

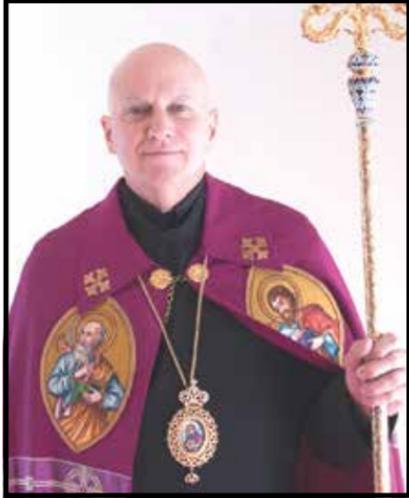


# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

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DECEMBER 2020



## O GREAT MYSTERY!

*Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt for the Nativity*



same word you would use to today if you asked someone to eat with you after a few French lessons. It was common in ancient times to wrap newborn babies in cloth, called swaddling cloth, but it would have been unusual to find one in a manger.

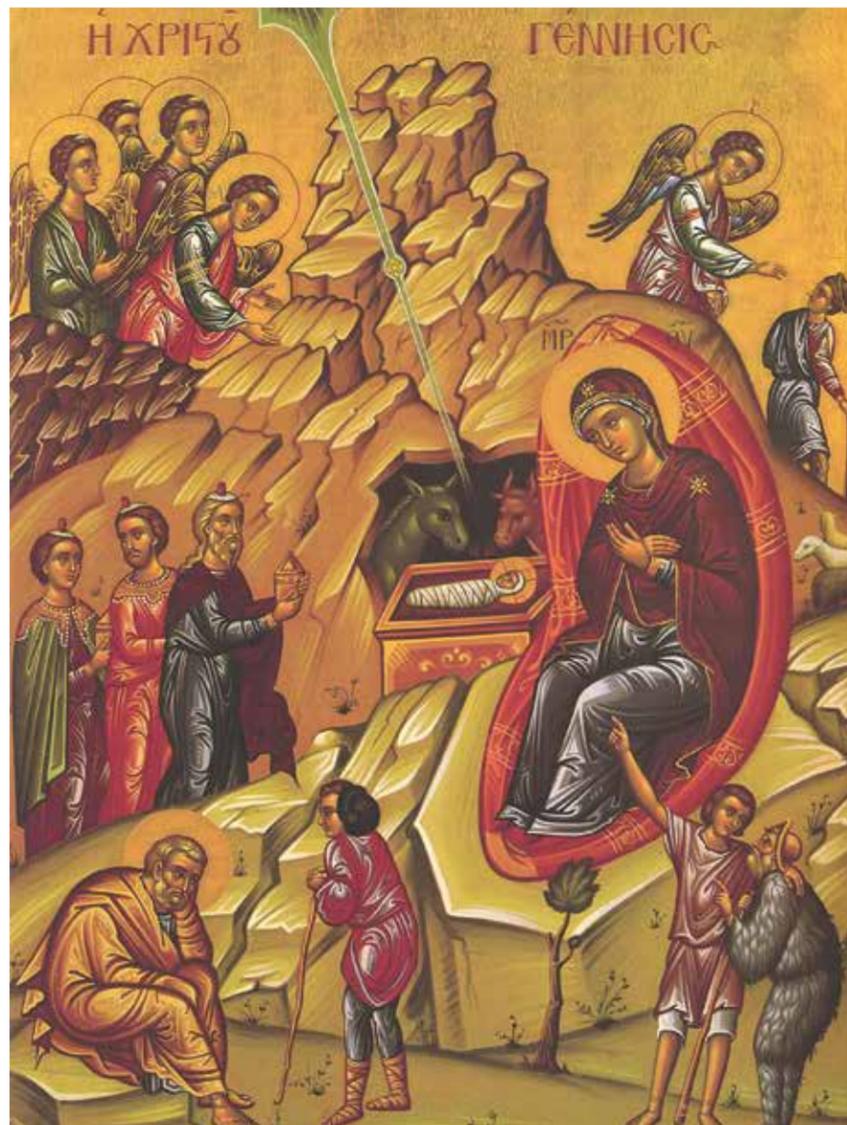
And so, all the mysteries of God's love for us is encapsulated in this one event. The God who made everything and has all the wealth in the world, is turned away from the inn. His mother gives birth among the animals and lays Him in a feeding trough. The king in Jerusalem is kept in the dark. The bankers, business owners, and scripture scholars miss the event. But an angel of God appears to shepherds out in the fields. I

He said, "I am the Good Shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me," it is certain that He was identifying Himself as the true Son of David for whom the cosmos was waiting. But no doubt, shepherds were not the financial movers and shakers of the day. So, the shepherds might not have been high on the social scale, but they had a special place in the heart of God. Out of all the people in the area, it was the shepherds who received the angelic message. And Saint Luke tells us, after the angel brought them the message, the sky was filled with an army of angels in the heavens saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will!" In the Old Testament, it is unusual to see more than

the prophet Elisha, the prophet allows his servant to see the army of angels on them, "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire." When Ezekiel has his vision of God, he sees Him with four cherubim, and Isaiah sees a number of Seraphim in the temple. Nevertheless, when angels come to bring a message, they usually come alone. If the shepherds saw a whole army of angels, this must be a very, very important message. Indeed, the shepherds say to one another, we must go see this thing that has been revealed to us. When they search where a manger might be found, Saint Luke tells us they find, "Mary and Joseph, with the baby lying in a manger." The humility of the birth must have seemed quite a contrast to the spectacular vision of an army of angels. Indeed, the shepherds told everyone about this remarkable and contradictory event, and it says, "everyone wondered." Saint Luke himself tells us that he carefully researched his sources. Could he have interviewed some of these people many years later? Perhaps even people who were children at the time and remembered the remarkable story of the shepherds?

Life is full of mysteries. Twenty-seven centuries ago, and seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah, a member of the royal family, prophesied in Jerusalem. From the very first chapter of his sublime prophecies, Isaiah describes one of the great mysteries: that God reveals Himself to the lowly, and the He humbles Himself out of love for us. Isaiah begins his book, the longest in the Bible, by saying "The ox knows its owner, the donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." What is it that Israel doesn't know? Isaiah tells us just before this verse, "Hear O heavens, and give ear, O earth! Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me." There are many names for the chosen people, but God uses the most familiar one here, Israel, the one who wrestles with God. As God says through Isaiah, how is it that an animal knows its master and where it will be fed, but we do not know the One who saves us and feeds us?

The ox and the ass who know their master standing by a manger — what do Christians hear when they hear these words? We hear Bethlehem! "And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room at the inn." Medieval Christians saw clear arc from God's complaint at the beginning of Isaiah — the ox and the ass know their master, but we idolaters do not — and the arc ends at the birth of Our Lord, where the animals stand by the manger, the bed of the Creator, and the angels tell the shepherds, "And this will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." By the way, in case you never thought about what it means, a "manger" is a feeding trough, it comes from the French word for "eat", the very



*Icon of The Nativity of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ*

can't tell you the social status of shepherds in Judea at the time, but I know that Aristotle considered it the lowest form of work. On the other hand, King David was a shepherd. When Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd,

one angel. Abraham saw three angels, but no one outranks Abraham in the Old Testament. Jacob had a vision of a heavenly ladder, with angels going up and down. When the King of Aram sends an expeditionary force to kidnap

If swaddling clothes were common on newborns, and they were until a few centuries ago, then what is the sign, as the angel called it? For the shepherds it would have been to see a newborn in a manger — a feeding trough. Finding a newborn in a feeding trough is especially shocking when the birth was just announced by a whole army of angels! But for a scripture scholar, there is more to it. The other place where swaddling clothes is mentioned is in the Wisdom of Solomon. King Solomon, in describing his search for wisdom, says that just because he is king, doesn't mean he started life differently: "I also am a mortal man, a descendant of the first one made from the earth, and my flesh was molded in the womb of a mother within ten months, compacted of blood and the seed of a man and the pleasure of sleep, and when I was born, I began to breath the common air, and fell upon the earth my kin, and my first sound was crying like everyone else, and I was nursed with care in swaddling clothes. For no king has had a different beginning of existence; there is for all mankind one entrance into life, and a common exit." So, the sign of the swaddling clothes is scripturally a reference to the birth of King Solomon, a birth that he himself insists is just like any other child. As an aside, it's worth noting that King Solomon's birth wasn't

*Continued on page 2*

## O GREAT MYSTERY!

Nativity Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt

Continued from page 1

exactly like Jesus'. King Solomon was born in the royal palace to the king's favorite, surrounded by every available security. Jesus was born with almost every inconvenience. And yet, despite its worldly lowliness, the birth of Jesus is announced by an army of angels that draw striking parallels to both King David and King Solomon.

