

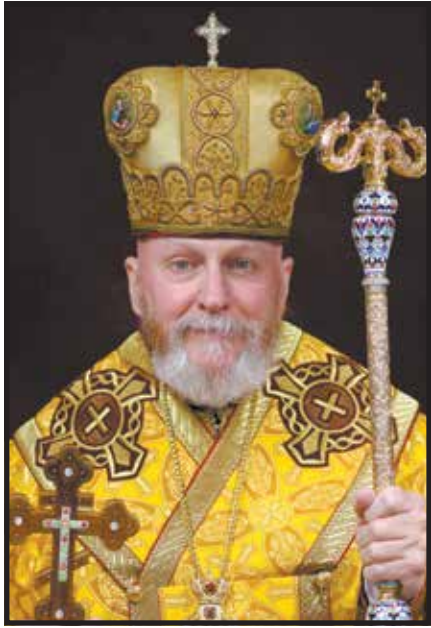


EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

VOL. LX, NO. 12

DECEMBER 2024



THE PRINCE OF PEACE

Christmas Pastoral Message of Bishop Kurt



The song says that Christmas is “the most wonderful time of the year”. Many people would call it the most “hectic” time of the year. They used to say that 50% of the retail economy in the United States was spent on Christmas. It’s been interesting to watch the merchants who rely on this to try to adapt to the changing shopping behaviors with the arrival of internet commerce. In addition, merchants find that they have to accept almost any return nowadays. If they don’t accept unconditional returns, another merchant will do so, and the shoppers will go there instead. Then there was the wave of shoppers who tell their families, “I will buy your gifts after Christmas during the sales.” As that grew in popularity, the merchants began delaying the after-Christmas sales a few days, and then a week. Many people decry the “commercialization” of Christmas. On the other hand, if Americans want to blow half of their retail economy on a birthday party of Jesus, that seems to me like a rather public statement of faith. Spending half of the economy on a birthday party for Jesus seems like something you would expect in Brazil instead of our country with its history of puritanism. Nevertheless, Christmas is hectic, starting right after Halloween, and growing in intensity until the great day itself.

What was the first Christmas like? Did the Mother of God take a much-needed rest ahead of time as her delivery date drew near? Did she catch up on her sleep because her more experienced friends warned her, “you won’t get any sleep after the baby arrives”? On the contrary, from the day she was told that she was pregnant, her first thought was to take care of

her cousin. The Archangel told her that her cousin, Elizabeth, was in her sixth month of pregnancy seemingly as an afterthought to show Mary the power of God to overthrow the laws of nature. Mary doesn’t even seem to take notice that she has been chosen to be the mother of the long-anticipated Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, the Heir to the Throne of David her ancestor. Instead, the scriptures tell us, she proceeded “in haste” to the hill country to care for Elizabeth.

outward sign, the physical presence in this world, of God’s faithfulness to the promises He made to Abraham. He told Abraham that his descendants would be special to Him, separated from all the people of the earth, that they would be more numerous than the sands on the seashore or the stars in the heavens, and that they would be blessing to the whole human race.

The Chosen People must have wondered at times how the promises to Abraham could ever be fulfilled. The Ark was a physical reminder, a historical

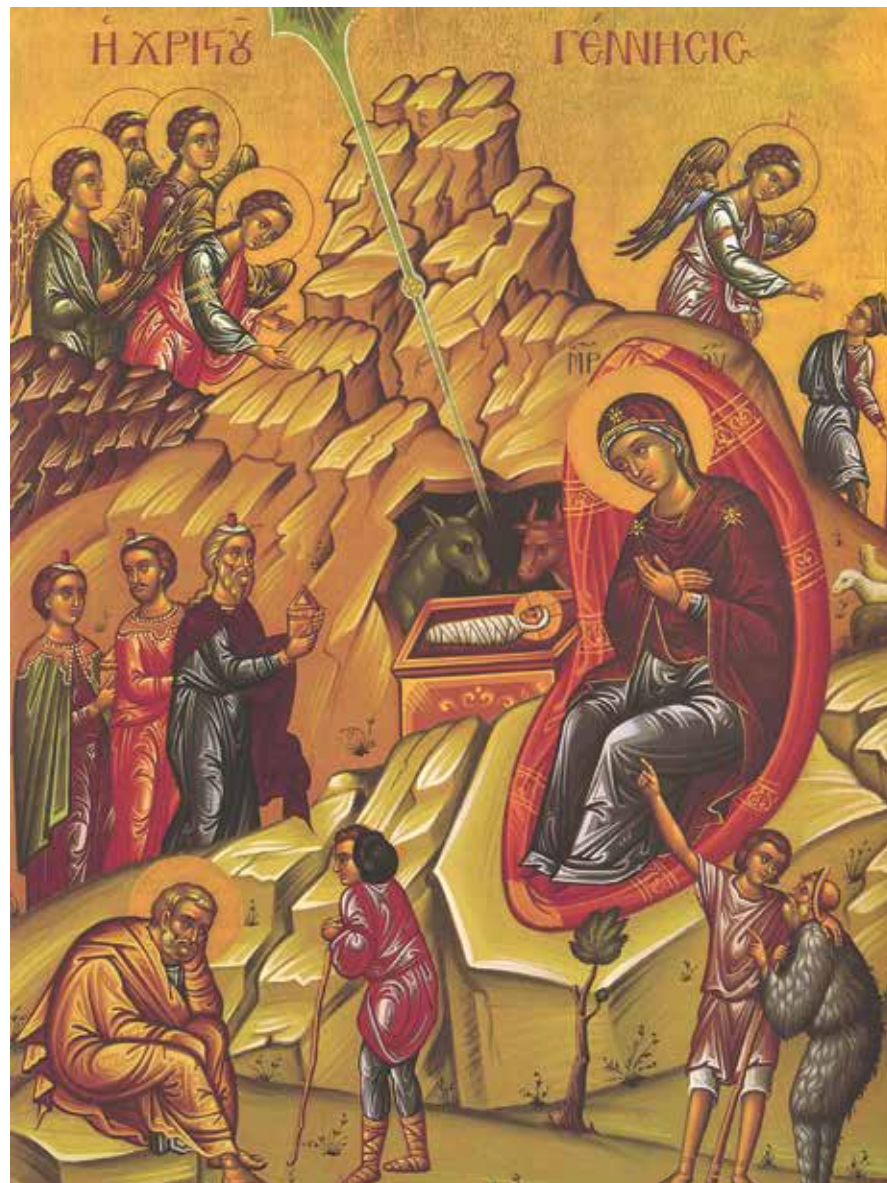
entrusted them with the Priesthood, the instrument of deliverance from the slavery of sin.

