

The Feast Day of the Apostle Nathanael

June 11, 2023

Gospel: Luke 10:16-21
Epistle: Acts 11:19-30
1st Reading for Vespers: 1 Peter 1:3-9
2nd Reading for Vespers: 1 Peter 1:13-19
3rd Reading for Vespers: 1 Peter 2:11-24
Matins Gospel: John 21:15-25

Background on Nathanael

Nathanael was native to the city of Cana (John 21:2), but we know very little of his early life. He is also known as “Bartholomew” (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:14), which is Hebrew for “Son of Tholmei”. Similarly Peter was also known as “Bar-Jonah” (Matthew 16:17) and Joseph was known as “Barnabas” meaning “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36).

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There is a story in one of the New Testament Apocryphal writings¹ that states that Jesus' parents knew Nathanael's parents. The story also states that Jesus performed miracles as a child, which is refuted by later Church Fathers. This story is possible, but can't be confirmed. Since Jesus' mother was prominent at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-12), where Nathanael grew up, she probably had some relatives there. The future Apostle, Simon the Zealot, was the bridegroom at the wedding feast at Cana², and Mary's prominence at his wedding suggests that they were related.

Jesus Called Nathanael: "An Israelite in Whom is No Deceit" John 1:43-51

The only real glimpse of Nathanael's personality from the New Testament comes from his first contact with Jesus at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in 27 AD. Nathanael was at least in his early 20's at this time, making his birth date c. 5 AD. Some of the Twelve had been followers of John the Baptist. When John pointed out Jesus as "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 35-37), they began to follow Jesus. After Jesus called Philip, Philip found Nathanael to tell him that he had found the Messiah. John's account of this reads:

"Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law, and also the prophets, wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' And Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!' Nathanael said to Him, 'How do You know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these'. And He said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man'" (John 1:45-51).

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John Chrysostom analyzed³ John's Gospel account in detail. He concluded that this account demonstrates that Nathanael was gentle, but not critical, and very exact in his understanding of the Scriptures. He was firm, steady and impartial in his inquiry, and was not sidetracked by vanity. When his questions were satisfied, Nathanael was quick to confess that Philip had indeed found the Messiah.

Chrysostom began to elaborate on this by pointing out that, at this time, Jesus' fame had gone throughout all Syria (Matthew 4:24). "The wonderful thing about Peter and James and Philip was that they believed, not only before the miracles, but they did so being of Galilee, out of which supposedly 'arises no prophet', nor 'can any good thing come'. For the Galileans were somehow of a more boorish and dull disposition than others; but even in this Christ displayed forth His power, by selecting His choicest disciples from a land which was thought to bear no fruit."

"Since Nathanael was an exact man, and one who viewed all things with truth, as Christ also testified and the event showed, Philip with reason referred him to Moses and the Prophets, in order that he might be open to receive Christ".

¹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior", 30, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

² Nikolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, May 10.

³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John 20, 1-3
John Chrysostom, Homilies on John 21, 1

“Nathanael had studied the writings of the Prophets. He had heard from the Scriptures, that Christ must come from Bethlehem. ‘And you, Bethlehem, are by no means the least among the princes of Judah, for out of you shall come a Governor, that shall feed my people Israel.’ (Matthew 2:6; Micah 5:2). And so when he heard that Jesus was ‘from Nazareth’, he was puzzled, and doubted, not finding the announcement of Philip to agree with the prediction of the Prophet. But observe his wisdom and candor even in his doubting. He did not say, ‘Philip, you deceive me, and speak falsely, I do not believe you, I will not come; I have learned from the prophets that Christ must come from Bethlehem, therefore this is not that Christ’. He said nothing like this; instead he goes to Him himself. And by not rejecting him who brought the message, he showed the great desire, which he felt for the coming of Christ. For he thought within himself that Philip was probably mistaken about the place.”

“And observe his manner of objection, how gentle he has made it. For he did not say, ‘Galilee produces no good’; but instead he said, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Wherefore Christ said, ‘Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile’. There is such a person as a false Israelite; but this is not such a one; for his judgment, Christ said, is impartial, he speaks nothing from favor, or from ill feeling. Nathanael continued to retain the opinion, which he had from the beginning, that He was not ‘of Nazareth’”.

“How then do the prophets (Matthew 2:23, see also Judges 13:5) call Him a Nazarene? From His being brought up and living there. Jesus avoided saying, ‘I am not ‘of Nazareth’, as Philip has told you, but of Bethlehem’, that He may not make the account seem questionable. For someone could have been from Bethlehem and not be the Christ. This issue then He avoided; but He did that which had the most power to bring him over, for He showed that He was present when they were conversing”.

“This indicates that Nathanael was a man firm and steady. When Christ had said, ‘Behold an Israelite indeed’, Nathanael was not made vain by this compliment, he did not run after this open praise, but continued seeking and searching more exactly, and desired to learn something certain. He still inquired as a man, but Jesus answered as God. For He said, ‘I have known you from the first’. Jesus did not know him from having followed him closely, but as God. When He saw him by the fig-tree, there was no one present there but only Philip and Nathanael, who said all these things in private”.

“Having seen him afar off, He said, ‘Behold an Israelite indeed’. Christ spoke these words before Philip arrived to demonstrate his foreknowledge. For this reason also He named the time, the place, and the tree. Because if He had only said, “Before Philip came to you, I saw you,” He might have been suspected of having sent him. But now, by mentioning both the place where he was when addressed by Philip, and the name of the tree, and the time of the conversation, He showed that His foreknowledge was unquestionable”.

“And He did not merely show to him His foreknowledge, but He brought him to a recollection of what they then had said; as, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” And it was most especially on this account that Nathanael received Him, because when he had uttered these words, Jesus did not condemn, but praised and approved him. Therefore he was assured that this was indeed the Christ, both from His foreknowledge, and from His having exactly searched out his sentiments, which only One who could read his mind could do. And besides, Jesus did not blame him, but rather praised him, when Nathanael had seemed to speak against Him. He said then, that Philip had ‘called’ him; but what Philip had said to him or he to Philip, He omitted, leaving it to his own conscience, and not desiring farther to rebuke him”.

“When Nathanael had received an unquestionable proof of His foreknowledge, he hastened to confess Him, showing his caution by his previous delay, and his fairness by his assent afterwards. For, said the Evangelist, ‘He answered and said unto Him, Rabbi, You are the Son of

God, You are the King of Israel'. His soul was filled at once with exceeding joy, and he embraced Jesus with the words, 'You are that expected, that sought-for One'".

"After Nathanael's reply, Christ said, 'Because I said unto you, I saw you under the fig-tree, do you believe me? You shall see greater things than these'".

"There is a question that arises from this passage. Peter, after so many miracles and such high doctrine confessed that, 'You are the Son of God' (Matthew 16:16), and is called 'blessed', as having received the revelation from the Father. While Nathanael, though he said the very same thing before seeing or hearing either miracles or doctrine, had no such word addressed to him, but as though he had not said as much as he ought, is brought to things greater still. What can be the reason for this?"

"Peter and Nathanael both spoke the same words, but not both with the same intention. Peter confessed Him to be 'The Son of God' but as being Very God of Very God; Nathanael, as being mere man. How so? After these words he said, 'You are the Son of God', and, 'You are the King of Israel'. But the Son of God is not 'King of Israel' only, but of the entire world. And what I say is clear from what follows. For Christ added nothing more to Peter, but as though his faith were perfect, said that He would build the Church upon this confession of his. But in the case of Nathanael, He did nothing like this, but the contrary. For as though some large part was lacking in his confession, He added what follows. 'Verily, I say unto you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man'".

"Christ led him up by little and little from the earth, and caused him no longer to imagine Him as merely a man? For One to whom Angels minister, and on whom Angels ascend and descend, how could He be man? For this reason He said, 'You shall see greater things than these'. And what He means is something of this kind. 'Does this, Nathanael, seem to you a great matter, and have you for this confessed me to be King of Israel? What then will you say, when you see the Angels ascending and descending upon Me?' Persuading him by these words to own Him Lord also of the Angels. For on Him as on the King's own Son, the royal ministers ascended and descended, once at the season of the Crucifixion (Luke 22:43), again at the time of the Resurrection (Matthew 28:2-3, Luke 24:4) and the Ascension (Acts 1:10-11). And before this also, when they 'came and ministered unto Him' after His baptism (Matthew 4:11), when they proclaimed the glad tidings of His birth crying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace' (Luke 2:14). Also when they came to Mary (Luke 1:26-38), when they came to Joseph (Matthew 1:20, 2:13). But Nathanael had seen none of this at His birth, and everything else was still future.

What then does Nathanael do? To this he makes no reply. And therefore at this point Christ stopped His discourse with him, allowing him to consider in private what had been said.

Chrysostom continued this analysis⁴ by comparing Nathanael's response to Christ to that of the Jewish leaders that opposed Nicodemus. John recorded this exchange as follows. "Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, 'Truly this is the Prophet'. Others said, 'This is the Christ'. But some said, 'Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?'" (John 7:40-42) "However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from" (John 7:27). There was a difference of opinion, as might be expected in a confused multitude; for they did not listen attentively to His words, nor for the sake of learning. Therefore Jesus did not answer them.

Nathanael said what he did as being a lover of the truth, and knowing exactly all the ancient histories. But the Jewish leaders looked only to one thing, and that was to remove the opinion that He was the Christ, on which account He revealed nothing to them. By way of contrast, He had

⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 51, 2.

praised Nathanael as being ‘an Israelite indeed’, who had said in a more forcible and striking manner, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ (John 1:46) But then the Jewish leaders, who said to Nicodemus, ‘Search and look, for no prophet is to arise out of Galilee’ (John 7:52), said it not seeking to learn, but merely to overturn the opinion concerning Christ.

For they who even contradicted themselves said at one time, ‘No man knows whence He comes’, and at another, ‘From Bethlehem’, would clearly, even if they had been informed, have opposed Him. They knew the place of His birth that He was from Bethlehem, because of His dwelling in Nazareth. Were they ignorant of His race also, that He was ‘of the house and lineage of David’? How then did they say, ‘Does not Christ come of the seed of David?’ They wished to conceal even this fact by that question, saying all that they said with malicious intent. Why did they not come to Him and say, ‘Since we admire you in other respects, and you bid us believe you according to the Scriptures, tell us how it is that the Scriptures say that Christ must come from Bethlehem, when you are come from Galilee?’ But they said nothing of the kind, but all in malice.

Nathanael as a Fisherman: John 21:1-6

Among Jesus’ relatives, James and John were fishermen along with their father Zebedee. Due to the type of nets they used, their business required at least two boats and at least a dozen able-bodied men to haul nets. Thus we see Peter and Andrew as partners with James and John Zebedee (Luke 5:10). In addition, Thomas and Nathanael worked with them also (John 21:1-3) and may have been hired hands.

Philip, a native of Bethsaida along with Peter and Andrew, was not a fisherman, but was a close friend of Nathanael (John 1:43-48). Matthias was not a fisherman or a direct relative of Jesus. But due to his being put forward as a candidate to replace Judas (along with Jesus’ step brother Joseph, Jr.), he had spent the last three years going everywhere with them as one of the Seventy (Acts 1:21-23). Since Matthias was born in Bethlehem (along with Joseph, the Betrothed of the Virgin Mary), he could have been a distant relative of Joseph.

Three types of nets⁵ were referred to in both New and Old Testaments, and these were the common tools of the fishermen like Nathanael. These types of nets had been used for thousands of years and required much different techniques.

The first type, a dragnet (Greek *sagaynay*), is the oldest type. Typical dragnets or seines were up to 1,000 feet long and 25 feet high. It was spread out by boat 100 yards or more from shore and then hauled to shore by a team of 16 men. Sinkers kept the bottom of the net down and floats kept the top on the surface. When the net reached the shore, fish were sorted and catfish were thrown away. This is the type of net referred to in Matthew 13:47-50. This net couldn’t be used if the shoreline was rocky or had kelp growing near the shore.

A second type of net is a cast net, also called a bag net (Greek *amphiblestron*). This type is circular, about 25 feet in diameter and has lead weights all around the outer edge. After the net is thrown and sinks to the bottom, it is either retrieved by a system of cords or by a diver. When Peter and Andrew were called (Matthew 4:18), they were using this net, perhaps catching sardines. (When Peter and Andrew left their nets, Matthew 4:20, they left the third type of net: their trammel nets.)

⁵ Mendel Nun, “Cast Your Net upon the Waters”, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Nov./Dec. 1993, pp. 46-56.

A third type of net is called a trammel net (Greek *diktuon*). This type of net has three layers and was used only at night. It was not useful during the day because the fish could see the weaving and avoid it. Modern synthetic fiber — which is invisible under water — has made trammel nets useful today in the daytime. The trammel net was spread in a crescent shape roughly parallel to the shoreline. The boat that laid the net then quietly maneuvered toward shore between the net and the shore. All of a sudden the fishermen in the boat started making racket by beating the water with oars or stamping on the bottom of the boat. The frightened fish headed for deep water — right into the net and became entangled.

The trammel net was lowered and hauled up perhaps a dozen times during the night. Early in the morning the net was washed and hung up to dry and repaired — and prepared for the next night's work.

Glimpses of Nathanael During the First Year of the Church

Nathanael was known in most written accounts as “Bartholomew”, both in Biblical accounts and non-Biblical accounts. “Bartholomew” (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:14) is Hebrew for “Son of Tholmei”, and may indicate that he was an only son, or that there were no other sons of Tholmei involved in the work of the Church. Nathanael never married, like many of the 12, but instead concentrated on a godly life in evangelizing the regions he traveled to.

In the first year of the Church, the Book of Acts describes several encounters between the Apostles and the religious leaders. In all cases, Peter or John are quoted as being the spokesmen for the Apostles. On Pentecost, Peter was described “standing with the Eleven” (Acts 2:14) in his message to the people who were confused by the events taking place. When Peter and John healed the lame man, the man held onto both Peter and John, but Peter was the one who spoke to the people about what had happened (Acts 3:1-12). When Peter and John were arrested for this, it was Peter who spoke in their defense (Acts 4:1-8). When the Twelve were arrested and put in prison, an angel let them out during the night. Summoned before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, the account reads that Peter *and the other Apostles answered* and said, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:17-29).