People of every generation are attracted to the King and Son of God, who lowered the heavens, not just to become one of us, but to enter our world in the humblest of manners and to have His birth announced to the poor not the rich. Throughout the scriptures, God revels in this mystery. When Hannah gives birth to Samuel the kingmaker, she sings a lengthy poem including, "The Lord sends poverty and riches; He humbles and exalts; He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; He seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor." In speaking to judges in Psalm 82(81), God says, "How long will you judge unjustly and show par-

Most-High visits him, and does justice for the righteous, and executes judgment. And the Lord will not delay, neither will He be patient with them, till He crushes the loins of the unmerciful."

In the Middle Ages, an especially difficult time to be alive, people were especially entranced with the story of the animals who recognized the Messiah, when the religious scholars overlooked Him — not to mention the innkeeper. Paintings of the ox and the ass kneeling at the manger were popular art in the era. There were even local feasts called the Feast of Fools in which everyone changed social positions for a day. Being a bishop isn't very prestigious nowadays, but in Medieval Europe it was really something. During these celebrations, the people elected a "boy bishop," some child from the Cathedral. According to one liturgy, he took the bishop's place early in December during the singing of the Magnificat. When they service came to the words of Mary, "He has exalted the humbler, and the mighty he has cast down," the



Sydney Ann places the Baby Jesus in the Manger at Saint Nicholas Parish in Meriden, CT

tiality to the wicked? Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; uphold the rights of the afflicted and oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy. Save them from the hand of the wicked." In the Torah, God says, "Do not deny justice to the foreigner or the fatherless, and do not take a widow's cloak as security." In Psalm 10 it says, "You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; You encourage them, and You listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed."

In the Wisdom of Ben Sirach, there is an especially moving passage of God's care for the lowly. "Do not offer Him a bribe, for He will not accept it...for the Lord is the judge, and with Him is no partiality. He will not show partiality in the case of a poor man; and He will listen to the prayer of one who is wronged. He will not ignore the supplication of the fatherless, nor the widow when she pours out her story. Do not the tears of the widow run down her cheek as she cries out against him who has caused them to fall? ... The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, and He will not be consoled until it reaches the Lord. He will not desist until the

bishop would leave his throne and the child would take his place until the feast of the Holy Innocents. As the Feast of Fools became more raucous, something like Mardi Gras has in recent times, the authorities clamped down on it. But in recent times, some churches revived the boy-bishop tradition for old times' sake, and you will be gladdened to hear that in the Church of England they even chose a (teenage) girl-bishop for the first time in 2009 in Wellingborough. In other parts of Europe, there were customs that on the Feast of Saint Stephen, the masters of households would wait on their servants, serving them dinner and so on.

Ironically, the custom of the boy bishop was abolished in England by Henry VIII, resumed by Queen Mary, and then abolished again by Elizabeth I.

Sometime in the middle ages, a short but powerful hymn was composed called *O Great Mystery, O Magnum Mysterium*. The hymn captured the imagination of composers for a thousand years, even up till the modern era.

*O magnum mysterium,  
O great mystery*

*et admirabile sacramentum  
and miraculous sacrament*

*ut animalia viderent Dominum natum  
that the animals see the Lord born*

*iacentem in praesepe!  
lying in a manger!*

*Beata Virgo, cujus viscera  
Blessed Virgin, whose womb*

*meruerunt portare  
was worthy to carry*

*Dominum Iesum Christum.  
the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Alleluia!  
Alleluia!*

The hymn was written for Christmas matins (in the Latin rite obviously), but you are likely to hear it at many Christmas concerts. On the internet, you can hear the original Gregorian chant, and a great amount of music by composers over the centuries. Some of the settings are so popular that you will find many performances by choirs all over the world and even instrumental ensembles. Palestrina, De Victoria, Gabrieli, to name a few composers, and some sublime modern settings by Francis Poulenc and Morten Lauridsen.

In the case of Lauridsen, he told the *Wall Street Journal* that he was inspired to write his *O Magnum Mysterium* by a painting in a museum in Pasadena by the Baroque Spaniard De Zurbarán from 1633. The famous still life is a black background with lemons, oranges, and a rose. Lauridsen says, "the objects in this work are symbolic offerings to the Virgin Mary. Her love, purity, and chastity are signified by the rose and the cup of water. The lemons are an Easter fruit that, along with the oranges with blossoms, indicate renewed life. The table is a symbolic altar." From the Pacific Northwest, Lauridsen worked first as a firefighter for the forest service. As a composer, he hit a home run with his *O Magnum Mysterium* — one recording of it won a Grammy.

Another popular feast in the Middle Ages that was inspired by the animals of Christmas was the Feast of the Ass. It celebrated the donkey who carried the Mother of God into Egypt when an angel warned Joseph in a dream, "Get up! Take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to destroy Him." In some places, a donkey with a child and young lady processed into the church, and remained at the front through the sermon as an aid for the preacher. The Feast of the Ass was so popular in southern France that bishop composed a song for the feast day that spread around Europe. It is written in bad Latin, and translates:

*From the parts East the ass came, beautiful and strong, most apt for baggage.*

*It surpasses the mules and roebucks and camels.*

*From the hills of Samaria, and suckled in Ruben, it crosses the Jordan, to go up to Bethlehem.*

*While pulling a cart with many packages, his jaw powders hard foods.*

*With ears of grain, barley, thistle, and wheat, he separates the chaff on the threshing floor.*

*Now say Amen, O donkey, you are satisfied with grass.*

*Say Amen, and turn again from the old.*

*There was a chorus verse after each stanza: "Hail, Mr. Ass, hail!"*

I suppose it loses something in the translation. The song was so popular around Europe that it entered into the English tradition, and became a popular Christmas Carol, *The Friendly Beasts*.

*The Friendly Beasts* begins with the gentle verse:

*Jesus our brother, kind and good*

*Was humbly born in a stable rude*

*And the friendly beasts around him stood,*

*Jesus our brother, kind and good.*

It reminds me of an Icelandic hymn, "My sweet brother Jesus."

In the next five verses, the animals brag one at a time about what they did for Jesus.

The donkey carried them safely to Bethlehem. The cow gave up her manger. The sheep gave him wool for a warm blanket. The dove cooed from the rafters with this his friends to comfort him in the dark and let him sleep.

Oh, what a great mystery! The ox knows its master, and the donkey knows who feeds it, but idolaters don't recognize their creator. God turned everything on its head when He was born in a hidden way and revealed to the animals and the poor. When Jesus sent His newly appointed representatives out on their missions, they returned rejoicing that they had power over demons in the name of Jesus. Saint Luke tells us, "The seventy-two returned rejoicing and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name.' So he told them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.... Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.' Then Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I praise You, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what You were pleased to do.'"

+ Kurt Burnette

## MORAL GUIDANCE REGARDING VACCINES AND COVID-19

23 Nov 2020—Prepared by Father Joseph Koopman, Moral Theologian—Saint Mary Seminary

With the prospect of the FDA approving one (or more) COVID-19 vaccines within the next few weeks, many questions have been raised regarding the ethical status of these vaccines (particularly questioning whether embryonic stem cells or tissue from aborted fetuses were used in their creation, and whether Catholics can morally receive such vaccines). The following is a brief moral analysis to help provide you some guidance when these questions arise. *Be mindful that this analysis is dependent on current information, and therefore could change once more information is released.* It has only been within the last few days that the findings of some of the vaccines have been submitted to the FDA for approval, so more information will be forthcoming in the upcoming weeks as the government and independent researchers have access to data.

At this point, it appears as if the vaccine created by Pfizer/Biontech, along with the vaccine created by Moderna *have not been created using material of illicit origin (i.e., embryonic stem cells and/or the tissue of aborted children.)* For Catholics, this is great news. Theologically speaking, there are no moral or religious grounds that would restrict the consciences of Catholics from receiving these vaccines.

There have been articles and press releases that affirm that, while these above vaccines were not *created* with material of illicit origin, there is good reason to believe that these vaccines may have been *tested* (post production) utilizing the tissue of aborted fetuses. These articles and statements, therefore, conclude that it is immoral to use them. This sweeping conclusion is *inconsistent with Catholic moral teaching.*

A critical question is: “Are Catholics always forbidden to perform an action if it touches upon evil, or cooperates, somehow, with the evil action of another?” The answer is ‘no’. There *certainly* are instances when Catholics *must* refrain from immoral cooperation. However, Catholic teaching on moral cooperation makes critical distinctions (mediate/immediate, proximate/remote, etc) to determine the *degree or level to which* one cooperates in evil. In some cases, some forms of cooperation, while unfortunate, can be allowed in certain circumstances.

Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world. Dig deep enough, and one finds that many of our actions somehow touch upon evil and the evil actions of others. While the Church draws a firm line in delineating certain acts of cooperation as immoral, it does not condemn *all* actions of cooperation as such. It challenges us to be aware of evil around us, to *always* choose the option that involves less evil (or no evil), and to speak and challenge others to desist from evil. It is for this reason that the Church, in the early months of vaccine development for COVID 19, boldly challenged (and continues to challenge) researchers and the medical industry to seek moral means of vaccine production (and to reject the use of material of illicit origin that involved the destruction of unborn life).

Regarding the previous statement regarding the immorality of taking the vaccine because of immoral post-production testing, or even statements from some bishops that have forbidden vaccines derived from material of illicit origin, the following paragraph from *Dignitas Personae*, issued from the CDF under Pope Benedict XVI, offers critical (and perhaps surprising) conclusions. In speaking of the use of embryonic stem cell lines or the tissue of aborted children, the document states in no. 35: “Grave reasons may be morally proportionate to justify the use of such ‘biological material’. Thus, for example, danger to the health of children could permit parents to use a vaccine which was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, while keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available.” While the statement uses the example of the danger to the health of children, the dangers of COVID-19 particularly to our vulnerable elderly or those with compromised health could reasonably be presumed as grave reason for vaccination. While the Church unequivocally condemns researchers and the medical industry for the creation, production, and distribution of vaccines produced from embryonic stem cells and from the tissue of aborted children, the *receiving* of these vaccines is in another moral category.

In conclusion, at this point there appears to be no moral issues to prohibit a Catholic from receiving vaccines produced by Pfizer or Moderna. If other vaccines are released which do have recourse to material of illicit origin, Catholic moral teaching would direct Catholics to utilize the option that is least morally problematic (i.e., the vaccines that were *not* created via such immoral means). Providentially, these two listed vaccines satisfy that criteria.



As more vaccines are produced, we recommend that you visit the following website, which provides a fairly complete list of all vaccines, and how they were produced and tested.

<https://lozierinstitute.org/update-covid-19-vaccine-candidates-and-abortion-derived-cell-lines/>



Sister Hillary Ross, a member of the Daughters of Charity, worked with Dr. George Fite on his breakthrough research on Hansen's disease (leprosy).

My dear friends,

This year has been a difficult year to find out the truth. It seems that we are deluged with information from sources that pretend to provide information, but really have an agenda. If you are skeptical of what you hear from “news” outlets, that might be the best thing to come from the year of Our Lord 2020.

After ten months of closing our country because of a virus, there will soon be a vaccine available. Actually, there may be several vaccines available. You will be faced with moral choices, and many different information services will be trying to win your attention with exaggerated stories.

The Church is entrusted with providing us with the revealed truths of our faith, from God's revelation to his Chosen People, and his revelations through Jesus Christ. Does the Church have any guidance for us on the issues of vaccines?

The most important teaching of the Church on moral questions was formalized in the Second Vatican Council: each of us is made in the image and likeness of God, and therefore, each of us has a conscience. The Ecumenical Council says this, “In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor.”

God gave us each a free will, and a conscience for which we must answer at our judgment. He also gave us knowledge and judgment so that we can inform our conscience. As Saint Paul says, our conscience is the law of God written in our hearts, and our conscience will accuse us or perhaps excuse us when “God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.” With the great dignity of our conscience, God gave us the responsibility to be well informed and to pass sober judgment on the most reliable knowledge that we can find. What an honor!

At this point in history, it is difficult for anyone to say that vaccines are wrong. During my lifetime, smallpox was eradicated from the earth, and polio, which terrorized the United States during the twentieth century, was eradicated from the Americas. Rubella caused tens of thousands of heart-breaking birth defects and stillbirths when I was young, and was nearly eradicated from our country by vaccinations, but it could return from other countries.

Nevertheless, there may be good reasons for an individual to decline a vaccination because of individual circumstances, or because of the particular vaccine. There may be good reasons for someone to get a vaccine as soon as possible, while someone else should wait for a while.

As your shepherd, and as a friend, I ask everyone to be well informed about the COVID vaccines, and form a sober judgment with good advice from trusted medical experts. Please avoid reading or listening to inflammatory presentations.

Right now, EWTN has several podcasts available through their Global Catholic Network in which Catholic physicians interview experts in vaccines and epidemiology. The podcast show is called “Doctor Doctor.” [ondemand.ewtn.com/Home/Play/1787](http://ondemand.ewtn.com/Home/Play/1787)

As another resource, Rev. Joseph Koopman STD, who received his doctorate in Rome in Catholic Moral Theology, has prepared a letter for the Diocese of Cleveland that discusses some of the moral and ethical questions about the COVID vaccines, and I am grateful that he has allowed us to publish it. Father Koopman provides a website that has up-to-date information on the vaccines from a pro-life foundation. On that website, you can see the latest information on which vaccines were produced without tissue from abortions.

In his day, Saint Paul was faced with moral extremists who tried to undo his teaching, and he had this to say, “I wish those who unsettle you would neuter themselves.” Then he goes on to say, “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

During this pandemic, may we use these hardships to grow in our spiritual life, by praying for those who died and for their families left behind, by praying for the medical workers, by praying for our leaders, by generosity to those around us, and by practicing the Christian virtues of forbearance and forgiveness. I commend you all to the prayers of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, and especially to the care of the all-holy Mother of God.

Your servant,

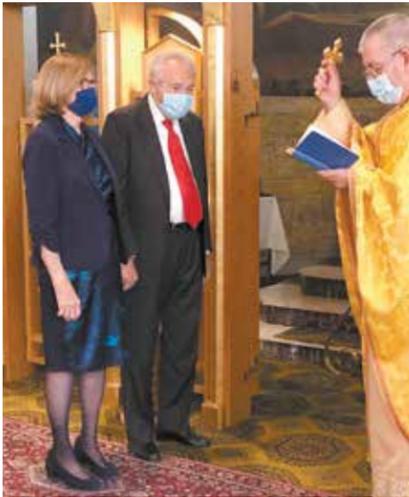
+Kurt Burnett



# PEOPLE YOU KNOW AROUND THE EPARCHY

## IN NEWARK...

### 50th Wedding Anniversary



Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Cizmar celebrated their 50th Anniversary of Crowning in Holy Matrimony on September 20, 2020, with a special blessing by Father Dave Baratelli. After Liturgy, the parish community honored Steve and Mary Ann with a reception on the rectory lawn.

### Parish Celebrates 100 Years of Faith!

Due to the present health crisis, Saint George Parish had to cancel its anniversary celebration and banquet originally scheduled for October 18, 2020. Instead, the parish initiated a year of faith honoring the 100 Years of Faith in the community under the patronage of Saint George. After Sunday Liturgy, the community adjourned to the rectory lawn for a simple reception with Father Dave Baratelli, parish administrator, offering a toast thanking our Lord for the blessings He has bestowed on the Saint George parish family.



## IN RAHWAY...

### Annual Pet Blessing

Saint Thomas the Apostle Church in Rahway, NJ, recently hosted its annual pet blessing in honor of Saint Matias. Despite the COVID pandemic, about 30 pets and 50 pet owners participated in the outdoor safe-distance

blessing on a beautiful autumn Saturday morning.

Following the prayer of blessing, which was broadcast on FM radio transmission, each pet was blessed from the safety of their cars – or strollers!



The annual event attracts animal lovers from within the parish, the neighborhood, and other local churches.

Saint Thomas Parish is served by Archpriest James Hayer and his canine companion, Rio.

### Helper of Mothers Icon

Saint Thomas the Apostle Church in Rahway, NJ, recently had the privilege of hosting the miraculous icon of *Mary, Helper of Mothers*. The *Albazinskaya* Mother of God icon was at the parish recently. On Wednesday evening, September 30, Bishop Kurt and area clergy were in attendance for a prayer service that attracted over 75 people.

the seminarians and all in attendance to witness such a beautiful expression of the Byzantine faith tradition!

Following the prayer service, Bishop Kurt and the clergy imparted a safe-distance blessing to everyone in attendance, with a special blessing for mothers and couples who are praying for a child.

Finally, in the fine tradition of Saint Thomas events, a take-home meal was provided to everyone as they were exiting the church.

They were about 80 individuals in attendance, and many more watching the live streaming broadcast.

Most Holy Mother of God, pray for us! Saint Thomas Parish is served by Archpriest James Hayer.

The church was filled to safe-distance capacity with faithful people from throughout the community, including many young couples who petitioned the Mother of God for her favor and intercession. Also in attendance were all the seminarians and faculty of Saint Andrew Seminary at Seton Hall University. It was a wonderful experience for



## IN WESTBURY...

### Pilgrimage for Hope and Healing

On Monday, Nov 2, 2020, Father Tony Stanganelli, Pastor of Saint Brigid Roman Catholic Church, Westbury, Long Island, NY, led a 26.2 mile Walk and Prayer Pilgrimage for the intention of hope and healing in our country and the world.

