



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 10 JANUARY 2016 – CHRIST – THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

EPISTLE **The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians [4:7-13]** But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: *“When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.”* (Now this, ‘He ascended’ – *what does it mean but that He also first descended in to the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.*) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

EXPLANATION: The unity that St Paul stresses does not preclude diversity of function in the members of the Church. While the Church is one in essence, it is diverse in gifts and functions. Each member is unique before God, with gifts and roles granted by Him. Though we are all one, each one of us was given his own grace at Baptism and Chrismation for the unity of service, for the preservation of truth and for the

operation of love, the primary quality of Christian growth. **(4:7)** Here St Paul explains this with a verse from Psalm 68:18. It refers ultimately to Christ's ascension to heaven, wherein He "**captured captivity**" (he was victorious over the devil), conquered death for our sakes, and gave spiritual gifts to his disciples, the result of Christ's plundering of Satan's usurped authority and of the spiritual riches of His ascended glory. These gifts are many and varied. Some, for example include the gift of being apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, etc. **(4:8)** Since God already dwells in the heights how could the Highest ascend? To say that God could ascend, presupposes that He has already descended – that He has already taken our flesh and came down, even **into the lower parts of the earth** – to the grave, to death, to Hades, to share the full extremities of our human condition. **(4:9)** Only after such a descent and humbling did He then ascend in glory "**far above all the heavens**" – not to abandon us, but rather "**That He might fill all things**". That is, unification and fulfilment of Creation. **(4:10)** These gifts of the Holy Spirit, therefore, are given for no other purpose than to serve the common good, to strive to build up the Church, the Body of Christ, and to serve our neighbour – "**until we all attain to the unity of the faith**" (until we become one with Christ and our neighbour in peace and love). **(4:11)** The job of the clergy is to "**equip the saints**" (the laity) for the "**work of ministry**", not to do the work instead themselves. The faithful, taught and empowered by their clergy, are to serve one another. It is only when we serve one another that true growth in the Body of Christ (the Church) is possible. **(4:12)** Thus if we have no peace with our Christian brethren, we have no true peace with God. Those who are mature believers do not just know about Christ, they know Him personally. Maturity is described as attaining to the

“measure of the fullness of Christ” – perfect manhood – entirely conformed to His image. (4:13)

GOSPEL The Reading is from the Gospel of St Matthew [4:12-17]

Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah and the prophet, saying: *“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.* From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

EXPLANATION: The **“great light”**, foretold by the prophet Isaiah centuries before the Saviour was born, was none other than Our Lord Jesus Christ. He came as a light to those languishing in “darkness”. That is, ungodliness and despair, who were overcome by spiritual ignorance and death, living in a dark time of tyranny and cruelty. Darkness came because of man’s sin. Yet in the darkness God kept the light of his presence and grace burning. All through the Old Testament God kept promising that one day the bond of darkness would be broken. Christ says, ‘I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.’ (John 8:12) Whoever “believes” in Me and “follows me” says Jesus, does not remain in darkness but already “has the light of life”. What is this light? In Christ we know who God is. This is the light. In Christ we know who we are. This is the light. In Christ we know the way of life for which man was created. This is the light. In Christ we have the answer to the riddle of death and eternal life. This is the light. All this has

been revealed to us by Christ who is the light of the world. God “has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ”. (2Cor 4:6) St John the Evangelist writes, “that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness (sin) rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19) Man tried to put out the light, but “the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:1-5) The light did not go out because God Himself is the light. His light shines today proclaiming to those who live **“in the region and shadow of death”** (that is, sin) that he has overcome death and the darkness of spiritual ignorance. For sin is the silhouette and likeness of death. Just as death overpowers the body, so too does sin overpower the soul. When Orthodox Christians go to Church on Sunday, they light a candle. What is this but a reminder that we have received light from Christ. So, just as He lights candles of love, joy, forgiveness, peace and meaning in our lives, we too, ought to be lighting candles in the lives of people today. In the early Church the baptismal candle was a symbol that the one baptised had received Christ Who is the Light of the world. The baptismal candle is brought to church by the godparents (or the baptised person) the following Sunday to renew their baptismal vows; to renew the commitment to Christ which they made at baptism. If we put ourselves in God’s hands we will tread safely into the unknown, protected by God’s providence, for He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and the Light of the world. “Glory to you Our Lord, glory to you, now and forever and unto the ages of ages.” Amen.