Few details are given in Acts regarding the exact accusations that were brought against the Apostles, or who of the Twelve answered these accusations. Pseudo Clement⁶ records one example where Nathanael responded:

“Then a certain Pharisee, hearing this, chided Philip because he put Jesus on a level with Moses. To whom Bartholomew, answering, boldly declared that we do not only say that Jesus was equal to Moses, but that He was greater than he. Because Moses was indeed a prophet, as Jesus was also, but that Moses was not the Christ, as Jesus was, and therefore He is doubtless greater who is both a prophet and the Christ, than he who is only a prophet”.

Nathanael's Early Missionary Journeys

Nathanael's early missionary journeys have not been well documented, and we know considerably more about his later missionary journeys, both when he traveled with the Apostle

⁶ Pseudo-Clement, Recognitions of Clement, I, 59

Philip (of the Twelve) and by himself. The Roman Martyrology states⁷ that during his early missionary journeys, he preached in Egypt for a time, as did some of the other Apostles. From a fragment of the writings of an unknown author⁸ of the late 2nd Century, Pantaenus of Alexandria “became a zealous missionary to the Oriental Ethiopia, and found there the traces of St. Matthias’ labors, and those also of St. Bartholomew. From this mission he (Pantaenus) seems to have returned about A.D. 192”.

Other traditional accounts⁹ state that he traveled throughout Syria and Asia Minor, sometimes with Philip, sometimes alone, then together again. The principle area of Asia Minor that they traveled to, according to these sketchy accounts, was Lydia and Mysia. Lydia is near Ephesus, and they occasionally met the Apostle John, who was also working there. Mysia is at the Northwestern part of Asia Minor near Troas. The Apostle Paul had also been working in this area, but the Spirit had forbidden Paul to preach the Word in Mysia and Troas; instead He had instructed him to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-9). The first well-documented part of Nathanael’s missionary journeys occurred in Hierapolis of Asia (near Phrygia). Since this account resulted in the martyrdom of Philip at Hierapolis during the reign of Domitian¹⁰ (81 to 96 AD), there is a considerable span of years (from 31 AD to 81 AD) where little is known of the work of the Apostle Nathanael

Nathanael Returns to Jerusalem for the Funeral of the Virgin Mary

Nathanael was busy on his missionary journeys just prior to the time of the death of the Virgin Mary in c. 55 AD. As Mary reached her mid 70’s, she was feeling the effects of old age. And it was then that the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her to tell her that her departure was imminent¹¹, and would occur in three days.

Shortly after Gabriel left, the Apostle John was translated in a bright cloud from wherever he was at the time. This was similar to the way the Deacon Philip was translated from the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza to Azotus (Acts 8:26, 39-40), and as Habakkuk the prophet carried food to Daniel, who was in the lions’ den, and quickly returned to Judaea¹². There is some disagreement among the Church Fathers as to whether John was in Ephesus or in some region of Judea. They contend that John did not leave the Virgin Mary alone during her lifetime, unless it was just briefly in the care of her stepson, James, the Lord’s brother.

After John arrived¹³, “the rest of the Twelve arrived also from whatever part of the world where they were then preaching the Gospel. All of the Twelve arrived except Thomas. They stood and went in, and greeted the queen mother with the following words: ‘Hail, Mary, full of grace!

⁷ Thurston and Attwater, Butler’s Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, August 24.

⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Pantaenus, the Alexandrian Philosopher, Introduction”, Remains of the Second and Third Centuries, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁹ Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, p. 173.

¹⁰ Thurston and Attwater, Butler’s Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, August 24. Hippolytus, On the Twelve Apostles, Where Each of Them Preached, 5

¹¹ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8. Roberts and Donaldson, “The Passing of Mary”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

¹² Lancelot C. L. Brenton, “Bel and the Dragon 1:33-39”, The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson, Peabody MA, 1990

¹³ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Passing of Mary, First Latin Form”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

The Lord be with you' (Luke 1:28). And she eagerly rose quickly, and bowed herself, and kissed them, and gave thanks to God. And Peter answered and said to the apostles, 'Let us each, according to what the Holy Spirit announced and commanded us, give full information to the mother of our Lord'. And those who had come likewise agreed to give an account of how they had come. So each of the Twelve gave Mary an account of where they were when they were summoned". Bartholomew said¹⁴,

"I was in the Thebais (possibly Thebes, in Upper Egypt) proclaiming the Word, and behold the Holy Spirit said to me, 'The mother of your Lord is taking her departure; go, then, to greet her in Bethlehem'. And, behold, a cloud of light snatched me up, and brought me to you".

"Then the blessed Mary said to her brethren: 'What is this, that you have all come to Jerusalem?' Peter, answering, said to her: 'We had need to ask this of you. Certainly, as I think, none of us knows why we have come here today with such rapidity. And they all wondered that they were there when they heard these things. The blessed Mary said to them: 'I asked my Son, before He endured the passion, that He and you should be at my death; and He granted me this gift. Whence you may know that my departure will be tomorrow".

"After Mary's death the next day, the Apostles with great honor laid the body in a tomb on the Mount of Olives, then Thomas was suddenly brought to the Mount of Olives, like the others had been brought earlier. He saw Mary's body going up to heaven, and began to cry out to her. Then the girdle with which the Apostles had encircled her body was thrown down from heaven to the blessed Thomas. And taking it, and giving thanks to God, he came again into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, finding all the Apostles and a great crowd there. Then Thomas said, 'Where have you laid her body?' And they pointed out the sepulcher with their finger. And he said, 'The body is not there'. But they didn't believe Thomas. Then they went to the sepulcher, which was a new one hollowed out in the rock, and took up the stone; but they did not find the body, and did not know what to say. Then Thomas told them how he was singing mass in India — he still had on his sacerdotal robes. He, not knowing the word of God, had been brought to the Mount of Olives, and saw the body of the blessed Mary going up into heaven, and prayed her to give him a blessing. She heard his prayer, and threw him her girdle, which she had about her. And the Apostles seeing the belt which they had put about her, glorified God, on account of the benediction which the blessed Mary had given him, and because he had seen her body going up into heaven. Then Thomas gave them his benediction, and said, 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

"And the same cloud¹⁵ by which they had been brought carried them back each to his own place. And so also the Apostles quickly returned to where they had at first been, to preach to the people of God".

Nathanael Travels to India with the Gospel of Matthew

¹⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary", *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.8.

¹⁵ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "The Passing of Mary, First Latin Form", *Apocrypha of the New Testament*, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

Eusebius wrote¹⁶ that Pantaenus, the head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria¹⁷, had gone to India in the 3rd Century. There he found a copy of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew that Nathanael had brought.

“About that time, Pantaenus, a man highly distinguished for his learning, had charge of the school of the faithful in Alexandria. A school of sacred learning, which continues to our day, was established there in ancient times, and as we have been informed, was managed by men of great ability and zeal for divine things. Among these it is reported that Pantaenus was at that time especially conspicuous, as he had been educated in the philosophical system of those called Stoics. They say that he displayed such zeal for the divine Word, that he was appointed as a herald of the Gospel of Christ to the nations in the East, and was sent as far as India. For indeed there were still many evangelists of the Word who sought earnestly to use their inspired zeal, after the examples of the apostles, for the increase and building up of the Divine Word. Pantaenus was one of these, and is said to have gone to India. It is reported that among persons there, who knew of Christ, he found the Gospel according to Matthew, which had anticipated his own arrival. For Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them, and left with them the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language, which they had preserved till that time¹⁸. After many good deeds, Pantaenus finally became the head of the school at Alexandria, and expounded the treasures of divine doctrine both orally and in writing”.

Jerome concurs¹⁹ with Eusebius

“Pantaenus was a philosopher of the stoic school, according to some old Alexandrian custom, where, from the time of Mark the evangelist the ecclesiastics were always doctors. He was of so great prudence and erudition both in scripture and secular literature that, on the request of the legates of that nation, he was sent to India by Demetrius bishop of Alexandria. There he found that Bartholomew, one of the Twelve Apostles, had preached the advent of the Lord Jesus according to the gospel of Matthew, and on his return to Alexandria he brought this with him written in Hebrew characters. Many of his commentaries on Holy Scripture are indeed extant, but his living voice was of still greater benefit to the churches. He taught in the reigns of the emperor Severus and Antoninus surnamed Caracalla”.

Hippolytus also stated²⁰ that Nathanael brought a copy of the Gospel of Matthew to India. It is also traditional²¹ that Nathanael translated the Gospel of Matthew into some of the languages of India, using the gift of tongues that he had received at Pentecost.

¹⁶ Eusebius, Church History, V, 10

¹⁷ This school dated to the planting of the Church in Alexandria by the Apostles according to Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, I, ii.

¹⁸ This was referred to as one of the treasures of the church on the Nile, according to Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, I, ii.

¹⁹ Jerome and Gennadius, Lives of Illustrious Men, II, 36

²⁰ Hippolytus, On the Twelve Apostles, Where Each One of Them Preached, 6-7.

²¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, June 11.

It might be noted that the borders regarding where “India” begins and where “Parthia” ends may be somewhat fuzzy. One account²² of this states:

“Historians declare that India is divided into three parts; and the first is said to end at Ethiopia, and the second at Media, and the third completes the country. And the one portion of it ends in the dark, and the other in the ocean. To this India, then, the holy Bartholomew the Apostle of Christ went, and lived there as one of the pilgrims and the poor”.

Socrates Scholasticus stated²³ that the lots drawn by the Apostles, as they divided up the known world, resulted in Nathanael’s lot being adjacent to that of Thomas. Thomas’ lot was to the East of that of Nathanael.

The Later Missionary Journeys of Nathanael

Nathanael and Philip (of the Twelve) were very close, as we see when Philip first brought Nathanael to Jesus (John 1:44-46). During the part of their missionary journeys, they traveled together, along with Philip’s sister, Mariamne plus others of their followers. After Philip had gone through the cities and regions of Lydia and Asia, they came to Hierapolis of Asia, which was near Phrygia, where the Apostle Paul had been 30 some years earlier (Acts 16:6).

This occurred in the latter part of the 1st Century, where Hierapolis of Asia was devoted to the worship of a huge snake. One account²⁴ of this missionary campaign states that it occurred during the reign of Emperor Trajan, who began his reign in 98 AD. Hippolytus, on the other hand, stated²⁵ that this occurred during the reign of Emperor Domitian, who began his reign in 81 AD.

The account that we have²⁶ occurred toward the end of Philip’s missionary journeys, as he was going through the regions of Lydia and Asia. Nathanael, Philip and Mariamne were together in Hierapolis (or Ophioryma) of Asia, teaching people the things of God. This city was called “Ophioryma”, which comes from the Greek word *ophis*, meaning snake, and was dedicated to the worship of a huge viper. The local priests had built a temple for the viper, and statues had also been made of the snake.

Mariamne was sitting in the entry of the house of a believer named Stachys, persuading people to come listen to the Apostles. This Stachys was not the Stachys of the Seventy, but had recently gained celebrity status²⁷ in Hierapolis since he had been blind for forty years. Philip and Nathanael healed him and baptized him, and the word spread quickly that blind Stachys had received his sight. Philip and Nathanael counseled the people that came to them to trample under foot the snares of the serpent (Luke 10:19) for his father is the devil, his mother is corruption, destruction is in his mouth and his path is Hades. As a contrast, they told people of the love of Jesus, who is light, and life and Truth. They urged the people who were coming to worship the viper to take hold of Him in love, that He may bring them up out of the pit of the wicked, and

²² Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

²³ Socrates Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History, I, 19

²⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Acts of Philip, From the 15th Act Until the End”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

²⁵ Hippolytus, On the Twelve Apostles, Where Each of Them Preached, 5

²⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Acts of Philip, From the 15th Act Until the End”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

²⁷ Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, p. 174.

having cleansed them, set them blameless, living in truth, in the presence of His Father. All the people gave ear and a great multitude of them fleeing from the enemy were turned to Jesus, and were added to Philip and those about him. And the faithful were the more confirmed in the love of Christ.

“And Nicanora²⁸, the wife of the proconsul and a Hebrew by descent, was lying in bed from various diseases, especially of the eyes, having heard about the Apostles and their teaching, and believed in the Lord. For she had even before this heard about Him; and having called upon His name, she was released from the troubles that afflicted her. And rising up, she went forth out of her house through the side door, carried by her own slaves in a silver litter, and went into the house of Stachys, where the Apostles were”.

“And when she came before the gate of the house, Mariamne, the sister of Philip the Apostle, seeing her, spoke to her in Hebrew before Philip and Bartholomew, and all the multitude of those who had believed. Mariamne said that Nicanora had formerly been given as a down payment to the serpent, but that she had now forsaken her father and the temple of that deception. Fleeing from the dwelling place of death, Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, has risen upon her to enlighten her”.

“And when Nicanora, standing before the door, heard these things, she took courage before all, crying out, and saying, ‘I am a Hebrew, and a daughter of the Hebrews. Speak with me in the language of my fathers. For, having heard the preaching of my fathers, I was immediately cured of the disease and the troubles that encompassed me. I therefore adore the goodness of God who has caused you to come to this city, in order that through you we may receive the knowledge of Him. Nicanora having thus spoken, the Apostle Philip, along with Bartholomew and Mariamne and those with them, prayed for her to God. ‘You, who bring the dead to life, Christ Jesus the Lord, who have freed us through baptism from the slavery of death, completely deliver also this woman from the error, the enemy. Make her alive in Your life, and perfect her in Your perfection, in order that she may be found in the country of her fathers in freedom, having a portion in Your goodness, O Lord Jesus’”.

And all having sent up the Amen along with the Apostle Philip, there came the tyrant, the husband of Nicanora, raging like an unbroken horse. Having laid hold of his wife’s garments, he cried out, saying, ‘Didn’t I leave you in bed? How have you so much strength to come to these magicians? And how have your eyes been cured? Tell me who your physician is or I’ll punish you severely, and have no compassion.

“And Nicanora said to him, ‘O tyrant, get rid of your tyranny, forsake your wickedness. Run away from the brutality of your worthless disposition; flee from the wicked dragon and his lusts; throw away the works of the man-slaying serpent. Renounce the abominable sacrifices of the idols, make for yourself a life chaste and pure. If you were in holiness you could know my Physician, and get His Name. If you wish me to be beside you, prepare yourself to live in chastity and self-restraint, and in fear of the true God, and I shall live with you all my life. Only cleanse yourself from the idols and from all their filth’”.

