

Scripture Readings for the Jesse Tree



A Shorter Version

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Day 1: The Creation of the World (*ornament: Sun*)

Genesis 1-2:4

In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. Now the earth was invisible and unformed, and darkness was upon the deep and a spirit of God was being carried upon the water. And God said: Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God made a separation between the light and the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night; and there was evening and there was morning, one day. And God said: Let there be a firmament in the midst of the water and let there be a separation between the water and the water; and it was so. And God made the firmament; and God made a separation between the water below the firmament, and between the water above the firmament. And God called the firmament Heaven; and God saw that it was good, and there was evening and there was morning, a second day. And God said: Let the water below heaven be gathered together into one gathering, and let dry land appear; and it was so. And the water below heaven was gathered together into their gatherings, and the dry land appeared. And God called the dry land Earth, and the accumulations of the waters he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said: Let the earth sprout herb of grass, sowing seed according to its kind and its likeness, and fruiting tree making fruit, whose seed is in it according to its kind upon the earth; and it was so. And the earth brought forth herb of grass, sowing seed according to its kind and its likeness, and fruiting tree making fruit, whose seed was in it according to its kind upon the earth, and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and morning, a third day.

God said: Let there be lamps in the firmament of heaven to give light on the earth, and to make a separation between the day and the night; and let them exist for signs and for seasons and for days and for years; and let them exist to give light in the firmament of heaven, to shine on the earth; and it was so. And God made the two great lamps, the great lamp to rule the day, and the lesser lamp to rule the night and the stars. And God placed them in the firmament of heaven to shine on the earth, and to rule the day and the night, and to make a separation between the light and the darkness; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. And God said: Let the waters bring forth living reptiles, and winged creatures flying over the earth, under the firmament of heaven; and it was so. And God made the great whales, and every soul of living reptiles, which the waters brought forth according to their kind, and every winged flying creature according to its kind. And God saw that they were good; and God blessed them and said: Increase and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let the winged creatures be multiplied upon the earth. And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

God said: Let the earth bring forth the living soul according to its kind, quadrupeds, reptiles, and wild beasts of the earth according to their kind; and it was so. And God made the wild beasts of the earth according to their kind, and the cattle according to their kind, and all the reptiles of the earth according to their kinds. And God saw that they were good. And God said: Let us make humanity according to our image and according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the flying creatures of heaven and the cattle and all the earth and all the reptiles which creep upon the earth. And God made humanity, according to the image of God he made it; male and female he made them. And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and have dominion over it; and rule the fish of the sea and the flying creatures of heaven and all the cattle and all the earth and all the reptiles which creep upon the earth. And God said: See, I have given you all seed-bearing grass, sowing seed, which is upon the whole earth; and every tree, which has in it fruit of seed-bearing seed, shall be food for you, and for all the wild beasts of the earth and for all the winged creatures of heaven, and for every reptile which creeps upon the earth, which has in itself a soul of life, and every green grass shall be food. And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made; and behold, they were very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. And the heaven and the earth were accomplished, and all their array. And God accomplished on the sixth day the works which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from his works which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it; because on it he rested from all his works, which God had begun to make.

Day 2: Creation of Man (*ornament: Two People*)

Genesis 2:4-25

This is the book of the genesis of heaven and earth, when it came to pass; in the day when the Lord God made heaven and earth and every herb of the field, before it was on the earth, and every grass of the field, before it sprang up; for God had not sent rain on the earth, and there was no man to work it. But a spring went up out of the earth and watered the face of the earth. And God fashioned man, dust from the earth, and breathed into his face a breath of life; and man became a living soul. And God planted Paradise in Eden, to the East, and he placed there the man he had fashioned. And God again made every tree fair to behold and good to eat to spring out of the earth; and the tree of life in the midst of Paradise, and the tree of knowing what can be known of good and evil. While a river came from Eden to water Paradise; from there it divides into four heads; the name of one is Phison,² this encircles all the land of Evilat,³ where there is gold. The gold of that land is good; and there is carbuncle and the green stone. And the name of the second is Geon,⁴ this encircles the whole land of Ethiopia. And the third river is the Tigris, this is the one which flows out opposite the Assyrians. The fourth river is the Euphrates. And the Lord God took the man he had fashioned, and placed him in the Paradise of delight, to work it and guard it. And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying: "From every tree in Paradise you may eat for food; but from the tree of knowing good and evil, you are not to eat from it; on the day you eat from it by death you will die." And the Lord God said: "It is not good for man to be alone; let us make a helper for him, corresponding to him." And God fashioned again from the earth all the flying creatures of heaven, and the wild beasts of the field; and he brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And every name that Adam called each living soul, that was its name.

And Adam gave names to all the cattle and all the flying creatures of heaven and to all the wild beasts of the field; but for Adam there was not found a helper like himself. And God put a trance upon Adam, and he slept, and he took one of his ribs and filled up the flesh instead of it. And God built the rib which he had taken from Adam into a woman and brought her to Adam. And Adam said: "This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she has been taken from the Man." For this reason a man will leave behind his father and mother and be attached to his wife and they shall be two into one flesh. And they were both naked, Adam and his wife, and they were not ashamed.

² Pronounced "Fee-sohn."

³ Pronounced "Eh-vee-laht."

⁴ Pronounced "Ghee-on."

Day 3: The Expulsion from Paradise (*ornament: Fruit*)

Gen 3:1-24

Now the serpent was more sagacious⁵ than all the beasts on the earth which the Lord God had made. And the serpent said to the woman: “What is it God said: you are not to eat of any tree of Paradise?” And the woman said to the serpent: “From the fruit of the trees of Paradise we may eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of Paradise, God said: ‘Do not eat of it, do not even touch it, lest you die.’” And the serpent said to the woman: “By death you will not die; for God knows that on the day that you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be as gods knowing good and evil.” And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat and that it was pleasing for the eyes to behold and fair for understanding; and she took of the fruit and ate; and she gave to her husband with her and they ate. And the eyes of the two of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made aprons for themselves. And they heard the voice of the Lord God as he walked in Paradise in the afternoon and Adam and his wife hid from the face of the Lord God in the middle of the trees of Paradise. And the Lord God called Adam and said to him: “Adam, where are you?” And he said to him: “I heard your voice as you walked in Paradise, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid.” And God said to him: “Who told you were naked, unless you have eaten of the tree of which alone I commanded you not to eat?” And Adam said: “The woman, whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” And the Lord God said to the woman: “Why did you do this?” And the woman said: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” And the Lord God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, you are accursed above all the cattle and all the wild beasts on the earth; on your breast and on your belly you will go, and you will eat earth all the days of your life, and I shall place enmity between you and the Woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he will watch for your head, and you will watch for his heel.” And to the woman he said: “Multiplying I shall multiply your pains and your groaning; in pains you will give birth to children, and your recourse shall be to your husband, and he will lord it over you.” While to Adam he said: “Because you listened to the voice of your wife, and ate of the tree of which alone I commanded you not eat, you ate of it, the earth is accursed in your works; in pains you will eat all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it will bring up for you, and you shall eat the grass of the field; in the sweat of your brow you shall eat your bread, until you return to the earth from which you were taken; because you are earth and to earth you shall return.” And Adam called his wife’s name Life⁶; because she is the mother of all the living.

The Lord God made for Adam and his wife tunics of skin, and clothed them. And God said: “See, Adam has become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now lest he should ever stretch out his hand and take from the tree of life and eat and live for ever—” And the Lord God sent him out of the Paradise of delight to work the earth from which he had been taken. And he cast Adam out and settled him opposite the Paradise of delight; and he stationed the Cherubim, and the sword of flame turning about, to guard the way to the tree of life.

⁵ Archimandrite Ephrem observes that the word is not pejorative (unlike “cunning”) in Greek.

⁶ In Greek, “Zoë,” which is analogous to “Eve,” meaning “life-giver” in Hebrew.

Day 4: Noë (Noah) (*ornament: Rainbow*)

from Genesis 6–8

Noë was well-pleasing to God. Noë begot three sons, Sem, Ham and Japhet.⁷ Now the earth had become corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with injustice. And the Lord God said to Noë, “Because the earth has been filled with the injustice of mankind, I am utterly destroying them and the earth. So make an ark for yourself from squared logs. I am bringing the flood, water upon the earth to destroy all flesh under heaven; and whatever there is upon the earth shall die. I shall establish my testament with you; you are to enter the ark, you and your sons and your wives.” And Noë did everything whatever the Lord God had commanded him.

The Lord God said to Noë, “Enter the ark, you and all your house, because I have seen that you are just before me in this generation. Of all the clean beasts bring in to you seven by seven, male and female, while of the unclean beasts two by two, and of all the unclean flying creatures of heaven two by two, to maintain seed for all the earth. For yet seven days I am bringing rain upon the earth for forty days and forty nights and I shall wipe out everything from the face of the whole earth.” And Noë did everything that the Lord God had commanded him.

It came to pass: on that day all the sources of the abyss were broken open, and the flood-gates of heaven were opened and it rained upon the earth for forty days and forty nights. On that day Noë, Sem, Ham, Japhet, the sons of Noë and the wife of Noë and the three wives of his sons entered the ark with him; and all the wild beasts according to their kind and all the cattle according to their kind and everything that creeps upon the earth according to its kind, and every winged bird according to its kind, entered to Noë into the ark, two by two, male and female. And the Lord God shut the ark from outside on him. And the waters were multiplied and lifted the ark up, and it was raised high from the earth. The water raised up, and hid all the high mountains. All flesh died which moved upon the earth. And Noë alone was left, and those with him in the ark. And the water was raised over the earth for one hundred and fifty days. And God remembered Noë and all the animals that were with him in the ark, and God brought a wind upon the earth, and the water abated, and the rain of heaven was withheld.

The ark came to rest in the seventh month, on the twenty seventh day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat. And in the tenth month, on the first of the month, Noë opened the window of the ark, which he had made, and sent forth the raven, and then the dove, to see if the water had ceased. And the dove not finding rest for her feet returned to him into the ark. And having waited again seven other days again he sent out the dove from the ark. And the dove returned to him towards evening, and she had a an olive leaf, a twig, in her mouth, and Noë knew that the water had ceased from the earth. And he waited again seven other days and again sent out the dove, and she did not return to him again. And Noë uncovered the roof of the ark, which he had made, and saw that the water had subsided from the face of the earth.

And the Lord God spoke to Noë saying, “Come out of the ark, and increase and multiply upon the earth.” And Noë and his wife and his sons and his sons’ wives with him; and all the wild beasts and all the cattle and every winged creature came out of the ark. And Noë built an altar to the Lord; and took of all the clean beasts and of all the clean birds and offered them on the altar. And the Lord God smelt an odor of sweetness. The Lord God, having considered, said: “I will not again smite all living flesh as I have done.” And God blessed Noë and his sons and said to them: Increase and multiply and fill the earth and have dominion over it. And the Lord God said to Noë, “This is the sign of the covenant, the sign that I setting between me and you and between every living soul which is with you for eternal generations. I am placing my bow in the cloud and it will be a sign of covenant between me and the earth. And I shall remember my covenant, which is between every living soul in all flesh, and there never again be water for a flood so as to wipe out all flesh.”

⁷ The name Noah is given as Noë in the Septugaint. It is pronounced, “No-eh.” The common alternatives for Noë’s sons are “Shem, Ham, and Japheth.”

