



# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

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## UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN —PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS

Bishop Kurt's Reflection on the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord 2019

If you are reading this column, then you are different from almost all of your ancestors. You know how to read. Language is not just something we write down. Most of our ancestors lived before writing was even invented. Even now, many people can speak a language fluently without knowing how to read or write. In my last parish, there were four brothers from Iraq. They spoke Aramaic in their family, the very language of Jesus Christ. The youngest brother, a happy enthusiastic and hard working young man, never learned to read or write. Their father was a prisoner of war in the Iraq/Iran war, and he was so disgusted with civilization he didn't want his youngest son to go to school. Despite the fact that he could not read or write, he spoke Aramaic—the language of Jesus—in his family just like Jesus. He also learned Arabic as most people in that country do, and in New Mexico, he picked up English and Spanish. It makes you realize that language is really something spoken. Writing things down is a relatively modern invention.

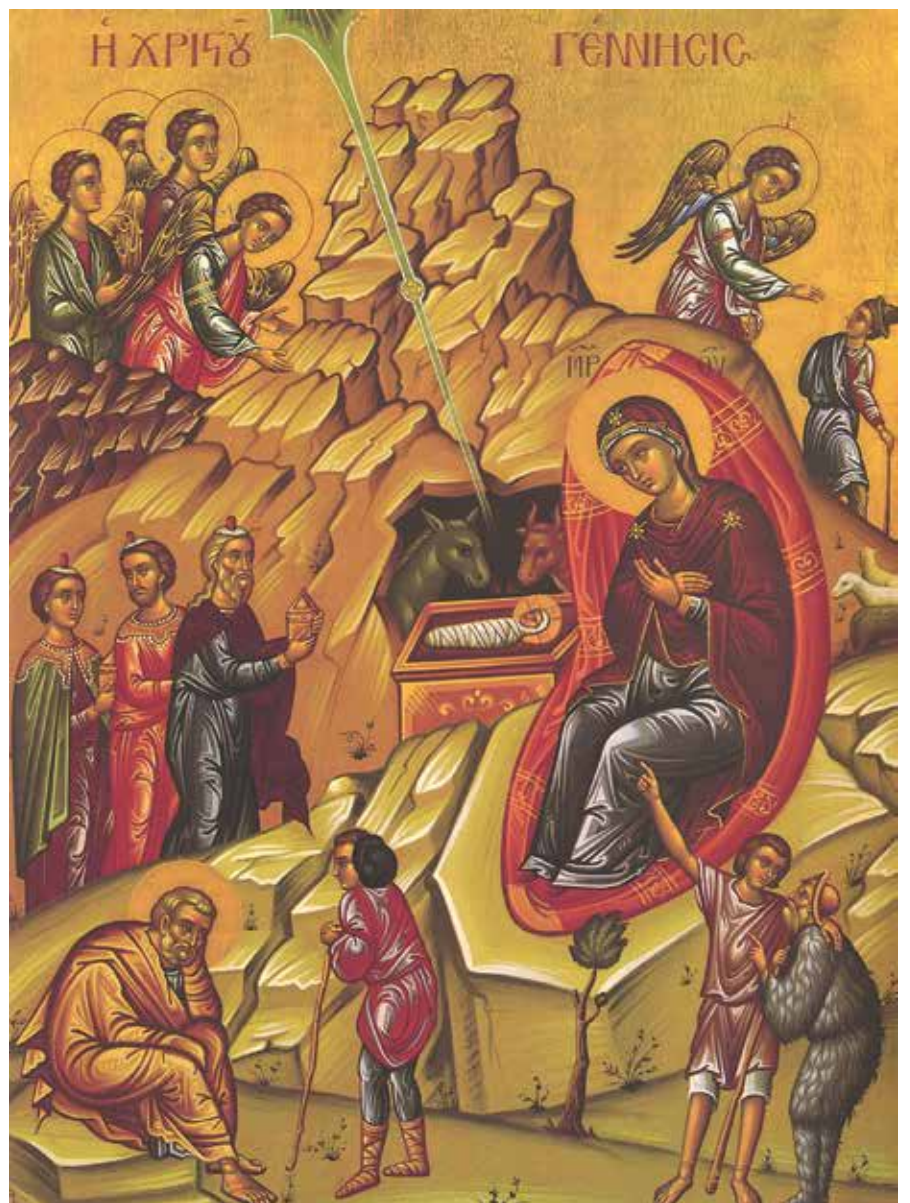
I didn't realize until recently how many people in the world still speak Aramaic as their first language. In the last century it went from the millions down to the hundreds of thousands, and it will probably be a dead language in a couple of generations because of the meddling of the western powers in the Near East since World War One.

Where did language come from? No one knows. Tom Wolfe wrote an entertaining book on the subject, exploring all the theories of the last few centuries. Where did writing come from? Well we know something about that. Writing seems to have been invented in more than one place. Our own writing comes from Mesopotamia, the same place as the Iraqi family in my last parish. For many years archeologists found little clay tokens all over the Near East. Museums were full of them. As more languages were decoded, they realized that these were tokens that represented property, sheep, cattle, crops, and so on. Furthermore, they often represented numbers of these things. The

archeologists finally realized that they were accounting tools. A sheep token represented a sheep. If there were a hundred sheep, they got tired of using a hundred tokens, so they invented symbols to let them say one hundred sheep or ten sheep. There was another token that meant cattle, and other symbols to mean ten cattle or one hundred cattle. There were tokens for units of barley and grain and textiles. Don't forget beer! Beer was an important part of Mesopotamian culture, so much so that some anthropologists suggest that beer was the real impetus for this ancient civilization. The Code of Hammurabi contains a law that a barkeeper who cheated customers should be drowned in beer.

When ancient merchants shipped property, animals, textiles, etc., they began using a manifest as we do today. They would take the clay tokens saying what was in the shipment, and seal them in little clay pot. If there were a dispute at the destination, they could break open the pot and check the accounting inside. Right now, scientists are researching tamper-proof communications over the internet and using quantum mechanics. Five thousand years ago, a baked clay pot was pretty tamper-proof! Then some clever accountant had a bright idea. He (or maybe she—tavern owners were women in Sumer) had the idea to make impressions on the outside of the clay pot while it was still wet using the same tokens that were put inside. Then it was possible to check the inventory or contract along the way without breaking open the pot. You can see these tokens in museums around the world, and also the clay pots that functioned as contracts or bills of lading from 5000 years ago.

Well, after they started putting these symbols on the outside of the pot representing sheep and oxen and so on, writing on clay tablets appeared very quickly. People realized they could mark down sentences instead of just inventories. It seems that writing was invented, at least in western civilization, by accountants! Don't tell your friends



## ICON OF THE NATIVITY

in the literature or drama department. One of the great revolutions of the human race occurred there about 3000 BC. Most history books will tell you that moveable type was invented five hundred years ago, and it was also one of the greatest revolutions. Ironically, the original writing 5000 years ago was with moveable type, but then we forgot about it for the next 45 centuries.

I have no doubt that it was part of God's plan that written languages would be sophisticated and highly developed, at least in the Near East, by the time that He began His revelations, revelations that could be preserved then for generations yet to be born. God's

word written down over a span of more than a thousand years, by scores of people and in several different languages, has come down to us in the Bible. By the time that God called Abram from Ur and changed his name to Abraham, and changed his wife's name from Sarai to Sarah, writing was already at least one thousand years old in that part of the world. In addition to the Bible we also have written records of the early Christians, how they prayed, what they preached, how they died for the faith, and what their neighbors were like. Most people today who question the history of the Church would be astonished to know how much written evidence we have of the early Christians

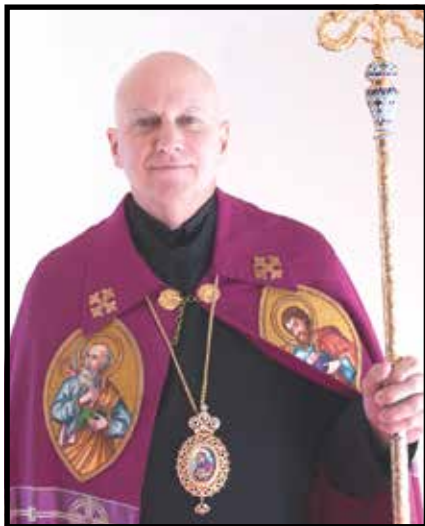
*Continued on page 2*



Christ is Born! Glorify Him! Christos Raždajetsja! Slavite Jeho!







# UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN—PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS



*Bishop Kurt's Reflection on the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord 2019*  
Continued from Page 1

besides the Bible. Even I am astonished at how much of it I'm still learning about.

Story telling is deeply ingrained in our nature, and when we hear a story, it's as though we are transported to another time and place. Ancient peoples, even without writing, listened to poets and bards tell stories that took up a whole evening, some based on events, some imaginary. What a wonderful blessing that God has given us in the written word! How many men and women in the last twenty centuries sacrificed so that the scriptures were preserved for us. The number of ancient copies that still exist are so numerous and so consistent that you could say that the life of Jesus Christ is the best documented event in the ancient world, but that is a topic for another day.

As I said, when we hear a story, or read one if we are blessed to be able to read, it's as though we are living another life than our own, in another time and place. And in the Bible, God has given us the opportunity to make ourselves present in the most important events of all time. By reading the first two chapters we see in a manner not physically possible the unfolding of all creation. We walk in the garden of Eden with our first parents. I remember a movie called the Bible came out when I was young. Adam and Eve were so stately! I have a feeling they weren't really like that. After all, whom were they trying to impress? I think there was a lot of laughing and jumping around, wide eyed wonder, a lot of innocent horseplay, running, dancing, and splashing in the four rivers. And then we relive the horror of the first sin, the first sense of unnatural shame, the first time someone hid from God, and lied. I saw a pitiful painting in the painted church of Hawaii. It shows Cain weeping and Eve trying to wake up Abel. No one ever died before, and neither one of them could understand why Abel wouldn't wake up.










If you choose you can walk with our father Abraham in his journey of faith from his family's land to his new land where he was a stranger and foreigner. You can feel for yourself the profound experience of Almighty God himself when he came to Abraham at night in a deep trance, and promised blessings to all future generations from his body, including the birth of Jesus Christ from the loins of Abraham. You can walk with Moses as he fled Egypt in fear for his life, and returned to Egypt trusting God's promises, and leading the Hebrews out through the parted sea. You can watch as Moses holds up the bronze serpent prefiguring the raising up of Jesus on this dear cross.

If you prefer family stories, there are plenty to relive in the Bible. You can be with Hannah at the holy shrine as she weeps before God because she is childless and her rival mocks her. Then you can be with Hannah as she consecrates little Samuel at the shrine, not knowing that he would be the real ruler of Israel for the rest of his life. You can be at Jesse's place as he presents each of his many sons to Samuel, and Samuel says, no this isn't the new king. Then Jesse says, I have one more son, but he's just a kid and he's out with the sheep. What a thrill to see Samuel anoint David. What were his older brothers thinking? They must have thought Samuel was off his rocker. No one at the time knew the symbolism, that Jesus would be the good Shepherd who carries us on his shoulders when we stray from safety. In other families, you can thrill as the angel of the Lord visits the parents of Samson to announce his special birth, or when the angel of the Lord visits hard-to-convince Gideon living under foreign occupation and makes him a warrior and leader. There's some pretty high drama when Gideon destroys the local idol, and the neighbors come to confront his father, and the father sends them away with their tails between their legs.

Many years later, when the chosen people have been sold out by their cowardly corrupt rulers, there is divine intervention in the most unexpected place. A local toughie named Jehu was at a drinking party with his friends when a disciple of the great prophet Elisha arrives on a mission. He takes Jehu

in the back room, pours oil on his head, and tells him he's the king of Israel, and slips out the back. When his pals ask him what that was all about, Jehu is bashful and says, "Oh you know how those old guys talk." When they pry the truth out of him, everyone becomes solemn, and his friends all throw their cloaks on the ground as a sign of his new royal status. He swiftly moves into action, wiping out the cult of Baal and the house of Ahab from God's land, and triggering the shameful death of Jezebel foretold by Elisha.

I never get tired of reading the very human stories in the Bible, seeing God preparing my salvation and yours in the lives of these ordinary people. However, if you prefer to read something grander, you can relive the experience of the prophet Isaiah in the temple. Feel

		
EWE	BREAD	GARMENT
		
GRAIN	METAL	TEN
		
WOOL	OIL	SIXTY

*Clay tokens used by accountants in ancient Mesopotamia. Writing was invented by accountants 5000 years ago.*

the ground shake! Hear the thunder! See the clouds of smoke! See the six winged seraphim, the flaming angels, circling the altar singing Holy Holy Holy is the Lord of the Armies! Feel the dread of Isaiah as he realizes his unworthiness to be present at this scene. "Woe is me! I am lost!" he cries with his voice shaking. Then an angel flies over with a burning coal and touches the mouth of Isaiah. "Behold this has touched your lips and cleansed you of your iniquity and taken away your guilt." These are the words the priest says after drinking from the chalice, and after giving the precious blood to the deacon. The church fathers say that the burning coal was the prefiguring of the Holy Eucharist. How sad to think of all the people in our country who have abandoned their ancient faith, are cut off from the apostolic succession and

priesthood, and no longer can eat the  
flesh of Jesus and drink his blood.

After the grandeur of Isaiah, you can weep for Jerusalem with the sad prophet Jeremiah. He spent his life warning his countrymen, and no one ever listened to him. He is so badly treated for doing his duty that at one point he makes the passionate speech, "You duped me Oh Lord, and I allowed



### Icon of the Prophet Jeremiah

myself to be duped by you!...Cursed be the day I was born. Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, a son is born to you.” Then he saw with his own eyes the destruction of his country and holy city of Jerusalem. “How lonely sits the city that was full of people. How like a widow has she become, she that was great among the nations. She weeps bitterly in the night, tears on her cheeks. Among all her lovers she has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her. They have become her enemies.”

After the intimate prophecies of Jeremiah, you can return to the cosmic grandeur of God's appearance to the prophet Ezekiel at the river Chebar in the Babylonian exile. Ezekiel's vision of the Cherubim is so spectacular that I won't even try to summarize it here. You must read it for yourself. You can then relive the "night visions" of the prophet Daniel as he sees one "like a Son of Man" being presented to God the Father on his flaming throne, prefiguring when Jesus the Son of God takes on flesh as the Son of Man or Son of Adam.

In the Song of Songs, there is a passage, “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is beautiful.” Of course, the book is a love poem between God and your soul. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

# BISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL 2019

## Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

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preached on this short poem enough to fill four volumes. He says that the wall described as a cliff is the Church, the body of Christ. Our soul, the dove flies away into the crannies in the cliff when we pray or contemplate the holy things. He says the wall is a soft wall, because it is made of the members of the Church, not from stones, although the rock is Jesus Christ. As we fly like a dove into the crannies in the cliff, we can enjoy the company of all the saints throughout salvation history, making crannies for ourselves in the welcoming company of the saints. As he says, now we visit the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now we are with King David singing the psalms with his harp. Now we are with the martyrs both Old Testament and New Testament. Now we are in the company of the prophets. Now we are with Saint. Paul writing his letters in prison. All of these are to prepare us to approach the holy cross, to be at the feet of Jesus as he sheds his blood for our eternal life. Saint Bernard says, “Happy the mind which frequently works at hollowing a place for itself in this wall; but happier still the one which does so in the rock! For it is all right to hollow even in the rock.” Remember, the rock is Jesus Christ.

Farther, Saint Bernard says, “Scrutinizing God’s majesty is then a thing to fear; but scrutinizing his will is as safe as it is dutiful. Why should I not tirelessly concentrate on searching into the mystery of his glorious will, which I know I must obey in all things? Sweet is the glory that has no source.” Saint Bernard tells us a little about God’s will, about what God asks of us: “The heart of the bridegroom is the Father’s heart. And how describe this? Christ said, be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful. This is the form he desires to see when he says to the Church, let me see your face, the form of love and tenderness.”

We are in the time of year preparing for the coming of the Lord in his little cave in Bethlehem. The time of year when we remember that the Lord of the heavens, the God who made the heavens, and is surrounded by the Seraphim, that he lowered the heavens and took on the humble form of a baby so that we could approach him without fear. Our Church encourages us to spend six weeks preparing for this event. The fast is not onerous, but it reminds us a little bit each week that our time belongs to God, and He is fast approaching.

