

God is with us (Archimandrite Varnavas Lambropoulos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The Gospel reading today [for the Sunday before Christmas] is the beginning of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew and, of course, of the whole New Testament. At first sight, the first page of this Holy Book seems to be the most tedious and perhaps the most off-putting page in world literature, consisting as it does of a tiresome list of Hebrew names. But a more careful examination reveals that it contains the glad fore-tidings of our salvation since it's the family tree of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. It records Christ's ancestors by name, beginning with Abraham and ending with the righteous Joseph, the apparent 'husband of Mary', but whose mission (duty) it was, in reality, to protect the Ever-Virgin.



‘Glory to your condescension’

We have the genealogy of the righteous Joseph rather than that of Mary, the Mother of God, because ‘it was not a law among the Jews to give the genealogy of women’ (Saint John Chrysostom), although- according to the testimony of Saint Luke the Evangelist- the Virgin also ‘came from the house and line of David’. Chrysostom deems it necessary to mention another ‘more arcane reason’ why the genealogy of Joseph is given, even though he had ‘nothing to do with the birth’: just as Christ initially concealed His equality with the Father and called Himself ‘the Son of Man’, so Joseph is presented as Mary’s ‘husband’ so that Our Lady would be free of ‘all wicked suspicion’ and risk being subjected to stoning. Because, if, even

after [He had performed] so many miracles, they [the Jews] continued to call Christ the 'son of Joseph', they certainly wouldn't have been able to believe that He was born of a Virgin before He had ever begun to work wonders. Can the human mind really conceive the love for humankind and the humility of the Son of God, Who consented to face the danger of a dishonourable death while He was still in the womb?

The reference to Christ's ancestors proves in the clearest manner how humbly God entered human history, taking on 'human flesh' from a people who were, by and large 'disobedient and gainsaying, that walked in a way that was not good, but after their sins' (Is. 65, 2). In this way, a tiresome list of names turns out to be powerful proof of God's love for us.

Unacceptable excuses or occasions for spiritual struggle

This condescension on God's part is even more apparent if we note that this list includes ancestors of Christ who were born from irregular relationships, such as Perez, who came from the relationship between Judah and his daughter-in-law even though he didn't recognize her because she'd dressed as a harlot; Boaz, who was born of the harlot Rahab; and Solomon, the offspring of David's adultery with Bathsheba. 'Christ consented to have such people as ancestors' says Saint John Chrysostom in wonder. 'He wasn't ashamed at our disgraceful deeds. He came not to avoid them, but to abolish them'.

Then he adds something very important: 'In this way, He shows us that we can't justify our sins by invoking bad blood lines. The one thing we have to do is seek virtue. Those who strive for virtue won't come to any harm even if they happened to have sinful forebears'. So it's, at best, ridiculous for us to invoke hereditary or childhood traumas in order to justify our unwillingness to free ourselves of the passions. So great is the gift of personal freedom (i.e. 'awareness, and the workings of the soul') that, in collaboration with the all-powerful Grace of God, it can reverse and heal even the worst of inherited leanings, the most deeply-rooted habits and the most enduring passions. Indeed, Saint Theofylaktos adds that we should regard bad forebears not as a cause for shame but as a starting-point for a greater struggle, so that 'by our own virtue, we may elevate them, too'.

Appropriation of God's gifts

The tripartite division of the genealogy of Christ into periods when the Jews- after Joshua, the son of Nun- were led successively by judges, kings and high priests, removes another, not infrequent, justification for mental dullness and indolence: that those in charge are to blame for everything. Saint John Chrysostom silences

those who invoke such justifications, noting: 'Not even by regime change were they changed'. The Jews didn't become any better, but remained just as bad no matter what the form of government. And even when Christ, the true Judge, King and Priest came, the only One Who 'announces remission not from concrete enemies, but- something much greater- from sin', the majority of the people 'did not wish to come to their senses'.

Remission from sin, the highest gift of Christ Incarnate, isn't granted without our own persistent request and free cooperation. Together with our staunch repentance, let us also confess that 'God is with us. Let us not seek justification for indolence but ever more reasons to glorify Emmanuel, the Son of God and the Mother of God.

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