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A MESSAGE FROM OUR PARISH PRIEST



Christ is Born, brothers and sisters in Christ!

It is a great joy of mine to greet you with this most amazing exclamation, announcing the Birth of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing on this world can fully express the miracle of the Nativity of Christ and its meaning for the salvation of the mankind.

On a feast like this, we are reminded that the promise of the coming of the Messiah is fulfilled and the human race, the nature and all of the creation can now rejoice and find comfort into the Newborn Who resolves the most important inherited consequences of the fall of Adam: the pain, the suffering and death.

In Christ, we become anew. We can see Him as the One Who emptied Himself from His glory and became one of us. In this enormous humility, one silent night Christ takes upon Himself our nature and sanctifies it, becoming the New Adam free from the burden of the fall and making the path for all of us who want to follow Him, a tangible reality of our salvation. He is here now among us. We can see Him as a new born baby, among us and as one of us. We can touch Him, smell Him, hug Him, kiss Him, be with Him.

There is no other God, like our God! Every religion on this planet have their own teachers and saviors, ideas and concepts about their gods and theologies, but only we have Christ, Who made Himself known and real so we can recognize Him and get even closer to God, as St. Athanasios the Great says: “God became man, so man can become gods”. What an honor?! What a humility?! No one has seen or shall ever see this kind of miracle or hear more joyous news than this. No one else said this bold words but Christ: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.” (John 14:6).

But glory to God again, Who blessed us to celebrate His Nativity this turbulent 2022. Some may say that 2021 was even harder than the previous year; that we went through many tribulations on this world, that we all saw a lot of suffering, pain... But we as members of the Mystical Body of Christ can always find comfort in these words: Glory to Thee o God, Glory to Thee for everything and for all! That is the only answer we can give. It is the only true statement that we can live by, for our hope is not on this world and its vain promises but we live our nostalgia for the Kingdom to come. Our true homeland - the upper Jerusalem.

When we live within the liturgical life of the Church, we realize that no matter what we face in front





of us, we live knowing the One Who was born for us, has already defeated this fallen world. We have no one else but the One who is the giver of life. The One Who for our sake and our salvation, became one of us.

My most intimate prayer for all of us, brothers and sisters, with God's help, is to celebrate this feast not just because we will follow the traditions of man, or the customs of the social/cultural life, but to dive deep into the Mystery of the Nativity and to find communion with Him and each other, so we can acquire His Divine Grace. To become a fire for Him, as the Holy Fathers would say. To find Him in our thoughts, in the most deepest corners of our heart, to live in Him every time when we see each other. To see Him in the eyes of the others. To witness Him with our whole being, for the purpose of our life is to become little "christs" and become one with Him. It is not enough to just call ourselves Christians, but to be Christians. How do we achieve this? By crucifying ourselves (our ego) on the Cross of this temporary life and living our lives according to the measure of our growth in Him. To continue to live the liturgy of our salvation not just when we come to the church services, but even more when we go outside of the temple, in our everyday life.

Glory to God, we had many events and new people joining our small Parish this past year. And we welcome all and everyone who wants to live in Christ. Everything happens according to His will. As long as we live in practice according to Christ, we will be true martyrs (witnesses) of His Church. We are here to witness Him, to have only Christ, and detach from the false values offered by the world.

So every day, every week, every year, and every moment of our life is a chance for a new beginning. To start over even if we fail sometimes. As we had said many times, we don't run a sprint on the path to salvation, but walk a marathon according to our strength. We put our whole trust in Him, Who orderest all things. We will continue to measure the quality of our life, based on the quality of our repentance and love for one another in Christ. So let us with joy exclaim:

Christ is born! Χριστος σε ροδι! Χριστός γεννάται!

With the blessing and through the prayers of our Bishop Irinej, may this light of Christ's Nativity bring to you all the Grace of the Holy Spirit. And remember me in your prayers as I remember you always,

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards men!

Your servant in Christ,

Fr. Borjan Vitanov

December, 2021





A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHURCH BOARD PRESIDENT



Seasons's Greeting: As we close out 2021 (New Calendar) and reflect on our church activities, I feel we've survived quite well. We've crawled out of a covid shutdown in the winter/spring with a successful Easter filling sale. After cancelling our Slava in May, we bounced back with four successful Chicken/Pork Bar-B-Qs. Although not quite ready to take on our annual Food Fest we did reintroduce the Berba (Harvest Dance) in November, followed by another sold out Thanksgiving filling sale and our annual bake sale in December. Many thanks to those who have worked so diligently to make these activities happen.

Father has been working equally hard on our spiritual growth, with additional services, his ever enlightening weekly Bible Studies and a newly introduced catechism class. Not only are adults benefiting from religious instruction but also our children with the addition of Chris Giovanis as church school teacher who is dedicated to both the faith and children. Considering the many obstacles covid has presented, 2021 has been a good year for our parish with continued growth, fellowship and good health.

As we look to the new year, our Slava which has been on hold for the past two years will, God willing, be celebrated with renewed enthusiasm. We anticipate a most successful event, which for our new parishioners, will be an added holiday celebrated in our church. Hopefully, our Ethnic Food Fest will return this fall, another well received event anticipated by the community.

On behalf of myself and the church board, I wish you a joyous, healthy year filled with spiritual growth and humility.

Secular Santa is fun, jolly and merry but : "Jesus is the reason for the Season".

MIR BOZIJI! HRISTOS SE RODI!

Judie Larson
Church Board President





CHRIST IS BORN! INDEED HE IS BORN!

*Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, / Has shone to the world the Light of wisdom! /
For by it, those who worshipped the stars, / Were taught by a Star to adore You, /
The Sun of Righteousness, / And to know You, the Orient from on High. /
O Lord, glory to You!*



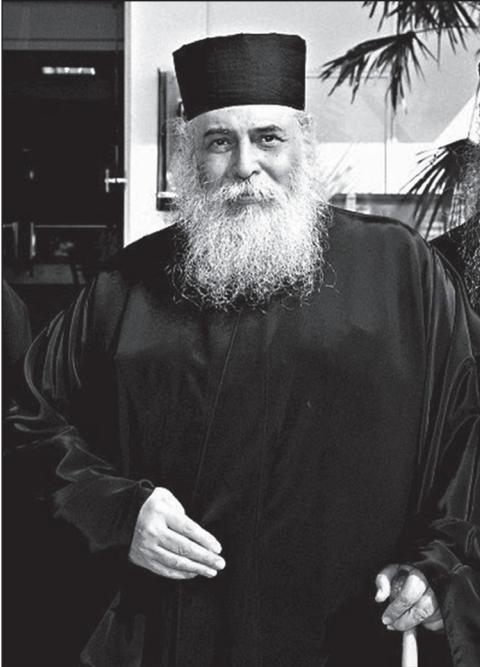
***Wishing you a joyous Christmas and the blessings
of peace and hope throughout the coming year!***

David and Judie Larson



Archimandrite Georgios Kapsanis,
Former Abbott of the Holy Monastery of
Gregoriou on Mount Athos

THE PLACE OF MAN'S DEIFICATION
(Continues from the last Christmas Messenger)



Those who wish to unite with Christ, and, through Jesus Christ, with God the Father, recognise that this union is realized in the body of Christ, which is our Holy Orthodox Church. A union, Of course, not with the Divine essence, but with the deified human nature of Christ. But this union with Christ is not external, nor is it simply moral.

We are not followers of Christ in the way that some perhaps follow a philosopher or a teacher. We are members of Christ's body, the Church. The Church is the body of Christ, the real body, not a moral one, as some theologians have mistakenly written, not having looked deeply into the spirit of the Holy Church. In spite our unworthiness and sinfulness, Christ takes us Christians and incorporates us into His body. He makes us members of Himself. And so we become real members of the body of Christ, not just morally. As the Apostle Paul puts it, 'We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones' (Eph. 5:30).

Certainly, depending on the spiritual state of Christians, they are sometimes living members of Christ's body, and at other times dead. Yet, even as dead members, they do not cease to be members of Christ's body. For example, someone who is baptized has become a member of Christ's body. If he does not confess, does not take Communion, does not live a spiritual life, he is a dead member of Christ's body. But when he repents, he immediately receives divine life. This permeates him and he becomes a living member of Christ's body. He does not need to be rebaptized. Someone who has never been baptized, however, is not a member of Christ's body, even if he lives a life which is moral by human standards. He needs to be baptized in order to become a member of Christ's body, to become incorporated into Christ.

So, because we are members of Christ's body, Christ's life is offered to us and it becomes our life. And thus we are enlivened, saved, and deified. We could not be deified, had Christ not made us members of His Holy body.



We could not be saved if the Holy Mysteries of the Church did not exist, which make us one body with Christ, and by which, according to the Church Fathers, we share the same flesh and the same blood as Christ, in other words, to become one body and one blood with Christ.

What a great blessing that we partake of the immaculate Mysteries! Christ becomes ours; Christ's life becomes ours; His blood becomes our blood. This is why St. John Chrysostom says that God has nothing more to give man than what he gives him in Holy Communion. Neither can man ask for anything beyond what he receives from Christ in Holy Communion.

This way then, having been baptized, chrismated, and having confessed, we commune through the Body and Blood of the Lord, and we too become gods by Grace; we unite with God; we are no longer strangers, but His intimates.

Inside the Church in which we unite with God, we live this new reality which Christ brought to the world: the new creation. This is the life of the Church, of Christ, which becomes ours as a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Everything in the Church leads to deification (gr. theosis). The Holy Liturgy, the Mysteries, divine Worship, the Gospel sermon, the fasting; they all lead to this one thing. The Church is the sole place of deification.