The Ark itself was a type of Mary, the Mother of God. The Ark contained the Manna from the desert—the miraculous bread of angels that sustained them for forty years. The Ark contained the Word of God carved on stone tablets. The Ark contained the Rod of Aaron—the symbol of the priesthood elected by God. All three of these, the bread of life, the word, the priesthood, were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and like the Ark, Mary carried all three of them in her womb when she journeyed to the hill country.

When David determined to move the Ark from Shiloh to Jerusalem, it was an elaborate affair. There were musicians galore. They stopped the procession every six steps to sacrifice an ox and a fattened animal. The king himself “danced with all his might”. His dancing was so enthusiastic that his royal wife scolded him for making a fool of himself and exposing himself in public. Every year, we sing on Easter morning, “David danced and made merry before the Ark.” Then tragedy struck on the journey. A well-intentioned attendant was struck dead for reaching out to steady the Ark. David was so frightened by this display of divine power, that he halted the journey to discern the will of God. The Ark resided in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months. When David heard that the Lord had blessed that house during the three months, he got the courage to try to move the Ark again, and this time it traveled all the way to Jerusalem.

We can see now after the fullness of revelation that Mary’s journey to the hill country, which was also three months, was prefigured by the journey of the Ark. Mary is the living Ark of the Covenant. Like Obed-Edom, the house of Elizabeth experienced great blessings from the presence of God. Elizabeth cries out, “Who am I that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? When I heard your greeting, the babe leapt in my womb for joy!”

Mary’s travels during her unexpected pregnancy were not over yet. In a far away ...continued on page 2



Icon of the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ

In hindsight, we understand that Mary’s journey to the hill country was the fulfillment of an Old Testament type. When King David established Jerusalem as his capital, he determined to move the most sacred Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The Ark of the Covenant, as its name implies, was the

artifact, that reminded them of God’s miracles in the desert. First, God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and showed Himself more powerful than any earthly king. Second, He had entrusted them with His own law, one of the ways that they would be blessing to all people. Third, He had



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



THE PRINCE OF PEACE

Christmas Pastoral Message of Bishop Kurt

continued from page 1

city, the power-hungry ruler of the Roman world, Octavius Caesar Augustus gives an order that everyone in the world must participate in a census. As is often the case, the Emperor had one purpose in mind for his census, but he was fulfilling God's hidden plan unknowingly. Because of the imperial order, Mary and Joseph must travel to Bethlehem, the City of David for the census. The Prophet Micah wrote, "As for you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though

you are least among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."


From the time that Mary received her first message from the Archangel Gabriel, through her many journeys to fulfill the Messianic prophecies, her journey to the hill country, her journey to Bethlehem, her journey to Egypt, and her journey to Nazareth. She had very

little peace or stability in the first years of the life of Jesus. When He began His public life, we know she continued with him throughout. She provoked His first sign at the wedding in Cana. She was with Him in His final trip to Jerusalem to stand before the flawed human judgment seat, to be condemned by a cowardly ambitious judge, and to be sacrificed for our sins. She was with the early Church and journeyed with Saint John to finish her earthly life.

As the world is roiled with wars and upheaval, we turn to the Prince of Peace at His birthday. We are reminded that the peace He offers is not the peace of

this world. He offers the Divine Peace that is inside of us that no one can ever take away. He offers forgiveness and mercy to anyone who is willing to accept it and then eternal life in "a place of peace, beauty, and greenery where there is no pain, sorrow, nor weeping". Every Christmas we sing, "Emmanuel! God is with us!" S'nami Boh'!" "Give ear all you nations and tremble, for God is with us!"

+Kurt Burnette



The Byzantine Catholic
Metropolitan Archeparchy of Pittsburgh
Office of the Archbishop
66 Riverview Avenue Pittsburgh PA 15214
(412)231-1000 Phone (412)231-1697 Fax

Assembly 2025 – Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Church of Pittsburgh

July, 10, 2024

Preparations are underway for our Church – Bishops, Clergy, Monastics, Religious, and Laity - to come together in Assembly next year - from July 16-20, 2025. The gathering will convene at St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Whiting, Indiana under the name and calling, "Come let us worship and bow before Christ"

Worship of the Lord includes our personal prayer and our liturgical prayer life. It is reflected in our relationships with each other and in the ways we live our faith as Byzantine Catholics of the Metropolitan Church of Pittsburgh.

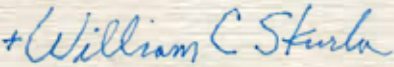
The goal of the Assembly is to together discern ways to live our worship of Christ today in a real and practical manner while learning from the past and looking to the future. The Assembly will include formal presentations, interviews, panel discussion and round table exercises.

Special emphasis will be given to the distinctive contributions Byzantine Catholic have made to their Metropolitan Church.