“And when the gloomy tyrant (the proconsul), her husband, heard these words, he seized her by the hair of her head, and dragged her along, kicking her, and saying. ‘It will be better for you to be cut off by the sword, than to commit fornication with these foreign magicians; for I see that you have fallen into the madness of these deceivers. First I shall cut you off by an evil death; and then, I shall put them to a most cruel death’. And having turned, he said to those about him,

²⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Acts of Philip, From the 15th Act Until the End”, *Apocrypha of the New Testament*, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

‘Bring out for me those impostors of magicians’. And the public executioners ran into the house of Stachys, laid hold of the Apostle Philip, and Bartholomew and Mariamne, dragged them along, and led them to where the proconsul was. And Stachys followed, and all the faithful. Seeing them, the proconsul gnashed his teeth, saying, ‘Torture these deceivers that say that they are worshippers of God, while they are an abomination’”.

“And he ordered thongs of rawhide to be brought, and Philip and Bartholomew and Mariamne to be beaten. And after they had been scourged with the thongs, he ordered their feet to be tied, and them to be dragged through the streets of the city as far as the gate of their temple. And a great crowd was assembled, so that scarcely anyone stayed at home; and they all wondered at their patience, as they were being violently and inhumanely dragged along”.

“Having tortured the Apostle Philip and the saints who were with him, the proconsul ordered them to be secured in the temple of the idol of the viper by its priests, until he should decide by what death he should destroy each of them. And many of the crowd believed in the grace of Christ, and were added to the Apostle Philip, and those with him, having renounced the idol of the viper, and were confirmed in the faith being magnified by the endurance of the saints. And all together with their voice glorified God, saying the Amen”. We might note that the “Amen” that they were saying was part of the Liturgy of the Church, even at this early date.

“And when they were locked up in the temple of the viper, along with all the snakes — both Philip, Bartholomew and Mariamne — the priests of the viper assembled in the same place, along with a great crowd, about seven thousand men. And having run to the proconsul, they cried out, saying, ‘Avenge us of the foreigners, and magicians, and corrupters and seducers of men. Ever since they came to us, our city has been filled with every evil deed. And they have also killed the serpents, the sons of our goddess. They have closed down the temple, and the altar has been desolated. And we have not found the wine which had been brought in order that the viper, having drunk of it, might go to sleep. But if you wish to know that they are really magicians, look and see how they wish to bewitch us. They say, ‘Live in chastity and piety, after believing in God’. The dragons (i.e. the large snakes) have not struck them blind, or even killed them; but even the keepers of our city (the snakes) have been cast down by these men’”.

This complaint is strangely similar to the one that was leveled at the Apostle Paul in Philippi.

“But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, ‘These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.’ Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks” Acts 16:19-24).

“And the proconsul²⁹, having heard these things, was even more inflamed with rage, and said to the priests, ‘Why need you speak, when they have bewitched my own wife? Since then she has spoken to me with strange words; and praying all the night long, she speaks in a strange tongue with a light shining round her. And groaning aloud, she says, ‘Jesus the true light has come to me’. Having gone forth from my chamber, I wanted to look down through the window and see Jesus,

²⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Acts of Philip, From the 15th Act Until the End”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

the Light, which she spoke of. And like lightning it came upon me, so that I was almost blinded; and since then I have been afraid of my wife, on account of her luminous Jesus. Tell me, you priests, what I am to do'. And they said to him, 'O proconsul, we are no longer priests; for ever since you locked them up in the temple, because of their prayers, not only has the temple been shaken from the foundations, but it is also about to collapse'".

"Then the proconsul ordered to bring the Apostles out of the temple, and to bring them up to the tribunal, saying to the public executioner, 'Strip them, and search thoroughly to try to find their enchantments'. Having therefore first stripped Philip, then Bartholomew, they came also to Mariamne. And dragging her along, they said, 'Let us strip her naked, that all may see her, how she follows men; for she especially deceives all the women'. And the tyrant said to the priests, 'Proclaim throughout the whole city that all should come, men and women, that they may see her indecency, that she travels about with these magicians, and no doubt commits adultery with them'".

"While everyone was gathering, he ordered Philip to be crucified, and his ankles to be pierced using iron hooks, and his heels also to be driven through, and to be hanged head downwards, opposite the temple on a certain tree. And they crucified Bartholomew opposite Philip, having nailed his hands on the wall of the gate of the temple".

"And both of them smiled, seeing each other, both Philip and Bartholomew; for they were as if they were not tortured; for their punishments were prizes and crowns. And when they had stripped Mariamne, the semblance of her body was changed in the presence of all, and there was about her a cloud of fire before all. And they could no longer look on the place where holy Mariamne was, but they all fled from her".

The hymns of the Church refer to the nakedness of Bartholomew and Philip (when they were crucified) and to the stripping of Mariamne as follows:

"Having woven a robe³⁰ of divine grace, O blessed one, you have clothed those who have been cruelly stripped bare through the malice of the serpent, and have given them the faith to chant, 'O all-hymned Lord God of our fathers, blessed are You'".

"While Philip and Bartholomew³¹ were hanging there, the mob set fire to the house of Stachys. As they were doing that, the Apostle John entered the city. At first they took him to be a fellow citizen of the viper, but John spoke to them about their delusion saying, 'Why do you punish these men because they told you that the serpent is your enemy?' And when they heard these words from John, they raised their hands against him, saying, 'We thought you to be a fellow-citizen, but now you have shown yourself that you are their companion'. But when the priests attempted to lay hold of John, their hands were paralyzed".

"Philip then prayed that Hades would open its mouth, 'Let the great abyss swallow up these the ungodly, who have been unwilling to receive the word of truth in this city'. And, suddenly the abyss was opened, and the whole place where the proconsul was sitting was swallowed up. Also swallowed up was the whole temple, the dead viper, the priests of the viper and a great crowd, about seven thousand men. And their voices came up from beneath, saying, with weeping, 'Have mercy upon us, O God of the Apostles, because we now see the judgments of those who have not

³⁰ "Ode VII for Matins of the Commemoration of the Return of the Relics of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew, August 25th", Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

³¹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "The Acts of Philip, From the 15th Act Until the End", Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

confessed the crucified One. The cross illumines us and we are being justly scourged because we have unjustly crucified Your Apostles”.

“Not swallowed up were both Stachys and all his house, Nicanora, and fifty other women who had believed with her upon the Lord, and a multitude besides, both of men and women. A hundred virgins also had not been swallowed up because of their chastity, having been sealed with the seal of Christ”.

“Just then there appeared a Cross in the air coming down from above even to the bottom of the abyss, and it was full of light, and had its form like a ladder. And the whole multitude that had gone down from the city into the abyss came up on the ladder of the luminous cross. But there remained below the proconsul, the dead viper, the priests of the viper and a number of other unbelievers³²”.

“And when the multitude had come up, they looked upon Philip hanging head downwards, and lamented with a great lamentation at their lawless action. And they also saw Bartholomew, and Mariamne having her former appearance. And all the unbelieving people silently glorified God in fear and trembling. And all the multitudes cried out, saying, ‘He alone is God, whom these men proclaim. He alone is God, who sent these men for our salvation. Let us therefore truly repent for our great error, because we are by no means worthy of everlasting life. Now we believe, because we have seen great wonders, because we have been brought up from the abyss. And they all fell upon their face, and adored Philip, and entreated him, ‘Do not do another miracle, and again send us away into the abyss’. And they prayed that they might become worthy of Christ”.

The hymns of the Church refer to this abyss as follows:

“With the net of your words³³, O divinely eloquent Apostle, you did draw forth the ends of the world out of the abyss of vainglory and wicked ungodliness, and did bring them with faith to Christ God, Who had given you such grace”.

“Dragging up the nations³⁴ out of the depths of ignorance in godly manner with the net of the Word, you did bring them in with faith; and as a well-spring of spiritual waters you have watered the whole world with grace”.

“Whirled about in the abyss of sin³⁵, I call upon the unfathomable abyss of Your loving-kindness. Lead me up from corruption, O God”.

“With the rod of grace³⁶, O right wondrous one, you did draw men from the abyss of vanity, submitting to the order of the Teacher, Who wholly enlightened your understanding and showed you as an honored Apostle and a divine proclaimer of His unapproachable Divinity, O most blessed Philip”.

“Your elucidation³⁷ of the mysterious has been piously shown to be a ladder of divine teachings whereby we have come to know the Son, Who is consubstantial and united with the Father. You were a golden lamp shining forth the ever-existing

³² Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, p. 176.

³³ “First Antiphon for Vespers of the Commemoration of the Apostle Bartholomew, June 11th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

³⁴ “Sedalion for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle Bartholomew, June 11th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

³⁵ “Ode VI for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle Bartholomew, June 11th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

³⁶ “Litia for Vespers of the Commemoration of the Apostle Philip, November 14th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

³⁷ “Ode III for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle Philip, November 14th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

Light upon men and thereby manifestly enlightening the whole world with knowledge, O most eminent Philip”.

“Having dried up³⁸ the deadly abyss of the soul-destroying poison of the enemy with your healing hands, you delivered them that are oppressed by grievous sickness. You have been shown to be wholly fiery of breath, O Philip, through the descent and grace of the Paraclete. With the warmth of faith you have restored to life them that were chilled through the winter of godlessness”.

“Beholding the deception³⁹ of the enemy which surrounds and destroys the human race, You took aim and loosed Your sharpened arrows, the Apostles, and laid open the serpent’s mouth of clay, O Savior, healing all that had been harmed by his wounding corruption”.

“Your discourse⁴⁰ was healing for those who had received the deadly venom of the serpent, O Bartholomew. And in accordance with the prophecy, the ground of the impious fell at the proclamation of your all-wise doctrines”.

“And some of the faithful⁴¹ ran up to take Philip down, and take the iron grapnels out of his ankles. But Philip told them to let Bartholomew loose first. While they were doing that, Philip explained that he was about to depart from his body as a result of hanging there for six days. He asked the people not to grieve for him because he would be with the Lord. He asked them instead to cleave to Christ, and not to forsake Him, for He is our life everlasting”.

“As they brought Bartholomew down, Philip asked that they build a Church in this place and that Nicanora provide for Bartholomew and Mariamne while they are in the city. He instructed Bartholomew to appoint Stachys as Bishop, and gave him instructions on the burial of his body. He also said that a grapevine would grow at the spot where his blood dropped, and that they should use the fruit of that vine as an offering to the Lord”.

“And after three days the plant of the vine sprouted up where the blood of the holy Philip had dropped. And they did all that had been commanded them by him, offering an offering for forty days, praying without ceasing. And they built the church in that place, having appointed Stachys to be Bishop in the church. And Nicanora and all the faithful assembled, and did not cease, all of them, glorifying God on account of the wonders that had happened among them. And the whole city believed in the Name of Jesus. And Bartholomew commanded Stachys to baptize those who believed into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And after the forty days, the Savior, having appeared in the form of Philip, said to Bartholomew and Mariamne, ‘My beloved brethren, do you wish to rest in the rest of God? Paradise has been opened to me, and I have entered into the glory of Jesus. Go away to the place appointed for you; for the plant that has been set apart and planted in this city shall bear excellent fruit’. Having therefore greeted the brethren, and prayed for each of them, they departed from the city of Ophioryma, the Hierapolis of Asia. Bartholomew and Mariamne then departed to continue their separate missionary journeys while Stachys and those with him remained, maintaining the church in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

The hymns of the Church refer to the martyrdom of Philip as follows:

³⁸ “Ode V for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle Philip, November 14th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

³⁹ “Ode VI for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle Philip, November 14th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁴⁰ “Ode V for Matins of the Commemoration of the Return of the Relics of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew, August 25th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁴¹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Acts of Philip, From the 15th Act Until the End”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

“Having forsaken earthly things⁴², you followed after Christ, signed with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and sent by Him to the Gentiles which were perishing, to turn men to the light of the knowledge of God, O Apostle Philip. And having completed the struggles of your divine suffering and diverse torments, you did commit your soul to Christ”.

“Having finished⁴³ the struggle with a cross of suffering, you were fittingly arrayed in crowns of victory, O Philip”.

“Aspiring to the sufferings⁴⁴ of the Savior, you set the falsehood of idolatry at naught, O glorious Philip. You appeared to the world pouring forth heavenly wonders upon all, having become an Apostle to the Gentiles, O most blessed one”.

The Martyrdom of Nathanael

The issue that Nathanael addressed at his martyrdom was an exposure of the work of demons among men. This issue is as prevalent today among people who worship false gods as it was in c. 90 AD when Nathanael traveled to Armenia⁴⁵. Some writers⁴⁶ referred to this area as part of India.

When he arrived, he took up his quarters in the temple of Astaruth, and lived there as one of the pilgrims and the poor. In this temple, there was an idol called Astaruth, which was supposed to heal the infirm, but rather injured them all more. And the people were in entire ignorance of the true God; and from want of knowledge, they all fled for refuge to the false god. And this god brought upon the people troubles, infirmities, damage, violence, and much affliction. And when any one sacrificed to him, the demon behind the idol (see Deuteronomy 32:17) retired and appeared to give a cure to the person in trouble; and the foolish people, seeing this, believed in him. But the demons retired, not because they wished to cure men, but in order to assail them more, and to have them altogether in their power. Thinking that they were cured bodily, those that sacrificed to them were the more diseased in soul”.

“While the Apostle Bartholomew stayed there, Astaruth gave no response, and was not able to cure. And when the temple was full of sick persons, who sacrificed to him daily, Astaruth could give no response; and sick persons who had come from far countries were lying there. When none of the idols was able to give a response, they were compelled to go to another city, where there was a temple of idols, where their great and most eminent god was called Becher. While sacrificing there, they demanded why their God Astaruth had not responded to them. And the demon Becher answered them, ‘From the day and hour that the true God sent his Apostle Bartholomew into the regions here, your God Astaruth is held fast by chains of fire, and can no longer either speak or breathe’. They said to him, ‘And who is this Bartholomew?’ He answered, ‘He is the friend of the Almighty God, and has just come into these parts, that he may take away all the worship of the idols in the name of his God’. And the servants of the Greeks said to him, ‘Tell us what he is like, that we may be able to find him’”.