I ask you all to spend the time before Christmas like the dove in the cliff. Open up your Bibles, and spend some time visiting other times and places. Relive the stories of the men and women of faith before us. Experience the majesty of God’s revelation on Mount Sinai and in the Temple and by the River Chebar. Feel in your gut the prayer of Hannah as she begs for a child. Walk in the Garden of Eden with your God in the cool of the evening. Be admitted to the throne room of Pharaoh with Moses and Aaron. Weep with Jeremiah, and dance with King David before the Ark. Listen as the prophet Nathan tells David, “your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.” Read for yourself the prophecies of the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of David, Jesus the Christ.

If you spend your time reading worldly “news”, which is really fabricated to destroy your soul, it will seem that the world gets worse every year. But every year, Christmas comes anyway. Every year, we remember that things were much worse in times past, but God sent his Son into that evil world to bring light, and mercy, and compassion, and life beyond the grave. Please

spend your time before Christmas preparing your heart to receive the birth of the Christ!

The Song of Songs begins with the astonishingly intimate verse, “Oh that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth!” That’s quite a prayer for Old Testament times. Saint Bernard spends his first several sermons on just that opening kiss. But he says the first kiss we give to God in our fallen state must be on his feet. When the Son of God took on flesh, he also took on tiny feet. And Saint Bernard says in the sixth sermon, “It is on these feet that, in a spiritual, invisible manner, he still goes about doing good and curing all who have fallen into the power of the devil. With these very feet he finds his way into the souls of his lovers, tirelessly enlightening and searching the hearts and loins of the faithful. ... Happy the man then in whose soul the Lord Jesus once sets these feet of his.”

+Kurt Burnette



# FROM THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

## TO BE ORDAINED TO THE ORDER OF DEACON

**Subdeacon John Reed**  
Saturday, December 14, 2019, 10:00 AM  
Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church  
Roswell, Georgia

**Subdeacon Richard Terza**  
Saturday, December 21, 2019, 10:00 AM  
Saint. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church  
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

**Subdeacon Richard Ballard**  
Saturday, January 18, 2020, 10:00 AM  
Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church  
Orlando, Florida

**Subdeacon Robert Knapp**  
Saturday, January 25, 2020, 10:00 AM  
Resurrection of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church  
Smithtown, New York

**Subdeacon John Harden**  
Saturday, February 1, 2020, 10:00 AM  
Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church  
Mont Clare, Pennsylvania



## 2019 BISHOP’S APPEAL

**Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic**  
445 Lackawanna Avenue Woodland Park, NJ 07424

PLEDGE NOW THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2019

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Most Reverend Bishop Kurt Burnette  
President and Publisher  
Father James Badeaux, Editor  
Father Ronald Hatton, Associate Editor  
Father Lewis Rabayda, Layout Editor

Mrs. Diane Rabiej, Copy Editor  
Mrs. Maureen French, Circulation Editor  
(mfrench@eparchyofpassaic.com)

E-Mail us at:  
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Eparchial Website:  
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# PEOPLE YOU KNOW AROUND THE EPARCHY

## IN HARRISBURG... SAINT ANN HELPING HANDS

Helping Hands is a Saint Ann Byzantine Catholic Church parish volunteer organization that for many years has helped the needy in Harrisburg, central Pennsylvania, and Ukraine. Motivated by God's desire that we help the needy, as repeatedly proclaimed in the gospel, Helping Hands supports the efforts of a number of charity organizations with funds, food and clothing generated from special projects and individual donations, as well as direct volunteer service with the organizations themselves. They also support efforts by the Sisters of the Order of Saint Basil the Great to help provide for the needs of orphans in Ukraine. Helping Hands volunteers frequently help local charity organizations prepare and serve meals. They also visit parish shut-ins in their homes and nursing homes delivering baskets of goods that they need. Father Ed Higgins is the administrator of Saint Ann Parish and Father Vladislav Budash is the parochial vicar.



Ronald McDonald House: Helping Hands volunteers after preparing dinner.



Father Vladislav Budash: Helping prepare dinner at Ronald MacDonald House.



Helping Hands with Ukrainian Orphans: Helping Hands volunteer Christine Smith distributing food and personal sanitary items to Ukrainian orphans.



Helping at Saint Francis Soup Kitchen: Helping Hands volunteers after serving lunch at Saint Francis Soup Kitchen.

## BISHOP KURT ATTENDS THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF THE UKRAINIAN SEMINARY IN STAMFORD, CT



Left to Right: Father Roman Malyarchuk, a former rector of Saint Basil Seminary; Bishop Kurt; Bishop Paul, Bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Stamford; and Father Mykola Popovici

## SEMINARY LIBRARY SEEKS CANTOR PAPERS

The library of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary in Pittsburgh is assembling a collection of music and papers from our cantors and choir directors since the founding of our church in the United States. These collections are being indexed and preserved so that they can be used for research by scholars, and for fostering our church singing in the future as well. If your parish or a retired cantor you know has music, memorabilia, or recordings which might have a place in this collection, please contact Deacon Jeffrey Mierzejewski (412-735-1676, mci@archpitt.org) or library director Sandra Collins (412-321-8383, scollins@bcs.edu). We also invite donations of materials from family and friends of our cantors who have reposed; this collection will serve as a permanent memorial to their labors.



Deacon Jeffrey Mierzejewski



# MARY, HELPER OF MOTHERS

At the initiative of Bishop Kurt, a miraculous Marian icon will make a tour of all the Byzantine Catholic parishes in the state of New Jersey throughout 2020.

The icon, known as the *Albazinskaya* from its place of origin on the borderlands between Russia and China, is also called “Mary, Helper of Mothers.” It depicts a calm and prayerful Virgin Mother looking directly at the faithful. She displays for us an image of her Son, newly born or perhaps as yet unborn, resting over her torso.

The original icon is credited with defending the Russian Orthodox outpost against Chinese invaders on several occasions from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 20th century. It is also especially beloved by women who struggle with infertility or difficult pregnancies. A number of miraculous births have been attributed to this icon in the Byzantine Catholic community of Albuquerque, New Mexico, where a copy has been venerated for twenty years.

A large, hand painted icon of the Virgin, Helper of Mothers, will be present in each Byzantine Catholic parish in New Jersey for two weeks or more. Bishop Kurt will personally preside over a devotional service in each parish. There will be opportunities for the faithful to venerate the icon, to engage in personal prayer, and to take home holy cards depicting the Virgin Helper of Mothers.

The *Albazinskaya* icon celebrates how God became Man, and a Virgin became His Mother. It celebrates the mysteries of conception and birth by which God has shared His creative power with married couples. It reminds us that every human life has its origin directly from God, and it offers hope to the despondent and the oppressed.

The Byzantine Catholic parishes of New Jersey welcome our Catholic and Orthodox neighbors, as well as all Christians who honor the Lord’s Mother, to join in the worship service of Psalms and Scriptural readings that will be offered in each parish.

Mary, Helper of Mothers will visit the following parishes:

- Cathedral of Saint Michael, Passaic: January 23-February 6
- Catholic Chapel, Fort Dix: February 6-February 20
- Saint Mary of the Assumption, Trenton: February 20-March 12
- Saint Nicholas, Roebling: March 12-19
- Saint Mary, Hillsborough: March 19-April 23
- Saint Nicholas, Dunellen: April 23-May 7
- Saint Joseph, New Brunswick: May 7-May 21
- Saints Peter and Paul, Somerset: May 21-June 4
- Nativity of our Lord, East Brunswick: June 4-June 18
- Saint Michael, Perth Amboy: June 18-July 2
- Saint Nicholas, Perth Amboy: July 2-July 16
- Saint George, Linden: July 16-July 30
- Saint Elias, Carteret: July 30-August 13



- Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Toms River: August 13-August 27
- Saint Mary, Jersey City: August 27-September 10
- Saint John the Baptist, Bayonne: September 10-September 24
- Saint Thomas the Apostle, Rahway: September 24-October 8
- Holy Spirit, Mahwah: October 8-October 22
- Saint Nicholas, White Plains NY: October 22-November 5
- Saint George, Newark: November 5-November 19
- Saint Michael Chapel, Woodland Park: November 14-December 3

More specific information about service times can be obtained from the individual parishes.