Father Nicholas Daddona, parochial administrator, gave a short explanation of the Eastern Church and Father Vladyslav Budash, parochial administrator of Resurrection Church, Smithtown, NY, blessed those participating sprinkling them with holy water.

Saint Andrew Byzantine Catholic Church, Westbury, NY, opened its doors to bless the pilgrims and joined in prayers to the Theotokos and Saint Michael the Archangel for protection and intercession during these difficult times.

Prayer cards with the icon of *Mary, the Unburnable Bush* were distributed with an explanation of the miraculous icon's significance.



From Right to Left: Father Tony Stanganelli; Father Nicholas Daddona; Father Vladyslav Budash; Pilgrim Cross-bearer; and principal of Saint Brigid School, Mr. Paul Clagnaz

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

Divine Liturgies at the Byzantine Catholic Mission of Fort Mill, SC for the month of December will be broadcast online. Please contact Ron Somich by email at [ron.somich@gmail.com](mailto:ron.somich@gmail.com) for the link and dial in information. <https://carolinabyzantine.com/>

**December: 5, 12, 19, 26**

THE BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES REQUEST THAT THE FAITHFUL OBSERVE JANUARY 22, 2021, AS A DAY OF PRAYER AND FASTING FOR AN END TO ABORTION.

# IN BAYONNE & JERSEY CITY...

## Reassignments of Father Lozinsky and Father Bertha

On Saturday, October 31, 2020, Father Gregory Lozinsky celebrated his last Divine Liturgy as Administrator of Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church in Bayonne, NJ. Father Gregory was also the Administrator of Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Jersey City, NJ. Through evangelization, many individuals from other parishes attended our monthly devotions to Blessed Miriam Teresa Demjanovich, watched live-streamed Divine Liturgies and joined the Bible Study classes. Our parishioners wish Father Gregory God's blessings and continued success in his new assignment as Administrator of Saint John the Baptist Church in Trumbull, CT.

Father Joseph Bertha, Administrator of Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church in Trumbull, CT, was reassigned as the new Administrator of Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church in Bayonne and Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Jersey City. Father Bertha celebrated his first Divine Liturgy on Saturday, November 7, 2020, in Bayonne. Father Michael Popson was the concelebrant. Father Joseph expressed some of his very enthusiastic plans and future endeavors regarding the continuation of our evangelization and plans for Blessed Miriam Teresa, especially since this is her spiritual home parish. We wish Father Bertha God's blessings for a smooth transition to our parish and are looking forward to working with him.



Above: Father Gregory with Sister Mary Canavan, Vice Postulator of Blessed Miriam Teresa League of Prayer

Right: Father Joseph gives his first homily in Bayonne.

Left: Father Joseph celebrates his first liturgy in Bayonne with Father Michael Popson concelebrating.



As we went to press, the ECL learned of the falling asleep of +Bishop Gerald (Dino), originally a priest of our eparchy.

*Grant, O Lord, blessed repose to Your high-priestly servant, +Bishop Gerald, and may his memory be eternal!*

## +BISHOP GERALD (DINO) ENTERS INTO ETERNAL REST

### When traveling to the South, please visit our churches

**All Saints**  
10291 Bayshore Road  
North Fort Myers, FL 33917  
1-239-599-4023

**Saints Cyril and Methodius**  
1002 Bahama Avenue  
Fort Pierce, FL 34982  
1-772-595-1021

**Saint Anne**  
7120 Massachusetts Ave.  
New Port Richey, FL 34653  
1-727-849-1190

**Our Lady of the Sign**  
7311 Lyons Road  
Coconut Creek, FL 33073  
1-954-429-0056

**Epiphany of Our Lord**  
2030 Old Alabama Road  
Roswell, GA 30076  
1-770-993-0973

**Saint Nicholas of Myra**  
5135 Sand Lake Road  
Orlando, FL 32819  
1-407-351-0133

**Saint Basil the Great**  
1475 N.E. 199th Street  
Miami, FL 33179-5162  
1-305-651-0991

**Saint Therese**  
4265 13th Avenue North  
Saint Petersburg, FL 33713  
1-727-323-4022

**Holy Dormition**  
17 Buckskin Lane  
Ormond Beach, FL 32174  
1-386-677-8704

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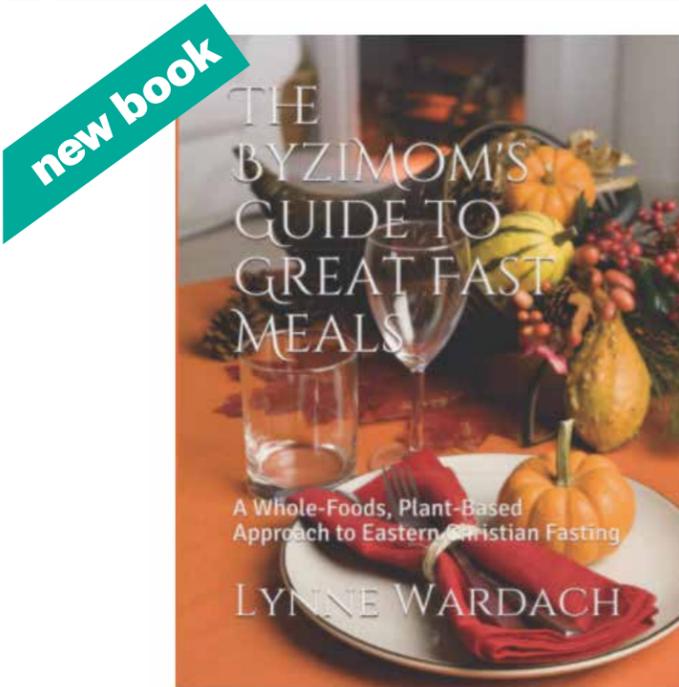
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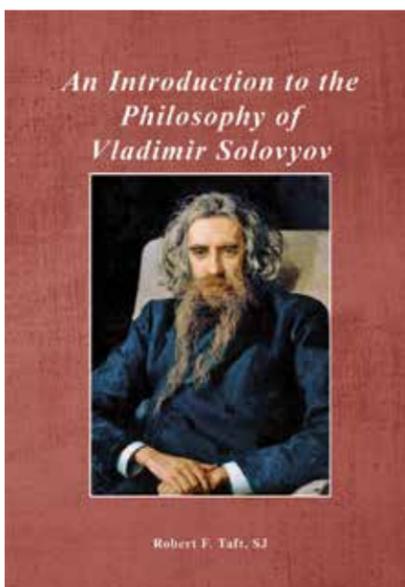
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## NEW BOOKS FROM EASTERN CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS



Did you know that Archimandrite Robert Taft, SJ, of blessed memory, first wrote his master's thesis in 1956 on the topic of philosophy, long before he became interested in liturgy? In the early 2000's, Father Taft asked ECP to publish it, after he would edit the text and add an updated bibliography. The work is titled *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov*, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian philosopher and theologian. Unfortunately, Father Taft never completed the project but ECP has asked Father Robert F. Slesinski, Ph.D., a retired priest of the Eparchy of

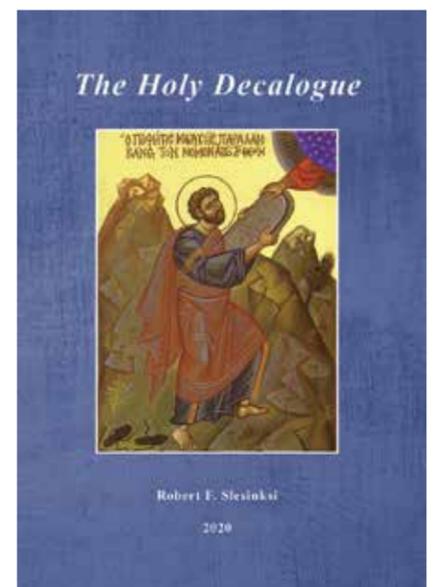
Passaic, to review the text and edit it for publication. He is a world-renowned Russian scholar who has published over a dozen books in English and Russian.

This project has been completed and we are pleased to announce its publication on the second anniversary of Father Taft's passing, November 2. For friends and followers of Father Taft, many may not know of the existence of this, his first academic work. It does not even appear in Father Taft's extensive bibliography (also published as a 100+ page volume by ECP). But now, everyone can examine the first and previously unknown work of one of the great Byzantine liturgists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With this new book, ECP has now published the "bookends" of Father Taft's career: his first on Solovyov, and his last just as he fell asleep in the Lord, *Worship Is What Liturgy Does*, a collection of his 8 most favorite essays from *Worship* magazine.

In recent months, Eastern Christian Publications has also published two other books by Father Slesinski. The first of these is *The Holy Decalogue*, a mystagogical treatment of the Ten Commandments, linking the worship of Almighty God, One in the Holy

Trinity, with the faithful observance of God's "ten holy words" to the People of Israel. This book was written as an adult catechesis during the first months of the pandemic now afflicting peoples worldwide.

The second work is *The Philosophy of Semyon Frank: Human Meaning in the Godhead*, which examines the religious philosophy of Frank through his many works, considered to be the finest Russian philosopher of the twentieth century. First writing in Imperial Russia, he was providentially exiled by Lenin along with many other anti-Marxist intellectuals in 1922, first settling in Germany, then later in France and finally in England where he died in 1950, thus being able to continue his philosophical probing. In his postscriptum to Father Slesinski's monograph, Brandon Gallaher, DPhil, a senior lecturer in theology at the University of Exeter (England) and an Orthodox deacon of the Archdiocese of Thyateria, writes: "It is the great virtue of the present volume that Robert Slesinski has woven a narrative that illuminates the interrelationship of metaphysics and Orthodoxy with characteristic analytical acuity, deep knowledge of modern Russian religious thought and sensitivity to the unique



vision of Frank. This monograph will stand for years to come as the single most important introduction to Frank, who was widely acknowledged by his peers as the most outstanding modern Orthodox Christian philosopher."

All of these books are available through the ECP website on the **Featured** books page here:

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The Pokrov Icon

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# LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

## THE RISK OF SHARING A GIFT

Have you ever shared something important or precious to you with someone? Perhaps it was a film or book that you found especially moving. Maybe you've shared the fruits of a garden harvest that you worked on diligently and which yielded your best crop yet. Or perhaps it was a gift that you searched for – or made – to show your love. We often share things dear to us hoping they'll find the same wonder and pleasure in it that we do. It is the anticipation of the other's reaction, the joy in another's discovery of something new, and the renewed appreciation in us that makes the sharing so satisfying. Whether art, a scenic view, a lovingly home-cooked meal, or anything special to us, sharing it with another person reflects to them our generosity as well as our desire for friendship and closeness with them. But sharing something precious to us also represents a *risk*; the risk that the other will be underwhelmed by what we find wonderful, or even reject it. That risk is scary, but if it prevents us from ever sharing anything we so cherish, we lose the prospect of discovering its value anew through the eyes of another – and they lose the chance to discover it at all.

Teaching new graduate students a course in *Foundations of Catholic Theology* gives me an opportunity to share something dear to me and watch them puzzle, grumble and *wonder* through it. I'm fortunate to have been able to add a few lessons on the theological and spiritual patrimony of the East, which has opened my students up to their Faith in ways that otherwise wouldn't have been accessible to them. Their most recent assignment was to choose an icon from a list I provided, to consult specific resources that explain iconographic symbolism, and to sit with the icon and pray. They were then to write their reflection on the experience, including their spiritual and theological insights. Occasionally a student is familiar with iconography or has attended Orthodox or Eastern Catholic Liturgy. Regardless of their previous experience, with each new group's discovery of the spiritual power of these images I appreciate them anew through their eyes. I am reminded of how much I take for granted our Tradition, and how much my prayer life is enriched by not only looking at an icon, but gazing upon it in wonder and contemplation. When I read a paper from a student that expresses their delight in praying with an icon or shares a very personal experience of spiritual transformation that happened in their prayer time, I rediscover how powerfully God speaks to us through beauty and in silence. Without sharing this treasured aspect of my spiritual life with them I would not be changed interiorly, nor would my students receive what they invariably express to be a true gift. Sharing about icons – even in an academic setting where I sit in judgment

over the quality of their work – is a *risk*, because students can easily criticize the images for lack of emotion, "flatness," or simply discount them because they are so *different*. Some students have written that these were just the impressions of iconography they held before taking the course. Certainly, the resources I provide educate them and help them to better understand the icons' meaning and purpose. But if I did not love iconography, if these images did not etch themselves in my heart and draw me closer to Almighty God, my students would likely see them as just another artefact to study, an academic exercise. To share beauty, to share goodness, to desire communion with others risks suffering disparagement – or rejection of ourselves and what we love. To weather such possible rejection and take the risk anyway requires great love, and *grace*.

A number of my students this term chose to reflect on the icon of *The Nativity of Our Lord*. Many of them noted

the darkness of the cave contrasted with the brightness of the Christ Child: light penetrating dark, order overcoming chaos. Others expressed being affected by Joseph's demeanor and how they could relate to his being overwhelmed by everything that had happened, and yet surrendering to God's will. Some were initially put off by Mary's seeming disinterest in her newborn, looking away (or in some icons, watching Joseph) rather than adoring Him as she does in Western art. Without my explaining, each one said that in prayer they came to understand Mary's posture as contemplative, and appropriate to the circumstances. They expressed how her contemplation prompted them to enter not only more deeply into the icon or the Bible story, but *into the reality* of the Son of God entering His Creation for our sakes.

We hear the story every year, we place the Nativity scene under our tree, and we see the icon somewhere in our parish iconostas or elsewhere, but how

invested are we in the reality that God is with us? When we look upon the scene at the cave, do we think of the *risk* Joseph took in taking Mary into his home at the possible cost of his reputation, and the ensuing danger in sheltering her and the Child from Herod's sword? Do we contemplate the *risk* in Mary's fiat, that opened her to suffering the loss of Jesus, first in the Temple, and later at the Cross?

There is the Christ Child, swaddled as for the tomb, the Light illuminating the dark cave – the darkness of our world, of our hearts. Consider the *risk* God took in becoming man, giving us the gift of salvation – the gift of *Himself* – knowing that He would receive the Cross in return. Pause at the scene to share with Jesus what you most deeply cherish, and whatever troubles your heart. Gaze upon His face, give yourself freely to Him without fear of being rejected. Know with certainty in the depths of your being that *God is with us!* **ECL**



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#### PRESENTERS

**Deacon Thomas Shubeck PhD** and his wife Caroline are navigating the pandemic with a young adult daughter and a teen-aged son. Deacon Tom serves at St Thomas the Apostle parish in Rahway and at Seton Hall University. Much of his more than 30 years as a licensed psychologist has been spent providing therapy services to married couples and families.



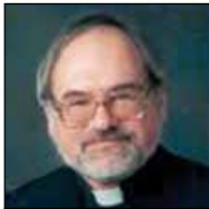
**Ann Koshute MTS**, earned a Master's degree at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family in Washington DC. She teaches theology at St Joseph's College of Maine and co-founded Springs in the Desert, an infertility support ministry. She and her husband Keith have been married for 9 years.

**Michael and Lisann Castagno** were married in 1994 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.



**Fr. Jack Custer** has delighted in preparing couples for marriage over four decades of priesthood. He holds degrees in Scripture and Theology and currently serves as Rector of St Michael's Cathedral.

**For more information, contact  
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# THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

## THE ANAPHORA: THE INVOCATION (EPICLESIS)

After the congregation sings the hymn, “We praise you, we bless you, we thank you, O Lord, and we pray to you, our God,” the priest begins to pray in the name of the community, “We implore, pray and entreat” the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon us and upon the gifts being offered. In Greek, this invocation is called the *epiclesis*, which means literally, a “calling upon.” It is the climax of the anaphora, which follows the three-fold Jewish pattern of prayer used by our Lord. We address God; we commemorate his blessings; and we ask him to act in our behalf here and now. Because our faith comes through Jesus, almost every Christian Liturgy has an epiclesis in some form, and it is usually an invocation of the Father to send the Spirit. However, in some anaphoras, the epiclesis is more explicit than in others.

The Byzantine Liturgy has very explicit invocations of the Holy Spirit. Saint Basil the Great refers to an epiclesis in his writings on the Holy Spirit: “Have any saints left for us in writing the words to be used in the invocation over the Eucharistic bread and the cup of blessing? As everyone knows, we are not content in the Liturgy simply to recite the words recorded by Saint Paul or the Gospels, but we add other words both before and after, words of great importance for this mystery.”

The idea that the Spirit comes upon us and empowers us in our worship is very ancient and is still found in the Liturgy today. After the great entrance, the deacon and concelebrants say to the presiding priest the words of the angel to Mary, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you” (Luke 1 :35). The priest responds: “May the Spirit himself join with us in our celebrations all the days of our lives.” In the fourth century Saint Cyril of Jerusalem spoke very clearly of the epiclesis: “We beseech the merciful God to send forth his Holy Spirit upon the gifts lying before him; that he may make the bread the body of Christ, and the wine the blood of Christ, for whatsoever the Holy Spirit has touched, is surely sanctified and changed.” By the time of John of Damascus in the eighth century this was the Church’s teaching: “For just as God made all that he made by the energy of the Holy Spirit, so also now the energy of the Spirit performs those things that are above nature and which it is not possible to comprehend unless by faith alone. ‘How shall this be,’ said the holy Virgin, ‘seeing I know not a man?’ And the archangel Gabriel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you.’ And now you ask, how have the bread become Christ’s body and the wine and water Christ’s blood? And I say to you, ‘The Holy

Spirit is present and does these things which surpass reason and thought.’”

The Church’s faith is that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ in the anaphora. The priest cannot transform the gifts by his own human power. It is done only in the power of God through the Holy Spirit. The priest is able to do nothing without the power of the Holy Spirit. The words of institution are the first sign of the power and gift and revelation of the love of Christ in giving us the Eucharist. The epiclesis is the sign that the priest acts through the gift of the Spirit given through the sacramental mystery of orders. Saint John Chrysostom tells us clearly, “The priest does nothing, nor is the right accomplishment of the offered gifts due to human nature; but the grace of the Spirit being present, and coming down on all, makes complete that mystical sacrifice; for even though a man be

present, it is God who works through him” (Homily 50 on Pentecost). This is awesome for us mortals. Though in the Divine Liturgy, we cannot see God’s action with our physical eyes, we can perceive what is happening in faith.

Saint John Chrysostom knew this, and so he described what is mystically happening here, “The priest stands, bringing down not fire, but the Holy Spirit; and he offers prayer at length, not that a fire may be kindled above and destroy the offering [cf. 1 Kings 18:34], but that grace may fall on the sacrifice through that prayer, and kindle the souls of all” (*On the Priesthood* 6,4). This is why he asks that there be an attitude of reverence in the church when the Spirit is invoked, “What are you doing, O man? When the priest stands before the table, stretching forth his hands to heaven, calling on the Holy Spirit to be present, and to touch the oblations, there is

a great stillness, a great silence. When the Spirit gives the grace, when he descends, and when he touches the oblations, when you see the Lamb slain and prepared, then do you bring in as well a noise, or disorder, or contentiousness, or railing?” (*De coemet. appel.* 3)

Hearing the epiclesis aloud teaches us that, even though the priest is saying the words, the power and action of transformation is done by God through his Holy Spirit. The service that we offer to God, then, is really a “Divine” Liturgy, for while we perform the ritual, God the Creator, who has given us the natural ability to pray and implore, is present as our Sanctifier and makes our created offerings a share in his divine life. For this reason, we can never completely express the mystery of the Liturgy. **ECL**

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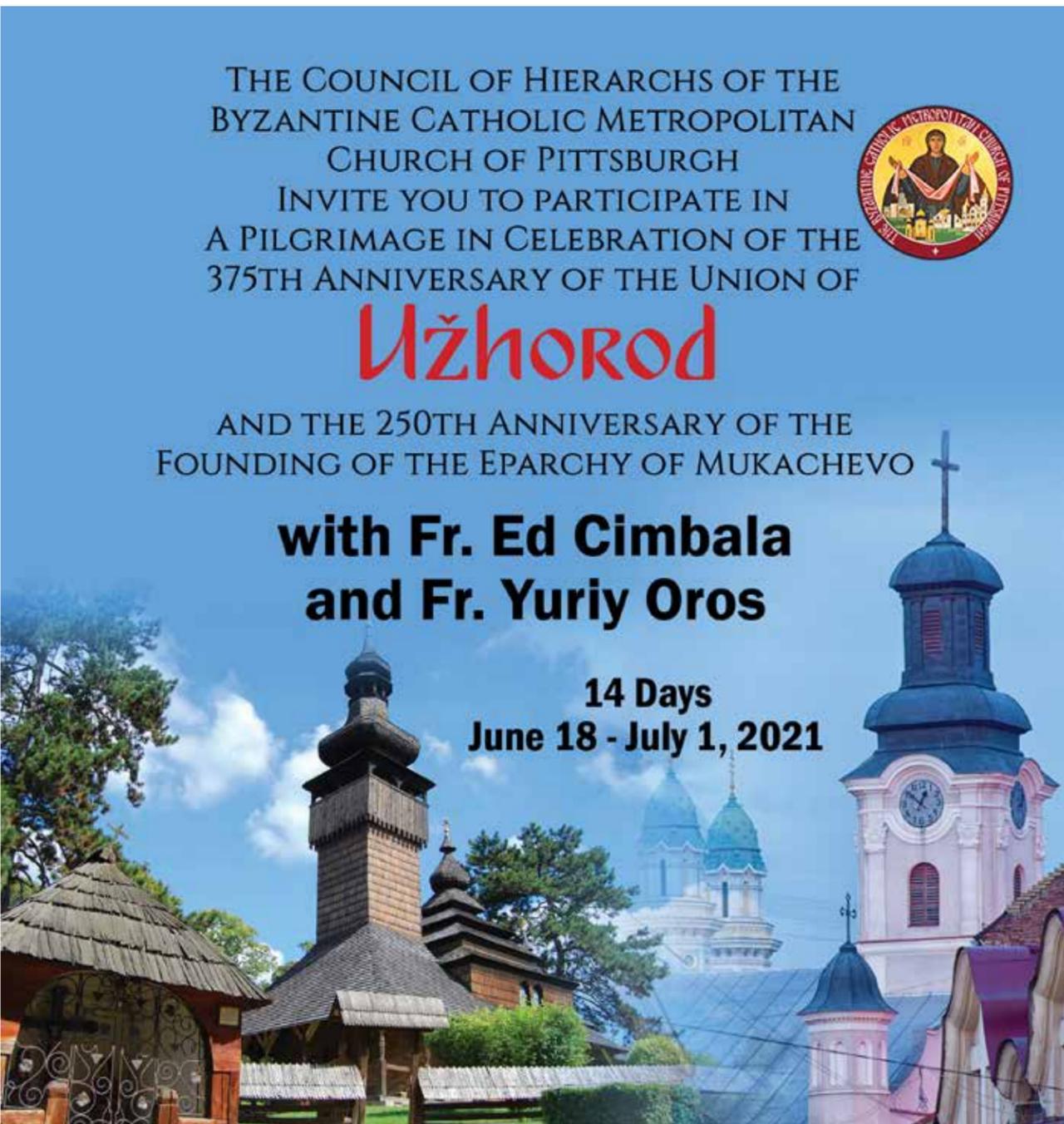
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## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

### THE WORD BECAME FLESH

Our celebration of Christmas naturally focuses on the accounts of Jesus' birth given in the second chapters of the Gospels of Saint Matthew and Saint Luke. Saint John's Gospel begins even before the beginning of time itself, in the mysterious life shared by the Holy Trinity. We hear it on Pascha: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). Here is a healthy reminder that the little baby in the manger is the second Person of the Holy Trinity. Our Rusyn *kol'ady* make that point every time they call Him "Boh predvičnyj" — "God from before all ages." As Son of God He has existed from all eternity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. "When the fullness of time had come" He was conceived by a human mother and born in a human nature without any compromise to His divinity (Galatians 4:4).

Saint John (1:3-4) continues: "All things came to be in Him, and without Him nothing came to be. What came

to be in Him was life, and the life was the light of men." As the one "through whom all things were made," the Son of God was already involved in our world long before Christmas. His light, "shining in the darkness" (John 1:5) guided the Magi through the star (Matthew 2:1-9).

The first two chapters of the Gospels of Saints Matthew and Luke are summed up in a single sentence by Saint John (1:14): "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of an only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth." In the language of the Bible, that word "flesh" denotes what is subject to death, what is not God and, in the aftermath of original sin, what is tempted to oppose itself to God. Challenging us to envision God in the flesh, Saint John joins Saint Paul in highlighting just how completely the Son of God humbled Himself (Philippians 2:5-11) to be "like us in every way except sin" (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15).

The words "among us" take us back nearly 800 years to Isaiah's (7:14) prophecy that a virgin would give birth to "God with us" — Emmanuel. The Son of God "came to his own" (John 1:11) already related to this world as its Creator; to "his own" chosen people of Israel, but "his own did not receive Him." Lawless shepherds and pagan wise men found their way to the manger while the priests, scribes, Pharisees, and King Herod would not. The "glory" Saint John insists "we have seen" was visible to the shepherds (Luke 2:9) and later to the Elder Simeon (Luke 2:32). The first eleven chapters of Saint John's Gospel reveal that glory again and again, from the Wedding at Cana to the raising of Lazarus.

Saint John (1:12) reminds us of the most profound 'reason for the Christmas season: "To those who believe in His name He gave the power to become children of God — to those who are born not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of a man, but of God." These words, first of all, describe

Jesus' own birth from a virgin Mother: free from the "bloods" of painful childbirth after Eve's sin (Genesis 3:16), not the result of marital intercourse, and not consequence of anyone's plan but God the Father.

Those who "believe in Jesus' name" — that is, those who recognize Him as Son of God — experience something similar, as the adult Jesus would explain to Nicodemus (John 3:1-9). We are "born again" in Baptism. This rebirth is not like our original procreation through the marital love of our parents, something Nicodemus struggles to comprehend (John 3:4). Rather, through the sacramental sign of water and the power of the Holy Spirit, we "are clothed with Christ" (Galatians 3:27). We come to share in His sonship; we become "children of God" (John 1:12); we inherit the eternal Kingdom of Heaven (Romans 8:17) along with the newborn "King" (Matthew 2:2). The Son of God took flesh and dwelt among us so that we could be clothed with Him and adopted into the family of the Holy Trinity. **ECL**

## CHRISTMAS EVE IN THE CARPATHIAN HIGHLANDS

Excerpted from an article by Michael Roman

For many years, many Carpatho-Rusyns — also known as Rusins, Carpatho-Russians, Carpatho-Ruthenians or Ruthenians — have been showing a keen interest in their "roots," history, traditions, and customs. Some of the traditions, so enthusiastically observed by our pioneers in America, then partially lapsed, are slowly but surely being revived. With the approach of the Feast Day of the Nativity of Our Lord, preparations are being made in many Rusyn-American homes for Holy Supper and Christmas Eve.

For many centuries Holy Supper on the even before Christmas was traditionally a special family meal for our Rusyns. It was full of meaning and symbolism. Even those who have unfortunately abandoned this glorious tradition still recall and cherish the childhood memories of *Svatyj Večer* — Holy Supper.

Many of our older readers will recall that a strict fast was observed on the day before Christmas. Some families observed the fast so strictly that they did not eat any food until Holy Supper. On the drinking of water was permitted. No wonder everyone waited for Holy Supper!

### The Holy Supper Table

When twilight arrived on Christmas Eve, the mother covered the table with a white cloth in memory of the swaddling clothes of Infant Jesus. She then set the various foods in their proper places on the table. The foods, prepared in or with oil, included fish, herring, *bobalki*, mushroom sauerkraut or lima

bean sauerkraut soup, meatless *holupki*, stewed plums, mashed potatoes, honey, garlic, etc. In some villages, there were twelve foods on the table, symbolizing the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ.

In the center of the table was a large round loaf of bread which symbolized Jesus as the Bread of Life. The candle, which was placed in the bread, was a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem, which guided the shepherds and wise men to worship and adore the Light of the World. There was also a custom of placing straw on or around the table. The head of the household would ask God's blessings, then the straw would be strewn on the floor and some of it was also placed on the table, symbolizing the fact that the infant Christ lay on the straw in the manger.

### The Honeyed Sign of the Cross

After dipping her forefinger into the honey, the mother made a sign of the cross on the foreheads of all present, including herself. The use of honey symbolized the mother's prayer that the lives of all present would be sweet, without any bitterness. However, when the mother made a honeyed sign of the cross on the forehead of her eligible-for-marriage daughters, she expressed her prayerful wish, *May Jesus grant that the young men will go after you like the bees go after honey!*

The mother then dipped garlic into honey and each one present had to taste it. Our Rusyn ancestors believed that garlic chased away all pagan and evil spirits and kept them healthy. While

giving the garlic to taste, the mother said, "May God grant that you be as healthy as this garlic!" Yes, even in this day and age, there are many Rusyn old people who believe that garlic has curative powers.

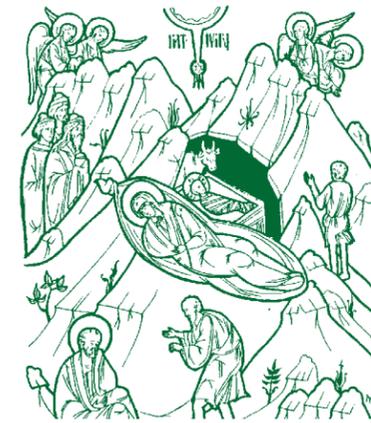
With the symbolic preliminaries out of the way, all started to eat the delicious, *strict fast* foods on the table. No one was permitted to bypass a food; he or she had to taste it, at least!

The Holy Supper ended with an extemporaneous prayer by the head of the household who again expressed gratitude to Christ, the new-born Light of the World, and wish everyone a Happy and Blessed Christmas. *Christos raždajetsja! Slavite Jeho! Christ is born! Glorify Him!*

### Christmas Carols

Most of the Rusyn parents did not have Christmas trees to decorate. Those that did have trees decorated them with the help of their children immediately after Holy Supper. Singing Christmas carols (*kol'ady*) and hymns, they placed homemade ornaments on the trees.

Christmas carols and hymns were sung in every hut in the village, starting immediately after the conclusion of Holy Supper. The mothers participated in the carol-singing with their husbands and children. They had no dishes, pots, pans, knives, forks, and spoons to clean. There was a superstitious belief that someone who had died in the family was hungry and would return on Christmas Eve to fill himself up with



what was left on the dishes or in the pots and pans.

House-to-house singing of carols and hymns also began after Holy Supper. A cherished custom associated with this is the arrival of the Bethlehem Carolers, or *Jasličkari*, to re-enact the Nativity Scene, stating that they were shepherds who had come from Bethlehem and who had brought with them the manger of Bethlehem.

### God Is With Us

Shortly after the *Jasličkari* had departed, the family trudged through the snow to participate in the midnight services in the church, during which the entire congregation, led by the pastor and cantor in unison, welcomed the Newborn Christ with an enthusiastic, moving, and hearty rendition of *S Nami Boh* — God is With Us!

Yes, the enthusiastic singing of *S Nami Boh* was a climactic conclusion to an unforgettable Christmas Eve in the Carpathian Highlands. May our enthusiastic rendition of "God is With Us" be a fitting climax to an always-remembered Christmas Eve in our own Byzantine Catholic parish in our own hometown.

“When Augustus became supreme ruler of the world, the many kingdoms among the people came to an end. Likewise, when You became incarnate of the Immaculate One, the worship of many gods had to cease. The cities came under a universal power, and the Gentiles believed in the one supreme Divinity. Nations were registered in the name of Caesar Augustus, and we, the faithful, were registered in Your divine name, O Incarnate One. O Lord, great is Your mercy; glory to You!” (*At Psalm 140, Vespers for the Feast of the Nativity*)

When I read this, it struck me that I had read this sentiment elsewhere. In fact, it was in the words of Pope Benedict XVI in his little book, “Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives.” In it, he says of the time of Jesus’ birth that “the context of world history was important for Luke.... For the first time, there is a great expanse of peace in which everyone’s property can be registered and placed at the service of the wider community.” An inscription at Priene, in Ionia, from 9 B.C. said of the birth of Augustus: “Providence, which has ordered all things, filled this man with virtue that he might benefit mankind, sending him as a Savior both for us and our descendants.... The birthday of the god was the beginning of the good tidings that he brought forth for the world. From his birth, a new reckoning of time must begin” (Chapter 3, pg. 59). Sounds very similar to our understanding of Christ at His Incarnation, doesn’t it?

## SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Father Ronald Hatton



### “WHEN THE FULLNESS OF TIME HAD COME...”

The world has always looked for a savior. We look to political figures time and time again, and are disappointed when we find that they have “feet of clay.” We put our hope and faith in socio-economical systems, from capitalism to anarchy, hoping to find peace in the world. It is no wonder that the writer of that inscription held out so much for the world because of Caesar Augustus. It is so sad that, at this season, so many people celebrate Christmas rather than actually celebrate the Nativity, the coming of our God into our world.

It is said that other feasts of the Church, Pascha and Theophany, are much older than our celebration of Jesus’ birth, but we should not take that to mean that Christmas is of less importance. The Incarnation is so important in making these feasts possible that the Nativity, even in the popular celebration, has taken such a deep hold in the hearts of all. No matter if a person is a believer or not, this season has become a time for thinking about others rather than ourselves, giving gifts, outreach into our communities, and so on. Food drives, clothing drives, even placing coins and bills into the pots of Salvation Army workers is a sign of a change of heart in most people, even if only for this season. The cries for peace between people and countries become louder

and persistent. And at the heart of it all is not a spontaneous burst of goodwill but a deep response to the Gift given to us this season. “For God so loved the world...” God taking flesh, becoming like one of us in everything except sin, is such a profound occurrence in human history that it affects everyone whether they believe or not. This deep, abiding need for a savior is part of who we are, whether we acknowledge it or not. Saint Augustine wrote, “You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in You.” So, it should not surprise us that the writer of the inscription at Priene expressed the desire for a savior, and saw it in Caesar Augustus. Mirroring the words of Augustine, we go from person to person, politician to politician, movement to movement, seeking a savior, and only becoming disillusioned when they fall through. We are restless until we find rest in the True Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, God-become-man. Even if we cannot accept God’s gift to us in the Incarnation, even if we deny the existence of God or the Truth of His Church, we are still restless, and will remain so, until we accept this Gift and fall into the arms of our loving God.

It is so easy for us to want to take this season away from those who do not believe, those who mis-use it. We can

look at the partying, the drunkenness, the greed for physical gifts and mourn how Christmas has been paganized, but we should realize that, whether celebrated properly or improperly, Christ’s birth is still having an impact on everyone. Even if we hear people trying to tear Christmas to shreds, we should recognize that even they cannot deny that something exceptional is happening once again this year. They may bridle when you wish them a Merry Christmas, but they cannot deny the power that is being celebrated. God has given all of mankind this season as an opportunity, year after year, to change themselves from self-centered to other-centered. It gives Christians, year after year, an opportunity to show forth the love of God to those in darkness and, hopefully, to extend their acts of mercy, kindness, and love beyond a defined point on our calendar. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ So, you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God” (Gal. 4:4-7). **ECL**



## SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian

### MAKE HEAVEN YOUR GOAL

Historical and biblical Christianity is essentially an “other-worldly” religion. The lives of the martyrs, ascetics, monks, and saints direct us toward the Kingdom above. Jesus died and rose to grant us the forgiveness of sins, justification (a right relationship with God), and ultimately heavenly glory.

The gospel is often wrongly proclaimed as a means to earthly fulfillment. For many, the Gospel of Christ is a self-help philosophy. “Follow Christ, apply biblical principles, and you will succeed in your endeavors, you will have a healthy self-esteem, you will get what you want out of life, and accomplish your personal goals.”

Some present the Faith as a means of dealing with emotional problems. “My faith helps me deal with my childhood traumas, and comforts my inner-child,” or “makes me know that I am loved and accepted.”

Others see the Christian Faith primarily as a way of effecting “social justice,” or “making the world a better place” and “being good to one another.” “Go out there and make a difference” by “being nice.”

For some people, the Christian religion is a “magical mystery tour.” Here the gospel is about visions, revelations, apparitions, miracles, signs, wonders, dramatic answers to prayer, exorcisms, and prophecies about the end of the world.

Perhaps the most common misconception is that Catholic Faith is a kind of “quid pro quo” with Almighty God, a favor in return for something. If I do my part, attend church, say my prayers, stay out of grave sin, then God is obligated to “take care of me,” or to “keep me safe,” or make everything work out for my family and me.

There is some truth to all these things. If we serve God, He will protect and bless us (Mt. 6:33). But throughout the ages, saints and faithful believers have endured severe sufferings, persecution, torture, and death. We all have to bear our cross (Mt. 16:24). We know faithful Catholics who have suffered and endured painful tragedies and losses. We know atheists, agnostics, notorious public sinners, members of cults, bizarre sects, and false religions who seem to coast through life without a care in the world.

Christianity is not about this world. Catholicism is not about this present life. The gospel is the message of everlasting life. We will not experience perfect happiness unless and until we get to heaven.

At your baptism, you were “born from above” (Jn. 3:3), and therefore heaven is your real home. “Our citizenship, our commonwealth, is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). Don’t look for earthly comfort or satisfaction because “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (Heb. 3:14). In this world, we are “foreigners, exiles, temporary residents, sojourners, aliens, strangers, pilgrims, refugees, wayfarers, non-citizens, people just ‘passing through’” (from various translations of 1 Pt. 2:11).

We are all a little nervous about Covid-19 and about dying. But Saint Paul, who told us to imitate him (1 Cor. 11:1), wanted to die. He wanted to go and be with Jesus Christ. He says, “we would rather be away from the body, and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8), and “I would rather go and be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil. 1:23). Let us make Saint Paul’s attitude our own.

Beware! Getting to heaven is not easy. We must apply ourselves. Prayer, faith, repentance, and spiritual striving are required. Not everyone goes to heaven. “For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Mt. 7:14). “‘Lord, will those who are saved be few?’ And He said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.’” (Lk. 13:23-24). “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12).

The saints tell us that only a minority go to heaven because “nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27).

Fellow believer, forget about worldly success, achievement, and earthly happiness. Give your life completely to Jesus Christ so that you may reign with Him forever in heaven (Rev. 3:21).

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col. 3:1-2).

Make heaven your goal. **ECL**

# EPARCHIAL PARISHES LIVE-STREAM THE DIVINE SERVICES

Below are just a few examples from our eparchy

Below is a list of many of the Parishes of the Eparchy of Passaic which are Live streaming Divine Liturgy on Saturday, Sunday, and Holy Days. You may access the links to their streaming sites (Facebook, Youtube, etc,) on our website: [www.eparchyofpassaic.com](http://www.eparchyofpassaic.com).

### CONNECTICUT

Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church—Danbury, CT  
Saint John the Baptist—Trumbull, CT

### NEW JERSEY

Cathedral of Saint Michael the Archangel—Passaic, NJ  
Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Saint Mary)—Trenton, NJ  
Our Lady of Perpetual Help—Toms River, NJ  
Our Lady of Perpetual Help—Toms River, NJ—Radio  
Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church—Perth Amboy, NJ  
Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church—Perth Amboy, NJ  
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church—Hillsborough, NJ  
Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church—Dunellen, NJ  
Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church—Somerset, NJ  
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church—Jersey City, NJ  
Saint John Byzantine Catholic Church—Bayonne, NJ  
Nativity of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church—East Brunswick, NJ  
Saint Thomas the Apostle Byzantine Catholic Church—Rahway, NJ  
Saint Elias Byzantine Catholic Church—Carteret, NJ  
Saint George Byzantine Catholic Church—Linden, NJ  
Saint George Byzantine Catholic Church—Newark, NJ

### NEW YORK

Saint Andrew Byzantine Catholic Church—Westbury, NY  
Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church—White Plains, NY  
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church—New York, NY  
Holy Spirit Byzantine Catholic Church—Binghamton, NY  
Resurrection Byzantine Catholic Church—Smithtown, NY

### PENNSYLVANIA

Saint Michael Byzantine Church—Mont Clare, PA  
Saint Mary Byzantine Church—Wilkes-Barre, PA  
Saint Mary Pokrova—Kingston, PA  
Saint John Byzantine Church—Wilkes-Barre, PA  
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic—Mahanoy City, PA  
Saint John Byzantine Church—Wilkes-Barre, PA  
Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church—Lansford, PA  
Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church—Bethlehem, PA  
Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church—Old Forge, PA  
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church—Taylor, PA  
Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church—Minersville, PA  
Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church—Dunmore, PA  
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church—Hazleton, PA  
Saint John Byzantine Catholic Church—Hazleton, PA

Holy Dormition Friary—Sybertsville, PA  
Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church—Jessup, PA  
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Church—Levittown, PA  
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church—Scranton, PA  
Saint Ann Byzantine Catholic Church—Harrisburg, PA

### GEORGIA

Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church—Roswell, GA

### VIRGINIA

Ascension of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church—Williamsburg, VA  
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Church—Virginia Beach, VA  
Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church—Annandale, VA

### FLORIDA

Saint Nicholas of Myra Byzantine Catholic Church—Orlando FL  
Saint Anne Byzantine Catholic Church—New Port Richey, FL  
Saint Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Church—Fort Pierce, FL  
Our Lady of the Sign Byzantine Catholic Church—Coconut Creek, FL

### NORTH CAROLINA

Saints Cyril & Methodius Byzantine Catholic Church—Cary, NC  
The Mission Community of Greater Charlotte

### SOUTH CAROLINA

Charlotte, NC, Byzantine Catholic Mission at Fort Mill, SC

### MARYLAND

Patronage of the Mother of God Byzantine Catholic Church—Arbutus, MD  
Saint Gregory of Nyssa Byzantine Catholic Church—Beltsville, MD

**Theosis in Action** December 12 Open to all young adults ages 18-35.  
**2020 events** Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in NYC; Christmas social Facebook.com/theosisinaction  
**Save the dates!** attheosisinaction@gmail.com

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## UPCOMING EPARCHIAL AND PARISH EVENTS

### DECEMBER, 2020

- 6 Our Holy Father Nicholas the Wonderworker  
*Solemn Holy Day*
- 8 Maternity of the Holy Anna  
*Solemn Holy Day\* Chancery closed*
- 13 Sunday of the Holy Forefathers
- 20 Sunday of the Holy Fathers
- 24 Vigil Eve of Christmas  
*Chancery closed*
- 25 Holy Nativity of Our Lord  
*Solemn Holy Day\*Chancery closed*
- 31 New Year's Eve  
*Chancery closed*
- Jan 1 Circumcision of Our Lord  
*Happy New Year!\*Chancery closed*

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:

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All Wedding Jubilarian Celebrations are moved to next year.