⁴² “Litia for Vespers of the Commemoration of the Apostle Philip, November 14th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁴³ “Aposticha for Vespers of the Commemoration of the Apostle Philip, November 14th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁴⁴ “Ode III for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle Philip, November 14th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁴⁵ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, June 11.

⁴⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Bartholomew”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

“And the demon answered, ‘He has black hair, a shaggy head, a fair skin, large eyes, beautiful nostrils, his ears hidden by the hair of his head, with a yellow beard, a few gray hairs. He is of middle height, clothed with a white under cloak bordered with purple, and upon his shoulders a very white cloak. He has worn his clothes twenty-six years, but neither are they dirty, nor have they grown old. Seven times a day he bends the knee to the Lord, and seven times a night he prays to God. His voice is like the sonnet of a strong trumpet. There go along with him angels of God, who allow him neither to be weary, nor to hunger, nor to thirst; his face, and his soul, and his heart are always glad and rejoicing; he foresees everything, he knows and speaks every tongue of every nation. And now, as soon as you ask me, and I answer you about him, behold, he knows. For the angels of the Lord tell him. And if you wish to seek him, if he is willing, he will appear to you; but if he shall not be willing, you will not be able to find him. I entreat you, therefore, if you shall find him, entreat him not to come here, lest his angels do to me as they have done to my brother Astaruth”.

The hymns of the Church address this conflict between Light and darkness as follows:

“Jesus our God, the Sun of Righteousness⁴⁷, sent you to the fullness of the world like a ray of light, O all glorious one, mightily dispelling the gloom of ungodliness and illumining all who sit in the darkness of ignorance. You have made them heirs of the Light, O divinely wise Bartholomew”.

“Ascending to the summit⁴⁸ of the virtues, O you who are most rich as an Apostle of Christ, you were enriched with the cloven tongue of fire breathed forth by the Spirit, and you burned up the tinder of impiety and ignorance. You were truly shown to be a God-bearing ember afire with the radiance of the divine Spirit, O all-praised Bartholomew, consuming the chaff of falsehood and enlightening the hearts of those who hymn you in faith”.

“And when the demon⁴⁹ had said this, he held his peace. And they returned, and set to work to look into every face of the pilgrims and poor men, and for two days they could find him no where. And it came to pass, that one who was a demoniac set to work to cry out, ‘Apostle of the Lord, Bartholomew, your prayers are burning me up’. Then the Apostle said to him, ‘Hold your peace, and come out of him’. And that very hour, the man who had suffered from the demon for many years was set free. And Polymius, the king of that country, happened to be standing opposite the Apostle; and he had a daughter a demoniac, that is to say, a lunatic. And he sent messengers to the Apostle, saying, ‘My daughter is grievously torn; I implore you, therefore, as you have delivered him who suffered for many years, so also to order my daughter to be set free’. And the Apostle rose up, and went with them. And he saw the king’s daughter bound with chains, for she used to tear in pieces all her limbs; and if any one came near her, she used to bite, and no one dared to come near her. The servants said to Nathanael, ‘Who is it that dares to touch her?’ The Apostle answered them, ‘Loose her, and let her go’. They said to him again, ‘We have her in our power when she is bound with all our force, and do you bid us loose her?’ The Apostle said to them, ‘Behold, I keep her enemy bound, and are you even now afraid of her? Go and loose her; and when she has partaken of food, let her rest, and early tomorrow bring her to me’. And they

⁴⁷ “Eight Stichera for Vespers of the Commemoration of the Apostle Bartholomew, June 11th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁴⁸ “Ode II for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle Bartholomew, June 11th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁴⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Bartholomew”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

went and did as the Apostle had commanded them; and thereafter the demon was not able to come near her”.

“Then the king loaded camels with gold and silver, precious stones, pearls, and clothing, and sought to see the Apostle; and having made many efforts, and not found him, he brought everything back to his palace”.

“As the following day was dawning, the Apostle appeared alone with the king in his bed-chamber, and said to him, ‘Why did you seek me all day yesterday with gold and silver, and precious stones, pearls, and raiment? For these gifts those persons long for who seek earthly things; but I seek nothing earthly. Wherefore I wish to teach you that the Son of God condescended to be born as a man out of a virgin’s womb”.

“King Polymius listened gladly as Nathanael explained the whole dispensation of the things of God. Nathanael began by explaining how the Son of God was born as a man out of a virgin’s womb. He was conceived in the womb of the virgin; He took to Himself her who was always a virgin, having within herself Him who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that there is. He, like mankind, took to Himself a beginning in time, He who has a beginning neither of times nor days; but He Himself made every beginning, and everything created, whether in things visible or invisible. When she was shut up in her chamber, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her, ‘Fear not, Mary; for you have found favor in the sight of the Lord, and you shall conceive’ (Luke 1:30-31). And she cast off fear, and stood up, and said, ‘How shall this be to me, since I know not man?’ The angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you; wherefore that holy thing which is born of you shall be called Son of God”’ (Luke 1:34-35).

“After the Son of God was born of the virgin, having become perfect man, after His baptism He fasted forty days. The tempter then came to tempt Him with earthly things saying, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves’. And He answered, ‘Not on bread alone shall man live, but by every word of God’ (Matthew 4:2-4). Thus the devil, who through eating had conquered the first man, was conquered through the fasting of the second man. By his wicked craft, he conquered through the eating of the tree by which man was deceived, and was expelled from paradise, and kept paradise shut. Thereafter this Son of the virgin conquered all the craft of the devil. And his craft was such, that when he saw the Son of the virgin fasting forty days, he knew in truth that He was the true God. The devil himself, when he saw that after the forty days He was hungry, was deceived into thinking that He was not God, and said to Him, ‘Why have you been hungry? Tell these stones to become loaves, and eat’. And the Lord answered him, ‘Listen, devil; although you may lord it over man, because he has not kept the commandment of God, I have fulfilled the righteousness of God and shall destroy your power, so that you shall no longer lord it over man”’.

“And when he saw himself conquered, he took Jesus to an exceeding high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and said, ‘All these will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me’. The Lord said to him, ‘Get you behind me, Satan; for it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve’ (Matthew 4:8-10)”.

“And there was a third temptation for the Lord; for he took Him up to the pinnacle of the temple, and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down’. The Lord said to him, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’ (Matthew 4:5-7). And the devil disappeared. And he that once conquered Adam, the son of the virgin earth, was thrice conquered by Christ, the Son of the Virgin Mary”.

“Nathanael concluded by saying that the Lord had sent His Apostles out into the whole world that He might redeem His people from the deception of the devil; and I am one of these. ‘On this account we do not seek gold and silver, but rather despise them, because we labor to be

rich in that place where the kingdom of Him alone endures for ever, where neither trouble, nor grief, nor groaning, nor death, has place. There is eternal blessedness, and ineffable joy, and everlasting exultation, and perpetual repose”.

The hymns of the Church celebrate Nathanael’s understanding and teaching about the Incarnation:

“You revealed⁵⁰ to the world the great mystery of the Incarnation, which is infinite and beyond all understanding, O Bartholomew, and which, though ineffable, is accessible and credible to the faithful alone. Rolling like a stone in pure manner, O all-holy Bartholomew, you did mightily overturn the foundation of falsehood. And shown to be an insuperable foundation for the Church, you preserve it unshaken”.

“As a result of all this⁵¹, the demon sitting in your temple, who makes responses to you, is kept in chains through the angel of the Lord who has sent me. If you shall be baptized, and wish to be enlightened, I will make Him visible, so that you can learn from what great evils you have been redeemed. At the same time you will hear from him by what means he injures all those who are lying sick in the temple. The devil, himself, causes the men to be sick and again to be healed. He does this in order that they may the more believe in the idols, and in order that he may have greater place in their souls that they may say to the stone ‘You are our god’. But that demon who dwells in the idol is held in subjection, conquered by me, and is able to give no response to those who sacrifice and pray there. And if you wish to prove that it is so, I will order him to return into the idol, and I will make him confess with his own mouth that he is bound, and able to give no response’. The king said to him, ‘Tomorrow, at the first hour of the day, the priests are ready to sacrifice in the temple, and I shall come there, and shall be able to see this wonderful work”.

“And it came to pass on the following day, as they were sacrificing, the devil began to cry out, ‘Refrain, you wretched ones, from sacrificing to me, lest you suffer worse for my sake. Because I am bound in fiery chains, and kept in subjection by an angel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom the Jews crucified. For, being afraid of him, they condemned him to death. And he put to death Death, himself, our king, and he bound our prince in chains of fire. And on the third day, having conquered death and the devil, rose in glory, and gave the sign of the cross to his apostles, and sent them out into the four quarters of the world. And one of them is here now, who has bound me, and keeps me in subjection. I implore you, therefore, supplicate him on my account that he may set me free to go into other habitations”.

“Then the Apostle answered, ‘Confess, unclean demon, who is it that has injured all those that are lying here from heavy diseases?’ The demon answered, ‘The devil, our ruler, he who is bound, sends us against men, that, having first injured their bodies, we may thus also make an assault upon their souls when they sacrifice to us. For then we have complete power over them, when they believe in us and sacrifice to us. And when, on account of the mischief done to them, we retire, we appear curing them, and are worshipped by them as gods; but in truth we are demons, and the servants of him who was crucified have bound us. For from that day on which the Apostle Bartholomew came I am punished, kept bound in chains of fire. And for this reason I confess, because he has commanded me”.

“The Apostle said to him, ‘Why do you not save all that have come to you?’ The demon said to him, ‘When we injure their bodies, unless we first injure their souls, we do not let their

⁵⁰ “Ode VI for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle Bartholomew, June 11th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁵¹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Bartholomew”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

bodies go'. The Apostle said to him, 'And how do you injure their souls?' The demon answered him, 'When they believe that we are gods, and sacrifice to us, God withdraws from those who sacrifice, and we do not take away the sufferings of their bodies, but retire into their souls'".

The hymns of the Church commemorate Nathanael's victory over the deception of the demons behind the idols as follows:

"Protected by the Cross⁵² of the Lord, O most excellent Bartholomew, you set at naught the savagery of the demons, and by your preaching you did dispel their soul-destroying deception. Christ showed you forth as a light to the world, divine effulgence of glory, O God-pleasing Bartholomew. For you have enlightened all creation with divine knowledge, O most blessed one. Like a most excellent steed, the chariot of the Word, you roiled the pagan seas. With faith you consumed the uttermost parts of bitter ungodliness".

"Then the Apostle said to the people, 'Behold, the god whom you thought to cure you, does more mischief to your souls and bodies. Hear now your Maker who dwells in the heavens, and do not believe in lifeless stones. And if you wish that I should pray for you, and that all these may receive health, take down this idol, and break it to pieces. And when you have done this, I will sanctify this temple in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; and having baptized all of you who are in it in the baptism of the Lord, and sanctified you, I will save all".

"Then the king gave orders, and all the people brought ropes and crowbars, and were not at all able to take down the idol. Then the Apostle said to them, 'Unfasten the ropes. And when they had unfastened them, he cast out the demon dwelling in it. And the demon arose at the word of the Apostle, and lifted the idols up from their foundations and dropped them; and in that same hour all the idols that were in that place were broken to pieces. Then all cried out with one voice, saying, 'He alone is God Almighty whom Bartholomew proclaims'".

"And when all responded to the Amen, suddenly there appeared an angel of the Lord, shining brighter than the sun, with four other angels. The first angel said, 'Thus says the Lord who has sent me, as you have all been purified from all your infirmity, so also this temple shall be purified from all uncleanness, and from the demons dwelling in it. When I make the sign of the cross, so you also, with your finger, seal your faces, and these evil things will flee from you. Then he made visible the demon, who dwelt in the temple, and his hands were bound with fiery chains, and he was firmly restrained. And the angel of the Lord said to him, 'As the Apostle has commanded, I let you go; go where voice of man is not heard, and be there until the great day of judgment. And when he let him go, he flew away, groaning and weeping, and disappeared. And the angel of the Lord went up into heaven in the sight of all".

"Then the king, the queen, and their two sons, with all his people, and with all the multitude of the city, and every city round about, wherever his kingdom ruled, were saved, and were baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And the king laid aside his diadem, and followed Bartholomew the Apostle of Christ".

Other traditional sources⁵³ state that ten neighboring cities received baptism at that time, following the example of their king.

⁵² "Ode IV for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle Bartholomew, June 11th", Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁵³ Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, p. 178.

The hymns of the Church commemorate the blossoming of the Church in Armenia as follows:

“The desert⁵⁴, the barren Church of the nations, blossomed forth like a lily, O Lord, at Your coming; and therein has my heart been established. Like rain from heaven, you have watered the whole world, which had grown dry under the darkness of ungodliness, O all-wise and right wondrous seer of God. You put forth a stream of the drink of salvation, O most honored Bartholomew, and you brought forth manifold fruit of salvation for the nations, O right wondrous one. With the salt of grace you brought an end to the putrefaction of idolatry, O most wise one, delighting the hearts of those who honor you with the sweet discourse of faith”.

John Cassian addressed demonstrations of power by classifying healing into three different classes⁵⁵. The wondrous works done by Nathanael fall into Cassian’s “First Class”, while the healings done by the demons fall into Cassian’s “Third Class”.

“The **first** is indeed for the sake of healing when the grace of signs accompanies certain elect and righteous men on account of the merits of their holiness. For example, the Lord said, ‘Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Freely you have received, freely give’” (Matthew 10:8).

The **second** is for edification of the Church and proceeds from either the faith of those who bring the sick or from those who are to be cured. “The virtue of health proceeds even from sinners and men unworthy of it. Of whom the Savior says, ‘Many shall say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your Name, and in Your Name cast out devils, and in Your Name done many mighty works? And then I will confess to them, I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity’ (Matthew 7:21-23). If the faith of those who bring the sick or if the faith of the sick is wanting, it prevents those on whom the gifts of healing are conferred from receiving the healing.