The Assembly is a time to celebrate the unique contributions of each region and Eparchy while at the same time acknowledging the unity of the Byzantine Catholic Church in North America.

More information will appear in your parish bulletins and online at the Assembly website: byzantineassembly.org

Sincerely Yours in Christ,



Most Reverend William C. Skurla, D. D.
Metropolitan Archbishop of Pittsburgh

EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

(USPS 165-600) (ISSN 0894-9786)

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic
Subscription Rate: \$20.00 per year.

News and Photo Services:
Member of the Catholic Press Association of America.
Published monthly by the Eastern Catholic Press Association

445 Lackawanna Avenue
Woodland Park, NJ 07424
Phone: 973-890-7777
Fax: 973-890-7175

Postage paid at Little Falls, NJ, and additional office at Bellmawr, NJ.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
Eastern Catholic Life
445 Lackawanna Avenue
Woodland Park, NJ 07424

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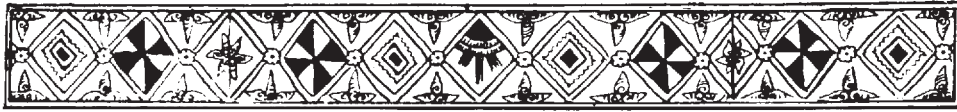
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PEOPLE YOU KNOW

IN FORT MILL...

A "Melting-Pot" Luck Dinner

On Saturday, November 2, the Petro Oros Byzantine Mission of Fort Mill, SC, located off I-77, hosted a special Divine Liturgy and ethnic potluck for Catholics of Eastern and Western Rites.

A group of 70 people from areas surrounding Charlotte metro came together to fill their spiritual hunger with a "reverent and beautiful Divine Liturgy and delicious halupki, halushki and pirohi," as one attendee eloquently said.



Parishioners listen attentively to Fr. Vasyl's homily

Over the last several years, the Charlotte metro area has seen an influx of young families. Many of those are Catholics seeking traditional ways of worship where they can create bonds with other parishioners. The fellowship after liturgy and children's activities during the potluck were also a hit. First-time visitor, Katy D., shared her thoughts, "Your families were so welcoming and kind. My family will be back soon."

God helps those in motion and the Petro Oros Mission is most certainly kicking it into high gear. Traveling South on I-77? Check out the Petro Oros Byzantine Mission of Fort Mill, SC. We are minutes away from Exit 85 and look forward to welcoming you.



Sharing conversation and ethnic food



Parishioners enjoying a time of fellowship

IN MONT CLARE...

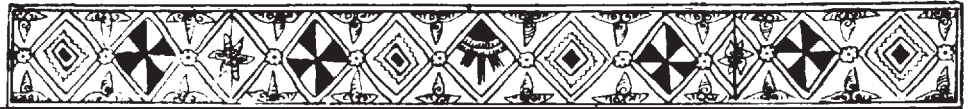
*Parish Celebrates 125th Anniversary
by Ms. Patricia Dietz*

On Sunday, September 22, 2024, Saint Michael the Archangel Parish in Mont Clare, PA, celebrated the 125th Anniversary of its founding in 1899. Bishop Kurt was welcomed at the door by Jackson Slezak and Mary Elizabeth Simpson with the traditional presentation of bread and salt, traditional symbols of Slavic hospitality. In anticipation of the anniversary, new icons were installed in the sanctuary and on the ceiling of the nave. Prior to the Divine Liturgy of Thanksgiving, Bishop Kurt rededicated the church and blessed the new icons. Concelebrating with Bishop Kurt were the current pastor, Father Andriy Kovach; former pastors, Father Nicholas de Prospero and Father John Cigan, Father Ihor Royik, pastor of Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic Church, Phoenixville; Father William Gore, and Deacon Edward Quinn. Also in attendance were Father Edward Higgins, Father Taras Lovska and Father Joseph Loya. Cantor Michael Petruska led the singing with the help of the choir members of the parish. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, everyone gathered on the front steps of the church for a group picture to commemorate the event.



A reception followed at The Desmond in Malvern, PA. Committee member, Jennifer Koenig, welcomed all and thanked all those who helped make the 125th anniversary a truly memorable day. She especially thanked Father Andriy and Pan'i Mariya Kovach for all that they do for the parish family of Saint Michael Parish. Next, Father Andriy welcomed everyone and asked Bishop Kurt to give the invocation. During the meal, a slide presentation, compiled by Maureen Rowan, was shown. The twenty-minute presentation chronicled Saint Michael Parish in pictures from 1899 to the present day. Each section was introduced by a picture of the pastor and his years of service at Saint Michael Church. There were many pictures of celebrations and events throughout the years and many group pictures taken on the same front steps! There was even a section dedicated to the Sisters of Saint Basil the Great who taught at Saint Michael School for many years. At the conclusion of the dinner, and in appreciation for their many years of faithful dedication to Saint Michael's, icons were presented to the oldest (wisest) parishioners by the children. Father James Badeaux, a former pastor, gave the closing prayer.

AROUND THE EPARCHY



IN TRENTON...

Saint Mary Parish Hosts "Invite-a-Friend Sunday"

On Sunday, November 17, 2024, Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church opened its doors and hearts for a special event: Invite-a-Friend Sunday. Parishioners enthusiastically responded to the call, extending invitations to friends, neighbors, and loved ones to join in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and experience the beauty of Byzantine Catholic spirituality.



The event was not only an opportunity to showcase the rich liturgical traditions of our parish but also a chance to share fellowship and community. Guests were warmly welcomed by parishioners, who took the time to explain the meaning behind the prayers, chants, and icons that make our worship so unique and spiritually enriching.

