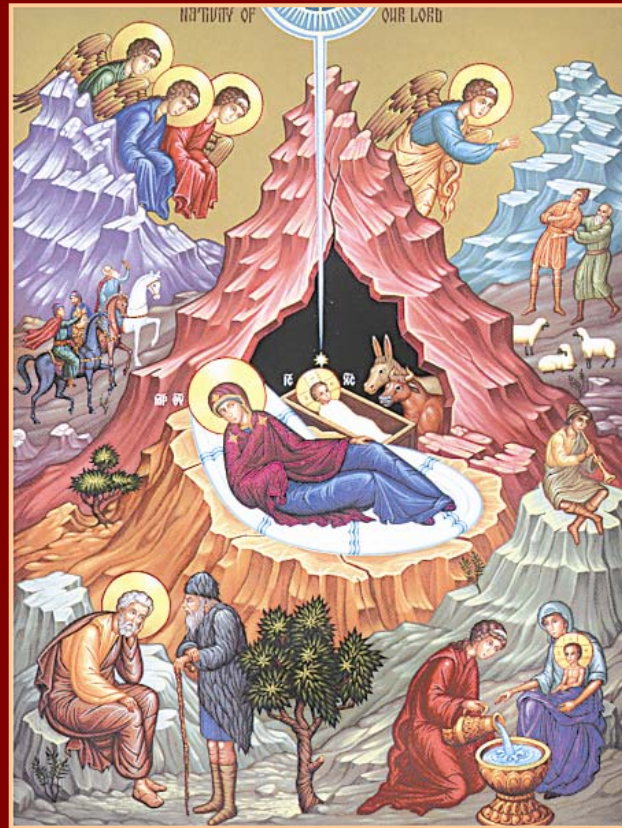


# THE ICON OF THE NATIVITY

## Images Foretold by the Prophets



Based on a Presentation Fr. Joseph Samaan

St. Stefanos Greek Orthodox Church ♦ St. Petersburg, Florida

Department of Outreach & Evangelism ♦ Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America



Thus the icon is also a theology, a theology in color, expressing the experience of God with lines and paints rather than with discursive language. The goal of the icon and that of written theology are the same ~ to lead others to the mystical experience of God. The icon artistically depicts the experience so that others may approach the mystery and be invited to share in it.

Anton Vrame, *The Educating Icon*



All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel”....

The Prophecy of Isaiah in The Christmas Eothonon ~ Matthew 1:22

# ~ The Prophets ~



Jeremiah & Habakkuk

## What is a Prophet?

The Prophets of the Old Testament were individuals chosen by God to tell people about the Salvation that was to come through Jesus Christ.

Prophets not only told about events to come, but also delivered the message of God and His will to the People.



# The Prophet Micah

The Prophet Micah lived in Judah  
from 750 to 687 BC.

He Prophesied that the Messiah  
would be born in in the  
City of Bethlehem.

~ the location of the Nativity icon scene ~

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the  
clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over  
Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Micah 5:2



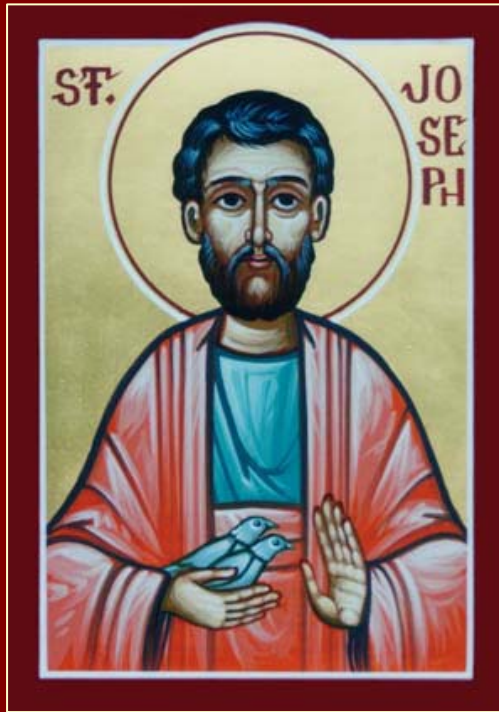
# The Prophet Jeremiah

The Prophet Jeremiah lived from 650 to 587 BC. He foretold that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David.