“The **third** (class) of healing is a fraud that is copied by the deceit and contrivance of devils. When a man who is enslaved to evident sins is regarded as a saint and a servant of God out of admiration for his miracles, men may be persuaded to copy his sins. Thus an opening is made for finding fault with the Church and the sanctity of the Faith may be brought into disgrace. Or else he who believes that he possesses the gift of healing may be puffed up by pride of heart and so fall more grievously. When the “healers” who have no merits of holiness or any spiritual fruits, they (the devils) pretend that by their merits they are disturbed and made to flee from the bodies they have possessed.

“After these things⁵⁶, the unbelievers of the Greeks came together to Astreges the king, who was the elder brother of the king who had been baptized, and said to him. ‘O king, your brother Polymius has become disciple to a certain magician, who has taken down our temples, and broken our gods to pieces’. And while they were thus speaking and weeping, some others came from the cities round about, both priests and people; and they set about weeping and making accusations before the king. Then King Astreges in a rage sent a thousand armed men along with those priests, in order that, wherever they should find the Apostle, they might bring him to him

⁵⁴ “Katavasia for Matins of the Commemoration of the Apostle Bartholomew, June 11th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁵⁵ John Cassian, Conferences, XV, i

⁵⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Bartholomew”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

bound. And when they had done so, and found him, and brought him, he said to him, ‘Are you he who has perverted my brother from the gods?’ To whom the Apostle answered, ‘I have not perverted him, but have converted him to God’. The king said to him, ‘Are you he who caused our gods to be broken in pieces?’ The Apostle said to him, ‘I gave power to the demons, who were in them, and they broke in pieces the dumb and senseless idols, that all men might believe in God Almighty, who dwells in the heavens’. The king said to him, ‘As you have made my brother deny his gods, and believe in your God, so I also will make you reject your God and believe in my gods. The Apostle said to him, ‘I have bound and kept in subjection the god which your brother worshipped, and at my order the idols were broken in pieces. If you also are able to do the same to my God, you can persuade me also to sacrifice to your gods. But if you can do nothing to my God, and I break all your gods in pieces; then you need to believe in my God”.

“And when he had thus spoken, the king was informed that his God Baldad and all the other idols had fallen down, and were broken in pieces. Then the king rent the purple in which he was clothed, and ordered the holy Apostle Bartholomew to be beaten with rods”.

After this beating⁵⁷ they scourged Nathanael, and crucified him, head downward. On the Cross, Nathanael did not cease to proclaim the Word of God, encouraging the faithful to remain steadfast in the Faith, and exhorting the unbelieving to know the Truth and turn from the darkness of demons to the Light of Christ. King Astreges could not stand to listen to this, and had Nathanael skinned alive. Nathanael still did not remain silent, but continued to teach everyone about God, offering up glorification to Him. Finally king Astreges had Nathanael beheaded while still on the Cross. This occurred in about the year 90 AD, meaning that Nathanael was at least 85 years old when he died. Thus Nathanael had the dubious distinction among the Apostles of having been crucified twice.

The Roman Martyrology states⁵⁸ that the location of Nathanael’s martyrdom was Albanopolis (modern Derbent), which is on the West Coast of the Caspian Sea. Other sources state⁵⁹ that the location was about 100 miles farther South at Albanus (modern Baku), also on the West Coast of the Caspian Sea.

“And innumerable multitudes⁶⁰ came from all the cities, who had believed in him along with king Polymius; and they took up the remains of the Apostle with singing of praise and with all glory, and they laid them in the royal tomb, and glorified God. Tradition states⁶¹ that Nathanael was buried in a leaden coffin, and that numerous miracles were done over the Apostle’s grave, especially healing of the sick.

In the 6th Century, Nathanael’s relics were moved during the Persian Conquests from the shore of the Caspian Sea to near the Black Sea. There the Persians threw Nathanael’s relics, along with the relics of several other saints, into the Black Sea. By God’s providence, Nathanael’s coffin floated, and was carried by the waves to the island of Lipari (off the coast of Sicily). Bishop Agathon of Lipari was warned by a revelation in a dream, and was expecting Nathanael’s coffin. Agathon buried Nathanael below the floor of his Church.

⁵⁷ Isaac Lambertsen, *The Lives of the Holy Apostles*, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, p. 178.

⁵⁸ Thurston and Attwater, *Butler’s Lives of the Saints*, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, August 24.

⁵⁹ Isaac Lambertsen, *The Lives of the Holy Apostles*, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, p. 179.

⁶⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Bartholomew”, *Apocrypha of the New Testament*, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

⁶¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, *Prologue From Ochrid*, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, June 11, August 25.

The hymns of the Church commemorates the movement of the relics of Nathanael as follows:

“Your paths were revealed⁶² in the sea, O Apostle, and shown to be beyond the understanding of men. Cast into the sea in a casket, you made your way to the West, O most renowned Bartholomew. With your wondrous ascents you purified the water, and arrived at the island of Lipari, pouring forth myrrh, O glorious one, and healing incurable diseases. And you became for the faithful in that place a savior and a refuge, a deliverer and intercessor before the King and Savior of all”.

“In a manner transcending mind⁶³ and thought, you learned the things that are great, discovering the hypostatic Wisdom. Making the ends of the earth wise with divine teachings, you showed the wisdom of the Greeks to be foolish. Though your lifeless body was encoffined, you traversed the sea, obedient to the commands of God, O Apostle. Like the sun, you passed from East to West, illumining it”.

“Traversing the unfathomable depths⁶⁴, borne on the crests of the waves of the sea, with the divine martyrs, O Apostle Bartholomew. You arrived at the island of Lipari, pouring forth abundant life upon a man many days dead”.

“You did have your path⁶⁵ in the sea (Psalm 77:19) and did make your way through the waters, O blessed Apostle. And your steps were perceived therein through the Spirit, as David foretold”.

“Those consumed with envy⁶⁶, driving you like the sun toward the West, O passion-bearer, set you afloat on the sea. And a wonder most great was beheld in you, who, in awesome manner, sailed the depths of the sea in a wondrous voyage O Bartholomew, Apostle of the Lord”.

“You were shown⁶⁷ to be a mountain which lets divine sweetness fall, O right laudable one. After your death, you did set your path in the sea, sailing under divine power, undrowned by its depths O valiant athlete, but being up borne thereby”.

“And it came to pass⁶⁸ on the thirtieth day after the Apostle was buried, that the king Astreges was overpowered by a demon and miserably strangled. And all the priests were strangled by demons, and perished on account of their rising against the Apostle, and thus died by an evil fate. And there was great fear and trembling, and all came to the Lord, and were baptized by the presbyters who had been ordained by the holy Apostle Bartholomew. And according to the commandment of the Apostle, all the clergy of the people made King Polymius bishop; and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ he received the grace of healing, and began to do signs. And he

⁶² “Stichera for Vespers of the Commemoration of the Return of the Relics of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew, August 25th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁶³ “Ode I for Matins of the Commemoration of the Return of the Relics of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew, August 25th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁶⁴ “Ode V for Matins of the Commemoration of the Return of the Relics of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew, August 25th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁶⁵ “Ode VI for Matins of the Commemoration of the Return of the Relics of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew, August 25th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁶⁶ “Kontakion for Matins of the Commemoration of the Return of the Relics of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew, August 25th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁶⁷ “Ode VIII for Matins of the Commemoration of the Return of the Relics of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew, August 25th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁶⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Bartholomew”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

remained in the bishopric twenty years; and having prospered in all things, and governed the church well, and guided it in right opinions, he fell asleep in peace, and went to the Lord”.

Gospel: Luke 10:16-21

The Gospel Lesson for the Feast Day of the Apostle Nathanael is also used in the Orthodox Church for the Feast Days of the Apostles James the Son of Alphaeus, Barnabas, Luke and Tryphon. It is also used for the Feast Day of the Archangels (November 8) and for some of the Unmercenary Healers. In the West, this Gospel Lesson is often used in July for the 9th Sunday after Pentecost.

Men and Angels Serve as Apostles

The word translated “Apostle” (Greek: *apostolos*) refers to someone who is sent, and is often used for ambassadors. Both men and angels fit the sense of this word and there are a number of facets to it.

Messengers of the Word

The Seventy were sent out as messengers, or “angels”, ahead of the Lord (Luke 10:1). There are a number of other places where men are referred to as messengers or “angels” from God; some examples:

- King David: 1 Samuel 29:9, 2 Samuel 14:17-20, 19:27
- Prophet Haggai: Haggai 1:13
- The Prophets: 2 Chronicles 36:15, 16
- The Priests: Malachi 2:7
- John the Baptist: Malachi 3:1, Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27
- Apostle Paul: Galatians 4:14
- Paul’s fellow Apostles: 2 Corinthians 8:23
- The Book of Malachi: “Malachi” means “My angel”

The Gospel lesson makes this statement: “He who hears you (the Seventy) hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” (Luke 10:16). Cyril of Alexandria comments⁶⁹ on this,

“He entrusts to them His Words, that they may be condemned who in anything resist or venture to reject them. When they are rejected, He assumes then that it is He who suffers this; and then again He shows that the guilt of this wickedness, as being committed against Him, mounts up to God the Father. See, therefore, with the eyes of the mind, to how vast a height He raises the sin committed by men in rejecting the saints! What a wall He builds around them! How great security He establishes for them! He makes them such as must be feared, and in every way plainly provides for their being uninjured.

If such words apply to the Seventy (lesser) Apostles acting as messengers of God, how much more does it apply to angels and archangels! Yet Deacon Stephen accused the Sanhedrin of doing just that: “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who

⁶⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 63, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 270

foretold the coming of the Just One (i.e. Jesus), of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers; you who have received the Law in ordinances of angels and have not kept it” (Acts 7:52, 53). Paul mentioned the same thing: “Why therefore the Law? It was added until the Seed should come to Whom it has been promised, being ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator” (Galatians 3:19, see also Hebrews 2:2).

Basil the Great commenting⁷⁰ on this, interpreted the mediator referred to here as Moses (from Exodus 20:19), since the people asked Moses to speak to God rather than have God speak directly with them. This implies that the angelic involvement in the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai was the very loud trumpet sound that grew louder and louder leading up to the voice of the Lord, speaking with thunder (Exodus 19:16-19). The lightning and some of the thunder may have also been the angels that surround the Lord wherever He goes. Thus, to set aside the Law, when it had been ordained by angels and given by God is a very serious matter.

Another very serious matter is alluded to in the Gospel lesson for Matins of this Feast Day (Matthew 18:10-20). In this passage, the Lord had just mentioned the angels’ role regarding children, using the illustration of a shepherd and concluding that He does not wish them to perish (Matthew 18:10-14). Then He went on to speak of a brother sinning against a brother, and instructing them to confirm every disagreement with two or three witnesses. If the brother who sinned refuses to hear them, the Church was to consider the sinning brother as a heathen and a tax collector. This will be bound in heaven as it was on earth (Matthew 18:15-18). While the Lord was talking here of human witnesses, there are also the angelic witnesses who will confirm everything in heaven. And the books in heaven that record the deeds of all men will record these also.

The Word Goes Out

As the Seventy went about their mission, angelic activity accompanied them. They had been given the power to heal the sick (Luke 10:9), which included casting out demons (Luke 10:17). Since all sickness has something to do with demons⁷¹, they encountered demonic activity everywhere they went. [For more discussion on the relation between demons and sickness, see the Gospel lesson for the 6th Sunday of Luke.] They returned with joy that the demons were subject to them in Christ’s Name (Luke 10:7). The Lord responded, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18).

Paul referred to Satan as “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). For Satan to fall from “heaven” does not necessarily mean that he fell from the abode of God. The First Century concept of heaven placed God in the “third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2), where the atmosphere, clouds, sun, etc., represent the first and second heaven. For example “the heaven gave rain” (James 5:18), refers to the first or second heaven. In our Gospel lesson, Satan fell from the first or second heaven, not from the third heaven.

As the Seventy returned with joy and told the Lord that the demons were subject to them, He responded that He was aware of that. He then summarized their mission by saying that He had given them “the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the

⁷⁰ Basil the Great, *On the Spirit*, 14.

⁷¹ For more discussion on the relation between demons and sickness, see the Gospel lesson for the 6th Sunday of Luke.

enemy” (Luke 10:19). Cyril commented⁷² that Christ said this in order that they might not be carried away with the ignorance of the Jewish leaders who, not understanding the mystery of the Incarnation, approached Him as a mere man.

Cyril confirmed⁷³ that for Satan to fall like lightning means that something has changed drastically on earth. He has been overthrown and is put under the feet of the Christians.

“For Satan to fall like lightning means that he was cast down from on high to earth; from overwhelming pride to humiliation; from glory to contempt; from great power to utter weakness. Before the coming of Christ, he possessed the world; all was subject to him, and there was no man able to escape the meshes of his overwhelming might. He was worshipped by everyone; everywhere he had temples and altars for sacrifice, and an innumerable multitude of worshippers. But because the Only-Begotten Word of God has come down from heaven, he has fallen like lightning. For he who of old was bold and haughty, and who vied with the glory of Deity; he who had as worshippers all that were in error, is put under the feet of those that worshipped Him. He has suffered a great and terrible overthrow”.

The angels of God also have a hand in this overthrow. David had said, “Bless the Lord, you His angels, mighty in strength, who perform His word, obeying the Voice of His Word! Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, you who serve Him, doing His will” (Psalm 103:20). “He makes winds (or spirits) His angels; flaming fire His ministers” (Psalm 104:4). The word translated “ministers” (Hebrew: *sharath* = to serve in the Temple) implies a liturgical worship. Paul had elaborated on this also in Hebrews, quoting both Psalm 103 and Psalm 110: “But to which of the angels has He ever said, ‘sit at My Right Hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool’? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth for service for those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:13, 14). The word “ministering” (Greek: *leitourgikos* = to serve in the Temple) also implies a liturgical worship.

The angels see themselves as our fellow servants. After the Apostle John had seen a series of incredible visions, his inclination was to fall down and worship the angel who had shown him all these things. The angel (perhaps Gabriel) corrected him saying, “See that you do not do that. I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!” (Revelation 22:9, 19:10).

The angels are constantly involved in the battle as the Word goes out. Some are involved in disputes with Satan (Jude 1:9). Others have the duty of the care and oversight of children. The Matins Gospel for the Feast Day of the Archangels is Matthew 18:10-20, quoted earlier. Jesus said, “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father Who is in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). Anyone disrupting the Word being planted in a child would be better off if a millstone was hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Matthew 18:6). He said that “it is not the Will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18:14). Thus, the angels have a job to do to encourage each person to seek the Lord.

Mixed in with the statement of angels guarding children, the Lord used an illustration that describes the angels’ role well: that of a shepherd. “What do you think? If a man has a hundred

⁷² Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 64, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 275.

⁷³ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 64, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 274.

sheep and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly I say to you, he rejoices more over that one sheep than over the ninety nine that did not go astray” (Matthew 18:12-13, Luke 15:3-7). Jesus referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-15). In the battle for men’s souls, the angels have a significant role to play in following the Good Shepherd’s orders to see to it that we are not tempted beyond what we are able to resist, and with the temptation, also making a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Courage

Because the angels see God all the time, they have an advantage over us. Because they see, it is easy for them to believe and obey. For us, it is more difficult because we are asked to believe without having seen. This is why Jesus gave His famous admonition: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). When the Seventy returned with joy at having the demons subject to them, it was easy to believe. What required faith for them was to take up their crosses as the Lord took up His.

Basil the Great wrote⁷⁴ about how the angels are very much like us as pertains to free will. “The powers of heaven are not holy by nature; were it so, there would in this respect be no difference between them and the Holy Spirit. It is in proportion to their relative excellence that they have their gift of holiness from the Holy Spirit. Their substance is an aerial spirit, or an immaterial fire, as it is written, ‘Who makes his angels spirits and his ministers a flame of fire’ (Psalm 104:4). Therefore they exist in space and become visible, and appear in their proper bodily form to those that are worthy. But their sanctification, being external to their substance, induces their perfection through the communion of the Holy Spirit. They keep their rank by their abiding in the good and true, and while they retain their freedom of will, never fall away from their patient attendance on Him who is truly good. The results is that, if you do away with the Holy Spirit, the hosts of the angels are disbanded, the dominions of archangels are destroyed, all is thrown into confusion, and their life loses law, order, and distinctness. For how are angels to cry ‘Glory to God in the highest’ (Luke 2:14) without being empowered by the Holy Spirit? For ‘No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Spirit, and no man speaking by the Holy Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed’ (1 Corinthians 12:3); as might be said by wicked and hostile spirits, whose fall establishes our statement of the freedom of the will of the invisible powers. I indeed maintain that even Gabriel (Luke 1:11-20) in no other way foretells events to come than by the foreknowledge of the Holy Spirit, by reason of the fact that one of the blessings distributed by the Holy Spirit is prophecy. How did he, who was ordained to announce the mysteries of the vision, derive the wisdom whereby he was enabled to teach hidden things, if not from the Holy Spirit? The revelation of mysteries is indeed the peculiar function of the Spirit, as it is written, ‘God has revealed them to us by His Spirit’ (1 Corinthians 2:10). And how could ‘thrones, dominions, principalities and powers’ (Colossians 1:16) live their blessed life, if they did not ‘behold the face of the Father which is in heaven’? (Matthew 18:10). To behold it is impossible without the Holy Spirit!”.

As a consequence, the angels exhibit a great deal of courage. Likewise the Seventy and the Twelve did, so long as they maintained their faith. At the time of the Crucifixion, they lost it and were scattered as sheep without a Shepherd as was predicted by Zechariah (Zechariah 13:7, Mark 14:27). But they regained their senses after the Resurrection. We note especially the Lord’s

⁷⁴ Basil the Great, On the Spirit, 16.

prayers for His disciples, that their faith should not fail, and when they had returned to Him, that they would strengthen their brethren (Luke 22:32). Having had the experience of trampling on demons (serpents and scorpions - Luke 10:19), courage was easier to come by. Cyril quoted⁷⁵ David's experience to describe this: "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy Countenance. And in Thy Name shall they rejoice all the day; and in Thy righteousness shall they be exalted (Psalm 89:15-16 LXX).

The Lord put all this in perspective by saying, "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). The real glory is having one's name written in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:12, Psalm 69:28). Other books exist that record the deeds or works of all men (Revelation 20:12, Daniel 7:10). If each child (Matthew 18:10) and each adult (Peter in Acts 12:14-16) have their own guardian angel, then there is a witness to everyone's deeds spanning his entire life.

Not everyone, who was allowed to work miracles, has their name written in heaven, however. The Lord said, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your Name, cast out demons in Your Name, and done many wonders in Your Name?' and then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

Cyril gives⁷⁶ some perspective on this: "To rejoice solely in the fact that they were able to work miracles, and crush the heads of demons, was likely to produce in them possibly the desire also of vainglory - and the neighbor of this passion constantly is pride. Most usefully, therefore, does Christ rebuke the first boasting, and quickly cuts away the root that had sprung up in them of the love of glory. Thus He imitates a good sower who, immediately when he sees a thorn springing up in his garden, tears it up with a hoe before it strikes its root deep".

Humility

The Gospel lesson concludes with Jesus' words to His Father, "In that hour, Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight'" (Luke 10:21).

By rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, Jesus was rejoicing in the works and miracles that were performed by means of the Holy Spirit. Cyril said⁷⁷ of this the Seventy were truly enlightened by their experience.

"Knowing that those who had been sent by Him had benefited a great deal, and that they had themselves learned His glory by experience, He was full of joy, or rather of exultation. Being good and loving to man, and wishing that all should be saved, He found the cause of His rejoicing (1) in the conversion of those that were in error, (2) in the enlightenment of those that were in darkness, and (3) in the answer of the understanding to the acknowledgment of His Glory for those who had been without knowledge and without instruction".

⁷⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 64, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 275.

⁷⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 64, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 275.

⁷⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 65, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 277.

When the Lord said that the Father had revealed these things to babes, He did not mean to imply that the Seventy were infants, but, in Cyril's words⁷⁸, they were "of an innocent and guileless mind and simple as a child regarding wickedness".

Paul said that "He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure" (Ephesians 1:9). He said this was "the unsearchable riches of Christ which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:8, 9). "This mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations has now been revealed to His saints, where the mystery is Christ in us, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26, 27).

This is foolishness to the wise of this world (1 Corinthians 1:18-21) because the recipients of the mystery take up their crosses and die like their Master did. For more discussion on taking up one's cross, see the Feast Day of the Exaltation of the Cross and the Sundays before and after.

To the angels, all this is fascinating, and they are always desiring to look into human affairs (1 Peter 1:12). There is joy among the angels when one sinner repents (Luke 15:10). Paul wrote to the Hebrews, "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing, some have unwittingly entertained angels" (Hebrews 13:2). This statement does not fit very well with the story of the Lord's visit to Abraham, where the Lord and two others (angels) ate dinner with Abraham (Genesis 18). However, it describes the visit of the Archangel Raphael to Tobit and Tobias quite well (Tobit 3:16 - 12:22 LXX).

Yet the angels are not completely informed of the Lord's plans. While they carry the souls of the righteous to Paradise (Luke 16:22) and they will gather together the elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven (Mark 13:27), yet they don't know the day or the hour when they will need to do so (Matthew 24:36). Even Satan, with all his wisdom, did not understand the wisdom of God in a mystery; if he had understood, he wouldn't have crucified the Lord of Glory (1 Corinthians 2:7, 8).

The Apostolic Work of Healing

Many miracles accompanied the work of the Twelve and the Seventy in their various missionary journeys. This was true both when they were first sent out by the Lord (Matthew 10:8, Luke 10:9, 17), later on after Pentecost (Acts 3:1-8, 5:15-16, 9:39-42) and wherever they went on their missionary journeys. Paul joined them later and performed similar miracles: "God performed unusual miracles by the hands of Paul so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts 19:11, 12). Paul refers to this: He did not come to Corinth "with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4).

The Gospel readings for the feast days of some of the Unmercenary Healers have similar themes. For example, the feast days for Cyrus and John, Cosmas & Damian of Asia and Cosmas & Damian of Rome use Matthew 10:1, 5-8 which is the account of the sending out of the Twelve. The feast days for the Apostles Luke and Tryphon of the Seventy use Luke 10:16-21, which is the account of the return of the Seventy.

⁷⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 65, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 279.

Both with the Twelve and the Seventy, there was extensive conflict with the forces of Satan. They were both instructed to heal the sick and cast out demons (Matthew 10:8, Luke 10:9, 17), and the Twelve were given the additional authority to raise the dead (Matthew 10:8). Commenting on this conflict at the return of the Seventy, the Lord said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:18, 19).

John Cassian classified⁷⁹ healing into three different classes in decreasing order of effectiveness. (1) Healing done by holy men and women. (2) Healing done by the faith of caretakers or by the sick themselves. There are many limitations on those involved. (3) Faked healing done by demons.

“The first is indeed for the sake of healing when the grace of signs accompanies certain elect and righteous men on account of the merits of their holiness. For example, the Lord said, ‘Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give’” (Matthew 10:8).

“The second is for edification of the Church and proceeds from either the faith of those who bring the sick or from those who are to be cured. “The virtue of health proceeds even from sinners and men unworthy of it. Of whom the Savior says, ‘Many shall say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your Name, and in Your Name cast out devils, and in Your Name done many mighty works? And then I will confess to them, I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity’ (Matthew 7:21-23). If the faith of those who bring the sick or if the faith of the sick is lacking, it prevents those on whom the gifts of healing are conferred from receiving the healing. For example, Mark said, ‘And Jesus could not do any mighty works there because of their unbelief.’ (Mark 6:5-6). The Lord Himself said, ‘Many lepers were in Israel in the days of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian’” (Luke 4:27).

“The third class of healing is copied by the deceit and contrivance of demons. When a man who is regarded as a saint and a servant of God is enslaved to sins, men may be persuaded to copy his sins out of admiration for his miracles. Thus an opening is made for objections and the sanctity of the Faith may be brought into disgrace. Or else he who believes that he possesses the gift of healing may be puffed up by pride of heart and so fall more grievously. When the names are invoked of those who have no merits of holiness or any spiritual fruits, the demons pretend that by their merits they are disturbed and made to flee from the bodies they have possessed. Moses had said, ‘If there rise up in the midst of you a prophet, or one who says he has seen a dream, and declare a sign and a wonder. And that which he has spoken comes to pass, and he says to you: Let us go and follow after other gods whom you do not know, and let us serve them. You shall not hear the words of that prophet or of that dreamer, for the Lord your God is tempting you that it may appear whether you love Him or not with all your heart and with all your soul’ (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). The Lord said, ‘There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall give great signs and wonders, so that, if it were possible, even the elect should be led astray’” (Matthew 24:24).

⁷⁹ John Cassian, Second Conference of Abbot Nesteros, II, xv, 1.

Hatred by the World

As one can expect, there was a reaction by the world to the work of the Apostles and the Unmercenary Healers. Just as all of the Twelve except John died the death of a martyr, so did many of the Unmercenary Healers. The reason for this is explained in the Gospel reading for the feast day of some of the Unmercenary Healers, such as Panteleimon and Haralampos (John 15:7-16:2). This reading addresses the hatred of the world in response to their work. This hatred is a very passionate, but often totally illogical hatred. How can one logically hate people who go around healing their fellow men for free?

Usually it was the civil authorities and seemingly good people that were behind the hatred and martyrdom of the Apostles and the Unmercenary Healers. But why would seemingly good people persecute the righteous? This is something that occurs today also, and this is described in the above Gospel reading. In the case of the Lord and the Twelve, it was the Jewish leaders or King Herod (trying to please the Jewish leaders). This was not the underbelly of Jewish society but the leaders who were respected and who upheld the law -- seemingly good people. There was a dark side to this, however. The Lord pointed out that there was considerable hypocrisy involved regarding the Jewish leaders (Matthew 23). And the Jewish historian, Josephus, describes in chapter after chapter the sordid, scheming, homicidal family life of the Herods. But most people didn't see this side of it; it seemed like good people were persecuting the righteous.

The Lord said, "If the world hates you, know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Because Christ and the Twelve were not of the world, they were hated by the world (John 15:19). Because they were of the Father (John 17:11, 12) and the ruler of this world hated the Father, they were hated by the world. This then led to persecution of the Lord and the Twelve by the world. In the centuries that followed, the same thing applied to the Unmercenary Healers: they stood out very dramatically as being of the Father.

This same Gospel lesson is used for the warrior-martyrs Demetrios of Thessalonica and George of Cappadocia. For a more detailed discussion of this, see the study for October 26 on the feast day of Demetrios and George.

The Purpose of Suffering⁸⁰

One of the Epistle readings for the Unmercenary Healers is 2 Timothy 2:1-10. This is used for Panteleimon (Table I), Haralampos (Table II) and Laurence (Appendix I) as well as for the warrior-martyrs Demetrios and George. Paul penned his last words before his martyrdom in encouraging Timothy to continue the Apostolic work that he was called to. Paul wrote that he himself had "finished the race" and that "his departure (i.e. martyrdom) was at hand" (2 Timothy 4:6,7). Some time earlier, Paul had established Timothy as Bishop of Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), and his encouragements to Timothy were:

- Be strong in the Grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:1).
- The things you heard from me, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2).
- You must endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:3).

⁸⁰ For more discussion on the purpose of suffering, see the Epistle lesson for the Feast Day of Demetrios and George.

Why should Timothy, Paul, the Lord, the Twelve and the Unmercenary Healers have to suffer? The answer is that they do this for the sake of those who follow them in the Faith. They help others to see what is beyond this life and what really matters.

John Chrysostom made⁸¹ some analogies. Wounded soldiers who recover are an encouragement to their fellow soldiers; so holy men and women who bear up patiently under persecution are an encouragement to the Church.

“In war, the Captain who sees his General wounded and recovered again, is much encouraged. Thus it produces some consolation to the faithful, that the Apostle Paul should have been exposed to great suffering and not rendered weak by the utmost of them. Timothy heard that Paul, who possessed so great powers (see Acts 19:11-12), was a prisoner and afflicted, yet was not impatient or discontented on the desertion of his friends. Timothy, if ever exposed to the same sufferings himself, would not consider that it proceeded from human weakness, nor from being a disciple, nor because he was inferior to Paul, but that all this happened in the natural course of things. For if Paul endured these things, much more Timothy ought to be able to bear them.”