After the Liturgy, everyone gathered in the parish hall for a delightful coffee social. Tables were laden with an array of homemade treats and beverages, lovingly prepared by parishioners. Conversations flowed easily as guests and parishioners alike shared stories, built connections, and reflected on the meaningful experience of worship together.

The response from our parishioners was overwhelming, with many taking the opportunity to bring along someone who had never before attended a Byzantine Catholic Liturgy. Their enthusiasm and hospitality shone brightly, making the event a resounding success.

This initiative reminded us of all of the importance of evangelization—not necessarily through grand gestures, but through simple acts of invitation and kindness. Many guests expressed their gratitude and curiosity, with some planning to return for future Liturgies.

As a parish, we are deeply grateful to everyone who made this event possible: those who extended invitations, those who prepared the hall, and all who contributed to making our guests feel at home.

May this event inspire us to carry the spirit of Invite-a-Friend Sunday into our daily lives, inviting others to share in the beauty and grace of our Byzantine Catholic faith. Father Yuriy Oros is pastor of Saint Mary Parish.

"Let us welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

IN HILLSBOROUGH...

Suicide Awareness Month

In recognition of the efforts of Richard Emiliano, a parishioner at Saint Mary Parish in Hillsborough, NJ, the borough of Manville, NJ, Richard's hometown, has recognized the month of September as *Suicide Awareness Month*. Richard is an active parishioner of Saint Mary Parish and is also involved in suicide prevention and in grief ministry to those who have lost loved ones to suicide. He speaks widely on this important subject. Pictured with Richard is Father James Badeaux, pastor of Saint Mary Parish.



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Email: petromissionfortmill@gmail.com

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Contact for more information:

(610) 220-3479

andrewskitko@gmail.com

DISCIPLESHIP AT SAINT NICHOLAS, DUNELLEN: THE LITTLE CHURCH THAT CAN...AND DOES

By Father Thomas Paul Shubeck

Whereas summer tends to be a slow time at most parishes, the parishioners at Saint Nicholas Church in Dunellen, NJ, began the summer season by hosting a Pilgrimage to the Theotokos of Albazinskaya Icon, from June 20 to 30. Pilgrims from area Roman Catholic, Byzantine Catholic, and Orthodox parishes in NJ and PA came to Dunellen to pray before this miraculous icon dedicated to the Theotokos, the Helper of Mothers. Pilgrims heard inspiring homilies and reflections by a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, Father Luke Mary Fletcher, director of the Blue Army Shrine, and Father Mariusz Koch, Director of

Spiritual Formation at the Immaculate Conception Seminary, Seton Hall University; and by Father John Zec, a bi-ritual priest serving in Central New Jersey. Pilgrims also took advantage of opportunities for the Holy Mystery of Reconciliation and fellowship. The newly formed intercessory prayer team began praying for the intentions requested by pilgrims and members of the parish family. Notably, eighty percent of the parish family assisted in hosting this memorable week.

In August, the parish began a monthly praying of the Akathist to the Theotokos, Searcher of the Lost. On



Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, Father Luke Mary Fletcher, at the Pilgrimage to the Theotokos of Albazinskaya Icon held at Saint Nicholas Church.



Bryant Malone and Margot Gumerlock ready to greet visitors at the Saint Nicholas Church hospitality and information table at the Dunellen Harvest Fest 2024 in October.

September 6, the parish family hosted guests from area Byzantine and Roman parishes as well as several seminarians from Seton Hall University. Before praying the Akathist, Norbertine Father Pius Collins, visiting from London, England, shared his reversion story and the role that Our Lady played in his return to the Church. In October, the parish family prayed the Akathist after hearing guests, Lee and Valiree Sondeno, share the story of their discovery of the Eastern lung of the Catholic Church after their conversion to Catholicism from Pentecostalism, a story which they had previously shared on EWTN's The Journey Home.

As the parish family looks ahead to its centennial celebration in 2026, it is also mindful of the Gospel mandate of discipleship and evangelization. To that end, the parish hosted an open house and had a presence at Dunellen's Harvest Fest 2024 in mid-October.

Evenings of Prayer and Conversation on November 22 and December 20 featured two young adults whose journeys led them to the Byzantine Catholic Church. In October, Theo Chowdury related his conversion story: **Christ Calls a Pharisee from Bengal**. In December, Rich Smith shared his conversion story: **None to Catholic: My Story of Conversion from Atheism to Catholic in Secular England**. Following the two personal testimonies, everyone prayed the Akathist and then enjoyed fellowship in the parish hall. These Evenings of Prayer and Conversation are a collaborative initiative with Theosis in Action, the young adult outreach of the eparchy. Father Thomas Shubeck is Administrator of Saint Nicholas Parish.

SAINT ANDREW CHURCH CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

On Sunday Oct 20, Bishop Kurt celebrated the Fiftieth Anniversary of Saint Andrew Church, Westbury, Long Island, NY, with a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Upon arrival, Paul Ulrich and his daughter, Victoria, presented the bishop with bread and salt, a traditional sign of Slavic hospitality. Mr. Ulrich was an original signer on the Article of Incorporation 50 years ago.

Parish children greeted Bishop Kurt with words of welcome and bouquets of flowers. The Liturgy was concelebrated with by Father Nicholas Daddona, pastor; Father Philip Sandrick, OSBM; and Father Kevin Dillon, pastor of the neighboring Roman Catholic Parish of Our Lady of Hope. Also serving were Deacons Robert Knapp and Michael Sivulich and assisting as master of ceremonies was Father Nicholas' son, Officer Nicholas Daddona.



A luncheon followed at Verdi's of Westbury where Father Nicholas presented the Papal Blessing given to the parish by the Holy Father. It was a wonderful day for all as we thanked God for all the blessing that He has bestowed on the Parish Community of Saint Andrew Parish over the past 50 years.





