

THE HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON  
His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

NATIVITY ENCYCLICAL  
of  
His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

My beloved Orthodox Christians,

On many occasions, I have encouraged our faithful to read the Lives of the Saints. These texts contain much that is edifying and instructive for all of us in our efforts to advance in Christian learning and the mind of Christ.

For example, the Life of the Forty-two Martyrs of Amorion [March 6, translated into English by Holy Nativity Convent and published in *The True Vine*, Issue #34] sets forth the heroic Christian confession of these Byzantine warriors in the account of their courageous martyrdom in the year 838 at the hands of their Muslim tormentors.

In their attempts to force these Byzantine army officers to convert to Islam, the Muslims used all manner of stratagems and arguments. But their efforts were in vain, for the valiant martyrs — though soldiers by profession— were well-versed and very articulate in their Christian Faith.

Here is an example of how the martyrs responded to their captors:

"If indeed you would be persuaded by the teachings of the Holy Prophets, it would be easy for us to prove your words false; and by the God-inspired Scriptures, we can condemn any position you take. Since, however, you do not accept the Divine Scriptures, but believe only in your own teaching, and since you revile us for suffering hardships because we do not believe in Mohammed, answer us the following: Two men had a difference and fought between themselves over a field. The one, quarreling, asserted without witnesses that the field must certainly be given to him, while the other, without quarrels, brought forward many tried and faithful witnesses who bore witness that the field belonged rather to him than to the other. To which of

the two would you Saracens decide to give the field?" Then the Muslims answered, "It is evident that to him who brought forth the faithful witnesses."

Then the Saints said to them, "Well, then, using reason, we too judge what is right concerning the Only-begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. He became man of the Virgin, as we have heard you also say many times. He had as His witnesses all the ancient and true Prophets who foretold His coming. You affirm that Mohammed was also sent from God bringing us a third law. Ought he not also to have had some of the Prophets of God, or at least one witness to speak of him, to prove that he was sent from God?"

To this, the Muslims could answer nothing. In all their encounters, the Muslim tormentors were silenced and put to shame by the witness of the holy martyrs.

The truth is that the Holy Scriptures, the Church Fathers, the hymnography and the holy services of the Church, particularly those pertaining to the Nativity of our Saviour, make repeated reference to these prophecies of Christ's incarnation and His redemptive work while He was among us in the flesh, and which the holy martyrs themselves had heard again and again in Church. The writings of St. Justin the Philosopher and Martyr, St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, and many other Church Fathers explain these Old Testament prophecies fully.

The hymns which we hear in the Church today, and which indeed the holy Forty-two Martyrs of Amorion themselves might well have heard, interpret for us the meaning of the prophecies.

For example, on the Sunday before the Nativity of our Saviour, the Glory of the Praises in Matins tells us:

The collection of the Law's teachings maketh plain Christ's divine Nativity in the Flesh through them that had preached of grace before the coming of the Law, since, by faith, they had transcended the Law. Wherefore, unto the souls held in Hades, did they foretell Thy Nativity which, through the Resurrection, was the cause of our deliverance from corruption.

For an Orthodox Christian, how many and how profound are the scriptural teachings found in this one hymn alone!

The holy Forty-two Martyrs of Amorion might also have quoted the following text for the benefit of their captors, the followers of the one the Muslims styled "the prophet":

The Prophet's sacred oracles receive their end. Behold, the Virgin giveth birth unto God in the flesh, in the city of Bethlehem, within the cave. Be ye made rich, all creation, be glad and dance for joy; the Master of all is come to dwell together with His servants, delivering from the mastery of the alien us who were made subject to corruption; and He is seen swaddled in a manger as a babe, a young Child Who before the ages is God.

[Oikos of the Forefeast, December 20]

This was the faith of the Prophets in the centuries before the coming of Christ. This was the faith of the holy martyrs of Amorion in the ninth century. This is the faith of the Orthodox Christians of every century: the Prophet's sacred oracles receive their end, their completion, in the coming of Christ. Christ is seen swaddled in a manger as a babe, a young Child Who before the ages is God!

My beloved Christians,

Christ is born! Let us glorify Him!

Your fervent supplicant unto God,

✠Ephraim, Metropolitan of Boston

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