## OPENNESS TO GOD’S WILL AT COME AND SEE 2019

By Benjamin Cafeo, Saint Mary Church, Windber, PA

From November 1st to 3rd, 2019, 16 men came from all over the United States to visit the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Saints. Cyril and Methodius in Pittsburgh for a discernment retreat accurately titled “Come and See.” The idea behind the weekend was to help retreatants prayerfully discern God’s calling by living with the seminarians and getting a taste of the experience of seminary life. Retreatants came from the four Ruthenian eparchies (Pittsburgh, Passaic, Parma, and Phoenix) and the Melkite Eparchy of Newton.

I was one of the men to attend this great weekend of prayer and fraternity. Prayer formed the structure of the retreat with beautiful liturgical services, including Vespers, Compline, Festal Matins, Divine Liturgies, and 9th Hour, led by Fathers Will Rupp, Robert Pipta, and Joel Barstad. There were also short classes and talks led by various instruc-



Preparing to hear the Gospel proclamation at Divine Liturgy.

tors who teach at the seminary, by spiritual directors of seminarians, and by the seminarians themselves.

Fraternity was also a significant part of the weekend. The seminarians were



Seminarian Riley Winstead delivers a witness talk on discernment and internal struggle.

each assigned retreatants in order to mentor them. This provided for some very good spiritual conversations on discernment and life in general. Very enjoyable was an ice cream social where we and the seminarians were able to talk, play games, and have genuine human interaction, which is something we do not get a lot of in today’s tech world. I particularly appreciated a long conversation with the seminary’s head cantor, where we talked about Byzantine musical melodies for almost an hour.

One of the rules for the weekend was “phones-off” which strongly encouraged us to interact with each other and be able to focus on God during times of silence.

This weekend was a powerful one in my life. Discerning God’s will is important for me; I have been praying in front of my icon corner at home and at the Divine Liturgy asking for a clearer understanding of His will for me for quite some time, and attending this weekend was a significant part of my continuing discernment. With the meditative prayer, disconnection from the world, and the fraternity of men in discernment and formation, it really helped all of us to focus on God’s plan and hear Him more clearly. I do not yet know fully if God is calling me to be a priest, but this weekend was a very good aid in teaching me how to listen more diligently and peacefully for the voice of His call.



Seminarians respond to a question during the panel discussion.







# EASTERN CATHOLICS OF THE NILE

by Father Tyler Strand, Administrator,  
Holy Resurrection Byzantine Catholic Church, Smithtown, NY

EASTERN CATHOLICS OF THE NILE

BY FATHER TYLER STRAND, ADMINISTRATOR, HOLY RESURRECTION BYZANTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH, SMITHTOWN, NY

I WAS RECENTLY THE GUEST OF THE COPTIC CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF ASYUT, EGYPT, AND THE FRANCISCAN COMMUNITY IN MOQATTAM, CAIRO, EGYPT, FOR A TEN-DAY EXPERIENCE OF THE LIFE OF OUR CATHOLIC BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO FORM ONE OF THE OLDEST AND LARG-

EST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN THE NEAR EAST. IT WAS AN EYE AND MIND-OPENING EXPERIENCE.

STATISTICS ON THE STRENGTH OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN EGYPT ARE NOTORIOUSLY UNDEPENDABLE DUE TO GOVERNMENT SENSITIVITY ABOUT GIVING CHRISTIANS TOO MUCH REPRESENTATION. BETWEEN



Coptic Catholic Cathedral in Asyut

Left: Apse of the Coptic Museum in Cairo

OFTEN AIDED BY OVERSEAS CHURCH

TEN AND FIFTEEN PER CENT OF THE ORGANIZATIONS. CATHOLIC RELI-

TOTAL POPULATION IS A GOOD GUESS, GIOUS ORDERS, PARTICULARLY THE

WITH MORE THAN NINETY PERCENT FRANCISCANS, ARE ALSO ACTIVE,

OF THAT BEING THE MAJORITY OR-

THODOX COPTIC CHURCH. COPTIC MONASTIC PRESENCE OF THE FAMOUS

CATHOLIC NUMBERS ARE COMPARA- MONASTERIES WHICH ARE THE BACK-

TIVELY SMALL, BUT SUFFICIENT TO BONE OF COPTIC ORTHODOX SPIRITU-

MERIT MULTIPLE DIOCESES AND AN ALITY.



Father Tyler Strand with the Franciscan Nuns

IMPRESSIVE COMMUNITY OUTREACH,

# EASTERN CATHOLIC RADIO

by Father Francis Rella

Eastern Catholic Radio is celebrating Eastern Christianity and all things Catholic!

Eastern Catholic Radio is a 24/7 internet radio station broadcast through Live365.com. Our programming consists of continuous Eastern Christian Church music and selections from Western Christianity. We also broadcast daily prayers, church services, sermons, podcasts, inspirational talk radio, and lectures. Lecture series produced by OLTV and Eastern Christian Publications are heard daily as well as “Light of the East,” featuring Father Thomas Loya.

Eastern Catholic Radio is a production of Eastern Catholic Broadcasting, a media Apostolate affiliated with the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic. With the permission of Bishop Kurt Burnette, the apostolate was founded in 2014 at Saint Joseph Byzantine Catholic Church in New Brunswick, NJ, and Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church in Somerset, NJ, by Father Francis Rella. The ministry began as weekly broadcasts of the Sunday Divine Liturgy and the production of multiple videos for the Eparchy, including a full-length documentary entitled “A Time for Living.” The media ministry con-



EASTERN CATHOLIC RADIO

Celebrating Eastern Christianity and all things Catholic

tinues with funding from Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Toms River, NJ, and private donations. For the past 10 months, Eastern Catholic Radio has beta-tested the station, without any formal advertising and publicity. So far, over 250,000 listeners have tuned in to Eastern Catholic Radio from around the world.

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SAVE THE DATE

# Crowned in Love

— A Byzantine Pre-Cana Program —

Sponsored by the Syncellate for the State of New Jersey

Saturday, February 8, 2020. 9am to 4pm.

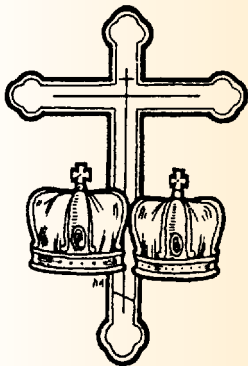
Saint Michael Chapel, 415 Lackawanna Avenue, Woodland Park, NJ.

The facility is entirely handicapped-accessible.

You bring the gifts that Jesus Christ will transform to make your relationship a sacrament where He Himself is present. Discover how the “ordinary” ways you share your life as a couple and a family can participate in this mystery. A hot luncheon will be served. There will be time for individual counseling and the Sacrament of Repentance. Couples planning to marry before spring 2021 are urged to attend.

For more information, contact your pastor or call Father Jack Custer at 973-777-2553.

SATURDAY, FEB 8  
9AM – 4PM



Deacon Thomas Shubeck, PhD, a father of three with Caroline, his wife of 25 years, serves at Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish in Rahway, NJ, and at Seton Hall University. Much of his 30 years as a licensed psychologist has been spent providing therapy services to married couples and families.

presenters



Ann Koshute, MTS, earned a Master's degree at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family at the Catholic University of America. She speaks and writes on marriage and family issues, has served in the Family Life ministries of several dioceses, and teaches theology at Saint Joseph's College of Maine. She and her husband, Keith, have been married for 7 years.

Michael and Lisann Castagno have been married for 24 years and have three daughters. They have been involved in marriage preparation and youth ministry in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for many years, speaking especially about the beauty of God's design for marriage, by proclaiming the good news of Natural Family Planning.



Father Jack Custer has prepared over 100 couples for marriage in his 35 years of priesthood. He holds degrees in Scripture and Theology and currently serves as Rector of Saint Michael's Cathedral.