The 2025 Prayer Vigil for Life and the March for Life in Washington DC will take place on January 23rd and 24th 2025.

The Annual Prayer Vigil for Life takes place at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC.

The Opening Mass will begin at 5 pm in the Great Upper Church. Immediately following the Mass will be the Holy Hour for Life.

Making a return this year is Byzantine Compline. Compline will be celebrated after the Holy Hour following the Opening Mass on January 23, 2025. Compline will be celebrated at 8 pm in the

2025 MARCH FOR LIFE IN WASHINGTON, DC

Byzantine Catholic Chapel in the Lower Church.

Also returning after many years is a Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy will be celebrated in our Chapel at 9:15 am on January 24, 2025.

Bishop Kurt has agreed to celebrate both Compline on January 23rd and the Divine Liturgy on January 24th.

Marchers who may be arriving for the day, would find plenty of time to attend Divine Liturgy and then proceed to the National Mall for the March.

For those who wish to stay at the Basilica and pray, there are over 60 Chapels dedicated to Our Lady, a gift shop, a bookstore, and a cafeteria which will be open from 8 am until 2 pm.

Eparchial Clergy who wish to concelebrate will need a Letter of Suitability that would be sent to the Basilica Worship Office in advance of the Prayer Vigil for Life.



LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

CONFORMING TO THE SHAPE OF LOVE

During the season of the Philip's Fast, I re-read the spiritual classic, *The Reed of God*, by British author, Caryl Houselander. Published in 1944, the book references the World War then being fought and is filled with the idioms and turns of phrase unique to that time, and to British English. For the modern American, so used to the language of texting and social media, Houselander's style takes some getting used to, requiring the reader to exercise patience and settle into a stance of receptivity and contemplation. This is just what I need, because I easily get swept up in the frenetic pace of the holiday season, somehow becoming more comfortable with noise than with quiet and peace. It's a trap many of us are susceptible to, since the world keeps turning, news keeps happening, problems and concerns never cease to find us. No matter how often we chant, "Now set aside all earthly cares," the command remains difficult to internalize.

The Reed of God is centered on Mary, the Theotokos, and her response to all that God brought about in and through her life. Houselander likens Mary to a reed, a wind instrument through which God, who has composed the "music of salvation," so to speak, communicates it to the world. Houselander's fleshing out of this metaphor is far more spiritually

deep and poetic than I can convey, but this idea is one that poses and opportunity for deep reflection leading up to, and during, the feast of Christ's Nativity. There are so many gems in the book, so many opportunities for deeper contemplation of the witness of Mary and God's deep and abiding love – more than I can list here without reproducing the entire text! One short passage stands out as I contemplate my own place in God's plan, and my willingness to give myself to Him completely. Houselander writes:

Our Lady said yes for the human race. Each one of us must echo that yes for our own lives. We are all asked if we will surrender what we are, our humanity, our flesh and blood, to the Holy Spirit and allow Christ to fill the emptiness formed by the particular shape of our life.

What draws me to this passage is the part about allowing "Christ to fill the emptiness...." The image that comes to mind immediately is the icon of the Nativity of Our Lord, and the abyss of darkness from the cave. The Child Jesus and Mary rightly take precedence in the icon, but the black hole behind them threatens to upstage them, and the meaning of the Nativity. Isn't that just the way with us, how readily we focus on the darkness, the emptiness in our lives. The Christ Child of the icon

– no gentle babe sweetly napping in His snow-white swaddling – lies there instead as if swaddled for the tomb, a reminder of the purpose for which He was born. He has made Himself so little, so vulnerable; how can this little Light not be consumed by that gaping hole of darkness? Can One so helpless and small fill all the emptiness of the world – including mine?

The answer is "yes," and Houselander gives us the means: we must surrender what we are, our humanity, our flesh and blood, to the Holy Spirit and allow Christ to fill the emptiness.... This statement is simple and direct – and feels positively overwhelming and impossible. The "yes" was already given by Mary on our behalf, and she shows us how to freely embrace it as our own, pointing us toward the means by which we can fulfill it. As the feast of the Nativity approaches, I invite you to join me in quiet contemplation of her "yes," and of your own. Let's approach the darkness of the cave and its emptiness, bringing with us our fears, our suffering, and our fragile humanity, focusing not on the darkness threatening to swallow us whole, but on the Light which shattered the darkness and desires to live in us.

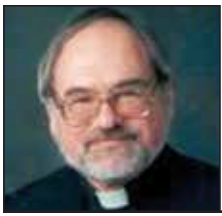
Surrender: What is keeping me from walking fully in the light of Christ? Am

I even aware of how much the darkness sometimes overshadows me?

What we are, our humanity: Do I know who I am, to Whom I belong? Can I acknowledge my weakness and sin, but not be defeated by them? Or does the darkness prevent me from seeking God's forgiveness and reconciliation?

Our flesh and blood: I am an icon of God's love, a work of His hands, a temple made for the Holy Spirit to dwell. Do I both believe this and strive to live a life that glorifies God here and now, so that I may one day live in the Light of His Glory forever?