Day 5: Abraham (*ornament: Constellation of Stars*)

Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-6; 17:1-9

The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, and you will be blessed. I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse; and in you all the tribes of the earth will be blessed.” So Abram went, as the Lord God had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Harran.⁸ And Abram took Sarah his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions which they had gathered, and every person that they had gathered in Harran; and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. And Abram journeyed through the length of the land to the place at Sechem,⁹ to the high oak. At that time the Canaanites inhabited the land. And the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “To your descendants I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

And the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision saying, “Fear not, Abram, I am shielding you. Your reward will be exceedingly great.” But Abram said, “Master, Lord, what will you give me? I am departing childless, while the son of Masek my home-born female slave, this Eliezer¹⁰ of Damascus will inherit.” And Abram said, “Since you have given me no seed my home-born slave will inherit from me.” And the voice of the Lord came to him immediately, saying, “He will not inherit, but one who will come forth from you, he will inherit from you.” And he led him outside and said to him, “Look up to heaven and count the stars, if you can count them up’. And he said, “So shall your seed be.” And Abram believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.

When Abram was ninety nine years old the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am your God; be well-pleasing before me and be blameless, and I will establish my covenant between me and you and I will multiply you greatly.” And Abram fell on his face and God spoke to him saying, “See, my covenant is with you, and you will be the father of many nations. And your name will no longer be called Abram, but your name will be Abraham, because I have made you the father of many nations. And I will increase you greatly and I will make nations from you and kings will come forth from you. And I will set my covenant between you and your seed after you to all generations for an eternal covenant, for me to be your God and that of your seed after you. And I will give you and your seed the land on which you are dwelling, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and I shall be God for them.” And God said to Abraham, “You are to keep my covenant, you and your seed after to all their generations.”

^{8.} Pronounced “Khahr-RAHN” or “Hahr-RAHN.” The Common alternative: is “Haran.”

^{9.} Pronounced “see-KHEM” or “see-HEM.” Common alternative:: “Shechem.”

^{10.} Pronounced “Eh-lee-eh-zehr.”

Day 6: Sacrifice of Isaac (*ornament: Altar*)

Genesis 22:1-18

It came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham, Abraham." he said, "Here I am." And he said, "Take your son, your beloved, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the high land and offer him there as a whole burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will tell you." But Abraham arose in the morning and saddled his ass. He took with him two lads and Isaac his son and having split wood for a whole burnt offering he arose and went and came to the place of which God had spoken to him on the third day. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. And Abraham said to his lads, "Sit here with the ass while I and the lad will go over there and when we have worshipped we will return to you." Abraham took the wood for the whole burnt offering and put it on Isaac his son, while he took in his hands both the fire and the knife, and they went the two of them together. Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father." he said, "What is it, child?" he said, "See, here are fire and wood. Where is the sheep for the whole burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will see for himself to a sheep for the whole burnt offering, child." They went both of them together and came to the place of which God had told him. And there Abraham built the altar and put the wood on it and he bound his son Isaac and put him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand to take the knife to slay his son. And the Angel of the Lord called him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham." But he said, "Here I am." And he said, "Do not lay your hand on the child nor do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God and you have not spared your beloved son for my sake." And raising his eyes Abraham saw and see, a ram caught in a Sabek plant by the horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it as a whole burnt offering instead of his son Isaac. And Abraham called the name of the place "The Lord saw"; so that they say today, on the mountain the Lord appeared. And the Angel of the Lord called Abraham a second time from heaven saying, "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not spared your beloved son for my sake, multiplying I will multiply you your seed like all the stars of heaven and like the sand which is beside the edge of the sea; and your seed will inherit the cities of their opponents. And in your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed, in return for your obeying my voice."

Day 7: Jacob's Ladder (*ornament: Ladder*)

Abraham's son Isaac also had a son, called Jacob. Jacob won from his brother Esau his birth-right and the blessing of Isaac, but had to flee from home to escape Esau's wrath. This next story takes place on that fearful journey.

Genesis 28:10-17

Jacob went out from the well of the oath and journeyed towards Harran.¹¹ And he lighted on a place and slept there, for the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of the place and put it at his head; and he slept in that place, and he dreamed. And behold, a ladder set up on the earth, whose head reached to heaven; and the Angels of God were going up and going down upon it. But the Lord stood above it and said: "I am the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac, do not be afraid. The land on which you are sleeping I shall give to you and to your seed. And your seed will be like the sand of the earth, and it will be spread abroad to the Sea and South and North and East; and in you and in your seed all the tribes of the earth will be blessed. And behold, I am with you, guarding you on every road on which you may journey; and I shall bring you back again to this land, because I shall never abandon you until I have done all that I have said to you." And Jacob arose from his sleep and said: "The Lord is in this place, but I did not know it'. And he was afraid, and said: 'How fearful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven.'"

When the Lord again brought Jacob back to his own land, he gave him the name Israel, by which God's people would be known.

^{11.} Pronounced "Khahr-RAHN" or "Hahr-RAHN." The Common alternative: is "Haran."

Day 8: Joseph and his Brothers (*ornament: Coat of Many Colors*)

Genesis 37:3–8, 13–14, 17–35

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, “Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.”

And his brothers said to him, “Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Then his brothers went to feed their father’s flock in Sechem.¹² And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers feeding the flock in Sechem? Come, I will send you to them.” Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. Then they said to one another, “Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into one of the pits; and we shall say, ‘Some evil beast has devoured him.’ We shall see what will become of his dreams!” But Ruben¹³ heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, “Let us not kill him.” And Ruben said to them, “Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him”—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father. So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic of many colors that was on him. Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ismaelites, coming from Galahad¹⁴ with their camels, bearing incense, resin, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. So Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to these Ismaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.” And his brothers listened. Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ismaelites for twenty pieces of gold. And they led down Joseph into Egypt. Then Ruben returned to the pit, and did not see Joseph in the pit; and he tore his clothes. And he returned to his brothers and said, “The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?” So they took Joseph’s tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and stained the tunic in the blood. Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, “We have found this. Do you know whether it is your son’s tunic or not?” And he recognized it and said, “It is my son’s tunic. An evil wild beast has devoured him. A wild beast has snatched Joseph away.” Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters gathered together and came to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, “I shall go down into Hades to my son in mourning.” Thus his father wept for him. Now the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Petriphres,¹⁵ a eunuch of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.

^{12.} Pronounced “see-KHEM” or “see-HEM.” Common alternative: “Shechem.”

^{13.} Pronounced “Roo-BEEN” (but the customary “ROO-ben” is fine). Common alternative: “Reuben.”

^{14.} “Ismaelites” pronounced “Is-ma-ee-LITES,” and Galahad pronounced “Ga-la-HAD.” Common alternatives: “Ishmaelites” and “Gilead.”

^{15.} Pronounced “Pe-te-FREES.” Common alternative: “Potiphar.”

Day 9: Joseph's Elevation (*ornament: Cow*)

from Genesis 41–43, 45

The Lord blessed everything Joseph did while a slave in Egypt, but his master's wife falsely accused him and had him put in prison. After two years, Pharaoh had a vision of seven fat cows being swallowed up by seven thin cows, and then plump ears of grain being swallowed by thin ones. No one could interpret his vision until his cup-bearer told Pharaoh how Joseph had correctly interpreted his own dream, that he would be released from prison and restored to office. Joseph told Pharaoh what God would do: seven years of famine would follow seven years of plenty. Joseph urged Pharaoh to find a wise and prudent man to store up food during the plentiful years to last through the famine. And Pharaoh set Joseph over all Egypt. So there was enough food in Egypt when famine spread across the lands. Jacob sent his sons to buy food from Egypt, but kept back the youngest, Benjamin. Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him. Joseph accused them as spies. He held Simeon until they brought Benjamin. Then the brothers acknowledged their guilt to one another, for their cruelty to Joseph, not knowing Joseph understood. In secret, Joseph wept at their words. Eventually the brothers returned with Benjamin.

Reading from the Lectionary begins (Gen. 43:26–31; 45:1–16)

And the brothers brought Joseph the gifts which they had in their hands, into the house; and they prostrated before him with their faces to the ground. But he asked them, "How are you?" and he said to them, "Is your father, the old man of whom you spoke, well? Is he still alive?" And they said, "Your servant our father is well. He is still alive." And he said, "That man is blessed by God." And bowing down, they prostrated before him. And Joseph, lifting up his eyes, saw his brother Benjamin, born of the same mother, and said, "Is this your younger brother, whom you said you would bring to me?" and he said, "God have mercy on you, my child." And Joseph was deeply troubled, for so strong was the affection he felt for his brother that he wanted to weep; and he went into his private chamber, and wept there. And having washed his face and came out and controlled himself. And Joseph could not refrain him with everyone standing near him, but he said, "Send everyone away from me." And no one stood near Joseph, when he made himself known to his brethren. And he cried aloud with weeping. All the Egyptians heard, and it became known in Pharaoh's house. But Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" And his brothers could not answer him, for they were deeply troubled. But Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near me"; and they came near. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now then do not be grieved, and do not let it seem hard to you that you sold me here, for God sent me before you for life. For this is the second year there is famine in the land, and there are still five years left, in which there will be neither ploughing, nor harvest. For God sent me before you that a remnant might be left for you on earth to nourish a great remnant of you. Now then it was not you that sent me here, but God; and he has made me like a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and ruler of all the land of Egypt. Hurry, therefore, and go up to my father, and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all the land of Egypt; come down therefore to me, and do not delay. And you shall dwell in the land of Gesem of Arabia; and you shall be near me, you and your sons, and your sons' sons, your sheep and your oxen, and whatever is yours; and I will nourish you there — for there are still five years of famine — lest you and your sons, and all your possessions be wiped out.' Look, your own eyes can see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin can see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. Report, therefore, to my father all my glory in Egypt, and everything you have seen, and make haste and bring down my father here." And he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept on him; and Benjamin wept on his neck. And he kissed all his brothers, and wept on them; and after this his brothers spoke to him. And the report was carried into Pharaoh's house, saying, "Joseph's brothers have come." And Pharaoh rejoiced, and his household.

Day: 10 Israel's Blessing and Prophecy for Judah (*ornament: Lion*)

Genesis 49:1-2, 8-12

Jacob called his sons, and said to them, "Gather round, that I may tell you what will happen to you in the last days. Assemble and hear me, sons of Jacob. Hear Israel, hear your father. Judah, your brothers shall praise you. Your hand will be on the back of your enemies. Your father's sons will bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp. From a tender shoot, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a whelp. Who will rouse him? A ruler will not fail from Judah, nor a leader from his thighs, until the things laid up for him come, and he is the expectation of the nations. Binding his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to the branch, he will wash his robe in wine and his cloak in the blood of the grape. His eyes are more cheering than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk."

Day 11: The Infant Moses (*ornament: Basket*)

Exodus 1:8-14,22; 2:1-10

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and stronger than we are. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pitho, Rameses and On, which is Heliopolis,¹⁶ for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and grew stronger, so that the Egyptians came to abominate the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Sephora and the other Phua,¹⁷ “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and they are about to give birth, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, spare her.”

First Lectionary text ends

And a man of the tribe of Levi chose among the daughters of Levi and had one. So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when they saw that he was beautiful, they hid him three months. But when they could no longer hide him, his mother took a basket for him, daubed it with asphalt, put the child in it, and laid it in the marsh by the river. And his sister was watching from afar, to learn what would happen to him.¹⁸

Second Lectionary text begins

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying in the basket, and Pharaoh’s daughter took pity on him, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became a son to her. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

^{16.} Pronounced “Pee-tho,” “Ram-es-SEES,” “Ohn,” and “Hee-lee-AH-poh-lihs.”

