

Righteous King Josiah

The Sunday before the Nativity of Christ God, December 20, 1998

Fr. Josiah Trenham, Pastor

St. Andrew Orthodox Christian Church, Riverside, Ca.

Introduction: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen. This morning is the Sunday of the Forefathers of Christ. We read in the Holy Gospel the first chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, which records for us our Savior's genealogy. The first seventeen verses focus upon his earthly genealogy and the remaining eight verses touch upon his heavenly genealogy.

Jesus' Earthly Genealogy: We all love to think about our family trees. It is important to understand your familial roots, even if your study leads you to discover that you have certain unseemly characters in your line. The most important family tree ever is the family tree, the genealogy of our Sweet Savior, Jesus Christ, recorded for us in St. Matthew's gospel. One of the reasons St. Matthew included such a detailed description of Jesus' genealogy was because St. Matthew wrote his gospel with a Jewish audience in mind. St. Matthew wished to convince them very firmly that Jesus was, in fact, the longed for Messiah and Hope of Israel. He was their King: the Ultimate Descendant of the Patriarch Abraham and King David. This emphasis is reflected in the division of the genealogy into three groups of fourteen generations from Abraham to David, from David to the deportation to Babylon, and from the deportation to Babylon until the birth of Christ.

Our Lord's genealogy is the most impressive and glorious line of faith including the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Continuing through the line of Judah with Jesse and his son, King David. We see King Solomon, Hezekiah and my patron the Zealot-King Josiah the tenderhearted. On and on we go. No family tree is more glorious. What providential care the Father undertook to prepare the way for the birth of His Only-

Begotten Son. The maintenance of the Messianic line from the time of the fall of our first parents was a great and miraculous work of God for the purpose of preserving the promise of the Gospel that one day a Savior would come to redeem mankind. The Nativity is no parenthesis in the history of the world. The Nativity is the center of history. It is the longed-for goal, which the entire world (even the gentile world as shown by the Magi) had been prepared for and was anticipating. This is why our Savior is called the "Expectation of the Nations".

The Righteous King Josiah: This morning I would like to fulfil a divine obligation. It is the sacred duty of every Orthodox to imitate his patron saint to the best of his ability, to meditate upon the saint's life and to be a channel by which the church comes to know of this saint, and to pray regularly to one's patron. And so, in this light I wish this morning to take up a meditation upon the life of one of the most eminent ancestors of our Savior, even Righteous King Josiah the tenderhearted mentioned in our Savior's genealogy this morning.

King Josiah was born about 650 B. C. It was, however, more than three hundred years previous to this around the year 930 B. C. that the world came to know of Josiah through the prophecy of an unnamed prophet/man of God. It was at the time that the Nation of Israel had just been sadly divided. King Solomon's son, Rehoboam, had ascended the throne and aggravated the Israelite people greatly to the point that the northern ten tribes broke away under the leadership of Jeroboam. In order to keep his people from traveling south to the Jerusalem temple and maintaining contact with Judah, Jeroboam set up rival altars and sinfully consecrated a rival priesthood, which was no priesthood at all. In so doing, he greatly provoked the Lord who sent to him an unnamed prophet who approached one of these pseudo-altars and prophesied that one day a son of David would be born, Josiah by name, who would burn the bones of the idolatrous priests on these very altars. As a sign to confirm the prophet's word the altar split apart and the ashes poured out. Let us adore the providence of our God, Who three hundred years before Josiah was born, foretold his work and even named Him. There is no occurrence, no

experience we have, indeed no tiny movement of an atom, that is not governed by the All-Seeing providence of God.

Three hundred years later King Josiah was born. His grandmother was Adaiah and his mother Jedidah. Now you know whom these names refer to when you hear them in the commemoration of the departed in our divine services. Josiah's great-grandfather was the pious King Hezekiah. His grandfather was the wicked Manasses, whose evil was so great that his actions sealed the doom of Jerusalem even though after being captured by the Babylonians he repented before God. Josiah's father was Amon, who did not reign long, and was even worse than Manasses and showed no repentance. And at eight years of age the young boy Josiah was crowned King. Details of Josiah's life and reign are found in the second book of Chronicles, chapters 34-35, and in the so-called second book of Kings, chapters 22-23.

Four kings dominate Israel's history. These four kings were the greatest leaders of Israel. They showed forth in their own persons the coming King of Kings, Christ the Lord, and they were all known for doing something pious more than any person before them or after them. The first King was David. He had a heart after God's own heart as no one else. The second King was Solomon. Solomon had wisdom like no one else before or after him. The third King was Hezekiah. Hezekiah trusted God like no one else. The last King was Josiah. Josiah repented and reformed himself and his nation like no other king before or after. The writer of Kings records, "And before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him" (2 Kgs. 23:25).