As we celebrate the Incarnation and Nativity of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, let us not be defined or overwhelmed by darkness. Instead, let us surrender what we are, our humanity, our flesh and blood to the Child. Let us allow ourselves to be shaped by the Light that overcomes the darkness and fills every empty space with everlasting love and peace. **ECL**



THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

MARRIAGE AND ONENESS

The foundation of our faith is that God is one and that there is one God. The Jewish profession of faith is, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Christian Creed begins, "I believe in one God," and the first commandment is "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not have other gods beside me" (Exodus 20:2-3). That God is one is the basis of all our morality, and of all our relations with God and with one another. The violation of this fundamental tenet is the first of all sins: idolatry, the worship of a false god. It is through this oneness that we are able to know the true God through whom all creation is held together. The Son of God was sent by the Father into the world to bring us all into unity: "I have given them the glory You gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and You in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that You sent me, and that You loved them even as You loved me" (John 17:22-23). This was the faith according to Saint Paul, "for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things are and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom we exist" (1 Corinthians 8:6), and again, "one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Only in this oneness are we able to understand the meaning of marriage. As the one God created the universe, His first act was to make humanity in His own image and likeness: "God created mankind in His image; in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). Marriage was to be the instrument of this unity. While God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18), he created a companion, a woman, so that "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of man this one has been taken." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body" (Genesis 2:23-24). Our Lord, Jesus, Son of God was sent into the world to reveal the plan of God: "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So, they are no longer two, but one flesh" (Matthew 19:4-6). In the unity of marriage, a man and woman are joined sacramentally in the one God, become one with each other, and share with God in the creation of new life.

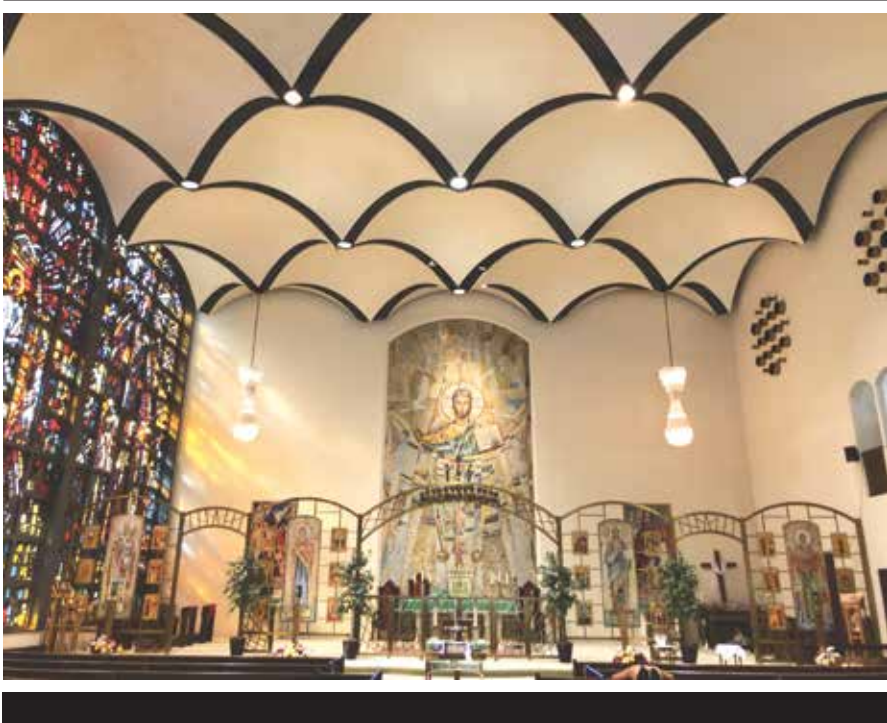
On the cosmic level, there is one God and one creation, formed not to be divided in hatred, but to work together for good. Marriage is the most perfect reflection of this unity. Just as Communion is the sacramental mystery of the union of a human being with God

through the Body of the Lord, so too marriage is the union of the bodies of a man and women in the "sacrament of love," which was the title of a book on marriage by the Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov. In his letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul explains that marriage is modeled from the love of God bringing us into one through his Church: "no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:29-32).

Monogamy, marriage as the union of one man with one woman, is the plan of God from the beginning of creation. This was recognized in the theology of the Church from the beginning. In the second century, the great African theologian, Tertullian was to write clearly, "The law of one marriage ... is founded both on the creation of the human race and on the sacrament of Christ. In both cases we derive our origin from a single marriage: physically in Adam, spiritually in Christ. From these two natiivities we receive the one law of monogamy. In either case, to deviate from monogamy is to degenerate. Plurality of marriage

started with a man who was cursed: Lamech was the first to marry two wives, thereby making three in one flesh? (Tertullian, An Exhortation to Chastity 5, quoted by John S. Bergsma). He is referring here to Lamech, described in the book of Genesis as one of the most-evil men of the early human race (Genesis 4:18-24). Lamech's story is read in the Presanctified Divine Liturgy of the Great Fast on Wednesday of the second week.

One man and one woman in marriage, then, is the law of unity intended by God. Human beings, however, have often been unable to keep to this standard. In the Old Testament, polygamy was sometimes permitted because of human weakness, though it was never the ideal. The law of Christ restored God's plan. A second marriage is sometimes permitted after the death of one's first spouse, this again from human weakness. Saint Paul wrote, "if they cannot exercise self-control they should marry, for it is better to marry than to be on fire [in passion]" (1 Corinthians 7:9). Sometimes marriages fail because two people prove unable to love one another as they should. The Catholic Church allows annulment if it can be shown that there was a human defect that made proper consent impossible from the beginning, while the Orthodox see such marriages as a kind of spiritual death. Unfaithfulness in marriage, the love of another outside the marriage covenant is considered, along with idolatry, the failure of the people to worship the one God alone, and murder, as adultery, the third of the great sins. **ECL**



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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.



Mosaic of the Three Wise Men, Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy. Photo credit Nina Aldin Thune

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

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**

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




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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

THE SHEPHERDS OF BETHLEHEM

Shepherds have always suffered from bad publicity. Wandering around and living in the open with their animals, shepherds were looked down upon by city dwellers as practically beasts themselves. Older readers may remember enjoying a visit from the *Jasličkary* (or *Gubi*), a Rusyn Christmas entertainment featuring four comical shepherds on their way to Bethlehem. With their axes and their heavy sheepskin coats and hats, they're an easy target for a laugh.