In this regard, the Lord had said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. If they have called the Master of the house ‘Beelzebul’, how much more will they call those of His household” (Matthew 10:24).

Chrysostom added⁸² that Timothy knew where the battle lines were drawn and that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6:12). Paul said to stand firm not to depress Timothy but to excite him.

“Be sober therefore, he means, and watch; have the Grace of the Lord cooperating with you, and aiding you in the contest; contribute your own part with much cheerfulness and resolution”. When we go to watch a wrestling match today, we don’t go there in depression, but with excitement to root for our favorite contestant. In the same vein, we are all contestants in a larger wrestling match where the angels and saints are cheering for us.

Chrysostom concluded⁸³ with a very fitting example: a comparison of the Emperor Nero with the Apostle Paul, where it was Nero who had Paul beheaded. Even though Nero had all the power, he couldn’t stop Paul from proclaiming the Word. Nero had all the honor from the world; Paul had none. Yet at the Second Coming of Christ, this situation will be reversed.

“Nero had the glory of this world, Paul had the dishonor of this world. Nero was a tyrant who had great success, many trophies, wealth overflowing, numerous armies, the greater part of the world in his sway, the Senate crouching to him and a splendid palace to live in. When he went out, he was arrayed in gold and precious stones and was surrounded by guards and attendants. When he sat down, he was clothed in robes of purple. He was called lord of land and sea, Emperor, King and other high-sounding names. Even wise men, potentates and sovereigns trembled at him for he was said to be a cruel and violent man. He wished to be thought of as a god, and he despised both all the idols and the very God Who is over all.”

⁸¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, IV, vv. 1-7.

⁸² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, IV, vv. 1-7.

⁸³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, IV, Moral.

“Now in opposition to him, let us consider Paul, a Cilician, a tent-maker, a poor man, unskilled in the wisdom of Rome, knowing the Hebrew language, which was especially despised by the Italians. He was a man that often lived in hunger, often went to bed without food, a man that didn’t have clothes to put on, often in cold and nakedness (2 Corinthians 11:27). Paul was cast into prison by Nero himself, confined with robbers, impostors, grave-robbers and murderers, and scourged as a malefactor. Yet (in the 4th Century), the greater part of the world had never heard of Nero while Paul is daily celebrated among Greeks, Barbarians, Scythians and those who inhabit the extremities of the earth. No one knows where Nero’s grave⁸⁴ is, while the tent-maker occupies the midst of the city⁸⁵ as if he were a king and living.”

“Yet let us consider what the case was when Paul was in chains, dragged bound from prison, while Nero was clothed in purple and walked out from a palace. Nero, with armies at his command, said, ‘Do not disseminate the Word of God!’ Paul said, ‘I cannot stop, the Word of God is not chained!’ (2 Timothy 2:9) Thus the Cilician, the prisoner, the poor tent-maker, who lived in hunger, despised the rich Roman emperor with all his armies. He that was in chains was a conqueror; he that was in a purple robe was conquered. A single man defeated the Emperor and his armies. The surrounding multitudes were all slaves of Nero, yet they admired not their lord but him who was superior to their lord.”

“And yet I am but praising the lion for his claws, when I ought to be speaking of his real honors. How will Paul come in shining garments with the King of Heaven? How will Nero stand then, mournful and dejected? Let us, my beloved children, be imitators of Paul, not in his faith only, but in his life, that we may attain to heavenly glory, and trample upon that glory that is here”.

Doing Battle with Demons

Sickness of all kinds is related to activities of demons⁸⁶ that try to discredit God and turn man away from God. For example, the Patriarch Job was the most righteous man of his day, yet Satan demanded, and received, permission to afflict Job with very painful diseases. It was so bad that Job’s own wife advised her husband to just “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). Another example of the connection between demons and sickness is the healing of various physical ailments by merely casting out the demon, who brought on the ailment. This occurred for the blind and mute demoniac (Matthew 12:22), the mute demoniac (Matthew 9:32-33) and the epileptic demoniac (Matthew 17:14-18, Mark 9:17-27, Luke 9:38-42).

If sickness is demon-related, then the Apostles and the Unmercenary Healers are likely to incur a great deal of demonic wrath by their work. It should be no surprise, then, that many of the Apostles and the Unmercenary Healers died as martyrs.

⁸⁴ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero>. When Nero was about to be overthrown, he committed suicide and was buried in the Mausoleum of the Domitii Ahenobarbi, in what is now the [Villa Borghese \(Pincian Hill\)](#) area of Rome.

⁸⁵ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle. Paul’s gravesite was in the middle of the city of Rome at the [Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls](#).

⁸⁶ For more details on the relationship of sickness to demoniac activity, see the Gospel lesson for the 6th Sunday of Luke

One of the traditional activities of many ascetics for the last 2,000 years has been to withdraw from society in order to do battle with demons, either in seclusion or in company with other ascetics. Again, it should be no surprise that all or most of the Unmercenary Healers were also ascetics.

Epistle: Acts 11:19-26, 29-30

Today's Epistle lesson focuses on the beginning of the church in Antioch. [This is the Antioch in Syria, not the Antioch in Pisidia that the Apostle Paul visited later in Acts 13:14]. Located where it was (i.e. Syria), it has always been an Arab church and still is today. The Church moved to Damascus in the 13th century due to economic conditions and due to massacres of the Christians by the Moslems; it is still located there on the street called "Straight" (Acts 9:11). This Epistle is not used in the West. In the Orthodox Church this Epistle is also used for the 5th Sunday of Pascha.

The time span of the Epistle lesson covers about 13 years from the death of Stephen in 31 AD (Acts 11:19) to the death of James Zebedee in 44 AD (Acts 12:1-2). Immediately after the death of Stephen, everyone was scattered by the bloodbath organized by the Jewish leaders, where Deacon Stephen, Deacon Nicanor and 200 others were stoned to death on the same day (Acts 7:59-8:4). The Seventy, the Twelve and others began preaching to Jews only at first. Two weeks ago, we saw the effects of Deacon Philip's preaching to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-8). When James and the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had received the Word of God – sown perhaps by Photini of Sychar, reaped by Philip – they sent Peter and John to lay hands on them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Today we call this chrismation. Later on, Peter was involved with the chrismation and baptism of the Gentiles in Caesarea at the request of Cornelius (Acts. 10).

The Scattering of the Saints after the Death of Stephen

“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:19-21).

The scattering of the Saints from Jerusalem began in early 31 AD, after the martyrdom of Stephen on December 27th, 30 AD. Thus the development of the Church in Jerusalem occurred very rapidly, and the span of time for Acts 1-7 is about 1 year⁸⁷. The motivation for this scattering was not just the martyrdom of Stephen; Stephen's fellow deacon Nicanor was also stoned along with about 200 others⁸⁸ during a major bloodbath in Jerusalem.

⁸⁷ A few authors place it at two years.

⁸⁸ Along with Deacon Stephen, Deacon Nicanor and 200 others were also murdered. This generated such a bloodbath that the Church was scattered to other parts of the world. See: Nickolai Velimirovic, *Prologue From Ochrid*, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28. Hippolytus, *On the Seventy Apostles*, 9. See also <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>, July 28, December 28. <http://www.goarch.org/en/chapel/saints.asp?contentid=144>, July 28.

We note the last time that the Twelve Apostles are mentioned as being together in Jerusalem is at the ordaining of the seven deacons (Acts 6:1-6). During the first year of the Church, the Twelve had been planning their missionary journeys as Christ had commanded them. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). The way they did this is to first divide the world up into different regions, then to draw lots for who should go where. At the time of the martyrdom of Stephen, they knew where they were going to go; so this was seen as the leading of the Lord to start their journeys. Knowing that they may never see each other again, they drafted a common statement⁸⁹ of the Faith – which we call today “The Apostles’ Creed”.

As part of this scattering, men from Cyprus and Cyrene who were also scattered at the death of Stephen began preaching to the Greek speaking Gentiles in Antioch. Over the span of a few years, a great number had believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:21). From the Scriptures, the men we know who were from (the island of) Cyprus and Cyrene (in Northern Africa) were:

⁸⁹ Rufinus, [A Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed](#), Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, v. 3.

Name	From	Bishop of	Reference	Notes
Simon	Cyrene	?	Mark 15:21	Carried Jesus' Cross
Rufus	Cyrene	Thebes	Mark 15:21	Son of Simon
Alexander	Cyrene	(heretic)	Mark 15:21	Son of Simon
Lucius	Cyrene	Laodicea	Acts 13:1	
Aristobulus	Cyprus	Britain	Romans 16:10	Barnabas' brother; Peter's father-in-law
Barnabas	Cyprus	Cyprus	Acts 12-15	

All of the above, except for Alexander, were members of the original Seventy and were referred to, in the early church, as the “lesser apostles” as opposed to the Twelve who were called the “great apostles.” The name Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21) is a Greek name that is equivalent to the Hebrew name “Simeon.” Simeon, called Niger (or black) in Acts 13:1, may be the same person (as being a black man coming from North Africa). This would explain the connection between Rufus (Simon’s son, Mark 15:21) and Antioch -- Rufus was martyred in c. 107 AD with Ignatius of Antioch. The connection being that Rufus came to Antioch with his father.

We should note also that Luke made a point to mention where some of the people present at the first Pentecost of the Church had come from. Notably present to hear Peter speak were a contingent from the parts of Libya about Cyrene (Acts 2:5-11).

Of the people listed above, all may have been involved in starting the church in Antioch, although Alexander ended up as an apostate later (1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 4:14). John Chrysostom notes⁹⁰ that when the text states, “the hand of the Lord was with them” (Acts 11:21), this means that the men from Cyprus and Cyrene performed miracles, further suggesting that the Seventy were involved. Barnabas was not, but when the news of the great number of people (including Gentiles) turning to the Lord reached the Church in Jerusalem, James and the Apostles⁹¹ in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to investigate. This was similar to the sending of Peter and John to chrismate the converts of Deacon Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:14) and the Lord sending Peter to chrismate and baptize Cornelius and those with him (Acts 10:19-21, 44-48). Barnabas may have been chosen to go because his brother Aristobulus was involved.

Barnabas was sent to Antioch by the Church in Jerusalem

“Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord” (Acts 11:22-24).

Ambrose of Milan singled⁹² out Barnabas as a man who was worthy of his calling at this time.

⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts*, XXV, v. 19.

⁹¹ We might note that at this time “the Apostles in Jerusalem” only included Peter and John from among the Twelve. “James” was James, the Lord’s brother, author of the Epistle of James, and who had been ordained as Bishop of Jerusalem by the Twelve. Judas, called Barsabas, and Silas (Acts 15:) from the Seventy Apostles among others were there also.

⁹² Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit*, II, 157.

“Barnabas also believed, and obeyed because he believed. Therefore, being chosen by the authority of the Holy Spirit, Which came on him abundantly, as a special sign of his merits, he was worthy of so great a fellowship. For one grace shone in these whom one Spirit had chosen.”

Since Barnabas was sent to Antioch just before Herod Agrippa killed the Apostle James the son of Zebedee in 44 AD (Acts 12:1-2), we can put a date on Barnabas’ trip to Antioch as just a few years earlier.

Chrysostom also speculates⁹³ on why Barnabas was sent to Antioch, whereas Peter and John were sent to Samaria following Deacon Philip’s evangelism (Acts 8:14). Chrysostom felt that it was because of the Jews in Jerusalem that they sent Barnabas. That is, the Jews in Jerusalem didn’t want to make it obvious that they were evangelizing Gentiles, so they didn’t send the “pillars” (Galatians 2:9), but instead sent one of the “lesser Apostles.” (Compare the attitude of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who are very zealous for the Mosaic Law: Acts 21:20-21).

“What may be the reason that, when such a city received the Word, they did not come themselves? Because of the Jews! But they sent Barnabas. However, it is no small part of the providential management so that Paul comes to be there. It is both natural, and it is wisely ordered, that they are averse to him, so that Voice of the Gospel that Trumpet of heaven is not shut up in Jerusalem. Note how on all occasions, Christ turns their ill dispositions to needful account and for the benefit of the Church! From the hatred of Paul by the Judaizers, God made Himself available for the building up of the Church. Observe this holy man, Barnabas, how he looked not to his own interests, but hastened to Tarsus. ‘When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord’ (Acts 11:23-24). He was a very kind man, single-hearted, and considerate”.

Barnabas Leaves for Tarsus to Get Paul

“Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Paul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:25-26).

When Barnabas got to Antioch and saw the grace of God among the Gentiles (Acts 11:23), he encouraged them and then left for Tarsus to get Paul (Acts 11:25). Why? Paul had been sent to Tarsus, his home town (Acts 22:3), by James and the Jerusalem brethren, to get him away from murder plots in Jerusalem (Acts 9:29-30). Paul had been in Tarsus now for about 8 years (Acts 9:31), and Barnabas was one of the brothers in Jerusalem who had welcomed Paul after his conversion (Acts 9:26-27). Both Paul and Barnabas had been educated by Gamaliel in their youth (Acts 22:3) and had known each other a long time.

But there was another reason why Barnabas went to get Paul. Just before Paul was sent to Tarsus, he had a vision in the Temple where the Lord told him that He was going to send him to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-21). This vision occurred before Peter’s vision of the sheet (Acts

⁹³ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXV, v. 21.

10:9-17) leading up to the baptism of Cornelius. Therefore Paul and the Jerusalem brethren probably didn't know what to do about the vision at the time. But when Barnabas saw the grace of God in Antioch, he went immediately to get the guy who had had the vision about the Gentiles 8 years earlier. And together, Barnabas and Paul spent a year teaching a great many people in Antioch. Following this, Barnabas and Paul were sent out by the church in Antioch on what has come to be known as Paul's First Missionary Journey.

Following the events described here, James (Zebedee) was killed by Herod (Acts 12:2) and Peter was imprisoned (Acts 12:3). When Peter escaped from prison (Acts 12:6-11), he "departed and went to another place" (Acts 12:17). According to tradition, he slowly made his way North and ended up in Antioch with Paul (Galatians 2:11-15). Thus the Apostles in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch, but the Lord sent Peter also a little later.