Josiah became King on his father's death when he was eight years old. By the time he was sixteen he began to very seriously seek God and do His holy will! Hear this young people. Imagine an eight year old pious King! Imagine a sixteen year old King whose love for God was an example to his entire nation! There is no obstacle to strong faith and devotion to God in youth. Josiah zealously turned himself to the Lord as a young man even when circumstances in Israel were spiritually bleak. Idolatry was pervasive due to

Josiah's sinful father and grandfather. The prophets were hiding. The law was lost. Yet in spite of all this Josiah listened to his conscience and sought the Lord.

At twenty King Josiah began to purge his nation of idolatry with great zeal. Who could be compared to Josiah in his zeal? He traveled throughout Judah tearing down the altars of the Baals, smashing the incense altars, destroying the idolatrous images and Asherim, and even burning the bones of the idolatrous priests and scattering their ashes on the graves of the common people. He destroyed what was in Israel somewhat equivalent to our modern day abortion mills. These were the areas devoted to child sacrifice where people burned their newborn infants. And all in fulfillment of the prophetic word.

At twenty-six he directed his vigorous efforts to restoring the proper worship of Israel. He set about repairing the Lord's House which other kings had let go to ruin. While his workers were rebuilding the temple structure they made an incredible discovery! They found the Word of God, the Law of Moses, which had been lost! Can you imagine? Israel was without the Holy Scriptures. Their bible had been lost! How could this be? That Word of God which the Lord had gone to great effort to give to His people, even inscribing His commandments with His own finger. That Law which Moses had called upon parents to diligently teach to their children, and speak of when they rise up, when they walk along the road, and when they lie down to sleep. That law which was to be bound to the doorposts of their houses and bound to their hands and foreheads. That law lost! **What misery does not come to a people who have lost or forgotten the Word of God?** And we must make no mistake! That even if we have possession of such a wondrous Law, of the very Word of God, but do not peruse it regularly then it is lost to us! If it simply sits on the shelf, then even while we "have" it, it is lost to our hearts and practice and we are in a miserable state! If it is lost then we are lost! Immediately King Josiah had it read before him and then publicly. When he heard of all the will of the Lord in the Sacred Scriptures he publicly tore his royal robes and wept in sorrow for all the ways that the Lord's word was going unheeded. He appraised the circumstances and discharged servants to Huldah the prophetess to discover from her how he might deter the Lord's wrath from coming upon Judah for their neglect of His Word. Huldah told him

that there was no stemming the judgment of God, but that because Josiah was so tenderhearted and wept before God in zealous repentance God would delay the exile of Judah so that Josiah would not have to see it with his own eyes.

King Josiah immediately gathered Israel to the Temple and had the Law read in the hearing of all. He then renewed his and the people's covenant with God, promising to walk in all the ways of the Lord. How did Israel then prosper! How they responded to a leader of integrity! Even though Josiah was so zealous and so strongly called the people away from infidelity to the Lord the people loved him and rose to improve and correct themselves. Josiah restored the worship of Israel. He turned his attention to the worship of God, and restored the celebration of the Passover in all of its glory. He renewed the entire festal cycle of the land, strengthened the priests, honored and obeyed the Lord's prophets, including such personal friends of his as the holy and glorious prophet Jeremiah. Here is a leader. Here is a head of state worthy of the position. What do we need more today than another Josiah! Someone who will boldly set before our people the unchanging standards of God, just as Josiah read and published abroad the law of the Lord! Someone who will before all commit himself to a complete obedience to all the will of God, and in so doing will provide moral inspiration to the people. Someone who will model true repentance, tear his royal robes, and weep in compunction for what he has done and hasn't done, and will then not rest until all the Word of God is honored in the land. This is a leader beloved. And such was the righteous King Josiah.

In order to spare the tenderhearted Josiah the agony of witnessing the exile of Judah to Babylon the Lord allowed Josiah to fall in battle at the age of 39 at the hands of Pharaoh Neco of Egypt who was passing through the outskirts of Judah in military pursuit of another enemy when confronted by the zealous Josiah. In response to King Josiah's death the entire nation lamented and mourned. How this humble, zealot-King was loved! The Prophet Jeremiah wrote a lamentation, which was chanted by all Israel. So great was the lamentation that the mourning over Josiah became proverbial of the greatest mourning and was later referenced by the Prophet Zechariah (12:11) as a type of the mourning which would take place at our Lord Jesus Christ's Second Coming in glory

when his persecutors and earthly enemies see the very One they pierced in death descending in glory with the Holy Angels to judge all men.

And so we honor today the memory of the righteous King Josiah, ancestor and type of our Precious Savior and King of all Kings, Jesus Christ Himself. And we conclude with the words of eulogy found in Sirach, “The memory of Josiah is like a blending of incense prepared by the art of the perfumer; it is sweet as honey to every mouth, and like music at a banquet of wine. He was led aright in converting the people, and took away the abominations of iniquity. He set his heart upon the Lord; in the days of wicked men he strengthened godliness” (49:1-3). May his example and pious life inspire the same life in us that as Christ comes to be born of a Virgin we may offer to him with the magi the frankincense of sweet-smelling lives and obtain eternal memory in the Kingdom by the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ, Who together with His Unoriginate Father and All-Holy, good and life-giving Spirit reigns throughout all ages. Amen.