^{17.} Pronounced “Seh-FOR-ah” and “FOO-ah.”

^{18.} This part of the reading does not appear in the Lectionary, and its translation is the responsibility of Fr. Joshua Mosher.

Day 12: Moses and the Burning Bush (*ornament: Burning Bush*)

Exodus 3:1–20

Now Moses was shepherding the sheep of his father-in-law, Jothor, the priest of Madiam;¹⁹ and he led the sheep to the desert, and came to mount Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush; and he saw that the bush was burning, but the bush was not burned up. And Moses said, “I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not being burned up.” When the Lord saw that he drew near to see, the Lord called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “What is it?” Then he said, “Do not come near; untie your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses turned away his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said to Moses, “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their suffering, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Pherizzites, the Gergesites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.”²⁰

Lectionary text ends

“Now therefore, see, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh and you will bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” And God said to Moses, “I will be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you forth: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” Then Moses said to God, “See, I will come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they will say to me, ‘What is his name?’ What shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “I am he Who Is.” And he said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘He Who Is has sent me to you.’” Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations.’ Go and gather the elders of the children of Israel, and say to them, ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, ‘I have surely looked upon you and upon all that has happened to you in Egypt; and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of the Egyptians to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Pherizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.’” Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to Pharaoh, King of Egypt; and you shall say to him, “The God of the Hebrews has summoned us; and now, let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to our God.’ But I know that Pharaoh, King of Egypt, will not let you go, except with a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all my wonders which I will do among them; and after that he will let you go.”²¹

^{19.} Pronounced “Joh–thor” and “Ma–dee–am.” Common alternatives: “Jethro” and “Midian.”

^{20.} Pronounced “KAY–na–nites” (or “KAH–na–nites), “HIT–tites,” “AH–moh–rites,” “FEH–rih–zites,” “GEHR–geh–sites,” “HIH–vites,” and “JEH–boo–sites.”

^{21.} This last part is the responsibility of Fr. Joshua Mosher

Day 13: The Plagues of Egypt and the Pascha for the Lord (*ornament: Frog*)

from Exodus 6–8, 11, 12

The Lord sent Moses with his brother Aaron to tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. And the Lord said, “But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay my hand on Egypt and with my power bring my people, out of the land of Egypt. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.” So Moses and Aaron did as the Lord told them, but Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. So the Lord spoke to Moses: “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their canals, over their marshes, and over all their standing water, that they may become blood.’” So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. The fish that were in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river. When Pharaoh still refused to send the Lord’s people away, the Lord told Moses to have Aaron stretch out his rod again, and the river vomited frogs which covered the land of Egypt. Pharaoh asked Moses to pray that the Lord would remove the frogs, and the Lord did as Moses asked, but when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, his heart was hardened and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said. After many plagues, the Lord said to Moses, “I will bring yet one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will send you away from here.”

The Lectionary passage begins (Exodus 12:1–13)

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: “This month is the beginning of months for you, it is for you the first among the months of the year; speak to the whole congregation of the children of Israel saying: On the tenth of this month let each take a sheep according to the houses of their families; if they should be too few in the house so that there are not enough for a sheep, he is to take with him his neighbor according to the number of souls; each shall be numbered for him according to the sufficiency for a sheep; it shall be for you a sheep, perfect, male, a yearling; you shall take it from the lambs and the kids. And it shall be kept by you until the fourteenth of this month and the whole multitude of the congregation of the children of Israel shall slaughter it towards evening; and they are to take some of the blood and put it on the two door-posts and on the lintel in the houses in which they eat it, and they are to eat the meat in this night; roasted by fire, and they are to eat unleavened bread on bitter herbs. you are not to eat it raw or boiled in water, but only roasted by fire, the head with the feet and the entrails. you are not to leave any of it until morning and you are not to break a bone of it; but what is left over of it until morning you are to burn up with fire. This is how you are to eat it: your loins girt, your sandals on your feet and your staves in your hands; and you are to eat it in haste: it is a Pascha for the Lord.”

The Lectionary passage ends

“For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute vengeance: I am the Lord. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will protect you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike in the land, Egypt.” Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, “Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the Lord as you have said. Also take your sheep and your oxen, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also.”

Day 14: Israel Passes through the Red Sea (*ornament: Parted Sea*)

Exodus 13:20-22, 14:1-31, 15:1-19

The children of Israel departed and encamped by the desert. God was leading them by day with a pillar of cloud to show them the way, but by night with a pillar of fire. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue after them; and I shall be glorified in Pharaoh and in all his army; and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." So Pharaoh yoked his chariots and assembled all his people with himself, and pursued the children of Israel. The children of Israel cried out to the Lord, and said to Moses: "Because there were no graves in Egypt have you brought us out to die in the desert? It is better for us to be slaves to the Egyptians than to die in this desert." But Moses said to the people: "Take courage, stand firm, and see the salvation which comes from the Lord, which he will perform for us today. The Lord will fight for you, and you will keep silent." But the Lord said to Moses: "Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand upon the sea, and divide it; and let the children of Israel enter the midst of the sea on dry ground. And see, I shall harden Pharaoh's heart, and that of all the Egyptians, and they will enter after them; and I shall be glorified in Pharaoh and in all his army; and all the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." Moses stretched out his hand upon the sea; and the Lord made the sea dry; and the water was parted. And the children of Israel entered the midst of the sea on dry land; and its water was a wall on the right and a wall on the left. But the Egyptians went in pursuit into the midst of the sea. But the Lord said to Moses: "Stretch out your hand upon the sea and let the water be restored and let it cover the Egyptians." Moses stretched out his hand upon the sea, and the water was restored to its place; and the water covered the chariots and the riders and all the power of Pharaoh and there was not one of them left behind. But the children of Israel marched through dry land in the midst of the sea. And the Lord delivered Israel on that day from the hand of the Egyptians. Israel saw the mighty hand, what the Lord had done to the Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord and believed. Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and said:

Let us sing to the Lord, for he is greatly glorified: horse and rider he has cast into the sea. Helper and protector he has become for my salvation: he is my God and I will glorify him; my father's God and I will exalt him. The Lord shatters wars, the Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and power he has cast into the sea; his chosen mounted captains he has drowned in the Red Sea. With the deep he covered them: they sank to the bottom like a stone. Your right hand, Lord, has been glorified with strength; your right hand, Lord, has crushed enemies; and by the multitude of your glory you have smashed the opponents. you sent forth your anger, it consumed them like a reed. And through the spirit of your wrath the water parted; the waters became fixed like a wall, and the waves became fixed in the midst of the sea. The enemy said: I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, I will fill my soul, I will destroy with my sword, my right hand shall lord it. you sent forth your spirit, the sea covered them, they sank like lead in a mass of water. Who is like you among the gods, Lord? Who is like you? Glorified in holiness, wondrous in glories, performing marvels. you stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them down. you guided with justice this people of yours, which you have redeemed; by your strength you have called them into your holy resting-place. Nations heard and were enraged; pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistim.²² Then the leaders of Edom and the rulers of the Moabites hastened: trembling took hold of them: all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away. Let fear and trembling fall upon them: by the greatness of your arm let them be turned to stone; till your people pass over, O Lord: till your people, whom you have gained, pass over. Bring them and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance, your prepared dwelling, which you have made, Lord: the sanctuary which your hands have prepared. The Lord reigns over the ages and for ever and ever: for Pharaoh's horse went with the chariots and horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought the water of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel walked on dry land in the midst of the sea.

²² Pronounced "Fih-lih-STIHM" or "Fee-lee-STEEM." Common alternative: "Philistia."

Day 15: Water in the Wilderness (*ornament: Staff*)

Exodus 15:22–16:1; 17:1–7

Moses led the children of Israel up from the Red Sea and brought them to the desert of Sour.²³ And they marched for three days in the desert and found no water to drink. They came to Merra²⁴ and were unable to drink the water from Merra, because it was bitter. And so the place was named “Bitterness.” And the people started to murmur against Moses and say, “What are we to drink?” Moses cried to the Lord and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water and it became sweet. There God laid down for him statutes and judgments and he tested him there and said, “If you listen to the voice of the Lord, your God, and do what is well-pleasing before him, heed his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring on you any of the diseases that I brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you.” And they came to Elim²⁵ and there were twelve springs of water there and seventy date palms. And they encamped there by the waters. Then they moved away from Elim and the whole Assembly of the children of Israel came to the desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sina.²⁶

End of Lectionary Passage

Then all the Assembly of the children of Israel departed from the desert of Sin, according to their encampments, by the word of the Lord, and camped in Raphidin;²⁷ but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people reviled Moses, and said, “Give us water, that we may drink.” So Moses said to them, “Why do you revile me? Why do you tempt the Lord?” And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, “Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “What shall I do with this people? Yet a little while and they will stone me!” And the Lord said to Moses, “Go on before this people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the children of Israel. So he called the name of the place Temptation and Reviling, because of the reviling by the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”²⁸

^{23.} Pronounced “Soor.” Common alternative: “Shur.”

^{24.} Pronounced “Mehr-rah.” Common alternative: “Marah.”

^{25.} Pronounced “Eh-lihm” or “Eh-leem.”

^{26.} Pronounced “Seen” and “See-NAH.” Common alternative “Sinai.”

^{27.} Pronounced “Rah-fi-DIN.”

^{28.} This last part of the reading does not appear in the Lectionary, and is the responsibility of Fr. Joshua Mosher.

Day 16: The Giving of the Commandments (*ornament: Stone Tablets*)

Exodus 24:12-18

The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tables of stone, the law and the commandments, which I have written for their instruction.” When Moses had arisen, he and Jesus,²⁹ who attended him, went up onto the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, “Wait here for us, until we come back to you again; and, see, Aaron and Or are with you; if anyone has a dispute, let them go to them.” Then Moses went up onto the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of God came down on Mount Sina,³⁰ and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day the Lord called Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the children of Israel. And Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. And he was there on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Even while the Lord revealed himself to Moses on the mountain, the people rebelled and put their trust in a false idol. Because the people would not listen to Moses and trust in the Lord’s ways, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years instead of coming quickly to the Promised Land of Canaan. Everyone who had grown up in Egypt died on the journey. Even Moses was permitted only to see the Promised Land from a distance before dying, leaving Jesus son of Nave³¹ to lead the people of Israel in his place. Jesus led them with the Ark containing the Tablets of the Law that Moses had received on the mountain — across the Jordan river and into battle with their adversaries in Canaan. Because the people followed his instruction always to trust in God to save them, they were victorious even against the most powerful enemies. Then he allotted each tribe its portion of the land and before he died reminded them again of their promise to follow God’s way and no other. After him, the people of Israel again and again forgot what the Lord had done for them, and followed after the foreign gods of Canaan. But each time, God raised up righteous judges to judge how to be faithful to his commandments, and they led the tribes of Israel through many great trials.

^{29.} Jesus the son of Navi. Common alternative: “Joshua the son of Nun.” To English-speakers, “Jesus” may sound strange, but the link to Jesus Christ is unavoidable in other languages and is simply assumed in the Orthodox tradition. It was Protestant Reformation translators who decided to render the Old Testament name one way and our Lord’s name in another.

^{30.} Pronounced “See-NAH.” Common alternative “Sinai.”