~ the depiction of Joseph in the Nativity icon ~

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

Jeremiah 23:5--6



“Joseph went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.” - Luke 2:4-5

Verily, Joseph the betrothed, saw clearly in his old age that the foresayings of the Prophets had been fulfilled openly; for he was given a strange earnest, receiving inspiration from the angels, who cried, Glory to God; for he hath bestowed peace on earth.

(Troparion)

## Matthew 1 The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the **Son of David**, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king.

David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.



“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

Luke 1:30-33



# The Prophet Moses

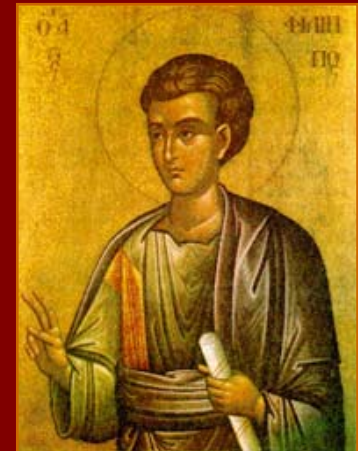
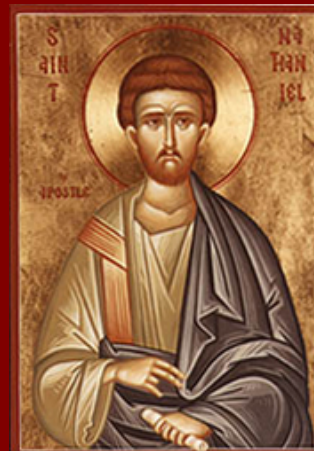
The Old Testament Book of Numbers is Attributed to the Prophet Moses and details the journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land.

~ A Star Will Come out of Bethlehem ~

Numbers 24:17

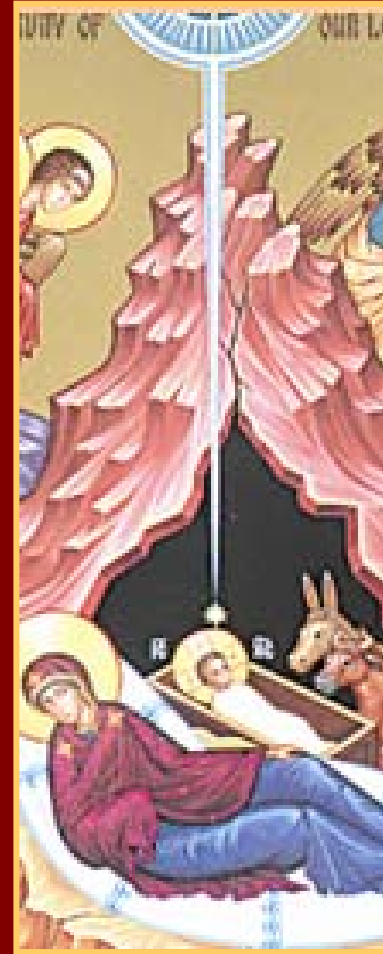
Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

John 1:45



“A long ray from the star points directly to the cave. This ray connects the star with a part of the sphere which goes beyond the limits of the icon – a symbolic representation of the heavenly world. In this way the icon shows that the star is not only a cosmic phenomenon, but also a messenger from the world on high, bringing tidings of the birth of ‘the heavenly One upon earth’.”

Ouspensky & Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*





# The Prophet David

King David was a Prophet and wrote many of the Psalms which we find in the Old Testament, and read during most of our worship services. He prophesied that foreign kings would bring gifts to the Messiah

