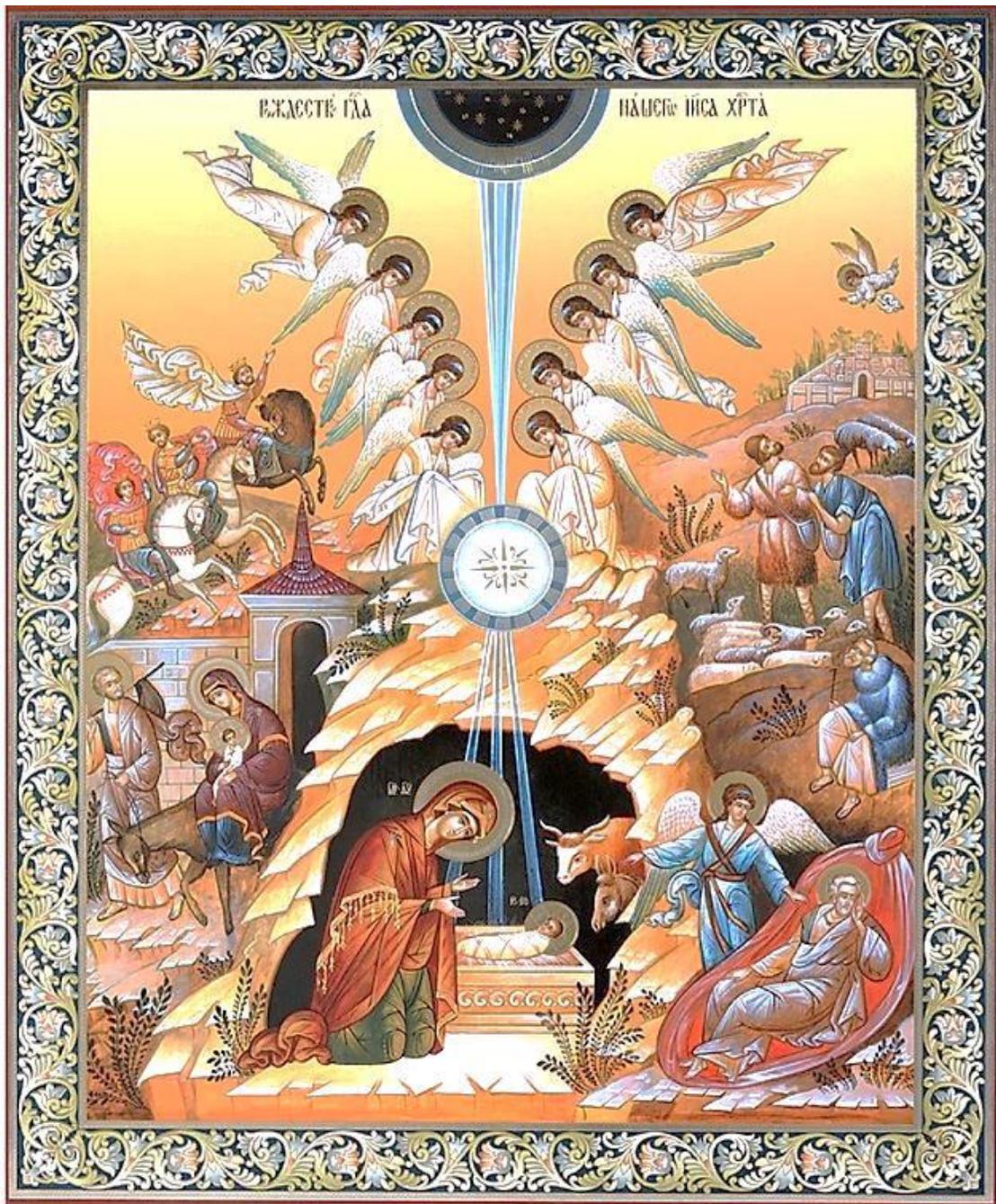


07 JANUARY 2021
FEAST OF THE NÀTIVITY ÀCCORDING
TO THE FLESH
OF OUR LORD, GOD & SÀVIOUR
JESUS CHRIST



CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!
CHRISTOS RÀZDÀJET'SJÀ!
SLÀVITE JEHO!

The Nativity Sermon of St. John Chrysostom

BEHOLD a new and wondrous mystery.

My ears resound to the Shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn. The Angels sing. The Archangels blend their voice in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory. All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He Who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised.



Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolds within itself on every side, the Sun of justice. And ask not how: for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed; He had the power; He descended; He redeemed; all things yielded in obedience to God. This day He Who is, is Born; and He Who is, becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is His. Nor yet by any loss of divinity became He man, nor through increase became He God from man; but being the Word He became flesh, His nature, because of impassability, remaining unchanged.