^{31.} Pronounced “Nah-vee.” Common alternative: “Joshua son of Nun.”

Day 17: Ruth (*ornament: Shock of Wheat*)

from Ruth 1–4

It came to pass, when the judges judged, that a man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab,³² he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Abimelech, the name of his wife was Noëmin,³³ and the names of his two sons were Maälön and Chelaion.³⁴ The sons took Moabite wives: the name of the one was Orpha,³⁵ and the name of the second Ruth. But Abimelech died, and later both sons also. Noëmin arose to return to Bethlehem; she kissed her daughters-in-law and told them to go back to their own homes. Orpha returned to her own people, but Ruth said: “Wherever you go, I will go; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.” Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. Ruth went and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. And by happenstance she happened upon the part of the field belonging to Boöz,³⁶ who was of the family of Abimelech. And Boöz said to Ruth, “Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but join with my young women. It has been fully reported to me, how you have dealt with your mother-in-law after the death of your husband. The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, to whom you have come to put your trust under his wings.” Then she said, “Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant.” Boöz gave her food and drink and ensured she gleaned plentifully. When she returned to Noëmin in the evening, Noëmin blessed the Lord for the kindness of Boöz. And Ruth continued to glean in the fields of Boöz until the end of the harvest. Then Noëmin said to Ruth, “Shall I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? Wash yourself and anoint yourself, clothe yourself and go down to the threshing floor. Notice where Boöz lies at night; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do.” So after Boöz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down by the side of the heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. In the middle of the night he was startled and said, “Who are you?” So she answered, “I am Ruth, your maidservant. Spread your wing over your maidservant, for you are a close relative.” Then he said, “Blessed are you by the Lord, daughter! For you have shown more mercy at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you say. Now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. If he will act as next-of-kin for you—good; let him do it. But if he does not, then I will, as the Lord lives!” The next day, Boöz went up to the gate to ask this relative regarding Ruth. The man would not act as next-of-kin, by marrying Ruth to carry on Abimelech’s name; so Boöz claimed the right himself before witnesses. And the elders said, “The Lord make your wife who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, who, both together, built the house of Israel and made strength in Ephrathah;³⁷ and there shall be a Name in Bethlehem, because of the offspring which the Lord will give you from this young woman.” So Boöz took Ruth and she became his wife; and she bore a son. Then the women said to Noëmin, “Blessed be the Lord, who did not bring to an end this day your next-of-kin; and may he call your name in Israel! And he shall be to you a restorer of soul and a sustainer of your gray head; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him.” And they called his name Obed.³⁸ This is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

^{32.} Pronounced “Moh-ab.”

^{33.} Pronounced “A-bee-meh-lekh” or “A-bee-meh-lek;” and “Noh-eh-meen.” Common alternatives: “Elimelech” (following the extant Hebrew manuscript tradition) and “Naomi.”

^{34.} Pronounced “Mah-ah-lohn” and “Kheh-lay-ohn” or “Heh-lay-ohn.”

^{35.} Pronounced “Or-fah.”

^{36.} Pronounced “BOH-oz.” Common alternative: “Boaz.”

^{37.} Pronounced “Eh-frah-thah.”

^{38.} Pronounced “Oh-veed” or “Oh-beed.”

Day 18: Birth of Samuel and the Prayer of Anna (*ornament: Horn*)

From 1 Kingdoms [1 Samuel] 1:1–2:10

The last of the judges that the Lord raised up, before the people of Israel asked for a king, was Samuel.

There was a man named Elkanah in Nasib, Ephraim.³⁹ And he had two wives: the name of the one was Anna, and the name of the second Phennana.⁴⁰ Phennana had children, but Anna had no child. This man went up from time to time from his city to worship and sacrifice to the Lord God in Selo.⁴¹ And the time came and Elkanah made offering, and gave portions to Phennana his wife and to all her children. And to Anna he gave one portion; nevertheless, he loved Anna, although the Lord had closed her womb. She grew despondent and wept and did not eat. Then Elkanah her husband said to her, “Anna, why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten children?” So Anna arose after they had eaten in Selo and stood before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the shrine of the Lord. And she was deeply grieved in soul, and prayed to the Lord and weeping she wept. And she vowed a vow and said, “Adonai Lord, Eloai Sabaoth,⁴² if you will indeed look on the humiliation of your maidservant and remember me, and will give your maidservant a child, then I will give him as one given before the Lord until the day of his death.” Now Anna was speaking in her heart, and her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. And Eli the priest thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, “How long will you be drunk? Depart from the presence of the Lord!” But Anna answered and said, “No, lord, I have drunk no strong drink, and I pour out my soul before the Lord.” Then Eli answered and said to her, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant all you have asked of him.” So the woman went her way, and her face was no longer sad. The Lord remembered her and she conceived. So it came to pass in due time that Anna bore a son, and called his name Samuel, and said, “Because I have asked for him from the Lord God.” When Anna had weaned her son, she went up to Selo and brought him to Eli. And she said, “I am the woman who stood by you here, praying to the Lord. The Lord has granted me my child which I asked of him. Therefore I lend him to the Lord, as many days as he lives.” And she said:

My heart is firm in the Lord; my horn is exalted in my God. My mouth is enlarged over my enemies: I became glad in your salvation. There is none holy like the Lord, there is none righteous like our God, and there is none holy besides you. Do not boast, nor speak things too high, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and a God that prepares his purposes. The bow of the powerful has become weak, and the weak ones have girded themselves with power. Those who were full of bread are in want, and the hungry have reached the land. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children has become weak. The Lord kills and brings to life; he leads down to Hades⁴³ and leads up again. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and also exalts. He raises the poor from the earth; he lifts up the needy from the dung heap, to make them sit with rulers and inherit their throne of glory. He grants the petitions of one who prays; he has blessed the years of the righteous, for not by his own force does the powerful man prevail. The Lord shall weaken his adversary; the Lord is holy. Let not the wise boast in his wisdom, the powerful in his power, or the rich man in his riches. Let him who boasts, boast in this: that he understands, and knows the Lord, and executes judgement and righteousness in the midst of the earth. The Lord has gone up to the heavens, and has thundered. He will judge the ends of the earth, for he is righteous. He will give strength to our kings, and exalt the horn of his Christ.⁴⁴

^{39.} Pronounced “Ehl-kah-nah”; “Nah-seeb” and “Eh-frah-eem” (often in English “Eh-frem”).

^{40.} Pronounced “Feh-nah-nah.”

^{41.} Pronounced “See-loh.” Common alternative: “Shiloh.”

^{42.} Pronounced “Ah-doh-ay”; “Eh-loh-ay”; “sah-bah-OHTH.”

^{43.} “HAY-dees.” (In Greek, “AH-dees.”)

^{44.} “Christ” means “anointed one.”

Day 19: Samuel and Eli (*ornament: Lamp*)

1 Kingdoms [1 Samuel] 3:1–20

Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli⁴⁵ the Priest. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no distinct vision. And it came to pass at that time, that Eli lay down in his place, and his eyes had begun to grow heavy and he could not see, and it was before the lamp of God was replenished, and Samuel lay down in the shrine of the Lord where the ark of God was. And the Lord called, “Samuel! Samuel!” And he answered, “Here I am!” So he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” And he said, “I did not call; return—lie down.” And he returned and lay down. And the Lord called again, “Samuel! Samuel!” So Samuel went to Eli the second time, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” he answered, “I did not call, my son; return—lie down.” (Now it was before Samuel knew the Lord and a word of the Lord was revealed to him.) And the Lord called Samuel again for the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you did call me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Return—lie down, child; and it shall be, if he calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood and called him as at other times, “Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for your servant hears.” Then the Lord said to Samuel: “Behold, I will carry out my words in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears them will tingle. In that day I will raise up against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house; I will begin, and I will finish. And I have told him that I will punish his house forever for the injustices of his sons, because his sons spoke evil against God, and even so he did not rebuke them. And I have sworn to the house of Eli that the injustice of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by incense and sacrifice forever.” So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision. Then Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son!” he answered, “Here I am.”

And he said, “What is the word that was spoken to you? Please do not hide it from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that were spoken in your ears.” Then Samuel report all the words, and hid nothing from him. And Eli said, “It is the Lord. He will do what is good in his sight.” So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and none of his words fell to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Bersabée⁴⁶ knew that Samuel was faithful as a prophet of the Lord.

From the Synaxarion [for August 20]: Of the holy Prophet Samuel.

... After this Samuel was chosen as the protector of the people, whom he judged with holiness and justice, becoming for them a model of good works and considering the one great sin to be ceasing to pray for them and entreating God for the forgiveness of their transgressions, as he said himself in the presence of them all, “Far be it from me to sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you. And I will serve the Lord and show you the good and upright way.” All confessed to his justice and lack of love of gain, with which he governed the people and judged the lawsuits of each, when he asked them, with God as his witness, that they tell him if he had ever wronged anyone, or taken from anyone either property, money or bribe even so much as a cheap sandal. They answered with one voice, “You have not wronged us, and you have not taken anything from anyone.” When the people asked for a king in his old age, he anointed Saul, but when, shortly after, he disobeyed God’s command, he deposed him from the Lord’s presence and went and anointed David, at God’s bidding. Having lived without blame in anything for 89 years and become a model to the fathers of a life pleasing to God, he died in about 1075 BC. The books of Judges and Ruth and the first 24 chapters of 1 Kingdoms are attributed to him.

^{45.} Pronounced “Ee-lee,” or commonly in English “Ee-lie.”

^{46.} Pronounced “Bee-sa-beh-eh.” Common alternative: “Beersheba.”

Day 20: David Anointed King (*ornament: Sheep*)

1 Kingdoms [1 Samuel] 16:1–13a⁴⁷

Now the Lord said to Samuel, “How long do you mourn for Saul, while I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and come, let me send you to Jesse, even as far as Bethlehem. For I have observed among his sons a king for myself.” And Samuel said, “How can I go? Saul will both hear and kill me.” But the Lord said, “Take a heifer in your hand, and you shall say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ And you shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will make known to you what you shall do, and you shall anoint the one I say to you.” So Samuel did all that the Lord told him, and went to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town were surprised at his coming, and said, “Do you come peaceably, seer?” And he said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Sanctify yourselves, and rejoice with me today.” Then he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice. So it was, when they entered, that he looked at Eliab⁴⁸ and said, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before him!” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance nor at the condition of his greatness, because I have refused him. For God will not look as man will see; for man will look at the face, but the Lord looks at the heart.” So Jesse called Aminadab,⁴⁹ and he passed before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Sama pass by. And he said, “The Lord has not chosen this one.” Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen these.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Have you no more young men?” Then he said, “There remains yet the smallest, and see, he is tending the flock.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and fetch him. For we may not sit down till he comes.” So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beauty of eyes, and good-looking. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint David; for he is good!” Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.

^{47.} This readings is not in the Lectionary, and so is the responsibility of Fr. Joshua Mosher.

^{48.} Pronounced “Eh-lee-ab.”

^{49.} Pronounced “Ah-meen-ah-dab.”

Day 21: David and Goliath (*ornament: Slingshot*)

From 1 Kingdoms [1 Samuel] 17

And the foreigners⁵⁰ gathered their armies to battle, and gathered themselves at Sokhoth⁵¹ of Judea, and encamped between Sokhoth and Azeka Ephermem.⁵² And Saul and the men of Israel encamped in the valley. They drew up in ranks to fight against the foreigners. And the foreigners stood on the mountain on one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, and the valley was between them. And there went forth a mighty man from the ranks of the foreigners, named Goliath of Geth,⁵³ whose height was four cubits and a span. And he had a helmet upon his head, and he wore a breastplate of chain armor; and the weight of his breastplate was five thousand shekels of bronze and iron. He wore bronze greaves on his legs and a bronze shield on his shoulder. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear was six hundred shekels of iron. And he stood and cried to the ranks of Israel, and said to them, "Choose for yourselves a man, and let him come down to me. And if he strike me, then we will be your servants: but if I strike him, you shall be our servants, and serve us." And the foreigner said, "See: I have defied the ranks of Israel in this very day; give me a man, and we will both fight in single combat." And Saul and all Israel heard these words of the foreigner, and they were amazed, and greatly afraid.

And David said to Saul, "Surely do not let the heart of my lord collapse upon him: your servant will go, and fight with this foreigner. And Saul said to David, "You will definitely not be able to go against this foreigner to fight with him, for you are a boy, and he a man of war from his youth." And David said to Saul, "Your servant tends the flock of his father; and whenever the lion and the bear would come and take a sheep out of the flock, then I would strike it and draw the spoil out of its mouth; and if it rose up against me, then I put it to death. Your servant beat both the lion and the bear, and the uncircumcised foreigner shall be as one of them. For who is this uncircumcised one, who has disgraced the ranks of the living God? The Lord, who delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out the paw of the bear, will deliver me out of the hand of this uncircumcised foreigner." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord shall be with you." And Saul clothed David with a woolen cloak, and put his bronze helmet on his head. And he fastened his sword on David over his cloak. And David said to Saul, "I shall not at all be able to go with these, for I am not tested." So they removed them from him. And he took his staff in his hand, and he chose for himself five smooth stones out of the brook, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the foreign man.

And Goliath saw David, and despised him; for he was a boy. And the foreigner said to David, "Am I like a dog, that you come against me with a stick and stones?" And the foreigner cursed David by his gods and said, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds and beasts!" And David said to the foreigner, "You come to me with sword and spear and shield; but I come to you in the name of the Lord, the God of the ranks of Israel, which you have disgraced today. And today the Lord shall enclose you in my hand; and I will kill you; and all the earth shall know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save by sword or spear, for the battle is the Lord's and the Lord will deliver you into our hands." And David took from his bag one stone, and threw it, and struck the foreigner on his forehead, and the stone penetrated through the helmet into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the ground. And David stood upon him, took his sword, and removed his head: and the foreigners saw that their mighty one was dead, and they fled. And the men of Israel and Judah arose, and pursued them as far as the entrance to Geth, and as far as the gate of Ascalon; and the wounded of the foreigners fell in the way of the gates. And David took the head of the foreigner, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armor in his tent.

^{50.} Philistines.

^{51.} Pronounced "Soh-KHOHTH" or "Soh-HOHTH."

^{52.} Pronounced "Ah-zee-kah Eh-fehr-mehm."

^{53.} Common alternative: "Gath."

Day 22: David the Psalmist (*ornament: Footstool*)

Psalm 109⁵⁴

Psalm of David.

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” The Lord will send out for you a rod of power from Sion; rule in the midst of your enemies. With you is the rule in the day of your power, in the splendors of your saints. From the womb before the morning star I have begotten you. The Lord has sworn and he will not repent; you are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedek.⁵⁵ The Lord at your right hand shattered kings in the day of his wrath. He will judge among the nations, he will heap up corpses, he will shatter the heads of many upon the land. He will drink from the torrent in the way, therefore he will lift up his head.

^{54.} This psalm is used repeatedly in the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It proclaims that Jesus Christ comes “out of the womb” and so is truly born in the flesh. But God the Father declares, “before the morning star I have begotten you,” revealing that Jesus Christ is the eternally begotten Son of God. The rest of the psalm sets forth the mission of the Lord’s Christ, why it is that he came to be born. It even has a sign of the Cross: the “rod of power” which the Lord has already prepared for his Christ. There is so much more than “sweet Baby Jesus” to the Lord’s Nativity.

^{55.} Pronounced “Mehl-khee-seh-dehk” or “Mehl-hee-seh-dehk.”

Day 23: King Solomon (*ornament: Crown*)

3 Kingdoms [1 Kings] 1:32–35, 38–40; 2:1–4, 10, 12; 3:5–14⁵⁶

And King David said, “Call to me Sadoc⁵⁷ the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Banaias the son of Iodaë.”⁵⁸ And they came in before the king. And the king said to them, “Take the servants of your lord with you, and mount my son Solomon upon my own mule, and bring him down to Gion.”⁵⁹ And there let Sadoc the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him to be king over Israel, and you shall sound the trumpet and say, “Long live King Solomon!” And he shall sit upon my throne, and reign in my place; and I have appointed that he should be ruler over Israel and Judah.” And Sadoc the priest went down, and Nathan the prophet, and Banaias son of Iodaë, and the Herethite⁶⁰ and the Phelethite,⁶¹ and they mounted Solomon upon the mule of King David, and led him away to Gion. And Sadoc the priest took the horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon, and blew the trumpet; and all the people said, “Long live King Solomon!” And all the people went up after him, and they danced in choruses, and rejoiced with great joy, and the earth burst at their voice.

And the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged his son Solomon, saying, “I, even I go the way of all the earth. And you shall be strong and show yourself a man; and you shall keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to keep his commandments and the statutes and the judgments which are written in the law of Moses; that you may understand what you shall do in all that I command you; so that the Lord may establish his word which he spoke, saying, “If your sons shall guard their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, I promise you, saying, ‘There shall not fail you a man on the throne of Israel.’” And David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. And Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, a son of twelve years, and his kingdom was well-prepared.

And the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and the Lord said to Solomon, “Request some request for yourself.” And Solomon said, “You have dealt very mercifully with your servant David my father, as he passed through before you in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with you, and you have kept for him this great mercy to grant his son on his throne, as it is this day. And now, Lord my God, you have granted your servant in the place of David my father; and I am a little child, and do not know my going out and my coming in. But your servant is in the midst of your people, whom you have chosen, a great people which cannot be numbered. you shall give therefore to your servant a heart to hear and to judge your people in righteousness, and to discern between good and evil: for who will be able to judge this your weighty people?” And it was pleasing before the Lord, that Solomon asked this thing. And the Lord said to him, “Because you have requested this thing of me, and have not asked many days for yourself, and have not requested riches, nor have requested the lives of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to hear judgement: see, I have done according to you word; see, I have given an understanding and wise heart. There has not been anyone like you before you, and after you there shall not arise one like you. And I have given you what you have not asked: wealth and glory, so that there has not been anyone like you among kings. And if you will walk in my way, to keep my commandments and my ordinances, as David your father walked, then I will multiply your days.”

^{56.} This reading is not in the Lectionary, and the translation is the responsibility of Fr. Joshua Mosher.

^{57.} Pronounced “Sah-DOHK.” Common alternative: “Zadok.”

^{58.} Pronounced “Bah-nay-ahs” and “Yo-dah-eh.”

^{59.} Pronounced “Ghee-ohn.”

^{60.} Pronounced “Kheh-reh-thite” or “Heh-reh-thite.”

^{61.} Pronounced “Feh-leh-thite.”

Day 24: Elias the Prophet (*ornament: Burning Rock*)

King Solomon ruled wisely for many years, and his God-given wisdom is recorded in the Scriptures. His sons after him did not walk in God's ways, and the kings led the people into many sins and disasters. In the days of King Ahab, Queen Jezebel even hunted the Lord's prophets and tried to set the worship of Baal in the Lord's place.

From 3 Kingdoms [1 Kings] selections from chapters 18 & 19

The word of the Lord came to Elias the Thesbite: "Go, and appear before Ahab, and I will give rain on the face of the land. When Ahab saw Elias, he said, "Is it you, the one who is troubling Israel?" He answered, "I am not troubling Israel; but you are, and your father's house, by forsaking the Lord our God and following Baal. Now therefore have all Israel assemble to me at Mount Carmel, with all the prophets of Baal." Then Elias said to the people at Mount Carmel, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." Then Elias said to the people, "I only am left a prophet of the Lord; but the prophets of the sacred grove are many. Let us each make sacrifice but put no fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord my God. And the god who answers by fire shall be God." All the people answered, "The word you have spoken is good." So the prophets of shame prepared the calf, and called on the name of Baal all day crying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no answer. Elias mocked them, and then said, "Stand aside now, and I will make my offering." Elias built and repaired the altar of the Lord. Then he made a large trench around the altar and prepared the offering on the altar. He told the people to pour jars of water so that the water ran all around the altar, and filled the trench. And the prophet Elias cried to heaven, "Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, hear me today by fire. Let this people know that you alone are the Lord, the God of Israel." Then fire from the Lord fell from heaven and consumed the whole burnt offering and all the water in the trench. And the people fell on their faces and said, "The Lord indeed is God; he is God." Elias said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape." Then Elias went up to the top of Carmel; there he bowed himself down upon the earth and prayed to the Lord. And the heavens grew black with clouds and wind; there was a heavy rain. Ahab told Jezebel his wife all that Elias had done. Then Jezebel sent to Elias, saying, "Tomorrow I will sacrifice your life like one of them." And Elias heard and was afraid; he arose and fled into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. There an angel fed him; and he went in the strength of that food forty days to mount Horeb. There the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elias?" Elias answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord; for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." Then the Lord said, "Go, return to your way; anoint Elissaios son of Saphat⁶² as prophet in your place."

From 3 Kingdoms 19; 4 Kingdoms [2 Kings] 2

Elias found Elissaios son of Saphat, who was ploughing, and threw his mantle over him. Elissaios ran after Elias and ministered to him. Then Elias said to Elissaios, "Stay here; the Lord has sent me as far as the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. Then Elias took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water with it; the water parted, and the two of them crossed on dry ground. Elias said to Elissaios, "Ask me what I may do for you, before I am taken up from you." Elissaios said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." he responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken up, it will be granted you." As they continued, a chariot and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elias was taken up in a whirlwind as if into heaven. Elissaios watched and cried, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" Then he picked up the mantle of Elias that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. Elissaios took the mantle of Elias, and struck the water, saying, "Where then is the God of Elias?" And so he struck the water, and the water parted, and Elissaios went over on dry ground.

⁶² Pronounced "Eh-lee-say-ohs" and "Sah-faht." Common alternatives: "Elisha" and "Shaphat."

Day 25: Jonas the Prophet (*ornament: Whale*)

Jonas was a successor to the Prophet Elissaios.

From Jonas 1–4

The word of the Lord came to Jonas saying: “Arise and journey to Ninevë⁶³ the great city, and preach in it, because the cry of its wickedness has gone up before me.” And Jonas fled to Tharsis⁶⁴ from the face of the Lord; and he boarded a boat bound for Tharsis. And the Lord raised a great storm; and the boat was in danger of breaking up. The sailors were afraid and each cried to his god, and they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten it. But Jonas was sleeping in the hold of the boat. The captain said to him: “Arise, and call on your God, perhaps God will save us.” Then they all cast lots to find the cause of this evil, and the lot fell on Jonas. And they said to him: “Tell us for what reason this evil is upon us.” And he said to them: “I am a servant of the Lord, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” And the men feared with a great fear, and said: “What are we to do with you?” Because the storm was increasing. And Jonas said to them: “Throw me into the sea, and the sea will become calm for you.” So they cried out to the Lord: “Let us not perish because of this person; because you, Lord, have done as you wished.” And they threw Jonas into the sea and the sea ceased from its raging. And the Lord had ordered a whale to swallow down Jonas; and Jonas was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights.

And Jonas prayed to the Lord his God and said: “I cried to the Lord my God in my trouble: and he heard me; from the bowels of hell my cry; you heard my voice. you cast me into the depths of the heart of the sea: and rivers surrounded me. All your billows and your waves passed over me. And I said: I have been thrust from your eyes; shall I look again towards your holy temple. Water encompassed me, even to my soul: the final deep closed round me. My head went down to the clefts of the mountains. I descended into the earth, whose bars are eternal barriers. Let my life come up from corruption to you, O Lord my God. As my soul was departing from me I remembered the Lord; and let my prayer come to you, to your holy temple. Those who preserve vain and foolish things have forsaken their own mercy. But I shall sacrifice to you with a voice of praise and confession; I will pay you. O Lord, whatever I have vowed, for my salvation.”

And the Lord ordered the whale to cast Jonas out upon the dry land. And Jonas arose and journeyed to Ninevë, as the Lord had told him. Jonas preached and said: “In three days, Ninevë will be overthrown.” And the men of Ninevë believed God and proclaimed a fast, and dressed in sackcloth, and cried out insistently to God; and they turned away each from their wicked way, saying: “Who knows if God will repent and turn back from the anger of his rage, and we may not perish?” And God saw their works, that they had turned from their wicked ways, and God repented of what he had said he would do to them. And Jonas was very deeply grieved, and he prayed to the Lord: “Because of this I made haste to escape to Tharsis, because I knew that you are merciful, and pitying and long-suffering. And now, Lord, take my soul from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” And the Lord said to Jonas: “Are you then so very grieved?” And Jonas left the city and waited outside to see what would happen to the city. And God gave orders to a gourd to be a shade for him above his head; and Jonas rejoiced at the gourd. And God gave orders to a worm to wither up the gourd. And the sun beat down on Jonas’ head; and he fainted and despaired of his soul, and said: “It were better for me to die than live.” And God said to Jonas: “Are you then so very grieved over the gourd?” And he said: “I am very grieved, even to death.” And the Lord said: “You had pity for the gourd, for which you had suffered no evil, nor did you rear it; it came into being before night, and perished before night. And shall I not have pity for Ninevë the great city, in which dwell more than one hundred and twenty thousand people, who do not know their right hand or their left, and many animals.”

^{63.} Pronounced “Nih-neh-VEE” or “Nee-neh-VEE.” Common alternative: “Nineveh.”

^{64.} Pronounced “Thar-SEES.” Common alternative: “Tarshish.”

Day 26: Tobias (*ornament: Fish*)⁶⁵

The kingdom had become divided: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. And because Israel still forsook the Lord, he allowed the Assyrians to take Israel captive, leaving Judah alone. The Book of Tobias⁶⁶ tells of a righteous man of Israel, Tobit,⁶⁷ his wife Anna, and his son Tobias, captives in Ninevė.⁶⁸ Tobit remembers the Lord and is generous to the needy. One day he sends his son out to look for “some poor man of our brethren” to share their meal, but hears of a murder. Tobit leaps up and buries the stranger, but through no fault of his own is blinded by disease. His family grows desperately poor, and Tobit prays in anguish. That same day, in another city, Sarah the daughter of Raguel⁶⁹ is scorned because she has had seven husbands die in her bridal chamber, because she is desired by a demon. She also prays to the Lord for mercy. The Lord hears them and sends the angel Raphael⁷⁰ disguised as Tobit’s kinsman in order to heal the two of them: Tobit by curing his blindness and Sarah by marrying her to Tobias and binding the demon. Tobit remembers that he still has money left in trust with his kinsman Gabael in a distant city. He instructs Tobias to remember the Lord always and tells him to hire a man to go with him to collect the money. He finds the angel Raphael, thinking that he is his kinsman, and his father gladly hires him. Here is the heart of the story from the Book of Tobias:

From Tobias [Tobit] 6–9, 11–12

Now they came at evening to the Tigris river, where a fish leaped up from the river and would have swallowed Tobias; and the angel said to him, “Catch the fish.” So the young man seized the fish and threw it up on the land. Then the angel told him to save the heart, liver and gall, but to eat the rest. Later, the angel told Tobias they would stay with Raguel, the young man’s relative. He also told him he would arrange a marriage between Tobias and Raguel’s daughter Sarah, adding that she was also beautiful and sensible. But Tobias had heard of the demon which loved her and had killed her seven husbands, and he was afraid that he would be killed and deprive his parents of their only support. The angel instructed him how to make a smoke from the heart and liver of the fish, which the demon would smell and flee from, never to return. “Do not be afraid, for she was destined for you from eternity. you will save her, and she will go with you.” When Tobias heard these things, he yearned deeply for her. When they arrived at the house of Raguel, they were greeted warmly as kinsmen. Then Raphael communicated the proposal to Raguel, and he, having warned them of her affliction, gave Sarah to Tobias with his blessing. Tobias came into the bridal chamber and made a smoke from the fish; when the demon smelled it he fled, and the angel bound him. When they were alone, Tobias got up from the bed and said, “Sister, get up, and let us pray that the Lord may have mercy upon us.” And Tobias prayed, “You are blessed, God of our fathers, and blessed be your name for ever. You said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make a helper for him like himself.’ Lord, I am not taking this sister of mine because of lust, but with sincerity. Grant that I may find mercy and may grow old together with her.” And she said with him, “Amen.” When Raguel discovered that Tobias had not been killed, he rejoiced and blessed the Lord. After this he gave a wedding feast. Tobias returned home with Sarah, the money entrusted to Gabael, and the angel. As Raphael instructed him, Tobias anointed Tobit’s eyes with the gall of the fish, and Tobit rejoiced to see his son. Tobias’ marriage was celebrated for seven days with great festivity. Then Raphael revealed himself to Tobit and Tobias, explaining that he had been secretly with them through all their trials and had testified before the Lord of all their faithfulness and all their prayers, and had been sent by God to help them. Then they saw him no more, but praised God for all his wonderful works through the rest of their days.

^{65.} The Fathers teach that the following passage also reveals the love of Christ for his Bride, the Church. He fearlessly destroys the beast in the watery depths which tries to devour him, and uses its remains to bring healing and joy to his bride and his father.

^{66.} Pronounced “Toh-BEE-ahs.”

^{67.} Pronounced “TOH-beet.”

^{68.} Pronounced “Nee-neh-VEE.” Common alternative: “Nineveh.”

^{69.} Pronounced “RAH-goo-ehl.”

^{70.} Pronounced “RAH-fah-ehl.”

Day 27: Call his Name Emmanuel (*ornament: scroll with “Emmanuel”*)

Isaias continued the prophetic work in Judah, giving some of the last warnings to the kings before the Lord allowed them to be swept away and the people to be led into captivity. At the same time, the Lord spoke many promises through Isaias of the coming of the Christ.

Isaias 7:10-16; 8:1-4, 8-10

The Lord spoke to Ahaz,⁷¹ “Ask a sign of the Lord your God; in the depth or in the height.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” And Isaias⁷² said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it a little thing for you to contend with men, and how do you contend with the Lord? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel. He shall eat butter and honey before he knows how to prefer evil or choose good. For before the child knows good or evil, he refuses the evil to choose the good.” Then the Lord said to me, “Take for yourself a large new volume and write upon it with a man’s pen, *Of making a rapid plunder of spoils*; for it is at hand. And get me witnesses, reliable men, Urias⁷³ the priest and Zacharias the son of Barachias.”⁷⁴ And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, “Call his name Despoil—quickly—plunder—rapidly; for before the child knows how to cry ‘Father’ or ‘Mother,’ he will take the power of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria before the king of the Assyrians.” Know you nations and be brought low; give ear, as far as the extremity of the earth; for if again you have become strong, again you will be brought low. And whatever counsel you take, the Lord will scatter it; and whatever word you speak, it will not remain in you, for God is with us.

^{71.} Pronounced “Ah-HAHZ.” Commonly in English “AY-haz.”

^{72.} Pronounced “Ee-SAY-ahs” or commonly in English “Ie-ZAY-ahs.” Common alternative: “Isaiah.”

^{73.} Pronounced “Oo-REE-ahs.”

^{74.} Pronounced “Bah-rah-KHEE-ahs” or “Bah-rah-HEE-ahs.”

Day 28: Great Rejoicing Foretold (*ornament: Throne*)

Isaias 9:6–7⁷⁵

A child has been born for us, a son has been given to us; whose government is upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Angel of Great Counsel, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Ruler, Prince of Peace, Father of the age to come.” For I will bring peace upon princes, peace and health to him. Great is his government, and of his peace there is no bound, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with judgement and with justice from henceforth and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

11:1-10

Thus says the Lord: There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse, and a flower shall grow out of the root. And the Spirit of the Lord God shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and piety. The spirit of the fear of the Lord will fill him. He shall not judge by glory nor reprove by hearsay; but he will give judgement for the lowly with justice, and reprove with equity the glorious ones of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the word of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall destroy the wicked. And he will have his loins girt with justice, and his sides clothed with truth. Then the wolf shall feed with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the bull and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them. The ox and the bear shall feed together; their young shall be together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. An infant child shall put its hand over the hole of asps, and the weaned child its hand on the nest of the offspring of asps. They shall not hurt or be able to destroy anyone on my holy mountain; for the whole earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as much water covers the sea. In that day there shall be the root of Jesse, and he that shall arise to rule nations; in him shall the nations hope, and his rest shall be honor.

⁷⁵ The two prophecies included in this reading are two separate readings from the Eve of the Nativity of the Lord.

Day 29: Visit of Kings Foretold (*ornament: Kings with Frankincense & Myrrh*)

Isaias 60:1-7⁶

Shine, shine, O Jerusalem, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. Behold, darkness and gloom shall cover the land, over the nations, but on you the Lord shall shine, and his glory shall be seen upon you. And kings shall walk in your light, and nations in your brightness. Lift up your eyes round about, and see your children gathered; see: all your sons have come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on shoulders. Then you shall see, and fear, and be amazed in your heart; for the wealth of the sea, and of nations and peoples shall change over to you. Herds of camels also shall come to you, and the camels of Madiam and Gaipha⁷⁷ shall cover you: all from Saba⁷⁸ shall come bearing gold, and shall bring frankincense, and they shall proclaim the good news of the salvation of the Lord. And all the flocks of Kedar⁷⁹ shall be gathered, and the rams of Nabaioth⁸⁰ shall come; and acceptable sacrifices shall be offered on my altar, and my house of prayer shall be glorified.

^{76.} Fr. Joshua Mosher is responsible for this translation.

^{77.} Pronounced “Mah-dee-AHM” and “Gay-fah.” Common alternatives: “Midian” and “Ephah.”

^{78.} Pronounced “Sah-bah.” Common alternative: “Sheba.”

^{79.} Pronounced “Kee-dar.”

^{80.} Pronounced “Nah-bay-ohth.”