## 2020 Vigil For Life Events, Washington, DC

### Thursday, January 25, 2020

Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception,  
Washington, DC

5:30 - 7:30 PM Opening Mass - Great Upper Church  
Principal Celebrant & Homilist:  
Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann, Chairman,  
USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities

8:00 - 9:00 PM National Rosary for Life - Crypt Church  
(lower level)

9:30 - 10:30 PM Small Compline (Byzantine Rite)  
- Crypt Church Celebrant:  
Bishop Kurt Burnette, Homilist: TBD

Thursday evening schedule subject to change according to the Shrine organizers.

### Friday, January 26, 2020

Epiphany of Our Lord,  
3410 Woodburne Rd., Annandale, VA, 22003

10:00 AM Divine Liturgy - Celebrant: Bishop Kurt  
Burnette, Very Rev. John G. Basarab

The Friday Liturgy in Annandale will be followed by a light lunch in the parish center. Since the March starts at noon, it is better to park your car at Epiphany Church and be ferried to the Dunn Loring Metro Station OR park at Dunn Loring Metro Station on Gallows Rd. This is the easiest way to get to the March from Epiphany Parish.







# LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

## CHRISTMAS IS FOR CHILDREN—LIKE YOU

We've all heard it said that "Christmas is for children," likely because of the sort of *magical* environment created by twinkle lights, brightly decorated trees and, of course, the mysterious Santa Claus and his unique delivery system to bring all the presents on their lists. As adults we can easily become jaded about Christmas because of its commercialism, the emphasis on spending money and pushing through crowds at the mall – or taking up all the bandwidth trying to get the best Cyber-Monday deals online. The whole holiday season can become a big chore, one for which there is a tremendous (and far too early) run-up, and which ends quicker than the spent wrapping paper and last scoop of mashed potatoes can be cleared. It is too easy to say, "Christmas is for children" with resignation, sarcasm and fatigue. Too easy because it's so hard for us to yield to our own true status: first and foremost, *we are children too*.

Of course, we're each the child of *someone*. Regardless of our family background, for better or worse we all come from two parents. This is the obvious answer, allowing us to acknowledge the past event of being born and growing up, but it misses the larger point: that *we are from God*. Each one of us is *His child*, His son or daughter. This relationship precedes and informs all our other ones. As a child of God, I am called into a relationship with Him, which in turn calls me to regard everyone else (friend or foe, family or stranger) as God's son or daughter, too. God knew us first because He willed us from all eternity, and God Himself formed us (cf. Psalm 139). Through our Baptism and Chrismation, we were freed from the inevitable grip of sin and death, incorporated into God's family and empowered to live a life in service and witness to Him. Put into this context the truth of the saying, "Christmas is for children" should become real for us, and a *command* to us. Christmas *is* for me because the Son of God became a child to save *me*, a beloved child of the Father myself. If we adopt this approach toward Christmas and adjust how we prepare for and celebrate the season, we may become less jaded and more willing to embrace the childlike attitude that opens us to the wonder of the event of our salvation. In this, our much younger and smaller brothers and sisters can teach us adults a lot about authentic Christmas spirit.

Children approach the season with anticipation, wonder and a sense of mystery. These are qualities that dull or become lost when we grow up. They are essential not only to the season, but to the whole Christian life, and should be part of our daily pilgrimage toward eternity with God. The time leading up to Christmas – which we call Saint Philip's Fast – is all about *anticipation*. This

Fast (like the Lenten one) is a time for us to slow down, become quiet (as hard for us as for children), and look forward to the coming Feast with hope and in prayer and repentance. Our approach should be one of waiting for something that is both a surprise (that God would be so generous in His mercy despite my obstinate sinfulness) and exactly what we expect (since God proves His fidelity again and again). Living in anticipation, of Christmas and of eternity, helps us take each day on its own, teaching us not worry about what will come tomorrow or the next day, but to focus on who I am and what I am doing right now. Am I living this day in generosity and love, asking for God's mercy and showing His mercy to others? To live each day in anticipation we focus not on getting what we want but receiving what we most need. A child is not

mature enough to know that gifts are not demands to be fulfilled based on the list they provide. Yet we can learn something from the sense of expectation they feel that their desires should be fulfilled. We children of God must come to *expect* good things from God, but with the maturity (holiness) that allows us to receive with excitement His unique (and often unexpected) gifts.

The *wonder* of children is found in either rapt silence or incessant questioning. Our approach to Christmas – and the Christian life – would benefit from a sense of wonder that is confident in God's promise of salvation yet overwhelmed by a generosity that surpasses anything we can muster. In these noisy times when our technology keeps us occupied every minute, it is difficult to maintain silence, but it is essential

for us to immerse ourselves in the experience of wonder. In the quiet, God speaks to us; He is present with us and He calms our restless hearts. We should take some time every day – even if all we can find is ten minutes – to just be with Him, to receive from Him. Then we can bring Him all our questions, our "earthly cares," and our worries and needs.

Finally, we approach Christmas and our Christian pilgrimage aware of the *mystery* that surrounds us, and in which we are actively participating. When children see presents strewn under the tree on Christmas morning their sense of anticipation returns, wondering which of the items on their lists will be found once the wrapping is removed. While not fully developed or understood, the child also senses that



## The Seasons of Infertility

### A RETREAT FOR WOMEN

Presented by: The Springs in the Desert Ministry Team

**Saturday, December 7, 2019**  
**8:30am-5:30pm**

*Infertility affects every woman and marriage differently. While each of our stories is unique to us, there is a shared experience of loss, isolation, self-doubt, testing of faith, and pain in our marriages.*

*But God transforms our grief and loss into a fruitful expression of His love when we shoulder each other's burdens. Join us for a day of talks, personal prayer/reflection and community as we walk together through the seasons of infertility.*

Please look for more details at <https://springsinthedesert.org/the-seasons-of-infertility>



*Springs in the Desert is a Catholic ministry devoted to helping women and couples struggling with infertility to process and move beyond their grief to find the fruitfulness God has planned for their marriage. We hope our Springs in the Desert community can provide refreshment for your soul as you find others who share in your same suffering. Instead of suffering the additional pain of isolation, please know there is a place where others can identify with your struggle, providing solace and solidarity. You are not alone. You are not meant to bear this Cross on your own. Learn more at [www.springsinthedesert.org](http://www.springsinthedesert.org)*

*Mother Boniface Spirituality Center welcomes groups and individuals of all faiths to our spacious and fully equipped facility and grounds located in Northeast Philadelphia. We offer a variety of retreats, speakers and programming in addition to hosting groups for retreats, meetings, and times of renewal. Learn more at [WWW.MSBT.ORG/MBSC](http://WWW.MSBT.ORG/MBSC)*



**"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." - Isaiah 43:18-19**



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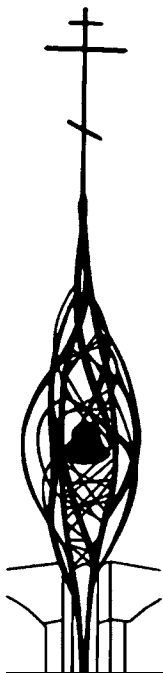
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Please return registration with \$30.00 registration fee to Mother Boniface Spirituality Center. Checks payable to MSBT. If you have any questions, please contact us at [MBCRetreat@msbt.org](mailto:MBCRetreat@msbt.org) or 267-350-1831.



the gifts are something *miraculously* given. Whether from the collaboration of Santa and his elves, or found on sale by mom and dad, it is the revelation of a mysterious generosity that overwhelms and excites them. We too should have this excitement at the mystery of God’s love and His plan of salvation. Whether we approach the tetrapod to venerate the Nativity icon, or the chalice to receive our Savior in the flesh, the way we think, the way we work and love and live our lives should be changed – *converted* – because we have willingly and wholeheartedly embraced the mystery. What a difference it would make for us, and for the world, if we approached our Lord and God, and each other, with joy-filled excitement, exclaiming, “What? All of this, all of these precious gifts for me?!”

Christmas *is* for children because through the birth of a Child the greatest gift imaginable was given to each one of us: the possibility to forever live in the house of the Lord as His sons and daughters. Let us receive Him, and each other, in gratitude and love. **ECL**



# Visiting New York City? Come Worship With Us!

Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church  
Father Edward G. Cimbala, D.Min.—Pastor

246 East 15th Street, Manhattan, New York  
212-677-0516

**Sunday Divine Liturgy**  
**10:00 AM**  
**6:00 PM**



## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Father Jack Custer, S.S.L., S.T.D.