The Church is not a social, cultural, or historical institution, and it does not resemble any other institution in the world. It is not like the different establishments of the world. Perhaps the world has fine establishments, fine organizations, fine institutions and other fine things. But our Orthodox Church is the inimitable, the sole place for the communication of God with man; of man's deification. Only within the Church can man become a god, and nowhere else. Neither in universities, nor in social service foundations, nor in any of the fine and good things that the world has. All these, however good they may be, they are not able to offer what the Church offers.

This is why, no matter how much worldly institutions and systems progress, they can never replace the Church.

It is possible that we weak and sinful men go through crises and difficulties from time to time within the Church. It is possible even for scandals to happen in the bosom of the Church. All these happen in the Church because we are as yet on the way to Theosis, and it is very natural that human weaknesses still exist. We are becoming gods, but not yet. So, no matter how often these things occur, we will not leave the Church, because within the Church we have the only possibility to unite with God.

For example, when we go to Church to attend the service, we may meet people there who do not pay attention to the holy service; who hold conversations and distract our attention. Then along comes a seemingly reasonable thought which says: 'What do you gain by coming to Church? Might it not be better to sit at home in greater peace and comfort?'

We, However, must prudently contradict this evil thought: 'Yes, perhaps on the one hand I will have more outward peace at home, but I will not have God's Grace to deify and sanctify me. I will not have Christ, Who is present in His Church. I will not have His Holy Body and His precious Blood, which are on the holy Altar in His holy Church. I will not partake in the Mystical Supper of the Holy Liturgy. I will be cut off from my fellow brethren in Christ, together with whom we form Christ's body.'

So, no matter what happens, we will not leave the Church, because only within it do we find the path to deification (gr. theosis).





DEIFICATION IS POSSIBLE THROUGH THE UNCREATED ENERGIES OF GOD*

In the Orthodox Church of Christ man can achieve deification because, according to the teachings of the Holy Bible and the Fathers of the Church, the Grace of God is uncreated. God is not only essence, as the West thinks; He is also energy. If God was only essence, we could not unite with Him, could not commune with Him, because the essence of God is awesome and unapproachable for man, in accordance with: 'Never will man see My face and live' (Exod. 33:20).

Let us mention a somewhat relevant example from things human. If we grasp a bare electric wire, we will die. However, if we connect a lamp to that wire, we are illuminated. We see, enjoy, and are assisted by the energy of electric current, but we are not able to grasp its essence. Let us say that something similar happens with the uncreated energy of God.

If we were able to unite with the essence of God, we too would become gods in essence. In other words everything would become a god, and there would be confusion so that, nothing would be essentially a god. In a few words, this is what they believe in the Oriental religions, e.g. in Hinduism, where the god is not a personal existence but an indistinct power dispersed through all the world, in men, in animals, and in objects (Pantheism).

Again, if God had only the divine essence – of which we cannot partake – and did not have His energies, He would remain a self-sufficient god, closed within himself and unable to commune with his creatures.

God, according to the Orthodox theological view, is One in a Trinity and a Trinity in One. As St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Dionysius the Areopagite, and other holy Fathers repeatedly say, God is filled with a divine love, a divine eros for His creatures. Because of this infinite and ecstatic love of His, He comes out of Himself and seeks to unite with them. This is expressed and realised by means of His energy or, better, His energies.

With these, His uncreated energies, God created the world and continues to preserve it. He gives essence and substance to our world through His essence-creating energies. He is present in nature and preserves the universe with His preserving energies; He illuminates man with His illuminating energies; He sanctifies him with His sanctifying energies. Finally, He deifies him with His deifying energies. Thus, through his uncreated energies, holy God enters nature, the world, history, and men's lives.

The energies of God are divine energies. They too are God, but without being His essence. They are God, and therefore they can deify man. If the energies of God were not divine and uncreated, they would not be God and so they would not be able to deify us, to unite us with God. There would be an unbridgeable distance between God and men. But by virtue of God having divine energies, and by uniting with us by these energies, we are able to commune with Him and to unite with His Grace without becoming identical with God, as would happen if we united with His essence.

So, we unite with God through His uncreated energies, and not through His essence. This is the mystery of our Orthodox faith and life.

Western heretics cannot accept this. Being rationalist, they do not discern between the essence and the energy of God, so, they say that God is only essence. And for this reason they cannot speak





about man's deification (gr. theosis). Because, according to them, how could man be deified when they do not accept that the divine energies are uncreated, but regard them as created? And how could something created, i.e., something outside God, deity created man?

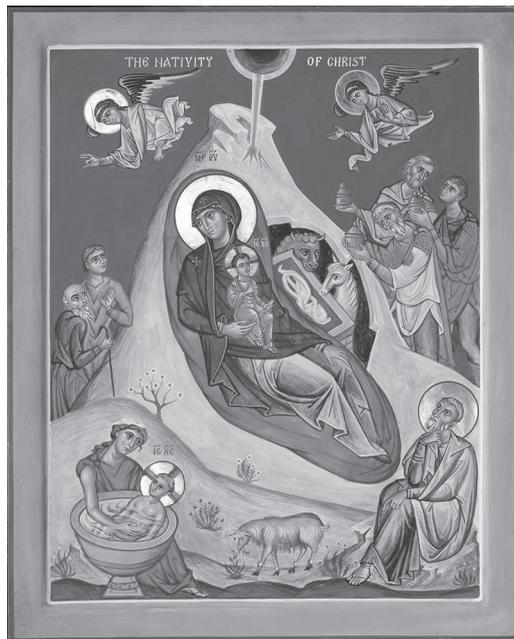
In order not to fall into pantheism, they do not speak at all about deification (gr. theosis). What then, according to them, remains as the purpose of man's life? Simply moral improvement. In other words, since man cannot be deified by means of divine Grace, the divine energies, what purpose does his life have? Only that he becomes morally better. But moral perfection is not enough for man. It is not enough for us simply to become better than before, to perform moral deeds. We have as our final aim to unite with holy God Himself. This is the purpose of the creation of the universe. This is what we desire. This is our joy, our happiness, and our fulfillment.

The psyche of man, who is created in the image and likeness of God, yearns for God and desires union with Him. No matter how moral, how good man may be, no matter how many good deeds he may perform, if he does not find God, if he does not unite with Him, he finds no rest. Because holy God Himself placed within him this holy thirst, the divine eros, the desire for union with Him, for deification (gr. theosis). He has in himself the erotic power, which he receives from his Creator, in order to love truly, strongly, selflessly, just as his holy Creator falls in love with His world, with His creatures. This is so that with this holy erotic impetus and loving power, he falls in love with God. If man did not have the image of God in himself, he would not be able to seek its prototype. Each of us is an image of God, and God is our prototype. The image seeks the prototype, and only when it finds it does it find rest.

In the fourteenth century, there was a great upheaval in the Church which was provoked by a Western monk, Barlaam. He heard that Athonite monks talked about deification (gr. theosis). He was informed that, after much struggle, cleansing of the passions, and much prayer, they became worthy to unite with God, to have experience of God, to see God. He heard that they saw the uncreated light which the holy Apostles had seen during the Transfiguration of our Saviour Christ on Mount Tabor.

But, having the Western, heretical, rationalistic spirit, Barlaam was unable to perceive the authenticity of these divine experiences of the humble monks, and so, he began to accuse the Athonite monks as though it was they who were deluded, heretical, and idolatrous. In other words he was saying that it was impossible for someone to see the Grace of God, because he knew nothing about the distinction between the essence and the uncreated energy of God.

Then, God's Grace brought out a great and enlightened teacher of our Church, the Athonite St.





Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki. With much wisdom and enlightenment from God, but also from his personal experience, he said and wrote much which taught, in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition of the Church, that the light of God's Grace is uncreated; that it is a divine energy. That, in fact, deified men see this light as the ultimate, the highest experience of deification (gr. theosis), and that they are seen within this light of God. This is the glory of God, His splendor, the light of Mount Tabor, the light of Christ's Resurrection and of Pentecost, and the bright cloud of the Old Testament. It is the real uncreated light of God, and not symbolic as Barlaam, and others like him, believed in their delusion.

Subsequently, in three great Synods at Constantinople, the whole Church justified St. Gregory Palamas, declaring that life in Christ is not simply the moral edification of man, but deification (gr. theosis), and that this means participation in God's glory, a vision of God, of His Grace and His uncreated light.

We owe great gratitude to Saint Gregory Palamas, because, with the illumination he received from God, with his experience and his theology, he bequeathed to us the teaching and eternal experience of the Church concerning the deification (gr. theosis) of man. A Christian is not a Christian simply because he is able to talk about God. He is a Christian because he is able to have experience of God. And just as, when you really love someone and converse with him, you feel his presence, and you enjoy his presence, so it happens in man's communion with God: there exists not a simply external relationship, but a mystical union of God and man in the Holy Spirit.

Even now, Westerners consider the divine Grace, or the energy of God, as something created. Unfortunately, this also is one of the many differences which must be seriously taken into consideration in theological dialogue with the Roman Catholics. It is not only the filioque, the primacy of authority, and the 'infallibility' of the Pope which are basic differences between the Orthodox Church and the Papists. It is also the above. If the Roman Catholics do not accept that the Grace of God is uncreated, we cannot unite with them even if they accept all the other points. For who is able to effect deification (gr. theosis), if divine Grace is a creation and not an uncreated energy of the All-Holy Spirit? Grace.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEIFICATION

The holy Fathers certainly say that within the Church we can attain deification (gr. theosis). Yet deification is a gift from God. It is not something that we can attain on our own. Naturally, we must want, struggle, and prepare ourselves so that we are worthy, capable, and receptive enough to accept and guard this great gift from God, since God does not wish to do anything to us without our freedom. Never the less, Theosis is a gift of God. For this reason, the holy Fathers say, on the one hand, that we "suffer" deification (gr. theosis), and on the other hand, that God actuates Theosis.

We also discern certain necessary qualifications on the path of man to deification:

a) Humility

According to the holy Fathers, the first necessary qualification is humility. Without blessed humil-





ity, man cannot be put on the right course for Theosis, cannot accept the divine Grace and so unite with God. Simply to acknowledge that Theosis is the purpose of our life demands humility, because without humility, how will you acknowledge that the purpose of your life is outside yourself; that it is in God?

So long as man lives egocentrically, anthropocentrically, autonomously, he places himself at the centre and purpose of his own life. He believes that he can be perfected by his own efforts; defined by his own efforts; deified by his own efforts. This is the spirit of contemporary civilisation, contemporary philosophy, contemporary politics: to create an even better world, even more just, but to do this autonomously, by oneself; to create a world which will have man at its centre with no reference to God; with no acknowledgement that God is the source of all good. This is the fault that Adam committed, believing that, with only his own powers, he could become God, could complete himself. The fault of Adam is one that all humanistic creeds make throughout all the ages. They do not consider that communion with God is indispensable for the completion of man.

Everything Orthodox is theanthropically centred; its centre is the God-man Christ. Everything that is not Orthodox has this common denominator: its centre is man, whether it is Protestantism, Papism, Freemasonry, Millenarianism, atheism, or whatever else is outside Orthodoxy. For us, the centre is the God-man Christ. This means it is easy for someone to become a heretic, a Millenarianist, a Mason or whatever else, but it is difficult to become an Orthodox Christian. To become an Orthodox Christian, you must first accept that the centre of the world is not yourself but Christ.

Thus, the beginning of the path towards Theosis is humility, i.e. that we acknowledge that the purpose of our life is outside us; is with our Father, our Maker and Creator.

Humility is needed to see that we are sick, that we are bigoted, that we are full of weaknesses and passions.

Again, to persist on this path, someone who begins the path of Theosis must have constant humility, for if he accepts the thought that he manages perfectly well just by using his own powers, then pride enters him; he loses what he has gained and must start again from the beginning; to become humble, to see his weakness, his human sickness, and learn not to rely on himself. In order to find himself continuously on the path of Theosis, he needs to depend on the Grace of God.

Therefore, in the lives of the saints, their great humility impresses us. While they were near God, they shone within the light of God; they were miracle-workers; they gave off myrrh; yet at the same time they believed about themselves that they were very lowly, very far from God, that they were the worst of men. It was this humility of theirs that made them gods by Grace.

b) Asceticism

The holy Fathers also tell us that Theosis has stages. It begins from the lowest and progresses to the highest. Once we have humility, in order to become cleansed from the passions we start our asceticism by applying the holy commandments of Christ, beginning our daily struggle in Christ with repentance and much patience. The holy Fathers say that within His commandments God himself lies hidden. When a Christian observes them out of love and faith in Christ, then he unites with Him.

According to the holy Fathers, this first stage of Theosis is also called 'praxis'. This is practical guid-





ance given at the start of the path towards Theosis.

Naturally, this is not at all easy, because the struggle to uproot the passions from within us is great. Much effort is required, so that gradually our inner wasteland is cleansed from the thorns and stones of the passions so that it can be cultivated spiritually, and so that the seed of God's logos may fall and bear fruit. Great and continuous effort towards ourselves is necessary for all this. Therefore the Lord said that 'the Reign of God suffers violence, so the violent seize it' (Matthew. 11:12). And again, the holy Fathers teach us: 'give blood and receive Spirit', i.e. you cannot receive the holy Spirit if you do not give the blood of your heart to the struggle to cleanse yourself from the passions, in order to repent really and in depth, and in order to acquire the virtues.

All the virtues are aspects of the one great virtue, the virtue of love. When a Christian acquires love, he has all the virtues. It is love that expels the prime cause of all the evils and all the passions from the psyche of man. This cause, according to the holy Fathers, is selfishness. All the evils within us spring from selfishness, which is a diseased love for one's own self. This is the reason why our Church has asceticism. Without asceticism, there is no spiritual life, no struggle, and no progress. We obey, fast, keep vigil, labour with prostrations, and stand upright, all so that we may be cleansed of our passions. If the Orthodox Church ceases to be ascetical, it ceases to be Orthodox, because then it ceases to help man rid himself of his passions in order to become gods by Grace.

The Church Fathers developed a great and profound anthropological teaching on the psyche and the passions of man. According to them, in the psyche you can distinguish intelligent and passible parts. The passible, again, comprises passionate and desiring parts. The intelligent part contains the reasoning powers of the psyche; the thoughts and cognitive powers. The passionate parts are the positive and negative emotions; love and hate. The desiring part contains the good desires of the virtues and the bad desires for pleasure; for enjoyment, avarice, gluttony, the worship of the flesh and the carnal passions. Unless these three parts of the psyche, the intelligent, the passionate, and the desiring, are cleansed, man cannot receive the Grace of God within himself, and cannot be deified. The intelligent part is cleansed by watchfulness, which is the continuous guarding of the nous from thoughts, keeping the good thoughts and rejecting the bad. The passionate part, again, is cleansed by love. Finally, the desiring part is cleansed by self-control. All these parts are both cleansed and sanctified by prayer.

c) The Holy Mysteries and Prayer

Christ installs Himself in the heart of man through the Holy Mysteries: Holy Baptism, Chrismation, Holy Confession and the Divine Eucharist. Those Orthodox Christians who are in communion with Christ have God and His Grace within them, in their hearts, because they have been baptised, chrismated, have confessed and have received Holy Communion.