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him Angels, nor Archangels, nor Thrones, nor Dominations, nor Powers, nor Principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb. Since this heavenly birth cannot be described, neither does His coming amongst us in these days permit of too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a Virgin this day gave birth, and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of this generation I have learned to venerate in silence and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech.

For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of Him who works.

What shall I say to you; what shall I tell you? I behold a Mother who has brought forth; I see a Child come to this light by birth. The manner of His conception I cannot comprehend.

Nature here rested, while the Will of God labored. O ineffable grace! The Only Begotten, Who is before all ages, Who cannot be touched or be perceived, Who is simple, without body, has now put on my body, that is visible and liable to corruption. For what reason? That coming amongst us he may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that men cannot see. For since men believe that the eyes are more trustworthy than the ears, they doubt of that which they do not see, and so He has deigned to show Himself in bodily presence, that He may remove all doubt.

Christ, finding the holy body and soul of the Virgin, builds for Himself a living temple, and as He had willed, formed there a man from the Virgin; and, putting Him on, this day came forth; unashamed of the lowliness of our nature.

For it was to Him no lowering to put on what He Himself had made. Let that handiwork be forever glorified, which became the cloak of its own Creator. For as in the first creation of flesh, man could not be made before the clay had come into His hand, so neither could this corruptible body be glorified, until it had first become the garment of its Maker.

What shall I say! And how shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infant's bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His Goodness.

For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, to sanctify me; He gives me His Spirit that He may save me.

Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been planted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels.

Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle. He became Flesh. He did not become God. He was God. Wherefore He became flesh, so that He Whom heaven did not contain, a manger would this day receive. He was placed in a manger, so that He, by whom all things are nourished, may receive an infant's food from His Virgin Mother. So, the Father of all ages, as an infant at the breast, nestles in the virginal arms, that the Magi may more easily see Him. Since this day the Magi too have come, and made a beginning of withstanding tyranny; and the heavens give glory, as the Lord is revealed by a star.

To Him, then, Who out of confusion has wrought a clear path, to Christ, to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, we offer all praise, now and forever. Amen.



HOLY RESURRECTION ORTHODOX CHURCH

A Parish of the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese
Ecumenical Patriarchate
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YouTube: HROC Media



Very Rev. Peter Zarynow, Pastor
Protoperbyter John Fedornock

Subdeacons Anastasios Davis & Theodoros Zarynow Reader Stephen Sudik

Thursday 07 January 2021

**Feast of the Nativity according to the Flesh
of our Lord, God & Saviour Jesus Christ**

The Adoration of the Magi: Melchior, Casper, and Balthazar

**Commemoration of the Shepherds on Bethlehem who were watching their flocks and came to see the Lord;
Massacre of Monk-Martyr Jonah & with him 50 monks & 65 laymen, at St. Tryphon Monastery, by the Swedes
New Hieromartyr Michael the Priest (1930)**

Epistle: Galatians 4:4-7 Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

THE SCHEDULE OF DIVINE SERVICES FOR THE NATIVITY FEAST IS AS FOLLOWS:

07 Jan (Thu) FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

Singing of Christmas Carols
Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom 11am @ St George Church, Bethesda

08 Jan (Fri) 2nd Day of Nativity/Synaxis of the Theotokos

Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom 9:30am

10 Jan (SUN) Sunday after Nativity

Chanting of the 3rd Hour 9:10am
Singing of Christmas Carols
Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom 9:30am/Group A
Socially distanced Coffee Social to follow



Announcements:

Confessions will be heard by appointment. Please contact Fr Peter to schedule All faithful are encouraged to come to the Sacrament every 8-10 weeks, on average, to help maintain spiritual health.

Welcome to all of our Family, Friends and Guests on this beautiful Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ! To all of you we say: **Christ is Born! Glorify Him! Christos Razdajetsja! Slavite Jeho!**

Because of the celebration of the Feast of the Nativity there is no fasting, except for the fast prior to receiving Communion, from today until the Eve of Theophany on 18 January. Enjoy the Feast! (These are the **real** 12 days of Christmas!)

Many thanks to Fr Dimitrios Antokos and the faithful of St George Greek Orthodox Church for opening their doors to us so that we can have a larger number of our Parish Family together for the Feast of the Nativity. May bless them for their kindness and hospitality! *Many Years! Mnohaja L'ita! Chrona Polla!*

The First ACRY Soup Sale of the season will be Sunday 17 January 2021. It will be a outdoor pick up event. Begin preparing now by thinking of the soups you will be making. Remember, each Sr ACRY household is asked to make at least one 5-qt. batch of soup. Soup containers (heavy paper, waxed) are in the ACRY closet. Soups must be here before Divine Liturgy begins. If it is not "your week" to be in church, contact Fr Peter to arrange a drop off.