### O Kto? Kto? Who is Jesus’ Disciple?

The series of Sunday Gospels we hear this time of year couldn’t be more at odds with the American “holiday season” that seems to run non-stop from Hallowe’en to New Year’s Day: the rich man who feasts while Lazarus starves at his gate (Luke 16:19-31), the rich man who can’t store all his grain but never considers sharing it (Luke 12:16-21), the rich young man who goes away sad when he hears Jesus’ invitation to sell everything, give to the poor, and follow Him (Luke 18:18-27), and finally the ingrates who are too busy with their own possessions and relationships to accept the invitation to the wedding banquet (Luke 14:16-24). While so many voices all around us are encouraging self-indulgence, the Lord’s voice is preaching a very different message.

We often sing the Beatitudes as recorded by Saint Matthew (5:3-12). On the feast of Saint Nicholas we hear a different version, pronounced by Jesus not on a mountain but on a level plain and to a vast crowd, not just to His Apostles. Jesus says bluntly: “Blessed are you who are poor now, mourning now, persecuted because of your faith now”

(Luke 6:17-23). There are two different ways to hear these Beatitudes.

First, the Beatitudes say positively what Jesus said negatively when He remarked, “How hard it will be for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven!” (Luke 18:24-25). The poor, the hungry, the mourners, and the persecuted are “blessed” precisely because material goods, superficial pleasures, and complacency are less likely to distract them from the Kingdom of God. They are more likely to place their faith and hope in God, and they may teach the more comfortable among us that relying on anyone or anything else is ultimately futile and disappointing.

But how are the poor, the hungry, the mourners, and the persecuted supposed to experience that blessedness that Jesus says is theirs? Is there no consolation before the “pie in the sky when you die” as the mockers of Christianity like to call it? Saint Luke describes how the crowds swarmed Jesus, seeking healing and consolation from Him and confident that He could provide it (Luke 6:17-19). His word and His touch was enough to cure them all. But how can people be touched by Christ

now that He has ascended bodily into heaven? In the sacraments, first and foremost. But what about the six days and twenty-three hours we spend each week outside the Liturgy?

Saint Paul reminds us repeatedly that we, the baptized members of the Church, are the body of Christ here on earth (1 Corinthians 12:27) and “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20). If Jesus’ Good News is going to be heard, it is because we will proclaim it. If Jesus’ healing touch is going to be felt, it is because we will minister it. We possess Christ’s living voice in the Gospels; we enjoy His real presence in the sacraments.

This is the lesson Saint Nicholas taught by his own life, not only teaching and preaching the Gospel, but also being good news for those in need. And so, Saint Nicholas shows us another way to understand Jesus’ black-and-white Beatitudes. It is our job, the Church’s job, to be that source of blessing for the needy whom Jesus proclaimed to be blessed.

There is an interesting detail in Saint Luke’s account of the Beatitudes. Je-

sus came down the mountain to a level plain waded into that chaotic crowd of needy people seeking to touch Him and be healed. In the midst of that crowd, “Jesus lifted up His eyes toward His disciples” (Luke 6:20) and proclaimed the Beatitudes.

In that crush of bodies, how could Jesus see and recognize His own disciples? Jesus’ true disciples, then and now, are those who prize the eternal Kingdom more than immediate gratification. Jesus disciples, then and now, are those who use the gifts God has given them to be a blessing to others. Is there a better example than Saint Nicholas? **ECL**



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# SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Father Ronald Hatton



## DOING THE FAST

Our penitential seasons are very important times of preparations for major feasts. In addition to The Great Fast before Pascha, there is the 40-day period before the Nativity–Advent or Saint Philip’s Fast. We have as well the variable period between All Saints Sunday and the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, and the 14-day period before the Feast of the Dormition. These periods are times of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving and should be taken seriously by all the faithful.

Questions keep coming up on how to fast especially, but on all three of these disciplines, so I thought it might be a good idea if I would pass along some thoughts on how to keep these aspects of the penitential seasons.

**Fasting:** Traditionally, fasting is seen as abstinence from meat. During the Great Fast, it can include abstinence from all meat and dairy products, including eggs, effectively reducing the one fasting to only eating vegetables. Nowadays, many people are vegetarians or even vegans, and so abstaining from meat is irrelevant. We realize that fasting from food is a way of placing the “will” of our bodies, and stomachs in particular, under the control of our mind, our will. We quickly find out that we are slaves to our appetites and how difficult it is to tell our stomachs “no.” The extension of this is that we are teaching ourselves how enslaved we are to sin, and our need to continually submit our sinful nature to the discipline of surrendering ourselves to Christ. Of course, it is silly to say, “I will fast from sin for this set time,” since we are to ALWAYS refrain from sin. But we know our bodies, our minds and our appetites well enough to know how we should fast during penitential seasons. We can limit ourselves to one meal a day on certain days. Many of us, because of medical necessities, cannot limit the number of meals or even what food we eat, and it is foolish to submit ourselves to a fast that

would harm us physically. But we can find other ways to abstain from the things that control us, whether it is the amount of time we watch television or other entertainment pursuits. Above all, we can *fast from ourselves*, our self-seeking, our self-satisfaction. “Jesus said to all, “Anyone who desires to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23). The holy Apostle Paul tells us, “Do nothing through rivalry or conceit, but in humility; consider others better than yourselves. Do not just look after you own selfish interests but each one of you should consider the interests of others.” (Phil. 2:3-4). With this in mind, fasting can mean putting others before yourself!

**Prayer:** During The Great Fast and Saint Philip’s Fast, we are offered other times at church to offer prayers and worship to God. This can be the Pre-sanctified Liturgy, Matins, Vespers, Akathists and Molebens. It also includes Holy Day Liturgies. These times of corporate prayer are important, as the Body of Christ as manifest in the parish joins voices in praising God and his saints, corporate penitence, and so on. But we should also bolster up our private prayer life during these seasons. Again, turning away from ourselves and toward others, a prayer discipline can be to offer daily prayers for someone with whom our fellowship has been broken—those we cannot bring ourselves to forgive or those we have wronged and find it so difficult to forgive. We can pray daily for shut-ins, all the sick and suffering of our parish.

**Almsgiving:** Almsgiving has traditionally been seen as giving money to someone or some organization in need of what we can give. This is a laudable practice and is encouraged. At the same time, I would offer another avenue: almsgiving can be a giving of *yourself*. With so many lonely and hurting people around us, we need to give ourselves to those in this kind of need. In this giving, just as with fasting, we

put the needs of others before ourselves. It could be a friend, a co-worker, a family member—so many people who need people in their lives. At the same time, it is not something that we can do superficially: people know when we are sincere and when we are not. The only way we can truly give ourselves to others is to pray that the love of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit will take us over and give that love to those who need it.

All three of these require hard work. True fasting is not easy; the extra prayer means taking a larger portion of our time from things we want to do and give that time to God; almsgiving means giving money to others that we would prefer to give to ourselves. Even more so, giving of *ourselves* to others requires a level of commitment that makes many of us feel uncomfortable. It is difficult to love someone with whom we don’t get along but need us all the same. Odd to say, but in all three of these, the “pain” we feel is more apt to be uncomfortableness with putting our own needs aside, whether that be the desire for what we have “given up,” or the time we feel can be spent doing “better things,” or the willingness to open ourselves to the needs of others. But, we don’t overcome our weaknesses by giving in to ourselves. We are spiritual athletes, not spiritual couch-potatoes. Just like other athletes only condition their bodies by the rigors of exercise, so too we only condition our spirituality and our walk with God by the rigors of *spiritual* exercise.

ECL

## God With Us ✠ ONLINE ✠

GOD WITH US ONLINE is an outreach project of the Eparchial Directors of Religious Education (ECED) and the Eastern Catholic Associates (ECA) and is dedicated to the catechetical renewal of Eastern Catholics in the United States in accord with the Church’s call for a new evangelization.



