

Homily on Two Families

Sunday Between Nativity and Theophany

Matthew 1:13-23 and Mark 1: 1-8

Departure from usual tact: to tell a story, to fill in the details and context of the events described in today's lesson. It is a story of two families and how the Lord worked through their righteousness to save the world. (middle of two feasts that join these two families)

Family One: Joahim and Anna; Mary and Joseph

- Joahim and Anna were old and childless. Devout Jews. Mocked for their lack of children.
 - So they prayed, and they promised to dedicate any child as an offering of their love
 - Granted a child in old age (as Sarah and Abraham with Isaac and Rachel and Jacob with Joseph)
 - At three years old they took her to the temple where the high priest Zachariah takes her in (Feast celebrated on November 21)
 - When she came of age, she could no longer stay in the temple. How could this holy offering be preserved in chastity? Parents gone. Other virgins were given in marriage, but Mary was to remain a virgin.
 - Solution: take lots from among the pious widowers (they brought their wooden rods and Joseph's budded).
 - [Today we commemorate Joseph, his humility, and his protection.]
 - Elderly widower with eight children (the "brothers of the Lord").
- So Joseph and Mary were betrothed, large disparity in ages. We recounted the story of the annunciation and subsequent Nativity of Christ in Bethlehem last week.
 - This gospel: Joseph told to take them to Egypt (Anne Rice wrote a romanticized account of this "Out of Egypt")
 - Returned Nazareth in Galilee once things were safe

Family Two: Elizabeth and Zachariah

- Zachariah was a priest of Israel, who served in the Jerusalem Temple.
- Elizabeth, like her cousin Anna, was barren.
- Some 13 years after Joachim and Anna had conceived Mary, The Gospels recount how an angel told Zachariah that they would bear a son.
 - He doubted, and so remained mute.
- You know of the meeting between Anna's Daughter Mary (w/ Christ) and Elizabeth (w/ John), and how the babe leapt in Elizabeth's womb
- Herod wanted to kill all the infant boys. John, too.
 - Zachariah was serving when the order came, and was slain between the temple and the altar
 - Elizabeth ran into the wilderness and was given safety in a cave
 - She died soon thereafter, so John dwelt in the wilderness until he began his prophetic ministry

Families united:

- By blood: Anna (and Mary) and Elizabeth were cousins
- By events: Priest Zachariah took Mary into the temple; then gave her to Joseph; Elizabeth and Mary spent some time during pregnancy together
- Then most strongly in Christ, as demonstrated at His Baptism (celebrate this week)

How do we know these things? Unbroken Orthodox tradition. Don't need to re-create them. They are ours. They are preserved in our songs, in our worship, in our iconography. We are of the body of Christ. This is our family history. Thank the Lord for making this so.