Origin of the Name "Christian"

Luke writes, "So it was that for a whole year Barnabas and Paul assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

Ignatius of Antioch stated⁹⁴ that the name "Christians" for the believers in Antioch was the fulfillment of a prophecy by Isaiah. We need to work at being worthy of being called by that name that we have received.

"Let us not be insensible to the kindness of God. Were He to reward us according to our works, we should cease to be. 'If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?' (Psalm 130:3) Let us therefore prove ourselves worthy of that name, which we have received. For whosoever is called by any other name besides this, he is not of God; for he has not received the prophecy which speaks thus concerning us. 'The people shall be called by a new name, which the Lord shall name them, and shall be a holy people' (Isaiah 62:2, 12). This was first fulfilled in Syria; for 'the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch' (Acts 11:26), when Paul and Peter were laying the foundations of the Church. Lay aside, therefore, the evil, the old, the corrupt leaven, and be changed into the new leaven of grace. Abide in Christ, that the stranger may not have dominion over you. It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism, which has now come to an end. Christ is one, in whom every nation that believes, and every tongue that confesses, is gathered to God. Those that were of a stony heart have become the children of Abraham, the friend of God; and in his seed all those have been blessed who were ordained to eternal life in Christ."

⁹⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Magnesians, 10.

According to tradition, it was Evodius⁹⁵, the 2nd Bishop of Antioch, and a member of the original Seventy Apostles, who coined the term “Christian” in Antioch⁹⁶. This occurred while Barnabas and Paul were in Antioch.

⁹⁵ Sometimes spelled Euodius, where the Apostle Peter was considered the 1st Bishop of Antioch. Ignatius of Antioch followed Evodius as Bishop of Antioch. See also Eusebius, Church History, III, 22 and Ignatius, Epistle to the Antiochians, 7.

⁹⁶ Holy Apostles Convent, The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 2002, September 7, p. 239.

Agabus the Prophet Warns of a Famine

Paul stated, “God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28). The “prophets” that Paul refers to as being almost as important as apostles are not just those of the Old Testament, but also those of the New Testament such as Agabus (Acts 11:28, 21:10), Judah Barsabas and Silas (Acts 15:22-32).

Agabus predicted the worldwide famine that occurred during the reign of Emperor Claudius (41-52 AD), and he also predicted the suffering of the Apostle Paul by the Jews in Jerusalem. He also preached⁹⁷ in many other lands and converted many pagans to Christ.

From Paul’s and Barnabas’ Missionary Journeys, we can see that the spiritual gift of Apostleship is of Primary importance in establishing Churches. How does the spiritual gift of prophecy fit in? Paul stated,

“Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification” (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).

How this works, Paul describes as follows: “If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all; he is convicted by all. Thus the secrets of his heart are revealed. Falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you” (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). This is what happened with Photini, the woman at the well in Sychar (John 4:16-26).

Thus Paul said that prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe’ (1 Corinthians 14:22). Paul’s advice on how this should be done is:

“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. You can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

Included in the gift of prophecy is the understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge (1 Corinthians 13:2). This understanding led to the ordination of Timothy as an Apostle (1 Timothy 4:14). Yet prophecy outside the Church is false, since “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21). Also included in the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus (1 Peter 1:10).

⁹⁷ See <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?SID=4&ID=1&FSID=101024>.

Early Christian tradition described⁹⁸ the difference between prophecy in the Church and false prophecy:

“The false prophet falls into a spurious ecstasy, which is accompanied by a lack of all shame and fear. Beginning with an intentional rudeness, he ends with an involuntary madness of soul. But they will never be able to show that any one of the Old Testament prophets, or any one of the New, was carried away in spirit after this fashion. Nor will they be able to boast that Agabus, Judah Barsabas, Silas, the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8-9), the woman Ammia in Philadelphia, Quadratus, or any of the others who do not in any respect belong to them, were moved in this way.”

Vincent of Lerins summarized⁹⁹ what is the mind of the Church regarding prophets and the unity of the Church. It is not an option to reject this; doing so places one outside the Church.

“Lest anyone should rashly think the holy and Catholic consent of the fathers of the Church to be despised, Paul says, ‘God has placed some in the Church, first Apostles’, of whom Paul was one; ‘secondly Prophets’ (1 Corinthians 12:28), such as Agabus. We ‘doctors’, are now called Homilists, Expositors; Paul sometimes calls them also ‘Prophets’, because by them the mysteries of the Prophets are opened to the people. Whoever shall despise these, who had their appointment of God in His Church in their several times and places, when they are unanimous in Christ, in the interpretation of some one point of Catholic doctrine, despises not man, but God. From their unity in the truth, lest anyone should vary, Paul earnestly protests, ‘I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment’ (1 Corinthians 1:10). But if anyone dissent from their unanimous decision, let him listen to Paul’s words, ‘God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace’. That is, God is not the God of him who departs from the unity of consent, but of those who remain steadfast in the peace of consent, ‘As in all the churches of the saints’ (1 Corinthians 14:33). The churches of the saints continue steadfast in the communion of the faith.”

All this is what Agabus (and Judah Barsabas & Silas) did. Agabus started in Jerusalem; then he prophesied in Antioch, then in other parts of the world.

Alms for the Jerusalem Church

“In these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout the entire world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Paul” (Acts 11:27-30).

There was more to this famine than immediately meets the eye. As persecution developed, especially at the hand of Saul (Acts 8:3), the Jewish leaders would raid houses occupied by Christians, drag people off to prison, plunder the house of food and clothing and confiscate the

⁹⁸ Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, VIII, I, 6.

⁹⁹ Vincent of Lerins, Commonitory, XXVIII, 73.

property. In Jerusalem and vicinity the long-term effect of the persecution was the impoverishment of the Jerusalem church. The effect of the famine of 44 AD was felt particularly hard by the Christians. By 57 AD, it was so bad that the Apostle Paul took up another major collection among the Gentile churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea), Achaia (Corinth, Athens) and Galatia (Iconium, Lystra, Derbe), to bring relief to the Jerusalem church (Romans 15:25-27, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, Acts 24:17).

Since the Christians in and about Jerusalem had sold their property and laid the proceeds at the Apostles' feet (Acts 4:35-37), these proceeds had to have been used for food, clothing and shelter for the saints. But if large portions were now being confiscated by the persecution, the Church began to be impoverished. The Gentile Churches that Paul started are never described as selling their property and laying the proceeds at the feet of the Apostles. Instead they are described as taking up a collection to help out the saints in Jerusalem. What the saints in Jerusalem were doing is certainly a blessed undertaking. James, the Bishop of Jerusalem, asked Paul specifically to remember the poor (Galatians 2:10). This refers not just to the poor among the Gentiles, but also to the very poor brethren in Jerusalem; and Paul was very eager to help out.

John Chrysostom referred¹⁰⁰ to the reason why this famine occurred: it was because of the evils done to the Apostles by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. The whole world suffered through the famine as a result. Jesus had predicted this, saying, "You shall have tribulation" (John 16:33).

Chrysostom noted¹⁰¹ one every important development in Antioch: the alms for the Jerusalem Church (Acts 11:29-30). Chrysostom said this had more benefit for Antioch than for Jerusalem:

"There is no sin which alms cannot cleanse; none which alms cannot quench. All sin is beneath this; it is a medicine adopted for every wound. On this, Paul and James concurred (Galatians 2:10). Solomon wrote, 'The ransom of a man's soul is his own wealth' (Proverbs 13:8 LXX). The Lord said, "If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor and come follow me"" (Matthew 19:21).

Chrysostom also spoke¹⁰² of the good use of wealth as a relief for the poor, and how neglecting that has dire consequences for us. Paying attention to this can cause us to inherit the Kingdom of God.

"Let us flee from this root of all evils, and we shall escape them all. 'The love of money is the root'; says Paul, or rather Christ by Paul, and let us see how this is. The actual experience of the world testifies to it. What evil is not caused by wealth, or rather not by wealth, but by the wicked will of those who don't know how to use it? It is possible to use wealth in well doing, and even by means of it to inherit the kingdom. What was given to us for the relief of the poor, to make amends for our past sins, and to please God, this we employ against the poor, or rather against our own souls, and to the great displeasure of God. A man may rob someone of his wealth, and reduce him to poverty; but he reduces himself to death. The man he robs he causes to pine in poverty here; but himself in that eternal punishment. Are they equal sufferers, do you think?"

¹⁰⁰ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXV, v. 28.

¹⁰¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXV, Recapitulation.

¹⁰² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XVII, Moral.

Chrysostom further stated¹⁰³ that people mired in deep poverty sometimes make unseasonable clamor, idle complaints and lamentations about matters for which they ought to be grateful. Others can easily be provoked by their unreasonable annoyance and complaints. This class of persons deserves to be pitied for their misfortunes, not insulted. To trample on their calamities, and add the pain of insult to that which poverty brings, would be an act of extreme brutality. The nature of poverty has a terrible power to depress even the noblest character, and induce it often to act in these same respects without shame. A man coming to help should not be irritated when accused of stinginess, or be provoked by continual begging to become an enemy. He should be affable and accessible to the needy, as Sirach said, ‘Incline your ear to a poor man and give him a friendly answer with meekness’ (Ecclesiasticus 4:8). The man, who is able to bear the other’s infirmity, should bestow his gift to correct the suppliant by the gentleness of his countenance and the mildness of his words. If someone coming to help with a gift loads the poor with reproaches, insults them, and is exasperated against them, he not only fails through his gift to alleviate the despondency produced by poverty, but aggravates the distress by his abuse. Although the poor may be compelled to act very shamelessly through the necessity of hunger, they are nevertheless distressed at this compulsion. Due to the dread of famine, when they are constrained to beg, they feel shame because of their begging. Then on account of their shamelessness, if they are insulted, the power of despondency becomes a complex kind, accompanied by much gloom, and settles down on the soul.

In dealing with the poor, one ought to be so long-suffering, as to avoid increasing their despondency by his fits of anger, but also to remove the greater part of it by his exhortation. The man, who has been insulted, although he is in the enjoyment of great abundance, does not feel the advantage of his wealth, on account of the blow, which he has received from the insult. On the other hand, the man who has been addressed with kind words, and for whom the gift has been accompanied with encouragement, exults and rejoices all the more, and the thing given becomes doubled in value through the manner in which it is offered. I say this not of myself, but borrow from him whose precept I quoted just now: ‘My son, do not mix reproach with your good deeds, nor cause grief by your words when you present a gift. Does not the dew ease the scorching heat? So a word is better than a gift. Indeed, does not a word surpass a good gift? Both are to be found in a gracious man’” (Ecclesiasticus 18:15-17).

Chrysostom continued¹⁰⁴ that alms can be done by other means than money, and that the services done by deeds often do more good than if done by money.

“But alms may be done not only by money, but by acts. For example: one can stand by a person kindly to help and defend him; one may reach to him a helping hand. The service rendered by acts has often done more good even than money. It is, do you think, small alms to a lost, castaway soul possessed by a burning fever to be able to rid it of its disease? For example, do you see one possessed by love of money? Pity the man. Quench his fire. What if he will not be persuaded? Do your part and do not be remiss. Have you seen him in bonds? For wealth is indeed bonds (Matthew 25:41-43). Go to him; visit him; console him; try to release him from his bonds. If he refuses, he shall bear the blame himself. Have you seen him naked and a stranger? He is indeed naked and a stranger to heaven. Bring him to your own inn; clothe him with the garment of virtue; give him the city which is in heaven.

¹⁰³ John Chrysostom, Treatise Concerning the Christian Priesthood, III, 16.

¹⁰⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXV, Recapitulation.

In considering the spread of the Early Church, one might think about how terrible the persecutions were. However, as Chrysostom put¹⁰⁵ it: “The persecution turned out to be no light benefit. As ‘to those who love God all things work together for good’” (Romans 8:28).

“If they had made it their express study how best to establish the Church, they would have done nothing else but this; they would have dispersed the teachers. When Stephen was slain, when Paul was twice in danger, when the Apostles were scourged, then the Gentiles received the word, and also the Samaritans. Paul declared: ‘It was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken to you (the Jews) first; but since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles’ (Acts 13:46). Truly this is the reason why it was there they were appointed to be called Christians, because Paul spent so long a time in Antioch!”

Distinguishing Characteristics about the City of Antioch

The city of Antioch acquired a special dignity due to the extended presence of Peter, Paul, Barnabas and others. This was the cradle of Christianity, which is why believers were first called “Christians” there.

John Chrysostom stated¹⁰⁶ that the city of Antioch was very distinguished for three reasons: (1) Believers were first called Christians there. (2) Even while they were expecting a famine, they gave generously instead of hoarding for their own sustenance. (3) When the Jewish believers tried to lay Judaism on them, they didn’t bear this in silence, but sent Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem to resolve the issue.

“Do you wish to learn the dignity and ancestry of the city of Antioch? I will tell it exactly; not only that you may know, but that you may also emulate it. ‘It came to pass, that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch’ (Acts 11:26). This dignity, none of the cities throughout the world possesses, not even the city of Rome herself! On account of that love toward Christ, that boldness and virtue, Antioch can look the whole world in the face.”

“Do you wish farther to hear of a different dignity and commendation belonging to the city of Antioch? A really bad famine was approaching (Acts 11:28-30), and the inhabitants of Antioch determined, as far as each person had the means, to send relief to the Saints dwelling at Jerusalem. Notice this; charity in a time of famine! The times did not make them stingy; the expectation of the calamity did not make them backward in helping. When everyone is apt to be storing up what is not their own, then they distributed their own, not merely to those who were near, but also to those who were living afar off! Do you see here the faith towards God, and the love towards their neighbor?”

“Another dignity of the city of Antioch was displayed when certain men came down from Judaea to Antioch, defiling the doctrine preached, and introducing Jewish observances. The men of Antioch did not bear this novelty in silence. They came together, sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, and caused the Apostles to provide pure doctrines, cleared from all Jewish imperfection, distributed throughout all parts of the world! This is the dignity of Antioch! This is its

¹⁰⁵ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXV, v.22.

¹⁰⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, XVII, 10.

precedence! This makes it a metropolis, not on earth, but in heaven. All other honors are corruptible, fleeting, perish with the present life, and often come to their end before the close of it! To me, a city that doesn't have pious citizens is inferior to any village, and less noble than any cave."