

**SERMON - Sunday After the Nativity - Holy Righteous Ones, David the King, Joseph the Betrothed, and James the Brother of the Lord, December 29, 2019**

Adapted from *The Synaxarion by Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady Ormylia (Chalkidike) 1998*

Today, being the Sunday after the Nativity, we celebrate the memory of the Holy Righteous Ones King David, Joseph the Betrothed, and James the brother of the Lord. All three being great fathers with edifying lives, I have selected David's life as the subject of my sermon today. David the Prophet-King lived at Bethlehem with his father Jesse and his seven older brothers, about a thousand years before Christ. He was a handsome young shepherd, remarkable for his piety, wisdom, humility and great meekness, which belied his courage as a warrior. King Saul disobeyed God and was also subject to violent fits of madness. The Prophet Samuel, therefore, secretly anointed David as King. David was sent for by Saul to play his lyre, which soothed the King's terrors and gained the King's favor. David married Saul's daughter. When the Philistines declared war against Israel, David faced them alone without weapons of war, to the amazement of some and the jeers of others. He took up the challenge against the Philistine giant Goliath. Trusting in the name of the Lord, David felled him with the first stone from his sling which sank into Goliath's forehead. Saul, therefore, set David over Israel's armies and won victory after victory. Saul became jealous of David and now sought to kill him. Saul purposely sent David into perilous battles, but David always emerged unscathed. Saul's son Jonathan and David became good friends and Jonathan helped David to escape from the court and Saul's plots. Saul and his soldiers pursued them wherever they went and put to death all who assisted them. David twice had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he spared him, considering Saul to be God's anointed. David for a time took refuge with the Philistines. After the great defeat of Israel at Gilboa and the death of Saul and Jonathan, David returned to Judah. He composed a moving elegy in their honor bewailing the death of his beloved friend and the unjust King who he nonetheless respected as God's anointed. God instructed David to go up to Hebron, where he was recognized as King by the tribe of Judah. Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, was made King of the other tribes by Abner, the commander of the army. Civil war broke out between the two kingdoms of Israel, resulting in the defeat of the Northern kingdom seven years later. David was recognized as sole King by the whole people of Israel and he established his capital at Jerusalem, which he had won from the Jebusites. Through wars the borders of Israel were extended, and the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the city of David with much music, joy and celebration. In Psalm 131:5 David had sworn that he would take no rest until he found a place for the God of Jacob to dwell in. Jerusalem was now also the spiritual stronghold of the chosen people, where God rested in His glory and was the prophetic figure of the *heavenly Jerusalem* which will come down from above at the end of time (Rev. 21). David was seized with such joy when he saw his vow fulfilled in the procession with the Ark, that taking the lead in it, he sang and danced with all his strength in ecstasy. King David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, composed a large number of Psalms to the praise of God and for divine worship. The *Psalms of David*, which form the basis of our *Psalter*, give utterance in inimitable tones to every disposition of man before God, and hence they are at the fountainhead of both the private and the public prayer of the Church. David was the most glorious of the Kings of Israel and prefigured the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is rightly called "son of David." David could not fulfill his desire to build the Temple, because his hands were stained by bloodshed and warfare. It was his son Solomon the wise who was able to devote all his efforts to that work, all the materials for the construction having already been collected by his father David. Showered with divine favor as he was, David was subject to human passions and sin. Although he had twenty wives, his passion was not satisfied, and smitten with lust when he caught sight one day of the fair Bathsheba, he did not hesitate to rid her of her husband Uriah the Hittite by sending him to certain death by ordering him to be placed in the front line at the siege of Rabbath. David and Bathsheba's first son died, stricken

by God in His wrath. The Prophet Nathan, in a roundabout way, vividly brought home to the King the full horror of his sin. David humbly acknowledged his sin before God and offered perfect repentance when he composed the 50th Psalm, *Have mercy upon me, O God*. This psalm has become the model of prayer that all sinners should send up to the Lord to implore His forgiveness, and is probably the most prayed psalm in the prayers and services of the Orthodox Christians, the central prayer of repentance. In addition to Solomon who Bathsheba bore him towards the end of David's life, David had a second son, Absalom, who revolted against his father, seized power, and forced the King to flee. In the end Absalom was killed by Joab, the commander of the King's forces. Far from rejoicing at this event, David always still loved his son, and broke down in tears lamenting the death of him whom he had never ceased to regard as his son. When he had re-established peace between the tribes of Judah and Israel, David had his son Solomon anointed as his successor, counseling him to keep the Law of the Lord blamelessly and to build the Temple. David died in peace in Jerusalem at 70 years of age giving thanks to the Lord for all His blessings and goodness. Through the prayers of our Holy father King David, may our souls be saved! Amen!