**Orthodox Church of the Annunciation**

The 27th Sunday after Pentecost, Dec. 21st, Tone 3; Matt. 1:1-25

The second Sunday which is specially consecrated to preparation for the Nativity is that which immediately precedes the feast of Christmas. It is called “Sunday of the Fathers or of the Genealogy”. It falls between December 18th and 24th.

“Turning our thoughts to Bethlehem, let us lift ourselves in spirit to contemplate the great Mystery which is taking place in the cave...Now that the time of our salvation draws near...Prepare thyself, O Bethlehem…”, the choir sings during the service, and mention’s made of the patriarchs, the prophets, the holy women of the Old Covenant who “through faith shine like the stars”. The Church’s idea, this Sunday, seems to be to bring the righteous who lived before Christ into the joy of the Nativity “inviting them all by praises and divine songs to prepare for the birth of Christ”.

The gospel read at the Liturgy (the whole of Matthew 1) traces back the genealogy of Jesus according to the flesh: “The generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob;...”. And it continues up to Joseph “the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ”. We have read or heard the genealogy many times. We may have the impression that the reading is of purely historical and documentary interest. What can this list of names bring us that has any spiritual import?

But each one of these names does have a particular meaning, if we remind ourselves of the story of the person who bore it. What needs to be clearly understood is that the ancestors of Jesus were not all just and holy men. Amongst them are also sinners; those who have committed incest, adultery, murder; and alien woman: the names of Judas, Thamar, of David and Ruth are filled with spiritual significance. Jesus wanted, humanly, to be linked with “all that” and to “all those”. He wanted to clear a way for himself through the sins and crimes of men. And so it is the history of each one of us that he takes upon himself and overcomes. For each one of us has some of the features of those of Jesus’ ancestors who are the furthest from holiness. In each of us can be found, either dormant or awakened, the sins of the patriarchs and all their children. All the
There do not exist many or few, nor small or great problems. The only problem is the absence of Christ from our lives." (From the life and teachings of Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos)