



# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

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DECEMBER 2022



Icon of The Nativity

Many people say that we live in a Mera without good role models for males. If you read enough history, you will find out that they have always been hard to find, starting with Adam. The Sunday after Christmas we find two admirable men, King David and Saint Joseph. I've heard it said that Saint Joseph was neglected in the East compared to the West, but it seems to me that we honor him even more since he is celebrated on a Sunday.

In the beautiful poetry of our Liturgy, Saint Joseph and King David are linked in the Good News. The hymns say to Joseph, "Tell David what you saw." The hymn is saying that when Saint Joseph died and arrived in the underworld, he could tell David, "Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled. The Virgin has given birth. Your throne will last forever. The universal Shepherd is now on the earth." A few years later, Jesus Himself arrived to liberate the underworld, or as we say, to despoil Hades, and to conquer Death.

What can we learn about Saint Joseph from the scriptures? Although he is named in Saint Luke's Gospel, almost

everything we know comes from the first two chapters of Saint Matthew's Gospel. In fact, Saint Joseph really dominates the action in those passages. He is truly a man of action, the great protector. By listening to the Word of God, he acts as God's agent in protecting the Messiah and his mother from the forces of evil.

In the first event, Saint Joseph is a just man who tries to follow the law of God, as he understands it. He learns that Mary is pregnant, and so cannot go through with his marriage knowing that he is not the father. But while respecting marriage and chastity, he does not desire to add to her burden by publicly denouncing her. He tries to follow the law but also practice charity. At this point he receives his first visit from an angel. In fact, there are five special revelations by God in this passage, three of them mention an angel. Four of these revelations are to Joseph, including all three of the angelic ones.

In this first revelation, the angel says, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is

## SAINT JOSEPH, MAN OF GOD

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

conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." From this revelation, we learn several things about a good man. The first is that even the best men have fear. **Courage does not mean a lack of fear; courage means acting despite fear. Joseph is able to be courageous because he trusts the word of God.** The angel tells Joseph to name the child, an act of a father. We learn that a good man must act like a good father, even when a child is not his own child.

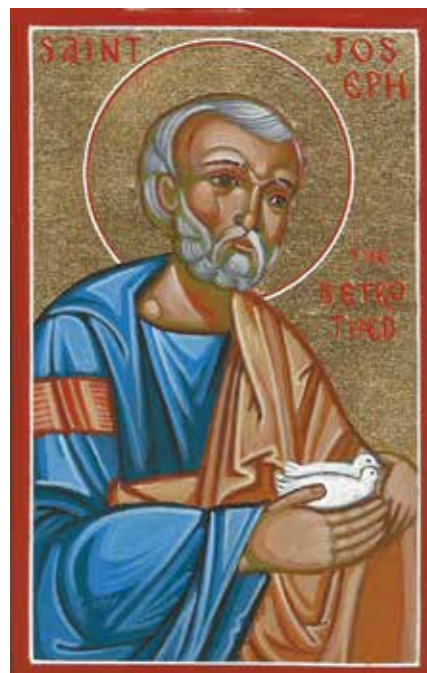
The second revelation is to the three magi, but the third revelation is again to Saint Joseph. In this one an angel speaks to him and says, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him." From this revelation we learn that a good man will sacrifice his own comfort, time, and even career to protect those entrusted to him. How often, when I was counseling a young man

against fornication, I have said, "God made men to protect women, not to use them for our own pleasure." What a delight it is to see a young man straighten his posture and relax his shoulders and look thoughtful, when moments earlier he looked ashamed, or cocky, or jocular! And what a contrast Saint Joseph is to King Herod. Herod's idea of manliness is to constantly increase his own power and wealth. And like so many men today who are deluded by materialism, Herod killed the very children that God gave him to protect.

In the fourth revelation, the angel says to Saint Joseph, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." Notice how the messages from the angel are full of activity. Saint Joseph didn't hideout or use subterfuge or clever words, but he took action, and swift action to protect his family. In fact, Saint Joseph is one of the most important men in history, and he never utters a word in the Scriptures.

Finally, on the way back to Judea, Saint Joseph receives his last revelation and moves to Nazareth. No doubt he was looking forward to returning to his original home, his relatives, his friends, and his business contacts. However, in his final sacrifice, Saint Joseph starts a new life in a different country to protect his family and to obey the word of God. We don't all have the best role model in this life, but God shows us a good man in the Scriptures. Saint Joseph follows God's law, practices charity, trusts God, acts decisively, keeps his mouth shut, and protects those whom God has entrusted to him.

+Kurt Bennette



Icon of Saint Joseph, The Betrothed by Raymond Mastroberta



Above: *Come and See* retreatants with their hosts, the seminarians and staff of B.C.S.

## COME AND SEE 2022: A STRONG SIGN OF HOPE

By Subdeacon Abraham Barahmeh; Saint Basil Melkite Church; Utica, New York

For many years I have been discerning the Holy Priesthood. But only recently, in my senior year of high school in 2020, did I take my faith and discernment seriously. Last year (2021), my spiritual father, Father Jim Koury, informed me about a three-day weekend retreat for discerning Byzantine Catholic men. It's held once a year in November at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Pittsburgh, and I was eligible. I applied and was accepted to participate. I attended it with the closed mindset of "I don't think the seminary is for me." By the end of the retreat, I had many questions for myself. These questions arose because I felt it had refueled the small fire urging me to take discernment to the Holy Priesthood more seriously. The two biggest questions that arose were, "Am I in the right major in college?" and "When am I ready to join?" I had talked to my spiritual father about my experience going, and I was advised to "Pray about it. There is no rush." I took his advice, and prayer became my journey friend.

I had planned on not attending another "Come and See," thinking I was all set and had the discernment I needed to consider joining the seminary after college, but Father Jim had insisted I go again, saying, "It won't hurt you going again! And you will always learn more!" So, I applied for the 2022 "Come and See" and was accepted again. It took place from the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 6<sup>th</sup> of

November at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary in Pittsburgh. I was one of 21 young men in attendance. Together we represented the Melkite, Ukrainian, and Ruthenian jurisdictions.

This time I could take in more information than before since I was more familiar with what would happen during the retreat. The first day of the retreat (Friday) focused on learning about the four dimensions of formation (spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and human). The seminary's Director of Human Formation explained each dimension's meaning and its key in our lives. At the end of that night, I reflected on each dimension and how I could improve myself more in each one.

The following day during brunch after Divine Liturgy, I talked with my mentor about the four dimensions of formation. He told me, "A big part of seminary is that not only will your professors/mentors help you grow, but also your peers." Following brunch that day were talks on a week in the life of a seminarian; the challenges of discernment, the theology of priesthood; and discerning marriage and priesthood. Each talk helped me understand how to prepare myself if I were accepted as a seminarian and what to look for during my discernment journey.

My favorite part of Saturday was the panel discussion. This allows time for the retreatants to ask the seminarians

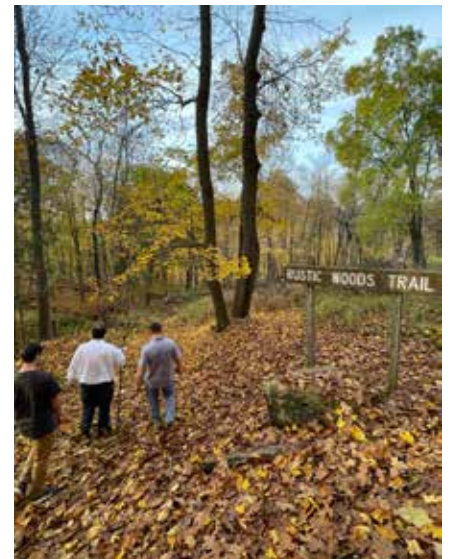


The gymnasium doubles as a perfect location to practice chant.

any question they want ranging from their pre-seminary studies to their favorite books and saints.

On the last day of the retreat (Sunday), we began the day with early morning Matins in the seminary chapel followed by Divine Liturgy at a nearby parish. For the conclusion of the retreat, the rector explained the discernment journey, and, from what he said, I learned it is not I who choose whether to become a priest or not, but God.

As my time began to end at the retreat, I had set three goals for myself by the time I graduate from college: First, take elective classes to help me think like a philosopher/theologian. Second, in-



"Come and See" allows time for some to take a hike on a beautiful fall day.

crease the time dedicated to God each day, like in seminary. Lastly, work on approaching new things with an open mind.

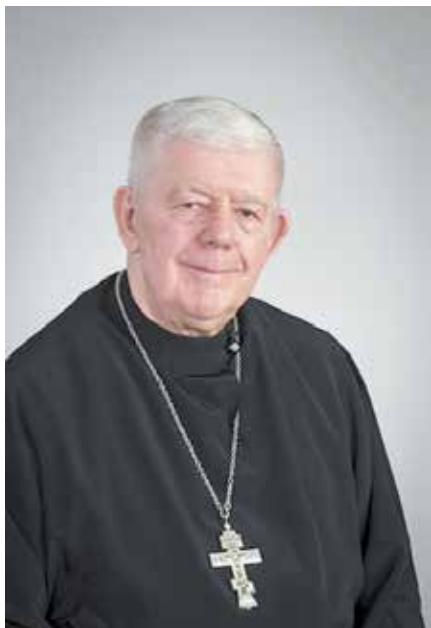
My thoughts on the "Come and See" retreat are that it gave me hope and a plan about my future, and that I encourage young men who take their Eastern Catholic faith seriously to take advantage of this opportunity in the future.



The panel discussion is always a favorite of retreatants at "Come and See."



Witness talks after brunch on Saturday.



## +FATHER EDWARD SEMKO ENTERS ETERNAL REST

February 8, 1943 - November 27, 2022

The son of Edward Symchesko (Semko) and Susanna Sopko, +Father Edward was born on February 8, 1943, in Linden, NJ. He was baptized and chrismated at Saint George Byzantine Catholic Church, Linden, NJ, on February 28, 1943, by Father John Slivka.

Discerning a vocation to the priesthood, he entered Saints Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA, where he also attended Duquesne University from 1961-1965. Furthering his studies, he was sent to the Russicum in Rome Italy, where he studied at the Gregorian University and the Oriental Institute from 1965-1969.

He was ordained to the Diaconate on August 6, 1968, by Bishop Stephen J. Kočisko, and to the Priesthood of Jesus Christ on July 13, 1969, by Bishop Michael J. Dudick.

Following ordination, Father Edward was appointed Assistant Pastor at Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church, Perth Amboy, NJ from 1969-1972; Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church, Wilkes-Barre, PA from 1972-1974; and Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church, Allentown, PA from 1974-1976. He was appointed Pastor of Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church, Jersey City, NJ, in 1976 where he remained until his appointment as Pastor of Saint Elias Byzantine Catholic Church in Carteret, NJ in 1987. He remained at Saint Elias Church for over 35 years, and continued to provide liturgical services for the parish, even after his formal retirement from administrative duties. In the 1970's, he also served at Holy Spirit Byzantine Catholic Church in Mahwah, NJ, and Holy Wisdom Byzantine Catholic Church in Flanders, NJ.

In addition to his pastoral responsibilities, +Father Edward also served

as a Judicial Notary for the Eparchy of Passaic, as well as Chaplain and Friar for the Knights of Columbus Council in Carteret, NJ. +Father Edward is survived by his sister, Barbara Pelosi; his nephew, Michael Pelosi; and his niece, Annette Young; as well as his beloved former parishioners, and friends.

On Monday, December 5, 2022, the Funeral for a Priest was celebrated at Saint Elias Byzantine Catholic Church in Carteret, NJ, at 6:00 PM. A Divine Liturgy for the Feast of Saint Nicholas, followed by Panachida and Pouring of Oil, was celebrated on Tuesday, December 6, 2022. Interment followed at Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Cemetery, Perth Amboy, NJ.

"Well done, my good and faithful servant ... Come, share your master's joy!" (Mt. 23)

*May his memory be eternal!*

CARTERET, NJ — +Father Edward Semko, 79, a retired priest of the Eparchy of Passaic, fell asleep in the Lord in on Sunday, November 27, 2022, at JFK Medical Center in Edison, NJ. Prior to his retirement, he was pastor of Saint Elias Byzantine Catholic Church, Carteret, NJ. He was a parish-son of Saint George Byzantine Catholic Church in Linden, NJ.

## SISTER LEOCADIA SEVACHKO, OSBM, ENTERS INTO THE FULLNESS OF LIFE

What joy to go from praying in the Chapel at the Manor to be welcomed into the embrace of the Lord. These last moments of Sister's earthly life were spent in God's presence, shortly to be followed by meeting Him face to face.

Sister Leocadia was called home to the Lord on Wednesday, November 23, 2022. She had been a member of the Sisters of Saint Basil the Great for 77 years. The daughter of the late Michael and Victoria (Backus) Sevachko, she entered the Sisters of Saint Basil from Saint Nicholas parish in Youngstown, OH on October 12, 1945 and made her Final Profession of Vows on August 28, 1953 in the presence of the late Bishop Daniel Ivancho. The first to enter the community, Sister Leocadia had the distinction of being one of three sisters in community; Sister Dorothy and Sister Bernarda.

Well-prepared with a Bachelor of Science in Education degree from Carlow College in Pittsburgh, PA, and a Master of Science in Education from LaSalle University in Philadelphia, PA, Sister was assigned to the teaching apostolate. She spent well over 57 years in elemen-

tary education. Her enthusiasm and her energy as a teacher informed all she did. God only knows the effect of her teaching and the special way she touched lives, and perhaps even changed them. Sister Leocadia wanted to be remembered for her deep faith, her spirit of trust, and her love of teaching. All who knew her can testify that these qualities were an integral part of her life.

Sister's assignments also included a number of years when she served as both teacher and principal as well as in catechetical ministry during the summers. Following this long period of active ministry, Sister Leocadia returned to the monastery, and when her health declined, the Manor became her new home. Here, she was blessed to enjoy the companionship of her sister, Sister Bernarda, whose visits were the highlight of her day. Both were enthusiastic sports fans, and they spent happy hours following the Cleveland sports teams and cheering them on.

In speaking of Sister Leocadia at the Funeral Divine Liturgy, Metropolitan William noted that she was sustained and nourished by the Bread of Life. This transformed her ministry into

a blessing for all. At the invitation of Metropolitan, Father Kevin Marks expanded upon this transforming effect of her life. Father stated that we might question the timing of Sister's death. However, coming as it did in preparation for Christmas, the timing was perfect. With her joyful spirit, Sister was truly a gift. Now, she will enjoy her first Christmas in her new home in the Kingdom. One can picture her sharing her joy as she was welcomed by all her parents, relatives, and friends.

In addition to the members of her community, Sister Leocadia is survived by her sister, Sister Bernarda, several nieces, nephews, grand-nephew, grand-niece, and cousins. She was preceded in death by her parents; her sister, Sister Dorothy; her sister, Marie; and brother, Matthew.

The Parastas Service was concelebrated on Sunday, November 27, by Father Andrew Deskevich and Father Jerome Botsko, Monastery Chaplain. The Funeral Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Metropolitan Archbishop William Skurla on Monday, November 28 with concelebrants Father Andrew Deskevich, Father Jerome Botsko, Father Kevin Marks, and Father James Ragan. Noah Hicks served at the altar, and Father Stephen Wahal was in attendance.

Interment followed in the Dormition Section of Mount Macrina Cemetery.

*May God grant to his handmaiden, Sister Leocadia, eternal memory and peaceful repose.*



### CARPATHO-RUSYN SOCIETY

MANIFESTING CARPATHO-RUSYN CULTURE AND HISTORY

The Society offers many educational programs online at Carpatho-Rusyn Society You Tube. Also offered are genealogy presentations on Zoom and expert help in finding your roots. Our new addition is our Heritage Store, where you will find educational materials, maps, flags and accessories. We will constantly be adding more items.

*The mission of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society is to preserve and perpetuate the distinct culture, history, language, and heritage of the Carpatho-Rusyn people.*

Visit our website at [www.c-rs.org](http://www.c-rs.org) and click on "Get Involved" to become a member. For more information contact: Bonnie Burke, Southeast Coordinator at [bb@c-rs.org](mailto:bb@c-rs.org) or call 440-729-2045.

You are invited and welcome to join us for  
**DIVINE LITURGY (MASS) VIGIL**  
**EVERY SATURDAY 11AM**  
(Fulfills Sunday Obligation)

Celebrated by Fr. Oleksiy Nebesnyk at  
**Christ Lutheran Church**  
**15699 SE 80th Ave.**  
**Summerfield, FL 34491**

For more information call 352-326-9831



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# PEOPLE YOU KNOW AROUND THE EPARCHY



## IN PASSAIC...

### Cathedral Celebrates Patronal Feastday

On Sunday, November 6, the faithful of Saint Michael Cathedral in Passaic, NJ, celebrated their patronal feast and 132 years of worship, fellowship, and service. Following the Divine Liturgy, which brought together a community usually divided between two Liturgies in two locations, a festive luncheon was served in Saint Michael's Hall. Among the guests in attendance were Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate and friends of the parish. Father Jack Custer, rector of the cathedral, introduced a number of new parishioners and thanked parish trustees and staff members for their dedicated service. A tricky tray raffle added to the day's festivities.



## IN WESTBURY...

### Roman Catholic Seminarians Visit Byzantine Church

On Sunday, November 13, seminarians from the Cathedral House of Formation on Long Island, NY, together with their Rector and faculty came to Saint Andrew Church in Westbury, Long Island, NY, to attend the Divine Liturgy. Father Nick Daddona, the pastor of Saint Andrew Parish, went to the seminary the previous Thursday and gave a Power Point presentation on the Eastern Church and the Liturgy. The book, *Come and See*, was given out and used as part of the presentation. After Liturgy on Sunday, the group shared lunch with the parishioners.

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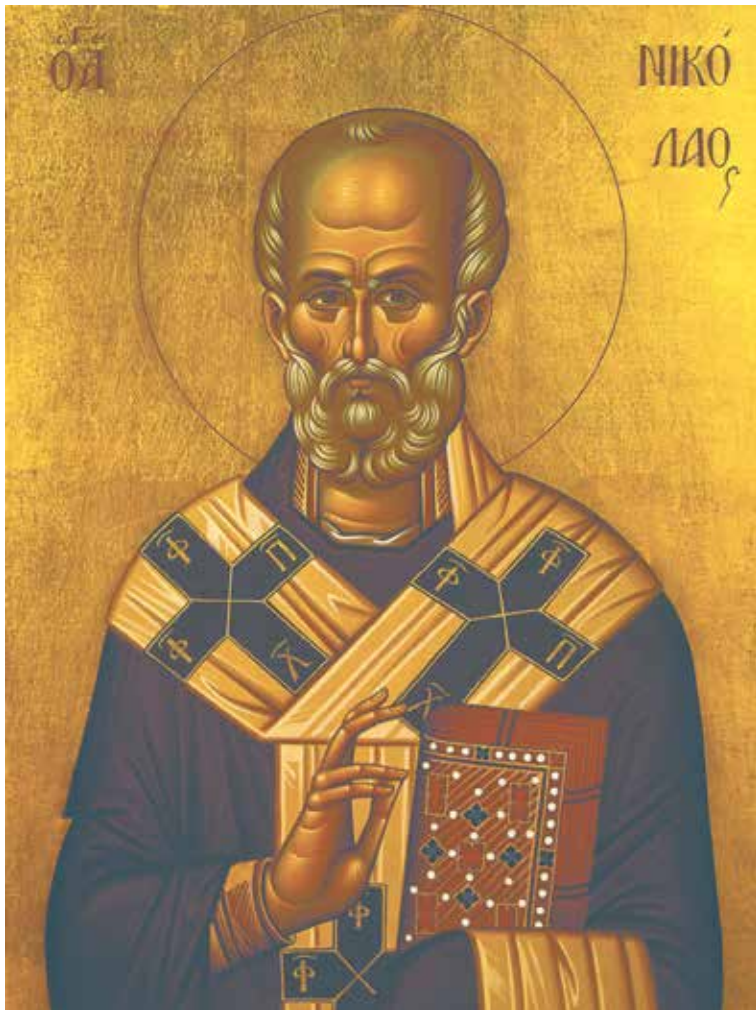
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# December Feasts



Saint Nicholas of Myra  
December 6



Maternity of the  
Holy Anna  
December 8



Synaxis of the  
Theotokos  
December 26



Saint Stephen  
the Protomartyr  
December 27



## FATHER DAVID BARATELLI CELEBRATES 40 YEARS A PRIEST

“This is what the Lord asks of you, only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God.” (*Micah 6:8*).

This verse, taken from the Book of the Prophet Micah, has guided Father Dave Baratelli’s (Lt. Col. USAF Ret.), Parish Priest and Administrator of Saint George Byzantine Catholic Church, Newark, NJ, in his priestly ministry for the last 40 years.



On Sunday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, East met West as Saint George Parish, joined Saint Rose Roman Catholic Parish at their church in Belmar, NJ, for a joyously celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Father Dave’s Ordination to the Priesthood. Father concelebrated a Divine Liturgy of Thanksgiving with Bishop Kurt, who was welcomed at the doors

of the Church by Christina Remias, Sue Adamo, and Carol Irwin of Saint George Parish and Mr. John and Mrs. Carol DeBartolo of Saint Rose Parish. Other concelebrants of the Liturgy included Father Francis T. Rella, Pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Church, Toms River, NJ; Reverend Msgr. Edward Arnister, Pastor, Church of Saint Rose, Belmar, NJ; Father Christopher Dayton, Parochial Vicar of Saint Rose of Lima Church and other priests of the Dioceses of Trenton and Newark and the Melkite Greek Catholic Eparchy of Newton. The responses for the Liturgy were chanted by Presbytera Tammy Rella with her daughters, Maria and Rose and the reader was Mr. Michael Fitz of Saint George Parish. Richard Rella was the altar server for the liturgy.

Following the Divine Liturgy, guests enjoyed Sunday dinner at the Spring Lake Manor, Spring Lake Heights, NJ. The Most Reverend David O’Connell, CM, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Trenton, joined Bishop Kurt, the Priests and Deacons, Father Dave’s family and friends, and the parish families of Saint George and Saint Rose for an enjoyable evening of dinner and dancing. Music was provided by the band, Remember Us, who delighted guests with classic songs from the fifties, sixties, and seventies.

Through the years, Father Dave has also assisted at other parishes in the Eparchy of Passaic including the Cathedral of Saint Michael the Archangel, Passaic, NJ, and Saint John the Baptist in Bayonne, NJ as well as Saint Philip the

Apostle Church, Sacramento, CA, in the Eparchy of Phoenix and the Melkite Greek Catholic Churches of Saint Ann, West Paterson, NJ, and the Church of



Saint Demetrius, Cliffside Park, NJ. Additionally, he also gives liturgical assistance at Saint Rose of Lima Parish. He serves as Coordinator for the Office for a Safe Environment in Ministry of the Eparchy of Passaic and for some years assisted with immigration work on behalf of newly immigrating clergy for service in the Eparchy.

As an air force officer, he has served units and bases both on the East and West Coasts. Prior to his assignment to McClellan AFB, Sacramento, while serving as Parochial Vicar at Saint Vincent de Paul Church, Bayonne, NJ, he also served as Catholic Chaplain to the Army’s Military Traffic Management Command Eastern Area headquarters at the former Military Ocean Terminal, Bayonne. As team leader for an air force interdisciplinary critical incident

response team, he participated in counseling support services for survivors and base communities impacted by mass casualty events. Past assignments included Laughlin AFB, Del Rio, TX; Norton AFB and McClellan AFB, CA; Warner Robins AFB, GA; Dover AFB, DE; McGuire AFB, NJ, and Willow Grove ARS, PA.

As chaplain to Newark Liberty International Airport for 27 years, he served a community composed of aviation professionals, employees, and travelers of diverse faith traditions. As a chaplain, he continues to serve the Port Authority Police Department and its members. In the aftermath of 9/11, Father Dave provided ongoing care for the Port Authority of NY and NJ and Port Authority police personnel and their families, which continues today.

We at Saint George Church and the Eparchy of Passaic are blessed by Father Dave’s remarkable priestly ministry. May God grant him peace, health, and happiness, and may his name be inscribed in The Book of Life. Na Mnohaja L’ita!





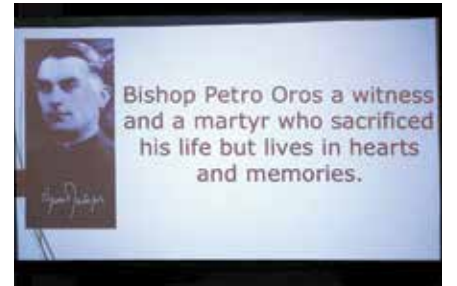
## BEATIFICATION OF TRANSCARPATHIAN MARTYR CELEBRATED IN HILLSBOROUGH

On Saturday, October 29, 2022, the faithful of the Byzantine Catholic Church in the United States and, with the aid of live streaming, around the world, gathered at Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Hillsborough, NJ, where Father James Badeaux is pastor, to celebrate the upcoming beatification of Father Peter Paul Oros, a priest and (probable) clandestine bishop from the Eparchy of Mukačevo, martyred by the Communists in Transcarpathia. The principal celebrant of the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was Metropolitan William of the Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, with Bishop Kurt,

who preached, and Byzantine Catholic priests from around the eparchy and the country serving as concelebrants. The responses were led in English and Church Slavonic by Saint Mary Parish Choir, under the direction of Professor Glenn Sedar, parish music director and cantor.

Some highlights of the events at the luncheon following in Saint Mary Parish Center were the Power Point presentation given by Father Yuriy Oros (no relation) and the recorded message from Bishop +Nil, Apostolic Administrator of the Mukačevo Eparchy,

together with the faculty and students of the seminary in Užhorod. Father Yuriy, who serves at Saint Mary Parish in Trenton and Saint Nicholas Parish in Roebling, NJ, holds a doctorate in history and this was evident not only in the quality of the research he had undertaken, but in his well-delivered and systematic presentation, which included many photos from the life of the martyr. To crown the event and showing the universality of our faith, Bishop Nil's previously recorded message, broadcast to the faithful with the aid of Rose Rella, daughter of Father Frank Rella, of Our Lady of Perpetual



Help Church in Toms River, NJ, inspired everyone to continue to live out the precious treasure of our Byzantine Catholic Faith, which sustained Father Peter even to the giving of his own life, despite the vicious persecution of militant atheists and communists. At the end of Bishop Nil's presentation, he intoned *mnohaja l'ita* for those present at the event in New Jersey. *O Holy Martyr, pray to God for us!*





# 2022 BISHOP'S APPEAL

## BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC

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*PLEDGE NOW THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2022*

BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC  
2022 BISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL

Please pledge online at [eparchyofpassaic.com](http://eparchyofpassaic.com)  
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in the envelope provided.

*As challenges continue to affect us, please take  
care of yourself, your family and your parish first.*

- \$2,500.00     \$1,000.00     \$500.00  
 \$250.00 \_\_\_\_\_     Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- full payment enclosed  
 first payment enclosed, bill me for 4 additional payments

The 2022 Bishop's Appeal will run through the end of our fiscal year, June 2023.  
Contributions received prior to December 31, 2022, will count toward your  
2022 tax year. Acknowledgement letter will be mailed prior to January 31, 2023.

**New Address or Correction**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
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City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parish: \_\_\_\_\_

# SYNOD ON SYNODALITY REPORT/SYNTHESIS FOR THE EPARCHY OF PASSAIC

This publication is the first of several, to be published in the ECL for the Eparchy of Passaic.

Prepared by Joan (Cebrick) Grossman, PhD, RDN, Synod Coordinator

Per the direction of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, he requested that the entire Catholic Church be consulted on the *Synod on Synodality*. Fundamentally, synodality is about journeying together. The concept of synodality refers to the involvement and participation of the whole people of God in the life and mission of the Church. This *Synod on Synodality* is specific to reaching those who have been a part of our church but are no longer active, discerning the future of our church, via an inclusive spirit and way of Jesus. This happens through listening to one another and realizing that the Holy Spirit can speak through anyone to help us walk forward together on our journey, as people of God.

## Overview of Synodal Process

The synodal process for the Eparchy of Passaic began with the appointment of Synod Coordinator in October 2021, Dr. Joan Grossman, Lifetime Parishioner, St. Nicholas of Myra, Swoyersville, PA, by Bishop Kurt Burnette. The process then evolved:

### Initial Eparchial Virtual Meeting—October 2021

From this meeting of protopresbyters, an introductory video was suggested to introduce the synod. Dr. Grossman completed this video in her home parish and it was then uploaded to the Eparchial website. Other ideas from this meeting included: weekly bulletin messages, in-person listening sessions, virtual listening sessions, US mail and email.

### Virtual Meeting with Archbishop William Skurla—February 2022

It was determined that the Synod work would become an integral part of the Lenten journey for the Archeparchy, with selected parish facilitators (e.g. deacon/trustee) to facilitate individual parish listening sessions and guided questions provided by the Archeparchy.

Bishop Kurt Burnette provided an introductory letter for the eparchy to be read prior to each listening session, to encourage and support the process. Continued communication of the synodal process for the eparchy was disseminated via email messages to all priests with specific deadlines at each level: parish facilitator(s), syncelli, coordinator and bishop.

The Passaic Eparchy synodal process began February 28, 2022, (the first day of The Great Fast), after which there was a featured article in the ECL specific to the synodal process for the parishes. Dr. Grossman then moderated a clergy listening session during the annual Presbyteral Days in April 2022. The syncelli reports were directed to Dr. Grossman May 2022, and the Eparchial Synod Synthesis provided to Bishop Kurt Burnette in June 2022, with final synthesis sent to Archbishop William Skurla, August 2022.

## Statistical Reporting of Syncellates

**New York/New England**—Very Rev. Nicholas Daddona

### Participating Parishes:

St. Mary, NYC; Resurrection, Smithtown NY; St. Andrew, Westbury, NY; St. Nicholas Danbury, CT; St. John Trumbull, CT

### Non-participating Parishes:

Not reported

**Susquehanna**—Very Rev. Michael Kerestes

### Participating Parishes:

St. Nicholas, Swoyersville; St. Michael, Pittston; St. Mary, Wilkes-Barre; St. Nicholas, Mt. Pocono

### Non-participating Parishes:

Not reported

**Central Pennsylvania**—Very Rev. Edward Higgins

### Participating Parishes:

St. Ann, Harrisburg; St. John, Lansford; Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Levittown; SS Peter & Paul, Minersville; St. Michael, Monte Clare; St. Mary, Nesquehoning; St. John, Pottstown; St. Mary, Saint Clair

### Non-participating Parishes:

St. Mary, Freeland; SS Peter & Paul, Beaver Meadows; SS Peter & Paul, Bethlehem; St. Mary, Brockton; Blessed Virgin Mary, Coatesville; St. John and St. Mary, Hazleton; St. Mary, Mahanoy City; St. Michael, McAdoo; Holy Ghost and Holy Trinity, Philadelphia; St. Mary, Shepton and SS Peter & Paul, Phillipsburg, NJ

**New Jersey**—Very Rev. John Custer, SSL, STD

### Participating Parishes:

Passaic, Woodland Park, Flanders, East Brunswick, Perth Amboy, Jersey City, Bayonne, Trenton, Roebling, Rahway

### Non-participating Parishes:

Newark, Hillsborough, Dunellen, New Brunswick, Somerset

**Middle States**—Very Rev. John Basarab, MA

### Participating Parishes:

SS. Cyril and Methodius, Cary, NC; Ascension of our Lord, Williamsburg, VA; Patronage of the Mother of God Church, Baltimore, MD; St. Gregory of Nyssa, Beltsville, MD

### No Responses Received (included statistically as no data reported):

Epiphany of our Lord, Annandale, MD; Epiphany Mission, Gaithersburg, MD

**Southern States**—Very Rev. Robert Evancho

### Participating Parishes:

St. Cyril & Methodius, Ft Pierce; St. Anne, New Port Richey; All Saints, N. Ft. Myers; St. Nicholas, Orlando; Holy Dormition, Ormond Beach; St. Therese, St. Petersburg; Our Lady of the Sign, Coconut Creek; Epiphany, Roswell, GA

### Non-participating Parishes:

Not reported

## Eparchial Parish Participation

Parishes (total, n+86)	Participating Parishes	Non-Participating Parishes	Unknown/No Data Reported
Number	39	17	30
Percentage	45.34%	19.76%	34.88%

## General Overall Theme

Parishioners welcomed the listening sessions, and indicated such sessions were long and overdue, as hearing from the laity of the Church is important, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic has been especially challenging for the Church. However, the synod questions lacked clarity of common American English, which may have been a deterrent from the start. A number of the questions overlapped and twelve questions, although far less than the previous synod, were still too many. Interestingly, more “hard” truths were provided from the questionnaires as compared to the listening sessions, perhaps due to anonymity with the questionnaires.

Listed below are the first two of the twelve synod questions with the answers consolidated into main themes teased out from the syncelli reports and clergy listening session. In addition, suggestions are offered after each question, provided as a means to move this process forward and strengthen our eparchy.

## Synod Questions and Thematic Responses

### What are the difficulties, obstacles, and wounds in the local Church?

- A failure on the part of bishops, priests, and deacons to preach the Truth of the Gospel Message as applied to the difficult moral issues of the present time which plague contemporary people, such as: decades of clergy sexual abuse, divorce, homosexuality and gender issues.
- Lack of leadership and engagement with the body of the Church at meaningful levels.
- Aging population, lack of priests, shrinking congregation due to those who have stopped coming to Church, who have lost their way and faith, parish politics, deaths, churches located in dangerous neighborhoods, family relocation and those who do not feel welcomed, all of which have resulted in increased financial stress for the parishes.
- Parochialism – Territorial within our parishes, not willing to change
- Keeping young people interested and engaged as we are in conflict with the current culture.
- Suggestion – Transparency is important, openness with sexual misconduct is necessary to begin healing. Explain how the Eparchy is handling any such offenses. Introduce the Safe Environment Program, which is known to parishioners required to participate, but the majority of the laity within the Eparchy are unfamiliar with this positive initiative designed to prevent further sexual abuse.
- Annual financial statements should be required by each parish and provided to the laity. This is a serious issue that seems to have been neglected among many parishes, particularly since COVID and should be addressed as fiscal health is part of the life blood of the church.
- ByzanTeen Youth Rally – an incredible experience for our youth
- Make Sunday the most important day of the week for the parish

- Jesus taught inclusivity and at the forefront of our decisions, we should ask, “What would Jesus do?” and all else will fall in line.

#### What is the Holy Spirit asking of us?

- The Holy Spirit breathes life into the Church. We seem to be closed-off, and not open to new life. While traditions are important, sometimes they may keep new people from joining us because they don't understand or are not invited into “our way”. We do not evangelize nor do we educate or explain our traditions, customs, and beautiful meanings of our liturgical services.
- The Holy Spirit guides us to embrace the changes that take place within the Church, it asks us to open our hearts to people who are different and curious about the Byzantine Catholic Rite. Change in the world and the Church is inevitable, change is good and is needed for the Church to move into the future. Change of attitude, change of the way things are done within the Church and change in our hearts. As the parish sizes shrink, we must work smarter not harder, everyone is needed to do their part, even if it means being a prayer warrior.
- Suggestion - One way to educate is via brief messages listed in the weekly bulletin, with focused key points about the Byzantine Rite. For example, a “*Did you know?*” section in the bulletin. “*Did you know? That the icons are written and not painted and the ears are larger than the mouths, as we are to listen more and speak less.*” Perhaps such a weekly message could come from an educational point person in the Eparchy assuring we all receive the same, coordinated message? Less is more, it could be one, simple, weekly educational point. And, this educational focus could be followed up in the ECL with a *short* paragraph, to educate all, in a concise, yet powerful way.
- Provide “greeters” in the vestibule to welcome everyone each Sunday, again, directed from the bishop, as the leader, this sends a strong unified message.

This could be a role for the youth in the parish which could instill a deep sense of belonging, simple and subtle evangelizing, yet meaningful.

- Utilize our priests from Eastern Europe to Evangelize the current clergy, directed from the Eparchial level.

The *Synod on Synodality* Report/Synthesis will continue in the January issue of the ECL.

Note: Parish-level reports can be obtained directly from your priest, parish administrator, deacon, or Synod facilitator.

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## LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

### WHO IS YOUR KING?

Every kid with an older sibling who tries to tell them what to do says at some point: “You’re not the boss of me!” There comes a point in our young lives when we begin to grow into ourselves, start testing our independence, and firmly reject any offers for help, confident that we can do what we want all by ourselves. That attitude of radical independence is only slightly moderated as we grow into adulthood, with some of us more stubbornly digging in. For those of us who grew up in America, this tenacious hold on our autonomy has become a dearly held value. For many, if not all of us, the thought of our independence being infringed upon (or lost as we age or become incapacitated through illness or accident) is devastating. As Christians who are navigating a culture where the main point of reference in all things must be *the self*, (that is, considering first and foremost what *I* want or feel) it’s important for us to re-evaluate who we are, what we believe, what matters to us, and what – or whom – we serve. In other words, as we look at how we live, the choices we make and the values we espouse, we must ask ourselves, “Who is my king?”

In chapter 6 of Saint Matthew’s gospel, Jesus teaches the disciples (and us) about who we are as creatures in relationship to our Divine Creator. What He says should deeply resonate with us in how it contrasts with our modern, materialistic world, in which self-satisfaction and radical independence are highly valued. In this chapter Jesus

teaches about money (both the good that can be done with it and the ways in which it can corrupt); prayer (here Jesus gives us the Lord’s Prayer, which encapsulates the teaching of this chapter); and dependence (that radical abandonment not only to God’s will for us, but to the confidence that He truly loves us and wants us to flourish). We’ve all heard or read parts of this gospel many times, and we all pray the Lord’s Prayer at least once a week, so the themes here are not unfamiliar. Yet if we only consider them in a piecemeal way, without reading the entirety of the chapter and then placing it within the context of the mystery of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, and the tradition and rituals of our faith, what is given in this gospel can become merely a series of tiny “lessons” in how to be good. What Jesus gives us here is so much more. He is teaching us about who we are, why we were made, how we are to relate to each other, and who we are before God. After addressing the necessities of life and how we are to live, our Lord reassures us that all we need (not necessarily all that we *desire*) will be provided to us by the God who loves us. Anxiety about the future, worry about how we will care for ourselves and those we love, making our mark in the world: all of these are part of the human experience. In the end, however, Jesus gives us a kind of off-ramp from the rat race, instead offering that, if God takes care of the birds and the flowers and all of Creation, how much more are we, who are made in His image and likeness, cared

for by Him? God loves us beyond our imagination, and in a way that is truly *generous* beyond our comprehension. Being *dependent* on Him does not mean giving ourselves over to be used by a tyrannical slave master. Submitting ourselves to God means recognizing that we are His *creatures*, not self-made individuals seeking self-actualization. True freedom is found in knowing that we are made for relationship with each other, and that we truly are *dependent* on God, and on each other. Following this way, accepting these principles (especially when we want to shout, “No one is the boss of me!”) is not easy. Then how do we begin to walk this path?

As I meditate on this chapter from Matthew, I find myself always drawn to the same verse: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.” (6:33). “All these things” refers to the verses above this one, where Jesus talks about God providing for us, which we all know takes a lot of trust, and a hefty dose of patience. The “righteousness” we are to seek is not our own; Jesus is not giving us license to call ourselves Christians and walk around with moral superiority. Rather, He is calling us to acknowledge that belonging to Him, following Him, and surrendering to Him, is to strive toward doing His will. In short, seeking God’s righteousness means striving every day to be formed in His image and likeness, not an image we create.

It is the first part of this verse that draws me back again and again, and which I think is well worth each of us pondering: *Seek first the kingdom of God*. At first blush most of us probably have the same thought: Jesus is telling us to look forward to Heaven. That is part of it, because ultimately, we’re not made for this world, but for union with God in the next. What really draws me back to this verse, though, is in the translation found in our Byzantine Lectionary (the “roadmap” to the Epistle and Gospel readings heard in the Liturgy throughout the year). If you don’t recall hearing this passage in the third week after Pentecost, contemplate it now: “Seek first *His kingship* over you.” Should we live good lives so that we’ll go to Heaven? Of course! But the beauty – and the challenge – of Jesus’ words ask much more of us. We’re not made to just to “do good” out of a sense of obligation or fear. Jesus is inviting us to enter the life of the Trinity, to grow into the Divine Image in which we were created, and to be immersed in God’s love and mercy in a way that makes *holiness* (and not just being “good”) into our hearts’ burning desire. It’s something we all must ponder, because Jesus is asking each one of us, “Who is *your* king?” **ECL**



## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

### THE NINTH BIBLICAL ODE, PART I: THE HYMN OF ZECHARIAH

The first two chapters of Saint Luke's Gospel recount the conception and birth of Jesus and John the Baptist in parallel. Unlike anything else in the Gospels, these two chapters are also a bit like a Broadway musical. At various points in the story, the Virgin Mary, John's father, Zechariah, the angels in Bethlehem, and the elder Simeon all break out in song. The first two of these hymns have long been part of Christian Liturgy, and together they comprise the ninth Ode originally chanted at daily Matins.

Zechariah was taking his turn as a priest, offering the evening incense (the Old Testament origins of our Vespers service), when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him inside the Temple. He was struck dumb for doubting Gabriel's announcement that he and his elderly wife Elizabeth would finally have the son they had so long desired. Gabriel foretold John's name and his future as a preacher of repentance. Only at the child's naming and circumcision, eight days after his birth, did Zechariah regain the power of speech, "prophesying" in the first words he spoke "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:5-25; 57-66).

Like the two Odes in Daniel, Zechariah's Hymn (Luke 1:67-79) begins with a traditional Jewish blessing: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel." He summarizes the whole Old Testament in praising God for remaining faithful to His people and sees the birth of his son as a moment of "redemption" (1:68) for all Israel. God is finally fulfilling what prophets predicted (1:70) and what He had promised in His covenant with Abraham (1:73).

So far, we could hear Zechariah's prayer as another example of an individual seeing God's answer to his personal prayer as proof of God's constant fidelity to all Israel. Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ode of Matins) does this too. But how does the birth of John the Baptist herald the defeat of Israel's "enemies" (1:71-74) and the restoration of the royal house of David (1:69)? Israel's historical enemies were other nations like Egypt and Babylon. The enemy for Zechariah and Elizabeth was their infertility and the judgment others were all too hasty to pass on them for it. But that reference to "the house of David" (1:69) is puzzling. Zechariah and his wife belonged to the priestly tribe of Levi; they had no connection to David.