The ACRY will be holding their annual Super Bowl pool. We know it is early but with staggered attendance, we figured we better start. Square sheet is in the church office to fill out. Also, you can SEE or EMAIL Mark or Marie Sudik (group B) or Nick Dzubak (group A) for squares. Cost is \$20 per square (like usual). \$400 from the proceeds will be donated to the church

The Annual Parish meeting will be held on Sunday 21 February from 1-2pm. We ask that all members of the parish family join in on the meeting. More details will be listed in the weekly bulletin as the date approaches. All organization and committee presidents/chairpersons are to have yearly reports to Fr Peter by 31 January.

Sponsors are needed for the 2021 Bulletins and for the HROC Website. Bulletin sponsors are \$30/month and website sponsors are \$25/month. The sign-up lists are on the bulletin board. If you are still not back in church yet, but would still like to sponsor, please notify FrPeter.



CANDLE OFFERINGS FOR CHRISTMAS

Altar & Tetrapod Candles: In memory of +William Dzubak on the 30th anniversary of his Falling Asleep in the Lord, with love by Wife, Irene, children and grandchildren (*Memory Eternal!*)

Eternal Light: A blessed Nativity to our HROC Family-Fr. Peter, Pa i Bernadette & Alex (*Many Years!*); in loving memory of +Les-love Carol (*Vicnaja Pamjat!*); Christmas Blessings (4) Fr. John and Pa i Marge; Pa i Jean; Holy Resurrection Parishioners; Family & Friends-Lois (*Many Years!*); in memory of newly-departed Aunt Michalene-Lois (*Memory Eternal!*); Blessed Christmas to HROC Parishioners-Rose Plowchin (*Many Years!*); (2)Christmas Blessings, health & happiness goddaughter Eva and her parents Sofia & Sergei & Lore/Golovchenko Family-Yuliya Lore (*Many Years!*)

Altar Candles: Christmas Blessings Metropolitan Gregory-Lois (*Eis Polla Eti Despota!*); Christmas Blessings, health & continued success Aleksey-Mom & Dad (*Mnohaja L'ita!*)

Sacramental Table: Fr Peter & Pa i Bernadette & Alex-Lois (*Many Years!*); Christmas Blessings, health & happiness Fr Peter, Pa i Bernadette, Alexander & all the HROC Family-Yuliya Lore (*Mnohaja L'ita!*)

Offerings for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ! (*Christ is Born! Christos Razdajetsja!*)

2-Christmas Blessings-brother George

Archbishop Michael; Barbara Knighton

101-Christmas Blessings-George Dahulich

Metropolitan Gregory; Bishop Matthias; Fr Peter & Pañi Bernadette; Alex Zarynow; Fr. John & Pañi Marge Fedomock; Fr. George & Psa. Diana Acsente; Constantin, Mina & George Acsente; Pañi Jean Hutnyan; Fr. Tom & Pani Linda Kadlec; Fr. Jim & Pani Kathy Dutko; Fr. Vincent & Pañi Christyn Dranginis; Feras & Rnad Alzraqat; Georgene & Ray Ammon; Brian & Linda Antonishek; Grace, Ella & Megan Antonishek; Jason Aumen; Nathan Berg; John & Sophie Birkenmeier; Donny & Debbie Boyd; Savannah, Caroline & Natalie Boyd; Alex & Eleanor Breno; Dan & Faith Breno; Alex, Philip & Matthew Breno; Michael Buchko; Wing Chow & Debbie Brancho; Katherine & Christina Chow; Sean Coxen & Rajani Polisetti; Jeanne Delasko & Jim David; Sdn Anastasios & Jennifer Davis; Katelynn, Benjamin, Morgan, Sawyer, Karoline, Elijah & Samuel Davis; Tom & Debbie Delare; Irene Dzubak; Nick & Cyndi Dzubak; Christopher, Allen & Daniel Dzubak; Tim Dzubak; Emily & William Dzubak; Joanne Dzubak; Steven Ellis; Lois Erhard; Chris & Mike Fallon; Kathleen Fallon; Vic & Staci Fitzwater; Julia Fitzwater; Linda Fotis; Yuliya & Andrew Lore; Aleksey Rogozin; John & Barbara Homick; John & Sheila Hrapchak; Chris Hudack; Sem. Daniel Katz; Joan Kondratick; Tom & Amy Koval; Alex & Melanie Krynitsky; Jonathon & Lara Krynitsky; Stephanie Krynitsky; Rob & Kathy Lavender; Will & Josie Lavender; Kevin Lindsay; Kate & Eric Gebert; Joann Medvigy; Carol Miller; Scott & Janet Miller; Fred & Barbara Muhlenberg; Matthew Muhlenberg; Charlie & Debi Myers; Jacob & Joey Myers; Steve Paczolt; Eric & Susan Peart; Rebekah & Zachary Peart; Barbara Parimucha; Rose Plowchin; Scott & Tracy Roby Jr.; Lee Roby; Diane Rowland & Brian Biles; Marie Skasko; John & Marie Smith; Mike & Erika Sofelkanik; Niko, Michael & Alayna Sofelkanik; Brian & Caryl Strauss; Ruth & Nora Strauss; Mark & Marie Sudik; Angela & Brian Luchini; Stephen Sudik; Michael & Rachel Sumner; Jude & Nadia Sumner; Andrew & Jessica Swindell; Grace & Brady Swindell; Linda & Angelo Taveira-DaSilva; Andrey Taveira-DaSilva; Chrysa Thear; Anna Thear; Dan & Rachel Timko; Laci, Ava & Danny Timko; Marge Tomasevich; Kate & Mark Ulicny; Sarah & Ryan Ulicny; Jared Walker; Joan Wisnosky; Ann & William Wright; Brandon & Nicole Patrick; Nick & Janet Yakubik