**THE GIFT OF GOD**  
Preparing for the Feast of the Nativity  
Rev. David Anderson  
Wednesday, December 16 @ 8:00 - 9:00 p.m. ET

As the Great Feast of the Nativity of the Lord draws closer, using the prayers of the Church in this holy season as our guide, we will ponder God’s gift of Himself to us, and consider how we can respond by making a gift of ourselves to Him.



**BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST**  
The Mystery of Initiation & Identity of the People of God  
Rev. Sebastian Carnazzo, PhD  
Wednesdays Jan 8, 15 and 22 @ 8:00 - 9:00 p.m. ET  
The celebration of baptism, chrismation and Eucharist together is not simply a practicality. These mysteries are closely connected and must be understood in light of each other. Using Scripture, Fr. Sebastian will show us how these mysteries are not just a symbol, but truly make us the People of God.

## 2019 ONLINE EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

All courses are offered as live webinars, free of charge. Register at [EasternCatholic.org/Events](http://EasternCatholic.org/Events).

## NEW BYZANTINE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY FORMING IN GREATER CHARLOTTE, NC, AREA

A Byzantine Catholic community is forming at Saint Philip Neri Church, 292 Munn Rd., Fort Mill, SC. Please join us as we grow our community and celebrate the Byzantine Divine Liturgy. Father Steven Galuschik of All Saints Byzantine Catholic Church in North Fort Myers, FL, along with bi-ritual Deacon Ron Volek are now offering weekly Divine Liturgy in the area. This community will serve the northern part of South Carolina as well as Charlotte, NC. Please share this information with your friends and family – especially those who have moved “down South.” We will be celebrating the Byzantine Divine Liturgy on Saturdays at 4:00 PM. If you would like to participate in anyway, or have questions please contact Ron Somich at 440.477.6389 or [ron.somich@gmail.com](mailto:ron.somich@gmail.com). Please check the website for news, upcoming gatherings, and service times at <https://carolinabyzantine.com/>

December:  
7, 14, 21, 28

### THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC subscribes to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Eparchy, within all its parishes, institutions and programs, is committed to assuring a safe environment in ministry for its children and young people that conforms to Charter requirements. For further information regarding the Eparchial Safe Environment Program please contact:

Father David J. Baratelli, Ed.S., M.Div. • Safe Environment Program Coordinator • 973.890.7777  
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# SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

Father Lewis Rabayda



## CHURCH: IT'S HEAVEN (HOME) FOR THE HOLIDAYS

There are many memories that come to mind when we think of ideal happy holiday moments. And these will be slightly different for each of us depending on how we grew up and where we grew up. Likewise, our current holiday plans probably contain many elements of what most people consider to be usual. But there is something fundamentally different between the Byzantine Catholic experience, and the situations and stories we encounter through advertising, tv shows, and movies that focus on this time of year.

The advertising we see and the television shows and movies that are now being played usually point toward family, friends, and romantic couples all resolving some complicated issue which will bring everyone together at that crucial moment of Christmas Eve. The climax of these stories usually culminates in someone arriving who was not expected, or for that dramatic situation to be resolved just in time for a meal, or in time to trim the Christmas tree, or to give out presents. And these conclusions makes sense, these are human stories of rebuilding broken relationships, recovering what was lost, and reuniting with those far away. These stories make

for good programming, but usually—save for some stories on the Hallmark Channel—they exclude the most unifying element of these holiday seasons: liturgical worship.

For any Catholic of any stripe, liturgical worship is our “holiday” climax. Yes, we gather together with those we love for a meal and conversation, but the holiday is not complete until we all go to church to celebrate the importance of the day. Because for us, a “holiday” is not just a vacation or time off so that we can relax and do whatever we want, no. For Byzantine Catholics a holiday is properly titled a “feastday,” a time to celebrate not only our human relationships, but more importantly, to celebrate our relationship with God, and to thank Him for His saving actions.

Feastdays always commemorate a crucial act in Salvation History. And Salvation History is properly understood as the moments that God—the one who lives outside of time—has interacted with His creation in a discernible moment *in* time. For example, The Nativity of John the Baptist is the moment that the herald of the Lord, the one who would prepare the Jew-

ish people to encounter their Messiah, was born. God also sent the Archangel Gabriel to announce the Good News to Mary that she would “conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel, which means, ‘God with us’” (Matt. 1:23). By entering into His creation in a moment of time, Jesus Christ, one of the Holy Trinity, lived in history so that He could bring about salvation, not only for the Jews, but for all of humanity who would believe in Him, and who would heed His Word. This feast, we call the Nativity of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, because for the first time, the One who spoke all that **is** into existence, enters into that same creation in a physical way, and is from that moment, inseparable from it. Christ is a part of history, He is a part of us, and He has reunited us with God through His flesh.

What is our true home? Paradise. The Kingdom of Heaven. By the sin of Adam and Eve we have been expelled from perfection and from perfect union with God and have then been subject to toil and hardship. But our relationship with God is the most important relationship that we can seek to mend and heal. When we have reunited with

those we love, and when we have resolved all of our conflicts, we can then lead each-other to the One who can complete us and heal all of our brokenness: Jesus Christ.

Our true home for the holidays is to attend the liturgical worship available to us. And not only to “show up,” but to fully participate. We can let go the sins and troubles of our lives that have built-up over the years by availing ourselves of a worthy confession. We can bring our family members to services such as the Emmanuel Moleben, Royal Hours, Christmas Eve Compline, Great Vespers, and ultimately, to the most important meal we could ever be invited to attend: the Divine Liturgy. Each Divine Liturgy is not just present in our time, but it joins in Salvation History with the Last Supper offered by Jesus Christ and by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Our true home, is to be in the embrace of Jesus Christ. We have been invited, but will we truly be present to reconcile with Him, and allow Him into our hearts so that we will never be without a home?

**ECL**



## SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian

## HUMILITY—THE KEY TO ANSWERED PRAYER

Humility is one of the most essential prerequisites for answered prayer. The Bible, the saints, and wise men assure us that if we can pray with humility, our prayer will pierce the heavens, and God will hear and answer.

King David tells us in Psalm 33[34] that “the LORD is near to the brokenhearted; He saves the contrite in spirit.” In Psalm 50[51], he prays, “the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” In II Chronicles the LORD promises King Solomon, “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (7:14).

In the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, the tax collector (the publican) went home justified because of his humble prayer, “O God, be merciful to me a sinner.” The prayer of the pharisee was simply an occasion for boasting and merited God’s wrath rather than His blessing. Saint James tells us that “God resists the proud but gives grace

to the humble” (Jas. 4:6). If we want God to answer our prayers, we must pray with humility.

Martyrius of Edessa writes, “Self-accusation before God is something that is very necessary for us; and humility of heart is extremely advantageous in our lives, above all at the time of prayer. For prayer requires great attention and needs a proper awareness, otherwise it will turn out to be unacceptable and rejected, and it will be turned back empty to our bosom.”

To Saint Catherine of Sienna, Our Lord said, “Know, My daughter that whosoever shall humbly persevere in asking graces of Me shall obtain all virtues.” “Never did I receive more favors from the Lord than when I humbled myself before His divine Majesty,” says Saint Teresa of Avila.

Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov writes, “the humbler our opinion of ourselves, the more swiftly our prayer rises to God. So soon as we lose humility, each and every ascetic effort is nullified. If pride is active in us, or fault-finding, or unfriendliness, the Lord stands remote from us.”

Seeing how necessary humility is in the spiritual life, and especially in the life of prayer, let us declare war on our own pride. The first step is to recognize that we are not humble. If we are easily insulted or angered, that is a sure sign that we are full of pride. If someone corrects us for something we did or said, and we feel that now they must be punished with the silent treatment or worse, then it is indisputable that we are proud. If we are shy, reserved, and self-conscious, once again, the problem is pride, for we care way too much what people think of us. If we boast and brag and strut our stuff, without a doubt, we are very proud. If we strive for positions of power and influence so that we may make our importance felt, we know we are headed for hell, for we are proud. When we pray, so full of pride, the heavens will be like brass (Deut. 28:23), impenetrable to our desperate pleas. Woe unto the proud.

Seeing how terribly proud we are, we need to cry out to God for humility. “O God, be merciful to me a sinner. Show me myself. Let me see my brokenness, my faults, my weakness. Make me like Jesus, so meek and humble of heart” (Mt. 11:29). Let us pray for holy humility.

