

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS **(SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31ST 2006)**

This coming Sunday, December 31st is the First Sunday after Christmas. The Holy Gospel reading for this Sunday is about the fleeing of the Holy family to Egypt. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Take the Child and His mother, go to Egypt and stay there until I bring the word because King Herod is trying to kill the young Child." Joseph immediately gathered the necessary things, took the young Child and His Mother, and they went to Egypt on the same night. According to tradition, James, son of Joseph also accompanied them on this journey.

In the meantime, Herod impatiently awaited the return of the wise men. When the wise men did not return from Bethlehem, Herod concluded that they are ashamed to return to Jerusalem because they cannot find the newborn. For the time being, Herod was tranquil. But after forty days, the news spread throughout Jerusalem that Mary had presented her newborn Son in the Temple, and that the aged Simeon also had come to the Temple to meet this Child and had prophesied that He was the Christ. Then Herod realized that the wise men had figured out his evil intent and had purposely avoided returning to him. He was exceedingly angry. Not knowing how to find the Christ Child, King Herod gave the disastrous order to kill all the children that were in Bethlehem and its surroundings from two years old and under. He hoped that among these children would be killed the Christ. Thus, he calculated according to the time when he had diligently questioned the wise men. The soldiers sent by Herod killed 14,000 children. Everywhere were heard the howls and screams of the mothers who is crying for their children, innocent children, killed by the order of the brutal King would never have been comforted. They were the first martyrs to spill their blood for Christ.

Soon after this, Herod was punished for his cruelty. He came down with a terrible illness. His body rotted alive and was eaten by worms, and he died in terrible torment. After the death of Herod, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Arise, and take the young Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for the king is dead who sought the young Child's life." Joseph did as he was told and took his family into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the place of Herod, his father, and that he was just as cruel, Joseph was afraid to go there. Being warned of God in a dream, Joseph turned aside into the parts of Galilee, into his native city Nazareth. There Joseph lived with the child Jesus and His Mother. Thus it was fulfilled as the prophets said that "He will be called a Nazarene". The child Jesus grew and became strong in spirit and filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. From the earliest years of His childhood, Jesus Christ exhibited unusual intelligence and remarkable sanctity in all His actions.

Please read the following Bible verses, in preparation for this Sunday's commemoration.

Bible readings for Sunday.

(First Sunday after Christmas)

Before Holy Qurbana

Genesis - 37: 13-28
Zechariah - 8: 3-8
Isaiah - 5: 20-30

Holy Qurbana

General Epistles: **Acts - 16: 6-10**
Epistles of St. Paul: **I Corinthians - 10: 1-13**
Holy Gospel: **St. Matthew - 2: 9-15 & 19-23**

With prayers,
Thomas Alex