2-Christmas Blessings-love Mom

Scott & Janet; Staci & Vic

1-Christmas Blessings Julia-love Grandma

6-Christmas Blessings-Carol Miller

Metropolitan Gregory; Father Peter, Pañi Bernadette & Alex; Father John & Pañi Marge; Pañi Jean Hutnyan; HROC Parishioners

7-health & healing-Carol Miller

Ann Thear; John & Barbara Homick; Marge Tomasevich; Chris Hudack; Chris Fallon; Aunt Mary; All Who Are Ill or Healing

4+in loving memory-Carol Miller

Mother & Daddy; Myrtle Miller; Muchesko, Patrick & Miller Families; HROC Parishioners

1-health & healing Hayley, Bob, Chris Hudack, John Homick, Peggy and Bruce, Andrea, and all who are sick-Lois

1-health of Savannah, Caroline, Natalie, Karen K, Elizabeth Michel, Marge Tomasevich, Georgene and Ray, Jeanne Delasko, John & Marie Smith-Lois

1-happy birthday George Dahulich-Lois

3-specail intention-Lois

Paula; Barb Homick; Chris & Mike Fallon

3-Christmas blessings-love Alex and Melanie

father Michael; Michael Jr, Michael III & Doug; Mark, Jennifer, Emma & Timothy

2-Christmas blessings-love Mom & Dad

Jonathan & Lara; Stephanie

7+Memory Eternal at Christmas-love Alex & Melanie

mother Elaine, mother Katherine; father John; grandparents George & Mary; grandparents Francis & Sophia; grandparents Alexander & Helen; grandparents Peter & Tatiana

7-Merry Christmas-Save Ellis

Sylvia Ellis; Christopher Ellis; Esmerelda Rivera; Katie Ellis; Chase Bertie; Andy Ellis; Dana Polson

6+in memory-Save Ellis

George & Betty Ellis; John & Helen Pinckney; David M. Barrett; Mark Saylor; Rev. Merritt Edney; Kris Ownes

4+Eternal Memory-Rose Plowchin

Mom & Dad; brother Jim; brother George; niece Kelly

3-Christmas Blessings-Anonymous

George Dahulich; Joanie Wisnosky; Lois Erhard

5-Christmas Blessings-John & Marie Smith

Fr Peter, Pañi Bernadette & Alex; Fr John & Pañi Marge; Pañi Jean Hutnyan; Our Family; Parishioners of HROC & their Families

7-Christmas Blessings, health & happiness-Yuliya Lore

Irene Dzubak & Dzubak Family; Joanie Wisnosky; Diane Rowland; Steve Paczolt; Olga Vovk; Irina Panfilov & Family; George Dahulich

3-Christmas Blessings-Aleksey Rogozin

Mom & Dad; godparents Daria & Dimitriy

9-Christmas Blessings-the Breno Family

Fr & John & Pañi Marge Fedomock; Alex & Eleanor Breno; Peart Family; Fedomock Family; Zankey Family; Fabian Family; Fr Peter & Pañi Bernadette Zarynow; Choti Family

1-happy birthday Baby Jesus-the Breno Family

5-Christmas Blessings-John & Sheila Hrapchak

Fr. Peter, Pañi Bernadette and Alex; HROC Parishioners; HROC Parish Council; HROC Cantor group; HROC Altar Servers

Poinsettias & Door Wreaths: Christmas Blessings to our Family, Love Alex & Melanie, Jonathan & Lara and Stephanie (*Many Years! Mnohaja L'ita!*)



What Do I Want for Christmas This Year?

by Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick

It's a question we get asked a lot, and it's a question that gets harder to answer as I get older. I have an Amazon wish list, of course. But, really, I do know what would make me feel like it was a really good Christmas. I know exactly what I want. I'm afraid it's a long list.