Next, take advantage of every opportunity to grow in humility. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux says that “humiliation is the way to humility.” In other words, failures and mistakes will show us our frailty and lead to true humility. When we fall into some sin or fault, we should pray, “O Lord, this is what I will do if You leave me to myself. Without Your grace and constant support, I will always betray You.” If we make some big mistake or fail at some endeavor, let’s not get angry at ourselves but rather learn that we are not as perfect as we had assumed. If we find out that someone talks bad about us behind our back, instead of getting offended and hurt, let us say, “Thank goodness, they don’t know how wretched I really am.”

Let us make a sincere effort to grow in holy humility. Humility is the foundation for effective prayer and holy living. Holy Scripture, the lives and sayings of the saints, and the insights of holy people assure us that humility is the key to answered prayer. **ECL**





# SEMINARIAN REFLECTIONS

Subdeacon Timothy Fariss

## LOOKING MORE LIKE CHRISTMAS

If you’ve been listening to the radio odd are you have scrolled past a few Christmas songs well before Thanksgiving. As I was walking through department stores in October, I saw Christmas trees right next to ghosts and skeletons. It can be tough to enjoy a season when we are always looking for what is next. As many of us settle down for Thanksgiving dinner, many others are leaving their houses to find great Black Friday deals.

However I have also seen a counter cultural movement growing: Catholics dressing like saints for Hallowe’en rather than like ghouls. I saw an advertisement from an organization that revealed 12 businesses that refused to open for Black Friday so that their employees can enjoy Thanksgiving with their families. As for December, the Hallmark Channel may be in Christmas mode but we Byzantine Catholics are solemnly approaching the Nativity of Our Lord. The Phillip’s Fast, beginning on November 15, is less like Hallmark’s “25 days of Christmas” and more like our own personal following the Three wise men to an inn in Bethlehem.

I doubt the wise men were purposefully fasting like we are but their fast was to drop everything and follow a

star. (Mt2:2) By not feasting on the 25 days that the culture says is Christmas, we walk into the Nativity with the surprise and joy that with which the wise men greeted the newborn King. We can enjoy the 12 days of Christmas following December 25 to Theophany on January 6 or to the Meeting of our Lord on the 40th day after Christmas.

We have a rich tradition that our culture has done away with, like a Christmas Tree on December 26, to make way for the next holiday. We can retake our personal walk with the Magi by taking a breath... and taking in the season and all of its meaning, like the tradition of taking the Christmas tree down after the 12th day of Christmas, which according to the Roman Church is the celebration of the Epiphany, the arrival of the Magi.

One tradition to decorate a tree is with green and red apples, the apple from the Tree of Knowledge of course was the demise of Adam and Eve. However, Christ’s Nativity was the Triumph of this event, green apples began to represent “new life” and red for “Christ’s blood”. The bristles of the tree can also lead a meditation on Christ’s crown of thrones that hold up the ornaments. In my house, the children alternated

placing the angel on top of the tree. An angel spoke to Mary at the Conception and also to the shepherds in the field to honor the Nativity of Christ. Candy cane’s of course are shepherds staffs.

Thankfully, we no longer decorate our trees with candles. I feel like our switch to string lights, albeit infuriating to unravel every year, is a safer bet. As the nights have gotten longer over the past few months, at Christmas these little bulbs light up the night. My family would load up our minivan and stroll through the neighborhoods in awe of these little stars, similar to the one that the Magi followed.

On December 6, we remember Saint Nicholas, a great protector of our Church and a great gift giver. As the story goes, a father was not able to provide for his family including three daughters. As Nicholas was walking the streets, he dropped three bags of gold coins through the back window which landed into stockings. Nicholas protecting this family from starvation and worse. Today, our tradition of placing our shoes by the back door still find little gifts in our shoes the next morning. Saint Nicholas’ humble act of charity is a little different than Black Friday. This isn’t a dig at people who make their



ways through the aisles on Black Friday and that weekend, but in the process of walking through the crowds and flashing lights, we should stop, take a breath, and remember Saint Nicholas’ charity and the meaning for the season that is the Nativity, the birth of our Lord.

For unto us a Child is born and his name is Emmanuel, which means God with Us. **ECL**

## When traveling to the Mid-Atlantic, please visit our churches

<b>Maryland—</b> <b>Patronage of the Mother of God</b> 1265 Linden Avenue Baltimore, MD 21227 Phone 410-247-4936 Web <a href="http://www.patronagechurch.org">www.patronagechurch.org</a> Sunday Divine Liturgy 9:15 am	<b>Patronage at Hagerstown</b> <b>meeting at:</b> <b>Saint Ann Catholic Church</b> 1525 Oak Hill Avenue Hagerstown, MD 21742 Saturday Vigil Liturgy 6:45PM 2 per month Call Baltimore for schedule	<b>Epiphany Mission</b> 9301 Warfield Road Gaithersburg, MD Web <a href="http://www.eolmission.org">www.eolmission.org</a> Sunday Divine Liturgy at 10:00AM	<b>Ascension of our Lord</b> 114 Palace Lane Williamsburg, VA 23185 Phone 757-585-2878 (rectory) Web <a href="http://www.ascensionva.org">www.ascensionva.org</a> Sunday Divine Liturgy 11:00 am	Phone 919-239-4877 Web <a href="http://www.sscyrilmethodius.org">www.sscyrilmethodius.org</a> Sunday Divine Liturgy 10:00 am
<b>Patronage at Abingdon</b> <b>meeting at:</b> <b>Stone Chapel at Saint Francis de Sales Church</b> 1450 Abingdon Road Abingdon, MD 21009 Sunday Divine Liturgy 5:30PM	<b>Saint Gregory of Nyssa</b> 12420 Old Gunpowder Road Spur Beltsville, MD 20705 Phone 301-953-9323 Web <a href="http://www.stgregoryofnyssa.net">www.stgregoryofnyssa.net</a> Sunday Divine Liturgies Church Slavonic 8:00 am Sunday Matins 9:30 am English Liturgy 10:30 am	<b>Virginia—</b> <b>Epiphany of our Lord</b> 3410 Woodburn Road Annandale, VA 22003 Phone: 703-573-3986 Web <a href="http://www.eolbcc.org">www.eolbcc.org</a> Sunday Divine Liturgies 8:00 am & 10:30 am	<b>Our Lady of Perpetual Help</b> 216 Parliament Drive Virginia Beach, VA 23462 Phone 757-456-0809 Web <a href="http://www.olphvb.org">www.olphvb.org</a> Sunday Divine Liturgy 8:00 am	<b>District of Columbia—</b> <b>Byzantine Ruthenian Chapel</b> <b>Basilica of the National Shrine</b> 400 Michigan Avenue, NE Washington, DC 20017 Phone 202-526-8300 Web <a href="http://www.nationalshrine.org">www.nationalshrine.org</a> No regularly scheduled Sunday Liturgy. To reserve a date and time, priests must call the Liturgy Office and submit a current letter from their eparchy's Safe Environment Office.
			<b>North Carolina—</b> <b>Saints Cyril and Methodius</b> 2510 Piney Plains Road Cary, NC 27518	

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## UPCOMING EPARCHIAL AND PARISH EVENTS

### DECEMBER, 2019

- 6 Our Holy Father Nicholas of Myra  
*Solemn Holy Day • Chancery closed*
- 8 Maternity of the Holy Anna  
*Solemn Holy Day*
- 24 Vigil Eve of Christmas
- 25 The Nativity of Our Lord  
*Holy Day of Obligation*
- 26 Synaxis of the Virgin Theotokos
- 27 Holy Protomartyr Stephen
- 24-27 Christmas Holiday  
*Chancery closed*
- 31—January 1 New Year’s Holiday  
*Chancery closed • Happy New Year*

### JANUARY, 2020

- 1 Circumcision of Our Lord  
*Solemn Holy Day • Chancery closed*
- 6 Holy Theophany of Our Lord  
*Holy Day of Obligation • Chancery closed*
- 25 Vigil for Life—see ad on page 7  
*Washington, DC*
- 26 March for Life—see ad on page 7  
*Washington, DC*
- 30 Three Holy Hierarchs  
*Simple Holy Day*