~ Kings of Distant Lands Will Come ~  
Psalm 72:10

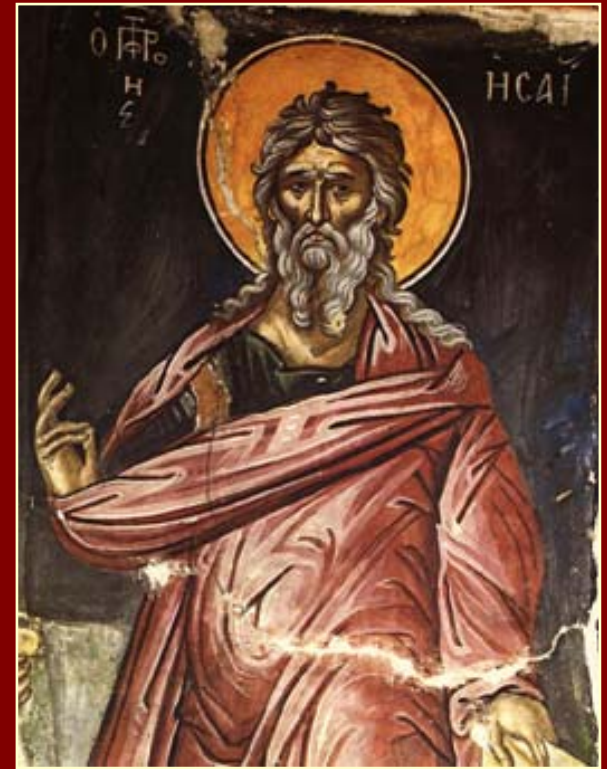
In the adoration of the wise men the Church testifies that it accepts and sanctifies all human science leading towards it, provided that the relative light of the extra-Christian revelation brings those who serve it to the worship of the absolute light. It should be noted that the wise men are represented as being of different ages, which emphasizes the fact that revelation is given to men independently of their years and worldly experience. Ouspensky & Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*

# The Prophet Isaiah

The Prophet Isaiah is often referred to as the fifth evangelist because so many of his prophecies pertain to the coming of the Messiah. He foretold that the Messiah would be born of a virgin.

“A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.”

Isaiah 7:14



She is the highest thanksgiving to God, which man, from among all created beings, brings to the Creator. By this offering in the person of the Mother of God, fallen mankind gives assent to its salvation through the Incarnation of God. The icon of the Nativity graphically underlines this role of the Mother of God, singling her out from among the other figures by Her central position and at times by Her size.

Ouspensky & Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*



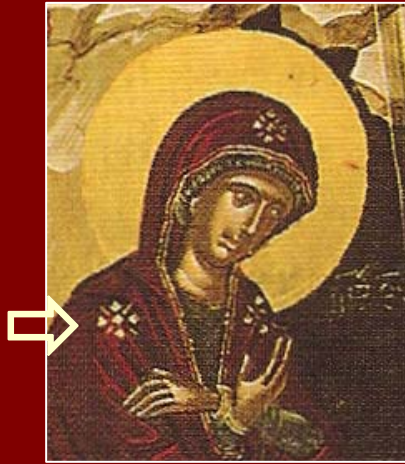
## Isaiah 9:6

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

# Discussion



# Additional insight into the Icon of the Nativity



The stars on Mary's garment denote her virginity before, during and after the Nativity.

The expression on her face is calm, gentle, meditative, showing that she gave birth to the child in a supernatural manner, free of all pain.



# Isaiah's Prophecy of the Animals:

“The ox knows his master, and the donkey his master's crib; but Israel does not know me, and the people have not regarded me.”

Isaiah 1:3



By the presence of the animals, the icon reminds us of Isaiah's prophecy and calls us to the knowledge and understanding of the mystery of the Divine Dispensation.

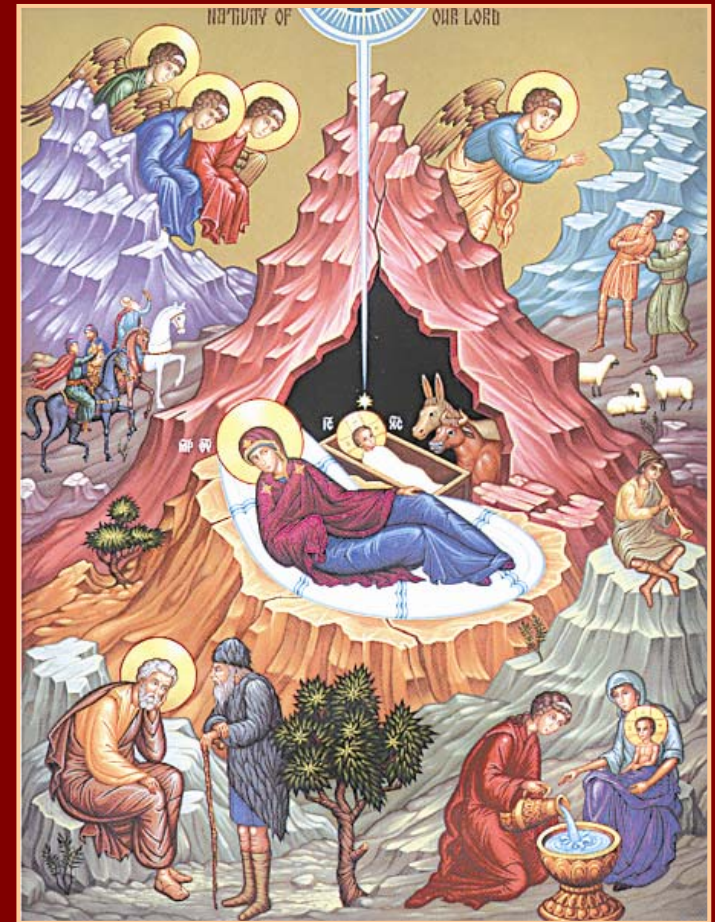
Ouspensky & Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*