Here's what I want:

- 1 I want for Christians to be in church worshipping the Lord, God and Savior Who was born for our sakes to destroy the power of death.
- 1 I want for families to pursue peace and family harmony by making Jesus Christ central in their family schedules.
- 1 I want to pray a lot better and a lot more consistently.
- 1 I want for Christians to stop acting like politics is more important than prayer.
- 1 I want for petty, transient things to stop mattering so much to me and to my country.
- 1 I want for people who say that their faith really matters to them to start acting like it.
- 1 I want for husbands and wives to see that they don't have to solve everything or even feel in love.
- 1 I want for husbands and wives to see that their spouse isn't responsible to make them feel happy.
- 1 I want for husbands and wives to see that they don't even have to be best friends.
- 1 I want for parents to see that their kids aren't responsible to make them feel successful or adequate or appreciated.
- 1 I want for parents to believe that an education in Christian life for their children is their first and only real task as parents.
- 1 I want for pilgrimage to be more critical and more consistent than vacation.
- 1 I want for spiritual life to be ~~the~~ thing, that is, a thing that people are working on- a project rather than an accessory.
- 1 I want for my spiritual life to be my biggest project.
- 1 I want to hear more Christians saying to co-workers, coaches, teachers, friends and family these two sentences together: I can't. We have church.
- 1 I want to meet kids who know more about the people in the Bible than the people in a cartoon, a sports team or a video game.
- 1 I want to be automatically kind rather than automatically defensive.
- 1 I want to see church members whose first question is ~~how~~ how can I help? rather than ~~you~~ you know what we should be doing?+
- 1 I want for the government of my country to stop acting like it can and should fix everything.
- 1 I want for me and my countrymen to stop acting like we can and should fix everything.
- 1 I want for the average annual gift to the church even to rival the average annual cost of cable TV or eating out.
- 1 I want people to see that history, especially Church history, matters.
- 1 I want people to see that doctrine matters and has a real effect on life.
- 1 I want people to see that morality isn't something holding you down but something giving you strength.
- 1 I want prayer to be more about meeting God and less about asking something from God.
- 1 I want people to know that God really does love them just as they are.
- 1 I want people to see that God's love doesn't leave them as they are.
- 1 I want for hope to be understood as something we have in the resurrection of Jesus, not in ~~the~~ the future of our country, any political outcome or personal ambition.
- 1 I want to see myself as a minor character in Jesus's story rather than Him as a minor character in my story.
- 1 I want the story of the death-conquering King of Kings to be what defines us more than any other story.

These are some things that I want. I think any one of them would really make my Christmas.

What do you want for Christmas this year?

For Home Blessings 2021

Christos Razdajetsja! Christ is Born!

Dear Fathers:

At the direction of His Eminence, Metropolitan Gregory, I am writing with his directive regarding Home Blessings this year.

His Eminence strongly feels that our priests should NOT ENTER parishioners' homes for the traditional Blessing. However, he is allowing our priests to make a local decision for an alternate procedure to chant the Theophany Home Blessing prayer from the porch of a home, blessing with water without entering. This is to be your local decision. Otherwise, parishioners should be advised that the Home Blessings will not be held this year but will resume in the traditional manner next year.

He is also advising our clergy to bless sufficient water to allow faithful to take water from the Church to their homes for their use throughout this year.

With kind regards, I remain

Sincerely yours in the New-born Saviour,

Very Rev. Protopresbyter Frank P. Miloro, *Chancellor*

***Fr Peter will take appointments for blessing your home in this fashion this year. He will miss the opportunity to sit and talk with you in your homes this year, but we hope and pray that next year we will be able to resume this beautiful tradition of our Church*



REMINDER --- 2021 DIOCESAN ASSESSMENT

Being our parish, and we as its faithful, are a part of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese (ACROD), each adult parish member (who is over 18 years of age and not a full-time undergraduate student or first enlistment military) has been assessed \$75 .00 in 2021 to support the work of the Diocese (Seminary, Camp Nazareth, etc.) and administration. A special envelope, Diocesan Assessment, is included as the first envelope in your box. The parish receives the invoice from the Diocese in January, so please try to submit the assessment as soon as possible after the first of the year. If there are any questions, or if you want to break up the assessment into payments, please see Debi Myers after Divine Services.

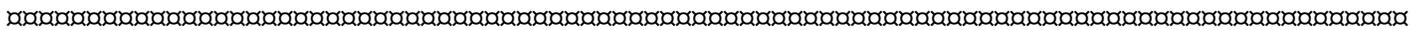
STEWARDSHIP NOTE:

Offering Envelope for 2021 boxes are now available to take home. They can be found on the table under the TV in the hall. Please take them so that you can begin using them in 2020. If we accidentally missed you, please stop in the office and see Debi Myers or Marie Smith to get that corrected.

Remember: it is only by your offerings that we are able to keep the doors to the church open and our parish functioning.

