

FROM THE PASTOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24th

Please accept the prayers of the clergy and staff of SLKF parish and school at this time of year we celebrate the earthly birth of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The details of this event are preserved for us in the first two chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. These passages inform us that the birth took place during the reign of Emperor Augustus, absolute ruler of the pagan Roman Empire. As the end of the Gospels inform us, the earthly life of Jesus ended with his unjust execution at the hands of officers of this same pagan empire, during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius.

Over six-decades after the birth, a fire erupted at the eastern-end of the Circus Maximus in Rome, on the night of July 18, 64 A.D., destroying two-thirds of the city. The fifth emperor, Nero, then ruled the empire. He could not blame a foreign enemy for the fire, since Nero's predecessors had crushed all possible threats. So, in the most decisive turning point in Church history since the crucifixion, Nero identified Christians as a non-Roman, disloyal, internal population, responsible for the arson, because they worshipped a King other than the emperor. For the next 249 years, simply being Christian was the crime of treason, punishable by death.

During this time, celebration of the sacraments by the faithful had to be carried out in secret places. The sixth Pope, St. Alexander I (r.105->115 A.D.), created the first ritual blessing for homes, intended to purify the dwellings of converts from paganism, of residual demonic influence.

The seventh Pope, St. Sixtus I (115->125 AD), added to the mass, a quotation from the Book of Isaiah (6:3), which we still repeat before the Eucharistic Prayer, the "Holy, Holy", because it was a specific prophecy of the Messiah, fulfilled by Jesus.

The eighth Pope, St. Telesphorus (r. 125->136 A.D.), added the refinement of midnight mass to celebrate the Incarnation of the Lord, a means of literally starting the day with Mass, while taking place at an hour in which Christians would be most secure from detection. Moreover, to set apart celebration of the Incarnation, Telesphorus added the "Gloria" to the Mass of the Nativity, beginning with the words of the angels in the Gospel of Luke (2:14) announcing the birth of the Lord.

These are just a few examples of how the ancient church honored the Nativity of Our Lord, within the practical constraints imposed by the need of avoiding capture and execution during an unjust persecution.

And so, we offer thanks for the freedom to practice our faith openly, at the same time we pray for those in the world who are still denied this liberty.

St. Louis King of France, Pray for us.