Zechariah clearly sees his son as the forerunner of the Messiah, the heir promised to David (2 Samuel 7). This portion of Zechariah's prophecy (Luke 1:76-79) builds on predictions made by Isaiah more than 300 years earlier. John would "go before the Lord to prepare His way" (Isaiah 40:3), preach repentance "for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4) to those who "sit in darkness and the shadow of death" (Isaiah 9:2), and guide their feet into "the way of peace" (Isaiah 58:9).

The Greek text of Zechariah's Hymn predicts the "Dawn" or "Dayspring" or "Orient" (place of sunrise). All of these struggles to translate various Hebrew words used by the prophets (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12; Malachi 4:2) to describe how the Messiah would suddenly "sprout" like a "branch" from the dead stump of David's house, which had produced no king for over 500 years.

Notice how Zechariah foresees the result of John the Baptist's mission and the coming of the Messiah. There is no talk of military victories, no description of a new and powerful Jewish state. Rather, Zechariah envisions a people "free to worship" the Lord "without fear; in ho-

liness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:75). What Zechariah the priest foresees is true worship of the one true God. The Jerusalem Temple was destroyed once and for all some 70 years after Zechariah spoke, and John himself seems to have been identified with those priests who considered the Temple and its hierarchy to be corrupt and abandoned Jerusalem for the desert. Zechariah is predicting the worship "in Spirit and in truth" that Jesus announced (John 4:24); the worship that flows from the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus' own blood as perfect Priest in the perfect Temple of His body, as the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches at length (chapters 9-10).

The Hymn of Zechariah was overshadowed by the Hymn of the Theotokos, the other part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Ode of Matins, and has left no trace even in Canons for feasts of John the Baptist. The only exception is a well-known *irmos* in tone 5, which is also chanted at weddings: "Rejoice O Isaiah! The Virgin has conceived and borne a Son: Emmanuel. He is God and Man; Orient (or Dayspring, or Rising of the Sun) is His name." **ECL**

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

### THE NINTH BIBLICAL ODE, PART 2: MARY'S HYMN OF PRAISE (LUKE 1:46-55)

The ninth Ode of Matins includes two New Testament texts. Last time, we looked at the Hymn of Zechariah, father of John the Baptist (Luke 1:67-79). The other (known in Slavonic as the *Veličanije* or "Magnification") is the Virgin Mary's Hymn and, unlike the other Odes, it is still regularly sung as part of Matins.

Both hymns, Mary's and Zechariah's, are connected with the birth of their children, as was Hannah's Hymn (1 Samuel 2:1-10), the third Ode of Matins. Mary and Zechariah both see their sons as the fulfillment of promises made to Abraham nearly two thousand years earlier (Luke 1:55 and 73). But while Zechariah eventually speaks directly about his newborn son (1:76ff), Mary (like Hannah) never mentions the child she has just conceived at all.

The *Veličanije* was Mary's response to Elizabeth's triple blessing: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb...Blessed is she who believed the Lord's promise to her" (1:42 and 45). Just as icons of the Virgin nearly always point us toward

her Son, here Mary deflects the praise from herself to the Lord in language very much like the Odes of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-2) and Habakkuk (3:18).

Like Hannah (1 Samuel 2:7-8) Mary rejoices in how God's plan repeatedly turns the tables, exalting the lowly and scattering the proud in their conceit (1:51-52). We may think of Israel being preserved against the Egyptians, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. But, in the end, the only real enemy was always Satan, the "dragon" who threatened the "woman clothed with the sun" as she was about to give birth to her Son in Saint John's vision of Mary exalted in heaven (Revelation 12). The ultimate turnabout is Christ's victory over Satan, sin and death by His own death and resurrection.

This same eternal life is what the "hungry" (1:53) have always hungered for. Mary's words echo the blessing pronounced by Jesus over "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6) and His warning: "Do not work for food that perishes, but for the

food that endures to eternal life...I am the Bread of Life" (John 6:27 and 48).

"The Almighty has done great things for me," Mary sings (1:49). There, at Elizabeth's house, the great thing on Mary's mind was her virginal conception. We could add her own miraculous birth to elderly parents, her election by God, and her preservation from sin. Looking back from the vantage point of her Dormition and bodily Assumption, guided by Saint John's prophetic vision in Revelation 12, we can see even more. The "promises made to Abraham and his seed" (v.55) seemed to involve no more than possession of the land of Israel with prosperity, many descendants, and an undefined "blessing" (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5; 17:4-8). Eight hundred years later, King David, a descendant of Abraham, was promised that a son of his would reign forever (2 Samuel 7:12; Psalm 132:11). In the whole course of Mary's life, we see the fulfillment of those promises beyond an earthly kingdom and a merely human king. We see a human being liberated from sin and death, sharing in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and inheriting the kingdom

of heaven—indeed, becoming Queen Mother of that Kingdom (Psalm 45:9).

Mary's insistence that the Lord "has mercy on those who fear Him, from generation to generation" points forward to us and includes us in the enjoyment of God's promises now kept in her. Mary's words and her own experience assure us that we will be satisfied if we hunger for righteousness (Matthew 5:6) and for the Bread of Life (John 6:25-34). Mary's trustful "yes" to Gabriel (Luke 1:38) teaches us to be humble enough to accept the salvation that can only be received as an undeserved gift (Luke 8:36-50 [the sinful woman]; 18:9-14 [the publican]; 19:1-10 [Zacchaeus]; 23:39-43 [the repentant thief]). Every time we call Mary "blessed" we should be reminded that her blessing is meant for us as well, provided we invest our faith and our hope in God's promise as Mary did.

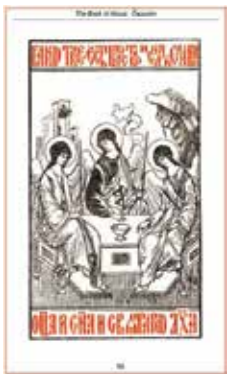
The ninth Ode of every Canon builds poetically on some aspect of the Virgin's role in our salvation, often alluding to other Old Testament prophecies that point to her. We said at the beginning of our study of the Old Testament Odes that they were read by the earliest Christians as foreshadowings of Christ's Resurrection. Mary's *Veličanije* look back but also forward and celebrates how she—and we—are invited to share in that Resurrection. **ECL**

## EASTERN CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS ANNOUNCES

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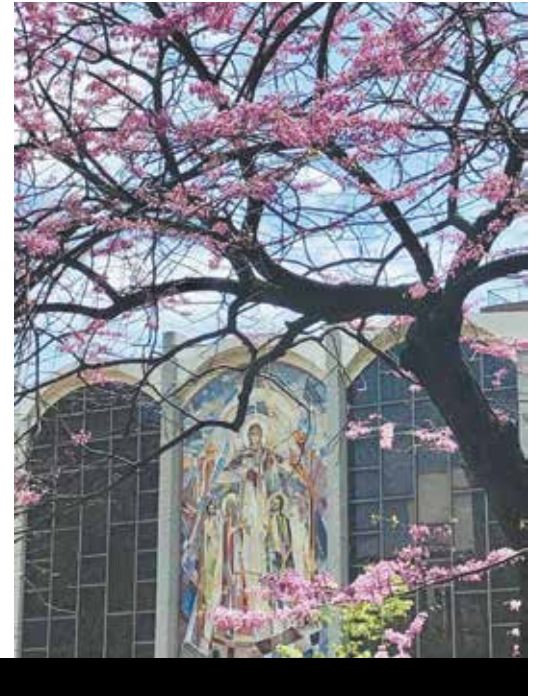
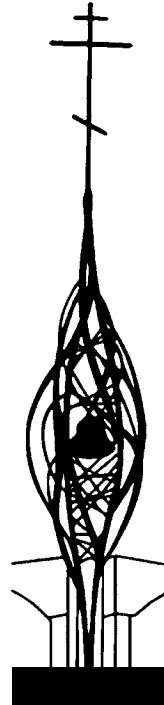
The book is printed in red and black on medium-weight opaque paper, with a black leatherette sewn binding and flexible covers. At 5"x7" and 2" thick, it also matches the original Slavonic edition with approximately 900 pages. The translation has been approved in concordance with the original by Bishop Kurt Burnette of Passaic. Special launch pricing is available at \$60/copy, or \$40/copy for orders of five or more, plus shipping and handling.

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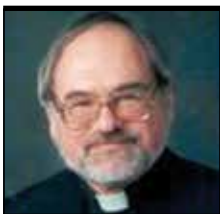


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## THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

### THE RITES OF INITIATION: HOLY COMMUNION

When we become children of God through the rites of initiation, this is completed by Holy Communion in the Body and Blood of our Lord. Holy Communion is the mystery of "God with us." Whenever we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, the gifts that we offer of bread and wine are changed into the real body and the real blood of our Lord. Of course, in reality these gifts were first given to us by God in creation. They are wheat and grapes that have then been transformed by our God-given human powers of reason and the work of our hands by being baked into bread and fermented into wine. In the Divine Liturgy, they are further transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into God's only-begotten Son who has been given to us by the Father. Indeed, in the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, quoting the Gospel of Saint John (3:16), we pray, "You so loved your world that you gave your only-begotten Son so that everyone who believes in him should not perish, but have life everlasting." Jesus, moreover, taught, "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world ... I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst ... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:33.35.53). The whole purpose of baptism into the Holy Trinity is to give us access to the Bread of Life, and every time we receive Holy Communion the grace of baptism is renewed in us.

The Church teaches that there are seven sacraments. In reality there is one seven-fold sacrament: Christ himself among us. Saint Paul wrote, "The mystery hidden from ages and from generations past...has been manifested to his holy ones...it is Christ in you, the hope for glory" (Colossians 1:26-27). For this reason, the Fathers called the Eucharist (Communion) the seal of all the sacraments, and in the practice of the Church the celebration of each of the sacramental mysteries was concluded with the Eucharist. Babies unable to eat solid food are still communicated with a little of the Eucharistic blood. The whole Church, for many centuries,



immediately communicated infants who had been baptized. The Eastern Church continues to do so to this day. The Western Church stopped communicating infants in the twelfth century when the Roman Church began to give Communion only in the form of bread and small infants could not receive Christ under this form. There was no way to communicate infants, though the practice of infant Communion ex-

isted in some parts of the Roman Catholic Church until the sixteenth century.

Under the influence of the Roman Catholic practice of the time, some of the Eastern Churches in union with Rome also stopped giving Communion to infants. This was contrary to tradition and, in fact, was not viewed entirely with favor by Roman authorities. This changed, however, in the 1990's, when the renewed Eastern Code of Canon was promulgated. Canon 697 read, "Sacramental Initiation in the mystery of salvation is perfected in the reception of the Divine Eucharist, and thus the Divine Eucharist is administered after baptism and chrismation with holy myron as soon as possible according to the norms of the particular law of the each Church *sui juris*." The Liturgical Instruction of the Oriental Congregation of January 6, 1996 explained why this is so: "Eucharist is the Bread of life, and infants need to be nourished constantly, from then on, to grow spiritually. The method of their participation in the Eucharist corresponds to their capacity: they will initially be different from adults, inevitably less aware and not very rational, but they will progressively develop, through the grace and the pedagogy of the sacrament, to grow until 'mature manhood to the extent of the full stature of Christ' (cf. Eph. 4:13). Furthermore, the *Liturgical Instruction* makes it clear that "the administration of the Divine Eucharist to infant neophytes is not limited to only the moment of the celebration of Initiation" but is to be given continuously from baptism on. (§ 51)

This was difficult for some to accept, and they pointed to Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (11:29): "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself." However, what Saint Paul is saying is that if we communicate in the body of Christ, we must discern that we – the community – are the body of Christ, and therefore must deal charitably with one another. He mentions that the rich do not share their food with the poor. Moreover, the practice of the Church was always to communicate those who were baptized at whatever age, and so did not interpret Paul as against infant communion. The question of infant communion is the same as infant baptism. Both are necessary for salvation: "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit," (John 3:5) and "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53).. An ancient Father, Saint Cyprian, said that "infants are as capable of baptism as are adults and share equally in the divine gift given in baptism. Having thus been baptized in the Spirit, the newborn drink from the Lord's cup and are both baptized and sanctified." This is not "forcing religion" on an infant unable to completely understand it, but giving God's nourishing grace to every human being in the hope that when they reach full maturity they will freely accept God's infinite love for the fullness of life for all. **ECL**

# THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

## THE RITES OF INITIATION: WATER, OIL, BREAD, AND WINE

Our Christian faith is not a gnostic religion, that is, one with secret symbols and an elite membership. In this way, it flies in the face of the human impulse to make religion a privileged search for a hidden and secret meaning to the existence of the universe and mankind. Instead, Christ came into the world to speak the word of God clearly, and to make human beings His friends as He says in the Gospel of Saint John, "I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father." (John 15:15). Even better, He has become our brother, "He is not ashamed to call them 'brothers,' saying: 'I will proclaim your name to my brothers, in the midst of the assembly I will praise you.'" (Hebrews 2:11-12). Saint Paul tells us that what the mystery is has been opened to us, "... the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. But now it has been manifested to his holy ones, to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory." (Colossians 1:26-27). The way to Christian faith is through baptism, when we respond to the Gospel by rejecting evil and attaching ourselves to Christ, for this is what the risen Lord commanded his disciples, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit," (Matthew 28:19) so that "all of you who were baptized into Christ have

clothed yourselves with Christ." (Galatians 3:27)

Baptism, then, is the entrance into the life of God for all who are willing to accept the Gospel, to renounce evil and to worship Jesus as Lord and God. However, this does not happen by some sort of pompous celebration filled with false knowledge, gaudy rites, and rich accessories. One becomes a Christian by the ordinary substances of water and oil, of bread and wine. At the center of baptism, of course, is the element of water.



There is no substance more necessary to life than water. A human being cannot survive without water for more than a few days. Water then becomes the physical sign of the fullness of life that God bestows on us, both spiritually and materially. Jesus revealed the meaning of baptism in water to the woman at the well in Samaria, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me

a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." (John 4:10). The water of baptism is the water of life. "Living water" for the ancients meant flowing water, and so, in baptism, the water must flow around the body of the person being initiated. Water also cleanses us, so that Saint Paul calls baptism a bath, "But when the kindness and generous love of God our Savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of His mercy, He saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit, whom He richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Savior." (Titus 3:4-6). We cannot, by our human efforts, ride ourselves of sin, but God does this through the water of baptism. Through baptism, we choose life.

Water is the most important element of baptism, but oil is also of importance in our initiation as Christians. The Christian faith is enlightenment, and Saint John writes, "But you have the anointing that comes from the holy one, and you all have knowledge." (1 John 2:20). When we entered the Church, we were anointed, first with the oil of gladness, identifying us with Christ, who is the Messiah, the "Anointed One;" second, of the whole body in preparation for the cleansing of baptism (this anointing is no longer practiced); and the third, with holy chrism, the oil of fragrance, the "seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The Church uses olive oil, which was a staple of the ancient Mediterranean world. Oil, of course, was used for food, sometimes as a flavor, and sometimes for cooking. Oil was also used like soap, before a bath, one anointed oneself with oil, and then scraped it off, taking the dirt with it. This second usage has been replaced by soap and is no longer done at baptism. In both cases, it was a common substance used in everyday life.

It was also important as a sign to mark those set aside as king, or as prophet, or as priest. In baptism, then, we become co-heirs with Christ of the Kingdom of God (Romans 8:17); as a prophet, we are given the grace to keep the will of God; and we become priests, as Saint Peter said, "But you are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own.'" (1 Peter 2:9). The anointing with chrism, fragrant oil gives us the multitude of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, "charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity."

By means of the simple substances of water and oil, made sacramental by God's blessing, we are initiated into his holy people. Then we are nourished by the staple foods of bread and wine. Grapes and wheat are the creation of God's nature, made by human labor into the nourishment of bread and wine, though, of course, human labor itself is the creation of God. Initiation is completed when we partake of this food, which by the power of the Spirit is transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. It is thus truly "yours of your own," as we proclaim when we offer it in the Divine Liturgy. In the end, then, by a small portion of what seems like ordinary food, we are filled with the spiritual nourishment of divine grace, the incarnate Body and Blood of Christ, and we "come to share in the divine nature. (2 Peter 1:4)," for we become what we eat.



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## PRIESTLY REFLECTIONS

Father Paul Varchola West

### “WHERE DO WE TURN, TURN, TURN?”

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. [Ecc 3:1-8]

You can imagine my shock and astonishment when I got to seminary and learned that these were not lyrics to a song by The Byrds! (I am kidding, of course!)<sup>1</sup>

Life is certainly composed of seasons, good times, and bad. It goes without

saying that the past few years have certainly brought their fair share of “rough seasons” if we can call them such. As we continue to navigate this ebb and flow that we call life, now, perhaps more than ever, we may find ourselves frantically looking for a port in the stormy seas. Living in a society that seems to be changing more frequently than the actual weather itself, where are we to look? How are we to navigate without a lighthouse to guide us safely to shore?