Still, Saint Luke (2:8-20) tells us, it was shepherds who first heard the good news. A greater contrast could hardly be imagined: brilliant angels and scruffy, illiterate shepherds! The Gospel describes this moment as an experience of light and music – not unlike the way the Mother of God got the attention of the peasant Juan Diego when she appeared to him in Tepeyac, Mexico, in 1531 (commemorated on December 12 as “Our Lady of Guadalupe”). It is the simple and sincere response of the shepherds that the Gospel highlights. In their curiosity they are willing to be led: “Let us go over to Bethlehem to see this great wonder.” No less important is their reaction to what they saw in the manger in the cave: “The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for what they had heard and seen.”

Herod didn't notice the wonders in Bethlehem until he perceived them as a threat to his shaky claim to kingship (Matthew 2:3-18). The powers in Jerusalem—the Roman governor and the Jewish priests—were likewise unaware, despite the prediction of the prophet Micah: “But you, Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel” (5:2). Only shepherds and foreign astrologers joined the ox and the donkey (Isaiah 1:3) and the Holy Family at the manger. Those shepherds returned transformed by their encounter with the newborn King; they became like the angels singing “Glory to God” (Luke 2: 14 and 20).

The attraction of the shepherds to the manger foreshadows how the grown-up Christ would reach out to the marginalized and the outcast: tax collectors and sinners, the blind, the lame, and the lepers – the very “crowd that does not know the law and is accursed” that the Jerusalem priesthood was so quick to dismiss (John 7:49).

The shepherds continue to be important to how we remember the first Christmas. In Italy, where Nativity crèches were first created, people delight in adding representatives of every humble craft and trade imaginable to stand alongside the shepherds at the manger. Real life shepherds from the Abruzzi hills still come to Rome each

Christmas to play their crude bagpipes at public crèches. What is the appeal of these shepherds?

The first Christians in Corinth were prone to a kind of snobbery, thinking themselves more spiritually and intellectually sophisticated than they actually were. At the start of his first Epistle to this very challenged Church, Saint Paul pulls no punches: “Not many of you are wise according to the flesh, not many are powerful, not many are well-born.


But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:26-27). A little earlier, Paul had asked, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 Corinthians 1:20).

Perhaps that helps to explain why the shepherds remain such attractive figures for us, an indispensable part of any representation of the first Christmas. It's a stretch to see ourselves in the humble

trust and chastity of Saint Joseph, and even harder to see ourselves in the most-pure Virgin Mother of God. Nor do we have much in common with the three visitors from the East, astrologers, or kings or whatever they may have been. It's a little easier to relate to the shepherds, so long as we remain humble enough to wonder at God's presence among us and willing enough to get out of ruts to come and worship Him with praise and glory. **ECL**

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Father G. Scott Boghossian



SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON THE POWER OF PRAYER

Saint John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (347-407), is one of the most important saints in all of Church history. He is recognized as a great saint and authoritative theologian by the Catholic, Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox churches. Four separate feast days are dedicated to Saint John Chrysostom on the Byzantine Calendar (including the Feast of the Three Holy Hierarchs). He is a Doctor of the Church, and Pope Saint Pius X named him the “patron saint of preachers” in 1908. His writings are cited in the footnotes of the official 1992 Catechism of the Catholic Church around eighteen times.

Some of Saint John Chrysostom’s most stirring words on prayer are found in his treatise, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, published by the Catholic University of America Press and available for free online.

In this work, Chrysostom writes:

“Prayer is a mighty weapon, an unfailling treasure, a wealth which is

never expended, a harbor that is always calm, a foundation for tranquility. Prayer is the root and source and mother of ten thousand blessings. It is more powerful than the empire itself” (5:44, p. 156).

“The power of prayer quenched the force of fire, it curbed the wrath of lions, it brought an end to wars, it stopped battles, it quelled storms, it drove out demons, it opened the gates of heaven, it cut asunder the chains of death, it put sickness to flight, it beat off insults and abuse, it made shaken cities stand. Prayer removed blows inflicted from above, it took away the plots and treachery of men, and, in a word, every dread event” (5:57, p. 161).

“When a prayer, like a ray of the sun, arises from our tongue and comes forth from our mouth, our mind is enlightened, all the savage passions which destroy our reason slink away and flee to their own lairs, if only our prayer is diligent, if only it comes from a watchful soul and sober mind.

Should the devil be on hand when we pray, he is driven off; should a demon be there, he slinks away” (7:59, p. 209).

“Surely, prayer is a harbor for those caught in a storm; it is an anchor for those tossed by the waves; it is a staff for those who stumble. Prayer is a treasure for the poor, security for the rich, a cure for the sick, a safeguard for those in good health. It keeps our blessings inviolable and quickly changes our ills to good. If temptation comes, it is easily repelled. If loss of possessions or any of the other things which cause grief to our souls befall us, prayer is quick to drive them all away. Prayer is a refuge from every sorrow, a basis for cheerfulness, a means for continual pleasure, a mother for our philosophy and way of life” (7:61, p. 209).

No matter what difficulty or challenge we face today, our father among the saints, John Chrysostom, directs us to the practice of prayer. Prayer is the solution to every problem. The crises that

we see in the world, in the church, and in our families today can only be remedied by a renewed emphasis on personal and community prayer.

“The grace shining forth from your mouth like a torch has enlightened the universe; it has stored up in the world the treasure of disdain for wealth. It has shown us the heights of humility. Instruct us by your words, John Chrysostom, our father, and intercede with the Word, Christ God, to save our souls.” –Troparion, Tone 8

“You have received divine grace from heaven and with your lips you teach all how to worship one God in the Trinity, all-blessed venerable John Chrysostom. It is proper that we praise you, for you are the teacher who reveals the divine.” –Kontakion, Tone 6

Holy Father, John Chrysostom, pray to God for us. **ECL**



PRIESTLY REFLECTIONS

Father Paul Varchola West

“CHRISTMAS TIME IS HERE!”