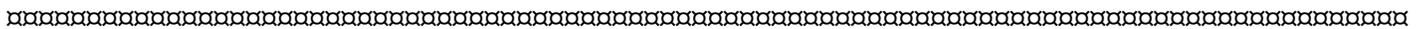


CHRIST IS BORN!! GLOEFY HIM!!
CHRISTOS RAZDAJETSJA!! SLAVITE JEHO!!
MAY YOU, YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR FRIENDS HAVE
A MOST BLESSED NATIVITY SEASON!!



“When God became known to us in the flesh, He neither received the passions of human nature, nor did the Virgin Mary suffer pain, nor was the Holy Spirit diminished in any way, nor was the power of the Most High set aside in any manner, and all this was because all was accomplished by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the power of the Most High was not abased, and the child was born with no damage whatsoever to the mother’s virginity.”

+ St. Gregory of Nyssa



Why is it necessary to pray at home, and to attend Divine Services at church? Well, why is it necessary for you to eat and drink, to exercise, or to work every day? This you do in order to support the life of the body and strengthen it. So also, it is absolutely necessary to pray in order to support the life of the soul, to strengthen the soul, which is sick with sin, and to cleanse it, just as you employ some kinds of food and drink to cleanse the body. If you do not pray, you behave inadvisedly and most unwisely, supporting, gratifying and strengthening your body in every way, but neglecting your soul. óSt John of Kronstadt

Why a Virgin Birth?

Bishop Kallistos Ware: The Orthodox Way



"In the New Testament it is clearly stated that Jesus Christ's mother was a virgin (Matthew 1:18,23,25). Our Lord has an eternal Father in heaven, but no father on earth. He was begotten outside time from the Father without a mother, and he was begotten within time from the Mother without a father. This belief in the Virgin Birth does not, however, in any way detract from the fullness of Christ's humanity. Although the Mother was a virgin, yet there was a real human birth of a genuinely human baby.

Yet why, we ask, should his birth as a man have taken this special form? To this it may be answered that the mother's virginity serves as a "sign" of the Son's uniqueness. This it does in three closely connected ways:

First, the fact that Christ has no earthly father means that he points always beyond his situation in space and time to his heavenly and eternal origin. Mary's child is truly man, but he is not only man; he is within history but also above history. His birth from a virgin emphasizes that, while immanent, he is also transcendent; although completely man, he is also perfect God.

Secondly, the fact that Christ's Mother was a virgin indicates that his birth is to be ascribed in a unique manner to the divine initiative. Although he is fully human, his birth was not the result of sexual union between man and woman, but it was in a special way the direct work of God.

Thirdly, Christ's birth from a virgin underlines that the Incarnation did not involve the coming into being of a new person. When a child is born from two human parents in the usual fashion, a new person begins to exist. But the person of the incarnate Christ is none other than the second person of the Holy Trinity. At Christ's birth, therefore, no new person came into existence, but the pre-existent person of the Son of God now began to live according to a human as well as a divine mode of being. So the Virgin Birth reflects Christ's eternal pre-existence."

Why is the Virgin Mary such an important part of Our Liturgical Services?

Worship is the manifestation of the faith and life of the Church. The Theotokos is an extremely important part of the faith and life of the Church. Therefore, it would be impossible for the Church to worship without including her prominently in the Services. The Theotokos is important in the Christian Faith, first and above all, because she is the Birth-giver of our Saviour Jesus Christ.+ It was she who gave the human nature to Christ, as His mother. In this she contributed to the incarnation of Christ, and therefore to one of the most important aspects of His work of salvation. Further, she is the first and Chief Saint of the Church. It was her purity and goodness that drew the grace of God to choose her to become the Mother of the Lord. Further, just as she did at the wedding at Cana, the Theotokos always points to Christ, saying, %Do what He says,+ that is, she is a perpetual witness to the need for Christians to follow Christ. Further, she always prays for us, so in worship we ask her intercessions before the Throne of the Lord. As you can see, the Theotokos is included in the worship of the Church so prominently precisely because she is so prominent in the drama of salvation. She herself prophesied her place in the Church when she said, %Behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed.+ (Luke 1:48)



In Defense of the Christmas Tree



Several years ago, during the Christmas season, a religious program on television caught my attention. The program featured a discussion on the dangers of cults, especially to young people. I found myself agreeing with the panelists as they warned young people about the hazards of involvement in occult or New Age spirituality.

During the interview, however, one participant made a statement that shocked me. "The Christmas tree is pagan too," he asserted. The Christmas Tree? Pagan? Could it be that something most of us enjoy so much might be actually pagan in origin? Despite its growing commercialization, the Christmas tree is still associated with the fondest memories of our early childhood. Who does not remember approaching the tree on Christmas morning? Today people are so captivated by it that some even put it up in November! It finds a place in the homes of believers and unbelievers alike.

Most people are aware that the Christmas tree came to America with immigrants from Germany, but just where did the Christmas tree originate? Are its origins to be found in paganism, as the speaker suggested?