The passions cover Divine Grace as ashes bury a spark. Through asceticism and prayer, the heart is cleansed of the passions, the spark of Divine Grace is rekindled, and the faithful Christian feels Christ in his heart; the centre of his existence.

Every prayer of the Church helps to cleanse the heart, but the so-called prayer of a single-phrase,





also known as noetic prayer or prayer of the heart, is particularly helpful: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner’. This prayer, which has always been handed down on the Holy Mountain, has the following advantage: because it is only one sentence it helps us to concentrate our nous more easily. Concentrating our nous, we immerse it in our heart, and then pay attention to make sure it is not busy there with other things and ideas, good or bad; that it is busy only with God.

The practice in this prayer of the heart, which with God’s Grace may in time become continuous, is a whole science, a holy art which the Saints of our Faith describe in detail in their holy writings, and also in a large collection of Patristic texts called the ‘Philokalia’.

This prayer helps and gladdens man, and when the Christian progresses in this prayer and at the same time his life follows the holy commandments of Christ and His Church, then he is worthy to receive the experience of Divine Grace. He starts to taste the sweetness of communion with God, to know from experience ‘O taste and see that the Lord is good’ (Ps. 34:8 ???). For us Orthodox, God is not an idea, something that we think about, that we discuss or read about, but a Person with Whom we come into living and personal communion, It is something we live, and somebody from Whom we receive experience.

Then we see what a great, unspeakable and inexpressible joy it is to have Christ within us and to be Orthodox Christians.

Within their different concerns and every day occupations, it helps Christians who are in the world so much to find at least a few minutes silence to exercise themselves in this prayer.

Certainly, when fulfilled with humility and love, all labours and obligations directed to God sanctify us, but prayer is also required.

In a quiet room (perhaps after some spiritual reading, or after lighting a small oil lamp in front of the icons and burning incense), as far as possible away from noise and activity, and after other considerations and thoughts have fallen quiet, they should sink their nous into the heart by saying the prayer: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner’. How much peace and strength the psyches draw from the silence of God! How much this strengthens them during the day so that they can keep themselves peaceful without nervous tension and anxiety, but have all their forces united in harmony!

Some people in other places seek silence of the psyche by using artificial means that are deluded and demonic, as in the so-called Oriental religions. They try to find a certain silence by using external exercises, meditation etc., to achieve a certain balance of psyche and body. The fault in all these is that properly speaking, even when man tries to forget the various considerations of the material world he does not have a dialogue with God, but only a monologue with himself, so that once again he ends up in anthropocentrism, and in this way he fails.

* *Original English translation (2005), annotation and glossary by Photius Coutsoukis. A subsequent translation, with extensive footnotes, but containing errors, by Robin Amis, was published in book and pdf format: (2006). Thesis: The True Purpose of Human Life (PDF) (4th ed.). Mount Athos, Greece: Holy Monastery of St. Gregorios. ISBN 960-7553-26-8.*

(Continues in the next Messenger...)





Kontakion — Tone 3

*Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One,
/ And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable
One! / Angels with shepherds glorify Him! / The wise
men journey with a star! Since for our sake the
Eternal God was born as
a Little Child!*



.....
.....

TO OUR MESSENGER PATRONS



We would like to thank our dear brothers and sisters who have supported financially and otherwise the work on this year's edition of our Parish Christmas Messenger.

We all know how important it is to have this kind of publication, not just for our Parishioners but for everyone who is interested to learn more about our Orthodox Christian Faith and way of life.

May God through His Divine Grace send every blessing upon them and kindle their hearts with love and peace that "comes from above!"



Christmas Greetings - Messages

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“Hristos se Rodi!

Christmas Greeting from the Pantelich Families:

**Nesho, Barbara, Nesho Jr., Erica, Blake, Stephanie, Skyler, Todd & Rose, Chad & Briggi,
Darren & Jessica, Miroslav & Tim.“**

- Family Pantelich

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**In Loving Memory of
Grandparents**

Ralph & Nellie Lebo

**In Loving Memory of
Baba & Dedo**

Alexa &Stephania Kormushoff

**In Loving Memory of
Parents**

George A. & Violet K. Lebo

**In Loving Memory of
Our Father**

John H. Barnhart

The Very Best of Health for the Christmas Holidays

Stephen George Lebo & Sandra Ann Barnhart

Mrs. Gail Barnhart

Stephen E. & Kristie L. Lebo,

children Lucas George, Lucy May and Leona Hope

Alexandra Erika & Jonathan Andrew Bailey

sons Rory Alexander and Rhys William

- Stephen Lebo

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“Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Boun Natale, Christo e Nato!”