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. [Isa 11:1-2]

Whenever the now-ubiquitous holiday tune announces that “Christmas time is here...” as it emanates from our TV speakers while watching *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, or whenever we hear the clanging of silver bells declaring that it is indeed Christmas time in the city once again, I think it is safe to say that the first thing that pops into our minds is most likely not the above-mentioned verses from the Prophecy of Isaiah! We have a lot on our plates, literally and figuratively; tons of songs and poems and stories swirl in our heads.

It is very easy for us Christians living in the modern world to slip into the mode of thinking that because of the Incarnation, because Jesus Christ was born into this world, that that “Old Testament stuff” is perhaps just that, “old,” and now that Christ has come, that’s all that really matters. For some Christian ecclesial communities, this is

indeed their mode of thinking. For us Eastern Christians, however, this is not the case at all – as a matter of fact, quite the opposite!

As we hear Christ Himself say in the Gospel of Matthew, “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them” [5:17]. And again, in the same Gospel, when pressed as to which Commandment is the greatest, Christ retorts:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” [22:37-40]

In the above from Isaiah, the one who is prophesied – the one upon whom the Spirit of the Lord shall rest, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD – IS Christ Himself! Isaiah continues to prophesy:

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.” [Isa 11:6-10]

Yes, at the coming of the Lord, all creation shall be turned on its head, renewed, humanity redeemed, and the ancestral curse lifted through the Incarnate Logos, the Co-Eternal Word of the Father, the Anointed One, the Messiah, Jesus Christ!

Considering that the Christmas season has only just begun, as we look toward the Great Feast of Theophany and continue to celebrate the *Winter Pascha*, these prophetic verses fresh in our minds from the Vigil Liturgy

of Nativity, let us use this time to explore the Old Testament prophecies foretelling of the coming of Christ in the Flesh. Let us explore our “past” and come to realize that it is indeed not our “past,” but rather the ever-present reality of Salvation, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, the very renewal of Creation. Just as we hear of the Mother of God in Luke 2:19, let us ponder these things and keep them in our hearts.

Just because December 25 has come and gone, that doesn’t mean we have to pack up the miracle of the Incarnation and put it in storage with the other decorations till next November! Rather, let us live the Incarnation now, and always, through observance of the above commandments, realizing that through them we are actively living the reality of the Age to Come in this life through the fulfillment of the Promise – Jesus Christ.

Christ is born! Glorify Him! **ECL**



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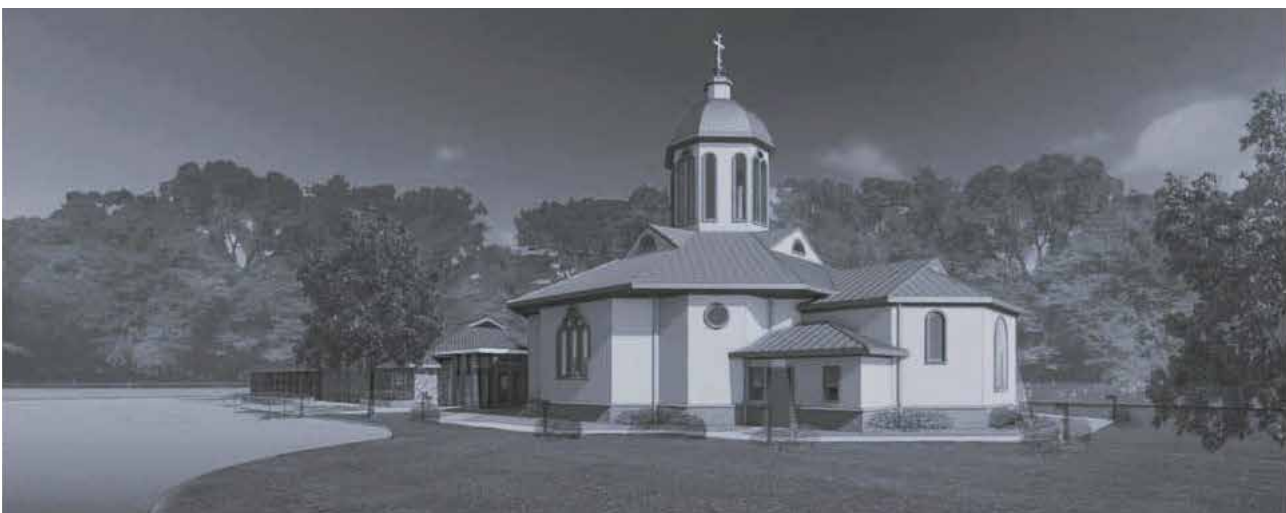
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Circulation Department
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Next Issue:
January, 2025

Copy Deadline:
January 10, 2025

The current issue of the ECL was printed at Evergreen Printing, Bellmawr, NJ, and was distributed from the U.S. Post Office via second class mailing in Bellmawr, NJ.

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- JANUARY, 2025**
- 1 Circumcision of Our Lord
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 - 5 Sunday before Theophany
 - 6 Holy Theophany of Our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ
Holy Day of Obligation
 - 12 Sunday after Theophany
 - 23-24 Prayer Vigil for Life
Washington, DC
 - 30 Three Holy Hierarchs
Simple Holy Day
- FEBRUARY, 2025**
- 2 Sunday of Zacchaeus
Encounter of Our Lord with Simeon
 - 9 Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee
 - 16 Sunday of the Prodigal Son
 - 23 Sunday of Meatfare

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