Day 30: Daniel (*ornament: Stone Smashing a Statue*)⁸¹

At last, the Lord allowed his people to suffer the consequences of forgetting his ways and chasing after foreign gods. The kingdom had been divided into Israel and Judah, then Israel had been wiped out, and now finally Judah was conquered and its chief people led away into captivity in Babylon. Some of these captives remembered the ways of the Lord and remained faithful even when surrounded by foreign gods. The Lord protected them and blessed them. One of the greatest of these was the Prophet Daniel, who also wrote of his friends, the three youths we will hear about tomorrow.

Daniel 2:31-36, 44-45

Daniel said to Nabuchodonosor,⁸² “You saw, O king; and behold, a great image! This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of pure gold, its hands, breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out from a mountain by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces; then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This was the dream; now we will tell the king its interpretation. The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever; just as you saw that a stone was cut from the mountain not by hands, and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. The great God has informed the king what shall be hereafter. The dream is certain, and its interpretation trustworthy.”

^{81.} Please note: this reading was moved from Day 32, to improve the logical flow.

^{82.} Pronounced “Nah-BOO-khah-DOH-noh-sor” or “Nah-BOO-hah-DOH-noh-sor.” Common alternative: “Nebuchadnezzar.”

Day 31: The Three Holy Youths (*ornament: Flames*)⁸³

With this reading, we are going to break the rule of one page per day. The story of the Three Holy Youths includes two of the most important hymns of our tradition: the seventh and eighth scriptural odes, which are found in Orthodox psalters and are the basis for Ode 7 and 8 of the Canon sung at Matins. They begin “Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our Fathers,” and “Bless the Lord all you works of the Lord.” We could not omit or carve up these powerful prayers of the Church; instead we will go a little over a page just this once.

From Daniel 3:1–88

In the eighteenth year Nabuchodonosor⁸⁴ made a golden image in the country of Babylon. And he gathered all the governors to come to the dedication of the image. And the herald cried loudly: “All people, when you hear the sound of trumpet and every kind of music, you shall fall down and worship the golden image. And any one who does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the burning furnace of fire.” Then certain men went to the king and accused the Jews Sedrach, Misach and Abdenago,⁸⁵ for they refused to worship the golden image. Then in rage Nabuchodonosor ordered Sedrach, Misach and Abdenago to be brought; and he said to them: “If you do not worship, you will be cast into the burning furnace. And who is the god that will rescue you from my hands?” They answered king Nabuchodonosor: “We have no need to answer you over this matter; for our God is in heaven, able to rescue us, and we will not worship the golden image that you have set up.” Then Nabuchodonosor ordered the furnace to be heated sevenfold; and he had Sedrach, Misach and Abdenago cast into the furnace. And they walked in the middle of the flame, praising God and blessing the Lord. And Azarias⁸⁶ prayed thus:

“Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers: and praised and glorified is your name to the ages. For you are just in all that you have done for us. And all your works are true, and your ways are right, and all your judgments are true. And judgments of truth you have executed in all that you have brought upon us. And upon Jerusalem the holy city of our fathers. Because in truth you have brought all these things upon us, because of our sins. Because we have sinned and committed iniquity in departing from you, and we have sinned in all things, and we have not obeyed your commandments, nor kept them, nor have we done as you commanded us, that it might be well with us. And all that you have done to us, and all that you have brought upon us, you have done with true judgement; and you handed us over into the hands of our lawless foes, hateful rebels, and to an unjust king, the most wicked in all the earth. And now we cannot open our mouth; we have become a shame and disgrace to your servants, and to those who honor you. Do not hand us over for ever, for your holy name’s sake, and do not annul your covenant, and do not withdraw your mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham your beloved, and Isaac your servant, and Israel your holy one. To whom you said that you would multiply their seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is by the shore of the sea. Because, Master, we have become smaller than all the nations, and we are humbled in all the earth today because of our sins. And at this moment there is neither prince, nor prophet nor leader; neither whole burnt offering, nor sacrifice, nor offering, nor incense; no place to make an offering before you and to find mercy. Yet with a contrite heart and with a spirit of humility may we be accepted, as though with whole burnt offerings of rams and bulls and tens of thousands of fat lambs, so may our sacrifice be acceptable before you today, and may it be perfected behind you; because there is no shame for those who trust in you. And now we are following you with

⁸³. **Please note: this reading was moved from Day 33 to improve the logical flow.**

⁸⁴. Pronounced “Nah-BOO-khah-DOH-noh-sor” or “Nah-BOO-hah-DOH-noh-sor.” Common alternative: “Nebuchadnezzar.”

⁸⁵. Pronounced “Sehd-rakh,” “Mee-sakh,” and “Ahb-deh-nah-go.” Common alternatives: “Shadrach,” “Meshach,” and “Abdenago.”

⁸⁶. Pronounced “Ah-zahr-EE-ahs.” As we learn in Dan. 1:7, Daniel and the three youths are given Chaldean names by the king: “to Daniel, Baltasar; to Ananias, Sedrach; to Misael, Misach; and to Azarias, Abdenago.”

our whole heart, and we fear you, and seek your face; do not put us to shame. But do with us according to your fairness, and according to the multitude of your mercy. Deliver us according to your wondrous works, and give glory to your name, O Lord. And let all who harm your servants be disgraced, and put to shame from all their power, and let their strength be smashed. And let them know that you Lord, alone are God, and glorious in the whole inhabited world.”

And the king’s servants, who cast them in, did not cease stoking the furnace. Flame poured out of the furnace and it burnt up those around the furnace. But the Angel of the Lord came down into the furnace with Azarias and his companions, and the fire did not touch them at all. Then the Three as with one voice, glorified God in the furnace, saying: “Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers: to be praised and exalted unto the ages. And blessed is your glorious, holy name: to be praised and exalted unto the ages. Blessed are you in the temple of your glory: to be praised and exalted unto the ages. Blessed are you who behold the deeps and sit upon the Cherubim: to be praised and exalted unto the ages. Blessed are you on the glorious throne of your kingdom: to be praised and exalted unto the ages. Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven: to be praised and exalted unto the ages. Praise the Lord, and highly exalt him, unto the ages. Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord; praise, and highly exalt him to all the ages. Bless the Lord, Angels of the Lord, heavens of the Lord; Bless the Lord, all you waters above the heavens, all you powers of the Lord; Bless the Lord, sun and moon, stars of heaven; Bless the Lord, every shower and dew, all the winds; Bless the Lord, fire and warmth, cold and heat; Bless the Lord, dews and snows, ice and cold; Bless the Lord, frosts and snows, lightnings and clouds; Bless the Lord, light and dark, nights and days; Bless the Lord, earth, mountains and hills, and all that grow in it; Bless the Lord, springs, seas and rivers, whales and all that move in the waters; Bless the Lord, all you birds of the air, beasts and cattle; Bless the Lord, you sons of men. Let Israel bless the Lord; Bless the Lord, priests of the Lord, servants of the Lord; Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the just, holy and humble of heart; Bless the Lord, Ananias, Azarias and Misael;⁸⁷ Bless the Lord, Apostles, Prophets and Martyrs of the Lord; We bless the Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen. We praise, bless and worship the Lord, praising and highly exalting him unto the ages.”

⁸⁷. Pronounced “Ah–nah–NEE–ahs” (often “Ah–nah–NIE–ahs” in English); “MEE–sah–chl.”

Day 32: God's Dwelling (*ornament: Ark of the Temple*)⁸⁸

Now we are going to turn to some of the most important prophecies pointing to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, coming to be born in the flesh. The prophecies for today might not sound like they are talking about the Lord's birth, until we remember where we heard them last: several days ago, in church, on the Feast of the Entry of the Most-Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary into the Temple.

Exodus 40 [selections]⁸⁹

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "On the first day of the first month, at the new moon, you shall set up the Tabernacle of the Testimony, and you shall place in it the Ark of the Testimony and cover the Ark with the veil. And you shall bring in the table and the lampstand. And you shall place the golden altar, to burn incense before the ark; and you shall put a covering of a veil on the door of the Tabernacle of the Testimony. And you shall take the anointing oil and anoint the Tabernacle and all things in it, and sanctify it and all its vessels, and it shall be holy. And you shall anoint the Altar of Burnt Offerings, and all its vessels; and you shall sanctify the Altar, and the Altar shall be the Holy of Holies." Then Moses did all that the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel commanded him. Then a cloud covered the Tabernacle of Testimony, and the Tabernacle was filled with the glory of the Lord. And Moses was not able to enter into the Tabernacle of Testimony, because the cloud overshadowed it, and the Tabernacle was filled with the glory of the Lord.

3 Kingdoms [1 Kings] 8 [selections]

It came to pass when Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord, he assembled all the elders of Israel in Sion, to bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord out of the City of David, which is Sion. And the priests took up the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, the Tabernacle of Testimony, and all the holy vessels that were in the Tabernacle of Testimony. And the king and all Israel were before the ark. And the priests brought the Ark into its place, into the Oracle of the House — into the Holy of Holies, under the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim covered over the Ark and its holy things from above. There was nothing in the Ark except two tablets of stone, the Tablets of the Covenant which Moses put there in Horeb, when the Lord had made a covenant. And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house. And the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, because the glory of the Lord God Almighty filled the house.

^{88.} Please note: this reading was moved from Day 30 to improve the logical flow.

^{89.} Both of these readings come from the Lectionary, but Fr. Ephrem has not yet translated them. They come from the Menaion, for the Entry of the Most-Holy Theotokos into the Temple, and they are distinct from the versions of these chapter found in critical editions of the Septuagint. These translations are the responsibility of Fr. Joshua Mosher.

Day 33: The Prayer of Avvacum the Prophet (*ornament: Mountain with a Large Cave—the Stable*)⁹⁰

Avvacum [Habakkuk] 3:2–19⁹¹

O Lord: I have heard your report, and was afraid; and your work, O Lord, I considered, and I was amazed. you shall be recognized between the two animals; you shall be recognized when the years draw near; when the time has come, you shall be shown forth. When my soul is stirred up, in anger you shall remember mercy. God shall come from Theman, and the Holy One from the dark and shady mountain.

Pause

His virtue has covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness is like light, horns are in his hands; and he has established his strength as a strong love. Before his face shall the Word walk; and he shall go forth for instruction at his feet. He stood, and the earth was shaken; he looked down the nations melted away; then the mountains broke asunder with violence, and the everlasting hills melted away. Instead of toils they saw his eternal going forth. The habitations of Ethiopia shall be in dismay, as well as the tents of the land of Madian. Were you angry with the river, O Lord? Was your fury against the rivers, or your rage against the sea? you will ride upon your horses, and your chariots are salvation; you string your bow. You string it against scepters, says the Lord.

Pause

The land shall be rent asunder by the rivers; the people shall see you, and shall be in pangs, while you scatter the waters in your walk; the abyss uttered her voice, and gave her the greatest display. The sun was raised up, and the moon stood still in her couse, at the light shall your missiles go forth, at the lightning-brilliance of the gleam of your weapons. you diminished the earth in threatening, you trampled the nations in fury. You went forth for the salvation of your people, you came for the salvation of your christ. You cast death on the head of the iniquitous, you lay fetters on their neck to the end.

Pause

You have cut asunder, when you were beside yourself, the heads of rulers; they shall quake within themselves, they shall break open their bridles, like the poor man that eats in secret. You mounted your horses in the sea, and they stirred up the many waters. I kept watch, and my heart was dismayed at the voice of the prayer of my lips; trembling went into my bones, and my strength within me was stirred up. I shall rest in the day of my affliction, that I may go up to the people of my sojourning. For the fig tree shall not bear fruit, and there shall be no increase for the vines, the produce of the olive shall lie, and the fields yield no food; the sheep have been missing from their grazing, and there are no oxen at the cribs; yet as for me, I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in God my Savior. The Lord is my God and my power; he will dispose my feet unto perfection; he raises me on high, that I might be victor with his canticle.