From Dr. and Mrs. Robin Saylor & family in Italy!

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“Hristos se Rodi! Vaistinu se Rodi!”

- Joe - Tom - Donald Maransky





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“Christ is Born ! Glorify him !

Wishing everyone a Blessed Nativity and a Happy New Year !

**- Panagiotis, Viktoriya,
Stefanos, Serafima, & Loukia Billis**

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“Christ is Born ! Hristos se Rodi!

In memory of David Ebling, loving husband, father and grandfather -

- Memory Eternal!

**- Jovanka, Scott, Kelly, Kris, Lisa, Jared,
Chassity, Alexis, Nicholas, Conner,
Matthew, David & Cohen**

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“Christ is Born! Indeed He is Born!”

- Eleni Veron

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“Hristos se Rodi! Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

May the miracle of His birth fill your heart with love at

Christmas time and throughout the New Year!”

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

- Helen & John Gingrich and family

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“Memory eternal to all our family and friends, forever in our hearts!”

- Helen & John Gingrich and Faimily

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“Much love and many blessings to our Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

We think about you all often and miss you!”

- Gordon & Fannie Easterly

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“In loving memory of Nancy Mrakovich Yetter - Hristos se Rodi! Christ is Born!”

- Dewey Yetter

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“As you celebrate the glory of this miraculous season,

may your home be filled with love, peace, and joy!”

- Joe and Louise Rahalewicz

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“Wishing everyone a very Merry Christmas and a healthy and joyful New Year!”

- Joe and Louise Rahalewicz





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“Hristos se Rodi!

**In loving memory of my parents Stevan and Radmila Bela Milosevich
and many family members overseas.”**

- Love you your daughter, Marija Milosevich

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“Hristos Razdajetsya, Slavite Ego!

Our payers to all our brothers and sisters in Christ!”

- Andrey, Natalia, Vsevolod, Georgy, Rostislav Soltanov

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“Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

May God bless all of our community in the New Year 2022”

- Vasilios and Georgia Anstine

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**“May the blessings of Christmas bring hope, peace, and happiness and
may the New Year 2022 bring much happiness and joy to all!”**

- James and Barbara Tautkus

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“Merry Christmas to all!”

- Blake, Steph, Skyler and Clinton

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“In honor of our parents and grandparents!

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!”

- Tony, Sue, Gregory and Stephanie Anstine

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“Hristos se Rodi! Voistinu se Rodi!

Christ is Born! Indeed He is Born

Merry Christmas wishes!”

- The Sentz, Vracharich & Oblinsky Family+++

“Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Wishing our Church Family a blessed Nativity and Happy New Year”

**- Love: Chris, Kate, Panayoti,
Kassiani and Seraphima Giovanis**

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“Hristos se Rod - Christ is Born!

A very blessed Christmas and a Happy and healthy New Year to all!”

- Gil & Elaine Resanovich Darlak





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**“Christ is Born! Glorify Him!
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!”**

- Ed & Tena Blain

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**“May there be peace through Christ!”
Mir Bozji, Hristos se Rodi!**

- With love, Karen & Dean Stefan

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“Christ is Born! Merry Christmas!”

- Dennis & Natalie Houser

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**“Hristos se Rodi! Vaistinu se Rodi!”
Glorify Him!**

- Tomislav Gligorevic

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“In loving memory of the Peyachkie Family!”

- Natalie Ratzkovich, Paul, Leigh & Nikolai

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“Christ is Born! May God bless you and keep you in His tender care!”

- Jennifer Lewis, Annville

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“Mir Bozji! Hristos se Rodi!”

- Mr. & Mrs. Milanovich

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**“Hristos Se Rodi!
Christ is Born!”**

- Greetings from the Saylor
and Holtz families. Joy

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“Hristos se Rodi! Christ is Born!”

- Buck & Betsy Jonovich and Family!

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**“Bob and I would like to wish everyone a blessed Merry Christmas and to our Family:
Christ is Born, Христос се Роџу!”**

- Lillian Sentz!





only unites with its divine and eternal meaning as God-conscience. Without this, human conscience is a ferocious and ghastly absurdity. And your death, and my death, and the death of all people— isn't it the cruelest torture for human beings throughout the world? Yes, it truly is. But it too, only as the death of the God-man, gains its eternal meaning through the resurrection of the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ; for through Him and only through Him does victory over death happen and death in the human world can be comprehended. Thus also everything human, the entire human with all his innumerable infinities, only as the grace-filled God-man in the deified and all-vivifying Body of the God-man Christ—the Church—gains his divine, eternal, God-human, and higher meaning.

