose in a cave. In the heavens He sits upon the same throne as the Father. O you people, let us say: Blessed are You, our God who has come. Glory to You!"

Matins Praises December 24

Steve Puluka

Phillipian Fast

The Winter Pascha

Week Four



To Christ our God, who is the only-begotten Son of the Father from before all ages, and in these latter times has become flesh of the Virgin without seed, let us cry aloud: You are our strength; glory to You, O Lord!

Nativity Canon Ode 3

Offerings to Christ

The great mystery of the Nativity is that the God who created all things becomes a creature. The giver of life and all things stands in need of gifts to live himself. The one beyond time and existence appears at a certain time and place. Creation responds to God's appearance in human flesh.

Angels, the highest order of creation, bow down and worship a lowly creature. Tradition tells us that the thought of this worship drove some angels out of the presence of God. Just as some people cannot accept God's appearance in the world,

“The Magi picked up their gifts and knelt before the gift of gifts and the myrrh of myrrh. Then they offered to Christ god, frankincense, and myrrh, saying: ‘Receive the triple gift like the thrice-holy hymn of the Seraphim. Do not reject it as the offerings of Cain; but accept it as the offering of Abel for the sake of her who produced thee and from whom thou has been born for us as a newborn babe, the God before time.’”

Magi in
Romanos’
Kontakia

and into their lives, some angels could not bear the plan of God. But those that remained faithful, offer their gift of praise.

The heavens created by God were a sign of royal majesty throughout the ancient world. People looked to the stars for signs and wonders of what was to come. God’s creation in the heavens offers the gift of a star, a special sign to show forth the royal power of God. The Magi accept this sign of the star and follow the lead to God in the flesh. Knowing the meaning of the star they bring gifts fit for royalty.

The shepherds represent the everyday people. They are the lowly and the outcast. Shepherds have the reputation that gypsies have today. They live on the fringes of society and are seen as liars and cheats. Yet these are the first to behold the Christ child. All they can offer is their awe and wonder.

The earth gives safe haven from the elements, a cave. The cave is symbolic of the womb. Mother earth holds and protects the Holy Family from the harm of the world. The dangerous and desolate desert gives the gift of a manger. Food for the animals but a safe resting place for the Christ child. From the desert the people of Israel come closer to God than ever before. In the desert we encounter the living God.

But the greatest gift to God at the Nativity is from humanity, the mother of the child gives the flesh of her own flesh. The mystical union of Divinity and humanity take place in the gift of human flesh from Mary. All creation contributes to the event, but Mary’s is the perfect gift for the occasion.

“O Christ, what shall we offer You for our for your coming on earth in our humanity for our sake? Every creature that has its being from You gives thanks to You: the angels offer hymns of praise, the heavens give a star; the Magi present their gifts and the shepherds, their wonder. The earth, provides a cave. The desert, a manger. As for us, we offer a Virgin Mother. O God who are from all eternity, have mercy on us!”

Vespers on the Eve of the Nativity

“God is with us! God is with us! Understand you, all nations, and submit yourselves, for God is with Us!”

Great Compline December 24

God is with Us

We sing this section of the prophet Isaiah during Great Compline on the eve of the Nativity. Isaiah tells a troubled and occupied Israel not to give up hope, that God is still with them. Even though times were bad and their enemies controlled all, God would grant them a savior, a messiah, and God was with them. Isaiah promises that a virgin shall be with child and before the child is old enough to know good from evil, all will be restored.

Matthew connects this child to Jesus in the account of the Nativity. The child shall be called Emmanuel, God is with us. The prophetic virgin with child has finally appeared in Mary. Judaism will deny this miracle. There are two versions of the book of Isaiah, Hebrew and Greek. In the Hebrew a young woman is with child, Isaiah’s wife. In the Greek a virgin is with child, only possible in Mary. Early Christianity would have many an argument with Judaism over which version of Isaiah is correct, with eyes of faith we see the miracle fulfilled.

The Gospel of John alludes to God with us. In the prolog we see that God “pitched his tent among us”. God descended to live right in the midst of his people. He moved among us, just as he did with Adam in the garden.

Great Compline is not limited to the feast of the Nativity. We again connect to the Nativity to Pascha with this liturgical service. We sing this during the first week of Great Fast. The appearance of Christ at Bethlehem is again connected to the end of his public ministry in Jerusalem.

Great Compline is about victory, but the victory results in justice. When the nations are called to submit themselves, they submit to the power of God, God in the flesh at the incarnation.

“When the blameless virgin saw the Magi carrying in their hands the new and shining gifts, and kneeling before Him, she entreated the One who is creator and Lord of all saying: ‘Receive the three gifts, my child, and grant three prayers for her who gave Thee birth. I beg Thee in behalf of the earth and those who dwell thereon, be reconciled to all for my sake, since Thou hast been born a newborn babe, the God before time.’”

Mary in
Romanos’
Kontakia