The Christmas tree does not date from early Germanic times. Its origins are to be found in a tradition that has virtually disappeared from Christianity, the Liturgical Drama. In the Middle Ages liturgical plays or dramas were presented during or sometimes immediately after the services in the churches of Western Europe. The earliest of these plays were associated with the Mysteries of Holy Week and Easter. Initially they were dramatizations of the liturgical texts. The earliest recorded is the *Quem quaeritis* ("Whom do you seek?") play of the Easter season. These plays later developed into the Miracle and Morality plays. Some were associated with events in the lives of well-known saints. The plays were presented on the porches of large churches. Although these liturgical dramas have now virtually disappeared, the Passion Play of Oberammergau, Germany is a recent revival of this dramatic form.

One mystery play was presented on Christmas Eve, the day which also commemorated the feast of Adam and Eve in the Western Church. The *Paradise Play* told the well-known story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise. The central prop in the play was the Paradise Tree, or Tree of Knowledge. During the play this tree was brought in laden with apples.

The Paradise Tree became very popular with the German people. They soon began the practice of setting up a fir tree in their homes. Originally, the trees were decorated with bread wafers commemorating the Eucharist. Later, these were replaced with various kinds of sweets. Our Christmas tree is derived, not from the pagan yule tree, but from the paradise tree adorned with apples on December 24 in honor of Adam and Eve. The Christmas tree is completely biblical in origin.

The first Christmas tree dates from 1605 in Strasbourg. By the 1700s the custom of the Christmas tree was widespread among the German people. It was brought to America by early German immigrants, and it became popular in England through the influence of Prince Albert, the German husband of Queen Victoria.

The use of evergreens at Christmas may date from St. Boniface of the eighth century, who dedicated the fir tree to the Holy Child in order to replace the sacred oak tree of Odin; but the Christmas tree as we know it today does not appear to be so ancient a custom. It appears first in the Christian Mystery play commemorating the biblical story of Adam and Eve.

How legitimate is it to use a fir tree in the celebration of Christmas? From the very earliest days of the Church, Christians brought many things of God's material creation into their life of faith and worship, e.g., water, bread, wine, oil, candles and incense. All these things are part of God's creation. They are part of the world that Christ came to save. Man cannot reject the material creation without rejecting his own humanity. In Genesis man was given dominion over the material world.

Christmas celebrates the great mystery of the Incarnation. In that mystery God the Word became man. In order to redeem us, God became one of us. He became part of His own creation. The Incarnation affirms the importance of both man and the whole of creation. For God so loved the world +

A faith which would seek to divorce itself from all elements of the material world in search for an absolutely spiritual religion overlooks this most central mystery of Christmas, the mystery of God becoming man, the Incarnation. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Enjoy your Christmas tree.

The Lord Has Brought Us a Wealth of Love

by Archpriest Alexei Uminsky

Christ is born in Bethlehem. The Son of God ó infinite, unseen, beyond comprehension ó comes to earth and becomes a man, bound by flesh and bearing all the hardships and sorrows of this world. He is born today in a cave in Bethlehem, to be rejected and persecuted by this world in order that mankind ó and this means each one of us ó would be given two remarkable things that man has always longed to have. He comes in order to give man Power and Wealth.

Only the Lord does not give the kind of power and wealth of which some, like Herod, may dream, whose entire goal in life was to attain such. Herod so highly valued this goal that he did not even spare his own children, and when he heard that the true King of the Jews had come to earth he was very much afraid of losing his earthly power and wealth.

The wealth that Christ brings, however, is the marvelous wealth of Faith, which enables man to walk on water and move mountains, and which can make a man not see himself at all in this world, but see only Christ God Himself and live only in Him.

The Lord has brought us a wealth of love, because He Himself is Love. This is a Love that goes to the cross, is crucified, sacrificing itself. This is a love that is willing and able to overcome everything in this world. The Lord gives us a tremendous wealth of humility, *for the meek shall inherit the earth* (Matthew 5:5). Along with this He gives a wonderful wealth of peace to every heart receptive to this gift, a peace that surpasses everything in this world and so fills a person that a thousand around him will be saved, according to St. Seraphim of Sarov.

The Lord also brings us a wealth of loving kindness. If we are ready to accept it, it is poured into our hearts, rendering us capable of forgiving those who offend us and of loving our enemies, for no one in the world can love their enemies except true Christians. This is the wealth that the Lord has given us.

The Lord has also given us true power. He says: *In My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover* (Mark 16:17-18).

The Lord commanded such of each one of us, because He granted us the astonishing authority of being His children. He gave authority to be perfectly like Him to everyone who truly believes in Him: we can act in this world as Christ Himself acted in this world, we can live His life, speak His words, look at the world through His eyes, take in the world through His feelings and His heart. Just as the Apostle Paul said, in each one of us should be the same feelings as in Jesus Christ. You see what He has granted us!

