



## AFTERFEAST OF THE NATIVITY

December 30

### THE HYMN

**Heirmos, 8th Ode, Matins December 30**

*Guiltless were those Servants in the furnace. The Son of the Theotokos went and rescued them. He who was prefigured then, having been incarnate now, is gathering the whole wide world into His Church to sing: "O all you works of the Lord, to all ages sing praises to the Lord and exalt Him beyond measure."*

### THE SERMON

**God's Plan For Our Salvation**

Holy Scripture consists of two parts: the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament provides an account of the creation of the world by God and chronicles the historical trajectory of the people of Israel. It also contains a series of prophetic and poetic books. The principal message of the Old Testament is God's promise to Adam, and by extension to the entire human race, that despite Adam's disobedience, God will not abandon him. He will send the Messiah to bring Adam back. For its part, the New Testament contains four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of the Apostles, and a prophetic book.

The entire Old Testament basically prepares the people of Israel and others, for that matter, for the coming of the Messiah. In the New Testament, the promise of the coming of the Messiah is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son and Word of God. The Divine Economy, that is, God's plan for our salvation is conveyed as a "type" in the Old Testament and as the action of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. In the Divine

Economy within the Old Testament, God reveals Himself as the Creator and the Fa-



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ther of all, a Father Who desires that His creation be saved. In the Divine Economy within the New Testament, God Himself takes on human flesh to redeem and lead His creation to salvation.

This hymn prefigures the Word in the Old Testament. During the reign of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, three pious youths refused to worship the King's golden idol and were thrown into the furnace to be punished. These young companions believed in the living God and were willing to sacrifice themselves for their faith. For their love of the true God, they were prepared to lose their lives. Seeing their faith, God protected them from the fire. The true faith of the youths was thus revealed to the King and the Babylonians.

In this event, the Word is prefigured as a cool breeze protecting the youths as part of God's redemptive activity in the Old Testament. While in the New Testament, redemption is fulfilled by the incarnate Word, who appears on earth as perfect God and perfect man after passing through the womb of the Virgin Mary. In this case, Divine Economy can be seen as accomplishing what the Old Testament prefigured. Whereas God had previously redeemed the pious youths, He now redeems the entire world from the figurative furnace of suffering, decay, and death. The Economy of God continues to act by the grace of the Holy Spirit, always in perfect communion and constant interaction with Christ and His Church.

Church, as a community of believers who personally embody the prospect for sainthood, makes its way to the Kingdom of God, constantly redeemed by the refreshing flame of the Holy Spirit. The Church is formed into a body that is bright and free, gathering at every Divine Liturgy in a festival of joy, expressing its gratitude to its Benefactor, and praising His everlasting and eternal majesty.