# The Manger foreshadows the Tomb.



Cave, manger, swaddling clothes ~ are indications of the kenosis of the Godhead, His abasement, the utter humility of Him who, invisible in His nature, becomes visible in the flesh for man's sake, is born in a cave, is wrapped in swaddling clothes, thus foreshadowing His death and burial, the sepulcher and the burial clothes.



# The Troubling of Joseph by Satan



“...on the basis of tradition, the icon transmits the meaning of certain liturgical texts which speak of the doubts of Joseph and the troubled state of his soul.”





But Mary treasured up all these things  
and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:19

# Suggested Reading

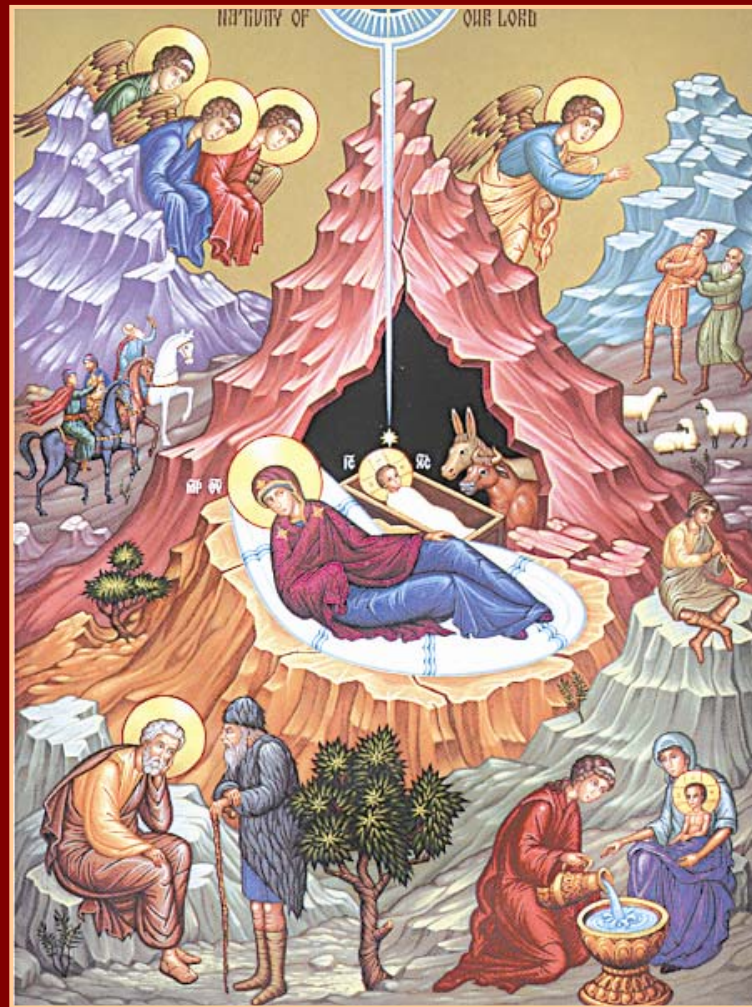
*The Meaning of Icons*, by Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky

*Guide to Byzantine Iconography*, by Constantine Cavarnos

*The Educating Icon*, by Anton C. Vrame

*The Festal Menaion*, translated by Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware

*Experiencing the Feast Days of the Festal Menaion in Greece*,  
by Mary Winterer-Papatassos



The traditional Orthodox icon of the Nativity tells us what the Bible tells us, and does so in a very clear, vivid, effective manner, by means of forms and colors.

*Constantine Cavarnos Guide to Byzantine Iconography*