^{90.} **Please note: this reading was moved from Day 31 to improve the logical flow.**

^{91.} This Prayer of Avvacum the Prophet is the fourth of the nine scriptural odes which are included in Orthodox Psalters and which form the inspiration for the Nine Odes of Matins. The translation follows *The Psalter according to the Seventy, That Is, the Septuagint* (The Archdiocese of Canada, Orthodox Church in America: 2001).

Day 34: The Wisdom, Word and Power of God (*ornament: Open Book*)

Baruch⁹² 3:36–38; 4:1–4

This is our God, and there shall be none other reckoned in comparison with him. He has found out all the way of knowledge, and given it to Jacob his servant and Israel his beloved. After this he appeared on earth and lived among men. This is the book of the commandments of God, and the law which exists for ever; all those who keep it fast will have life; but those who abandon it will die. Turn back Jacob, and lay hold of it, walk in the presence of its light to be illumined. Do not give your glory to another, and what is profitable to you to a foreign nation.

⁹² Pronounced “Bah-ROOKH” or “Bah-ROOH.” The Church considers this a prophecy of Jeremias.

Day 35: The Birth and the Star Foretold (*ornament: Star of David*)

Micheas⁹³ 5:1–3

Thus says the Lord: And you Bethlehem, house of Ephratha, are not least among the thousands of Judah; for from you there will come forth for me the one who is to be ruler in Israel, and his goings out are from the beginning, from eternity. Because of this he will give them until the moment that she who bears child shall give birth; and the remainder of his brethren will return to the children of Israel. And he will stand and will see, and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, and they will abide in the glory of the name of the Lord his God; for now they will be magnified even to the extremities of the earth.

⁹³ Pronounced “Mee-khay-ahs” or “Mee-hay-ahs.” Common alternative: “Micah.”

Day 36: Zacharias⁹⁴ and Elizabeth (*ornament: Censer*)

Luke 1:5–25⁹⁵

Now we come to the days leading to the Birth of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. In the Church, this time is called the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ. For the next several days, we will be reading from the Gospels about the events leading up to our Lord's Birth.

At that time, there was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

^{94.} Commonly pronounced in English "Zack-ah-RIE-ahs." Pronounced in Greek, "Zah-khah-REE-ahs."

^{95.} This is the reading from the Feast of the Conception of St. John the Forerunner. From here on, unless noted otherwise, all readings are from the NKJV.

Day 37: Announcement of Good News to the Holy Virgin Mary (*ornament: Angel*)

Luke 1:24–38⁹⁶

At that time, in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

⁹⁶ This reading is from the Feast of Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos, or to translate more literally, the "Evangelization" or the "Announcement of the Good News" — the Gospel.

Day 38: The Visitation (*ornament: Mary*)

Luke 1:39–56

At that time, Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.” And Mary said: ⁹⁷

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For he has regarded the lowly state of his maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.”

And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

^{97.} The following is the Song of the Theotokos, or the Magnificat, the first part of the ninth of the scriptural odes which are included in Orthodox Psalters and which form the inspiration for the Nine Odes of Matins.

Day 39: Joseph the Betrothed (*ornament: Joseph*)

Matthew 1:1–25⁹⁸

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.⁹⁹ [Judah's descendant] Boöz begot Obed¹⁰⁰ by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Urias.¹⁰¹ [Solomon's descendant] Ahaz begot Hezekias.¹⁰² Hezekias begot Manasses,¹⁰³ Manasses begot Amos, and Amos begot Josias.¹⁰⁴ Josias begot Jechonias¹⁰⁵ and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begot Salathiel.¹⁰⁶ and [Salathiel's descendant] Matthan¹⁰⁷ begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called his name Jesus.

^{98.} This is the reading from the Sunday before the Nativity of Christ. It may seem intimidating, both for all the "begots" and the challenging names; it is, however, a wonderful opportunity to tie together all of those stories now hanging on the Jesse Tree. Here are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Here are Boöz and Ruth, David and Solomon. Here also are Ahaz the wicked king to whom Isaias the Prophet foretold the Virgin Birth, and the Babylonian captivity, and at last Joseph. We've summarized certain sections to make it a little easier. For the rest, just review the pronunciation notes ahead of time and go slowly and clearly. "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise!" (If you and your children truly are not up for the challenge, just start reading from "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows....")

^{99.} The following is omitted: "Judah begot Phares and Zara by Thamar, Phares begot Hesrom, and Hesrom begot Aram. Aram begot Aminadab, Aminadab begot Naasson, and Naasson begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boöz by Rahab."

^{100.} Pronounced "BOH-ahz" and "Oh-BEED" or "Oh-VEED."

^{101.} Pronounced "Oo-REE-ahs" or commonly in English "Yoo-RIE-ahs."

The following is omitted: "Solomon begot Roboam, Roboam begot Abiah, and Abiah begot Asaph. Asaph begot Josaphat, Josaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Ozias. Ozias begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz."

^{102.} Pronounced "Ah-HAHZ" and "Heh-zeh-KEE-ahs" (commonly in English "AY-haz" and "Heh-zeh-KIE-ahs").

^{103.} Pronounced "Mah-nahs-SEES" (commonly in English "Muh-NA-sehs").

^{104.} Pronounced "Ah-MOHS" and "Joh-SEE-ahs" or "Yoh-SEE-ahs" (commonly in English "AY-muhs" and "Joh-SIE-ahs").

^{105.} Pronounced "Jeh-khoh-NEE-ahs" or "Jeh-hoh-NEE-ahs." (Or "Yeh..." technically.)

^{106.} Pronounced "Sah-lah-thee-EEL."

The following is omitted: "and Salathiel begot Zorobabel. Zorobabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Sadok, Sadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan."

^{107.} Pronounced "Maht-THAHN."

Day 40: Journey to Bethlehem (*ornament: Manger*)

Luke 1:1-5

At that time, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

The Nativity according to the Flesh of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ

Day 1 of Nativity: The Birth of Jesus Christ (*ornament: Infant Jesus — day 41*)

Luke 2:6–7

At that time, while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Day 2 after Nativity: The Coming of the Light of the World

(ornament: Radiant Light — day 42)

John 1:1–5, 10–11, 14¹⁰⁸

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

^{108.} This is an abbreviated version of the reading from the Gospel on Pascha.

Day 3 after Nativity: The Angel's Announcement

(ornament: Angel with Trumpet — day 43)

Luke 2:8-14

At that time, when Jesus was born of Mary, there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And see, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Day 4 after Nativity: The Shepherds Prepare
(ornament: *Standing Shepherd — day 44*)

Luke 2:15

At that time, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.

Day 5 after Nativity: The Visit of Shepherds (*ornament: Kneeling Shepherd — day 45*)

Luke 2:16–20

At that time, the shepherds came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Day 6 after Nativity: The Star of Bethlehem (*ornament: Star — day 46*)

Matthew 2:1-2

At that time, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him.”

Day 7 after Nativity: The Wise Men Visit Herod (Third king with myrrh — day 47)

Matthew 2:3-7

At that time, when Herod the king heard the words of the wise men, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship him also."

Day 8 after Nativity: The Naming of Jesus (*ornament: "JESUS" Banner — day 48*)

Luke 2:20–21

At that time, the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, his name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

With older children, since the above reading is so short, it may be good to include this reading from Genesis, which is one of the readings for the Circumcision of the Lord:

Genesis 17:1–14 (selections)¹⁰⁹

The Lord appeared to Abram and said to him: I am your God. Be well pleasing before me and be blameless. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly; and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. And your name will not be called Abram, but you will be Abraham, because I have established you as father of many nations. And I will increase you greatly, and I will establish you for nations, and kings will come forth from you. And I will set my covenant between me and you, and between your seed after you for their generations for an eternal covenant, and I will be their God. And Abraham fell upon his face and worshipped the Lord. And God said to Abraham: You are to keep my covenant and your seed after you to their generations. And this is the covenant which you are to keep between me and between your seed after you to their generations. Every male among you shall be circumcised; and you shall circumcise the foreskin of your flesh, and it shall be a sign of a covenant between me and you all. And every male child among you shall be circumcised at eight days for your generations. And an uncircumcised male, that is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin on the eighth day, that soul shall be destroyed from its race; because it has rejected my covenant.

^{109.} This passage from Genesis is one of the readings from the Circumcision of the Lord. It is Archimandrite Ephrem's translation. The Gospel reading is an abbreviation of the Gospel reading of the Feast, and is from the NKJV.

Day 9 after Nativity: The Visit of the Wise Men (*ornament: King With Gold and Camel — day 49*)

Matthew 2:9–12

At that time, when the wise men heard King Herod, they departed; and see, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshiped him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Day 10 after Nativity: The Flight to Egypt & the Slaughter of the Innocents (*ornament: Sword — day 50*)

Matthew 2:13–23

At that time, when the wise men had departed, see, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy him.” When he arose, he took the young Child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called my Son.” Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.” Then he arose, took the young Child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus¹¹⁰ was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

¹¹⁰. Pronounced “Ar-KHEH-lah-os” or “Ar-HEH-lah-os.”

Day 11 after Nativity, Eve of Theophany: Song of Zacharias (ornament: *Dove Carrying Olive Branch*¹¹¹ — day 51)

Luke 1:57–64, 67–80¹¹²

Now we are turning from the Nativity of Christ toward his Theophany, when he was baptized by St. John the Forerunner in the river Jordan. So today we go back to the story of St. John's birth.

At that time Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:¹¹³

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham: to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Orient¹¹⁴ from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

^{111.} This ornament is less obvious than most. Because the dove carrying the olive branch is a sign of peace, the connection is to "the Orient from on high has visited us ... to guide our feet into the way of peace."

^{112.} This is the second half of the reading for the Nativity of St. John the Forerunner. We read the first half on Advent Day 36.

^{113.} The following is the Song of Zacharias, or the Benedictus, the second part of the ninth of the scriptural odes which are included in Orthodox Psalters and which form the inspiration for the Nine Odes of Matins.

^{114.} NKJV and KJV have "Dayspring," but "Orient" is how the Church traditionally has translated this, as in the Prophecy of Isaias: "And Orient is his name."

The Holy Theophany of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Day 12 after Nativity: The Holy Prophet, Forerunner & Baptist John (*ornament: Sandal — day 52*)

Luke 3:1–17, 21–22

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch¹¹⁵ of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis,¹¹⁶ and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,¹¹⁷ while Annas and Caiaphas¹¹⁸ were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” So the people asked him, saying, “What shall we do then?” He answered and said to them, “He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.” Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than what is appointed for you.” Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, “And what shall we do?” So he said to them, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.” Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to all, “I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor, and gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while he prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased.”

^{115.} Pronounced “TEH-trark.”

^{116.} Pronounced “Ee-too-REE-ah” and “Trah-koh-NEE-tihs” or “Trah-koh-NIE-tihs.”

^{117.} Pronounced “Lee-sah-NEE-ahs” and “Ah-bee-lee-NEE.”

^{118.} Pronounced “AHN-nahs” and “Kah-ee-AH-fahs” — or simply “Kie-AH-fahs.” Commonly in English “KIE-ah-fahs.”