We need not turn to the 24-hour news cycle, nor to violence, nor hatred. We need not turn to fleeting slogans, nor fancy language, nor haughty debates. We need not get sucked into the whirlpool of arguments swirling round about, nor pummeled and drowned by the tidal wave of social media. We have only one option. We *MUST* turn, turn, turn to Jesus Christ!

We must heed the following advice given in the Letter to the Hebrews.

Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honor among all and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have; for he has said, “I will never fail you nor forsake you.” Hence, we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?” Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. [13:1-8]

Yes—Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever! In a world of fog, full of never-ending change, we need to cling to the fact that Christ never changes. When we feel ourselves being

swayed by popular opinion, when we feel ourselves tossed about by the fleeting vanity of the modern world, when we find ourselves drowning in a sea of opinions all claiming to be “gospel truth,” we must remember *THE* Gospel Truth: that Jesus Christ is our Lord, God, and Savior who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is to Him and His Church that we turn, turn, turn to find guidance, refuge, strength, and protection. **ECL**

<sup>1</sup> In case you were wondering, the song, “Turn, Turn, Turn,” known for its direct references to these verses from the Book of Ecclesiastes, was made popular on the mainstream pop charts by the folk-rock band, The Byrds, in 1965, but was actually composed by American folk legend, Pete Seeger, in the late 1950’s!

## SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian



### REMEMBER DEATH

“In all thy works remember thy last End, and thou shalt never sin” (Sir. 7:40, DR).

We are all going to die. Physical death is a scientific fact, a biblical truth, and a theological certainty.

From a biological perspective, we know that over time, our stem cells lose the ability to regenerate tissue. Genetic abnormalities develop as we age. As a result, our organs weaken and eventually fail. Unfortunately, severe illness and tragic accidents often take our lives before old age does.

Scripture reveals that God created humanity immune from death and in an elevated supernatural condition. We lost the gift of bodily immortality because of the sin of our first parents (Gen. 2:16, 17, Rom. 5:12). Ludwig Ott’s *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* notes: “All human beings subject to original sin are subject to the law of death. (De fide.) D 789.” And therefore, “it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

The promise of Christianity is the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with

God, and the happiness of heaven for all eternity. But to attain that future happiness is serious business. Our Lord said that many people will miss out on heaven. Only “the few” will enjoy eternal bliss (Mt. 7:13). The Savior advises us to “strive” to enter life, “for many will seek to enter and not be able” (Lk 13:24). Remembering death will help us get to heaven.

The Bible, the Church Fathers, and the Saints urge us to meditate on death.

Saint Charles Borromeo kept a human skull on his table so that he would never forget death.

Cardinal Baronius had “Remember Death” (“Memento Mori”) inscribed on his ring.

Chapter 6 of Saint John Climacus’ *Ladder of Divine Ascent* is dedicated to the remembrance of death. “He who with undoubting trust daily expects death is virtuous, but he who hourly yields himself to it is a saint” (6:7).

The Fathers of the Philokalia speak of the importance of keeping death in mind: “We should devote ourselves to

the remembrance of death and to meditation on it,” says Philotheos of Sinai.

“Sit in your cell and concentrate your intellect; remember the day of death, visualize the dying of your body, reflect on this calamity, experience the pain, reject the vanity of this world, its compromises and crazes, so that you may continue in the way of stillness and not weaken,” says Evagrius the Solitary.

“For, like the holy fathers, and especially like his great model Arsenios, [Abba Philimon] was always full of contrition and kept the thought of death continually in his mind.”

Hesychios the Priest writes: “The unremitting remembrance of death is a powerful trainer of body and soul. Vaulting over all that lies between ourselves and death, we should always visualize it, and even the very bed on which we shall breathe our last, and everything else connected with it.”

We are all going to die. In light of this fact, let us: consecrate our lives to Jesus Christ, renew our baptismal vows, go to Confession at least once a month, and receive the Eucharist with faith and de-

votion. We can’t afford to miss the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.

Most importantly, we must put our faith in Jesus Christ and trust in Him for our salvation. Here is the Good News:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

Eternity is at stake. Remember death.

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them’” (Rev. 14:17). **ECL**

# SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Father Ronald Hatton



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

“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?

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 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**



## Crowned in Love

### A Byzantine Pre-Cana Program

Sponsored by the Syncellate for the State of New Jersey

Saturday, February 25, 2023, 9AM to 4PM, Via Zoom

Sat. March 5  
9AM-4PM

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.

Couples planning to marry before spring 2023 are urged to attend. The cost is \$75.00 payable to St Michael’s Cathedral Syncellate at time of registration.

### Presenters



Father Thomas Shubeck, PhD and his wife Caroline are navigating the pandemic with a young adult daughter and a teen-aged son. After many years of diaconal ministry at St Thomas the Apostle parish in Rahway and at Seton Hall University Fr. Thomas will be ordained to the priesthood in December 2021. Much of his more than 30 years as a licensed psychologist has been spent providing therapy services to married couples and families.



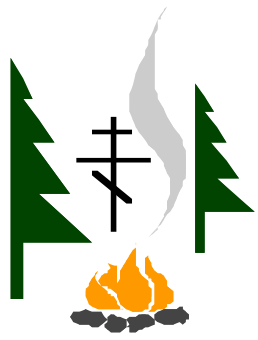
Michael and Lisann Castagno were married in 1994 and have three daughters. They have been involved in marriage preparation and youth ministry in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for many years, speaking especially about the beauty of God’s design for marriage, by proclaiming the good news of Natural Family Planning.



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 10 years.



Father 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.



# Carpathian Village Saint Nicholas Shrine

802 Snow Hill Road, Cresco, PA 18326-7810  
 Tel (570) 595-3265 - Cell (570) 650-3252  
 Email: carpathianvillage@earthlink.net  
 Father Michael J. Salnicko, Director

*Carpathian Village is presently taking reservations for group retreats, ski weekends, family vacations, day of recollection weekends, parish or group picnics, and private retreats. To schedule your event or for more information call or email Fr Michael.*

*Events Scheduled as of October 1, 2022*

## 2023 Eparchial Events

### “Eparchial Teen Rally 2023”

Thursday, June 22, thru Sunday, June 25  
 Camp Director Father Andrii Dumnych

### “Altar Server Retreat Congress 2023”

Sunday July 16 thru Thursday July 20  
 Camp Director Deacon Stephen Russo

### “Annual Saint Nicholas Pilgrimage 2023”

Sunday, August 6  
 Pilgrimage Co-Ordinator Father Michael Salnicko

### “Family Weekend Retreat Camp 2023”

Friday, August 11 thru Sunday, August 13  
 Camp Director/Retreat Master Father Andrii Dumnych

## 2022-23 Parish Events

### “Teen Ski Retreat Weekend”

Friday, January 13 thru Monday, January 16  
 Saint Ann’s ECF, Harrisburg, PA

### “Teen Ski Retreat Weekend”

Friday, February 17 thru Monday, February 20  
 Saint Ann’s ECF, Harrisburg PA

### “Annual Great Fast Teen Retreat”

Friday March 17 thru Sunday March 19  
 Saint Ann’s ECF, Harrisburg, PA

## Are you called to the Priesthood? Are you afraid of College Debt?

Is God calling you to be a priest? Are you worried about college debt? Why not study in Europe and avoid college debt? Would you like to study in Vienna in the heart of Europe at the International Theological Institute in your own English Language? You can receive a university degree approved by the Pope. Contact the Director of Vocations for the Eparchy of Passaic, the Very Reverend Michael Kerestes at Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church, 695 N Main Street, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18705, phone: 570-822-6028



## UPCOMING EPARCHIAL AND PARISH EVENTS

### Eastern Catholic Life

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### DECEMBER, 2022

- 6 Our Holy Father Nicholas of Myra  
*Solemn Holy Day*
- 8 Maternity of the Holy Anna  
*Solemn Holy Day*
- 11 Sunday of the Holy Forefathers
- 18 Sunday of the Holy Fathers  
*Sunday before Christmas*
- 24 Vigil Eve of Christmas  
*Chancery closed December 23-30*
- 25 Holy Nativity of Our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ  
*Holy Day of Obligation*
- 26 Synaxis of the Virgin Theotokos  
*Solemn Holy Day*
- 27 Holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon, Stephen  
*Simple Holy Day*

### JANUARY, 2023

- 1 Circumcision of Our Lord/Feast of Saint Basil the Great/Sunday before Theophany
- 6 Holy Theophany of Our Lord  
*Holy Day of Obligation*

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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