But here is something interesting: given this amazing wealth, given this extraordinary power, we always ask something silly of God, we seek small things from God, which in fact adds up to seeking authority and wealth, but of a pitiable kind: earthly wealth and authority, earthly prosperity, earthly success, the ability to act in this world according to our capabilities.

We think that this is so important, that this is life itself, that this contains the meaning of life ó to live calmly, conveniently, successfully, and piously. Maybe this is pious, but it is not Christian, because we are too frightened to walk on water. We do not believe that we can cast out demons and overcome death. We read the Gospel, but these verses somehow do not relate to us, because this is not what we need from God, and our life seems nothing like the gift that Christ has brought us.

Today Christ is born into the world and He distributes His gifts: true power in Christ and true wealth in Christ. Let us try to forget once and for all those little things with which we fill our lives, and let us truly and profoundly seek the true power of Christ and the true wealth of Christ: the desire to be with Christ, to be in Christ, and ourselves to be Christ, Who is today revealed to us in His bright and joyful Nativity. Amen.



CHRISTIANITY MAKES NO SENSE

by Fr. Lawrence Farley



Christianity makes no sense. Just ask self-proclaimed intellectual giants like Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens. They will tell you that Christian claims are crazy, outrageous, and intellectually scandalous. The very idea that a man who lived in Palestine two millennia ago, who wrote not a single line that survives, who never travelled beyond the borders of his own little country, and who had to work with his hands to make a living— the notion that this man was God almighty makes no sense. To which the Church replies: you are correct. It does make no sense.

The idea that the eternal and almighty God— the power that set the stars and the sun alight, and that keeps the world turning on its axis, and that brought into being the vast expanse of interstellar space billions of years ago— the idea that this same deity became a little baby growing in the womb of a Jewish peasant girl does make no sense. The idea is crazy, outrageous, and intellectually scandalous. It also happens to be *true!* Christianity is the greatest example in

the world of “You Can’t Make This Stuff Up.” And in fact nobody did make it up. What happened historically is that one human being, Jesus of Nazareth, spoke and acted and claimed to be God in such a way that compelled belief. The apostles didn’t make up the Christian Faith. Like everyone else in their day and age, they knew that God was “up there” and we were “down here,” and that an infinite gap and distance separated us from the divine. They were part of a religion that tried to bridge that gap, with whatever success. But whether or not all was well with the world, they believed that God was in His heaven, and that everyone down here was simply a human being created by Him. The notion that a man could also be God struck them as nonsensical, as it would later strike Dawkins or Hitchens. The only difference between the apostles and our own smug atheists is that our atheists never met and spent time with Jesus of Nazareth like the apostles did. The apostles’ experience of Jesus forced them to re-evaluate everything they thought they knew about God. It compelled them to confess that God was up there and somehow also down here with us in the Person of Jesus.

This reveals something of the immensity of God’s love for us. That a deity might like sinful humanity enough to talk to us makes some sort of sense, (though the Deistic notion that He made the world and then more or less retired and sat back and left us on our own makes sense too). Many religions thought so, and posited a God Who inspired sages and sent prophets and shared messages with humanity, the upshot of most messages being “Stop Messing Up.” But the Christian Faith alone claims that God not only inspired sages and sent prophets, but also bridged the infinite gap between divinity and humanity and came to live as one of us. And not only that, He came to live among the poor and mediocre— among shepherds and carpenters and fishermen. And more than that, He dared to die for us. And even more than that, He dared to die the most shameful and terrible of deaths, the death of the cross, betrayed and abandoned by all. This makes no sense. It is crazy and outrageous and scandalous. It is also true. Other religions can be justly accused of being the sort of thing a man might make up. No one could guess or make this up. That is perhaps what Tertullian meant when we wrote, “*Credo quia absurdum*”— “I believe because it is absurd.” The love that God has for us outrages common sense, and (in the words of the Akathistos Hymn to the Theotokos) “shows the philosophers to be fools.” (Sadly, it does not leave orators like Dawkins and Hitchens “as voiceless as fish.”) That is why we make such a liturgical fuss over Mary, and why we keep Christmas. God loves us so much He did something we can’t get over, and can scarcely comprehend. We sing song after song, and celebrate it in a thousand verses, but we still can hardly get our minds around it. Christianity makes no sense. But it saves us nonetheless.

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Such splendor of heavenly glory was revealed to the simple shepherds of Bethlehem. Up until then, such glory could only be seen by chosen individuals, and this is the first instance that we find in Holy Scripture of a whole group of mortal men clearly seeing and hearing the immortal, angelic host. This is a sign that, with Christ’s coming to earth, heaven is wide open to all who seek it in purity of heart. — St. Nikolai Velimirovic



GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!

CHRIST IS BORN!!

GLORIFY HIM!

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ

ΓΕΝΝΗΘΗΣΗ!

ΣΛΑΒΙΤΕ ΤΗΝ!