Through His incarnation, through becoming man, becoming human, has God in the most manifest way entered into the very womb, the very bowels of human life, into the blood, into the heart, into the center of all existence. Squeezed out by voluntary human sin from the world, from the body, from the human soul, through the incarnation, by becoming man He returns to the world, to the body, to the soul. He wholly becomes a man, and being a man He labors for man, settles into the world and among creatures, takes care of the creature, enlightens the creature, saves the creature, transforms the creature, and deifies the creature. God's incarnation is the greatest upheaval and the most providential event, both on Earth and in Heaven, for the miracle of miracles has happened. If up until then the creation of the world from nothing was the greatest miracle, the incarnation of God in man has without a doubt surpassed it in its miraculousness. If at the creation of the world the words of God were clothed in matter, then at the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ God has clothed Himself in a body, in matter, in flesh. Therefore the incarnation of God became providential throughout the whole creation—for every individual, for every being, for every creature.

You, too, live by Him—live by the God-man and you will be healed of all deaths, all sins, all passions, and all diabolism. May your life become a God-life. In this is your whole heavenly-earthly mystery, O man, the moment you become a member of the church—a member of the God-man Body of Christ. And how should we live in the Church of Christ? We should live through the Holy Mysteries and holy virtues. That is why there is a fast before the Nativity. Fasting is the first virtue, and prayer is always with it. These two foundational virtues bring a person to the God-man and teach him with divine wisdom how to live by Him and in Him. What should we do with the body given to us from God? Purify it, free it from all uncleanness, from all passions, from all evil, from every demon. And what does this mean? It means cleansing it of every sin, for in every sin a devil is hiding, in every sin a devil works apart from your free will. In a great sin is a prince of demons, in a small sin is an imp. You and I and every person has been given all the necessary means to conquer those demons, all the passions, all sins, and all deaths in us and in the world around us. Prayer and fasting are in the first place. The all-true lips of the All-true Lord Jesus Christ have pronounced also this life-creating truth: This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting (Matt. 17:21)—all kinds of sins, all kinds of passions, all kinds of demons.

The Nativity is before you, before me, before us, brothers and sisters: God is born as a man, “so that we would receive life through Him” and thus be filled in soul and body with God. And this is most readily acquired by prayer and fasting. They cleanse and purify the body and the soul, so





that wondrous joy would settle into them, and the sweetest God-infant, our Lord Jesus and God would fill completely our human existence, all of its enumerable infinities. It is for this reason, O man, that your body and your soul were created—to be filled with God and to live with God in the divine world on high. Our God-given teachers in this work are humble prayer and humble fasting—these holy foundational Gospel virtues. May they fly with us, may they precede us and ceaselessly announce to all people throughout the world the all-saving and all-joyful glad tidings:

Christ is Born!

*From St. Justin Popovic. On the path of the God-man
(St. Petersburg, 1999) [Russian].
St. Justin Popovic*

*Translation from the Russian translation by Nun Cornelia (Rees)
Source: Pravoslavie.ru*



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THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST. THE GOSPEL OF THE FIRSTBORN

St. Nikolai (Velimirovic)



Whoever approaches the Lord Jesus Christ with obedience and humility will never want to be separated from Him.

The beginning exercises of the newly-recruited army of Christ are the exercises of obedience and humility.

With obedience begins a new world, a new creature, a new mankind. The old world trampled upon obedience to God and humility before God, and thus destroyed the bridge between earth and heaven. The spiritual building materials for restoring this bridge are first of all, obedience and humility.

As long as Adam was rich in obedience and humility, he could hardly introduce a difference between his own spirit and the Spirit of God, between his own will and the will of God, between his own thoughts and the thoughts of God. He could not feel, want, and think anything that could not have been in God and from God. Like the angels of God, so too did Adam stand in direct proximity to God, and because of this direct proximity he contemplated

the Primary Source of light, wisdom, and love. Living within the sun itself, he had no need to light any candle of his own. His candle would not have burned or given off light within the sun.

But when Adam violated obedience and lost humility—and these are always lost or acquired at the same time—then his direct communion with God was broken, the bridge destroyed, and he fell into terrible darkness and rotten dankness, which he was forced to light up with his own candle given to him nevertheless by God’s mercy when God’s righteousness cast him out of Paradise. Then he not only began to feel the difference between himself and God, between his own will and God’s will, his own feeling and God’s feelings, his own thoughts and God’s thoughts—he not only began to be aware of the difference, but only in rare hours of enlightenment was just barely able to notice his own divine likeness.

Alas, into such an abyss was he cast down by his disobedience and pride who had been first created in the image and likeness of the Most Holy and Divine Trinity! (“In man, the incorrupt image of God was the source of blessedness, while in fallen man it was [only] the hope of blessedness” St. Philaret of Moscow. Homily on the Entrance.) Alas, all of us, descendants of Adam, all are low outgrowths from the stump of the felled cedar that once majestically towered and



rose over all God's creation in Paradise—low sprouts, smothered by the tall thistles of crude nature, which have come down like a veil between us and the First Source of immortal love.



Just look at how, as if at the wave of a magic wand, the disobedience and pride of mankind's forefathers immediately changed all creation around him, and he was immediately surrounded by a whole army of the disobedient and proud!

As long as Adam was obedient to his Creator and humble before Him, everything around him breathed obedience and humility. But what a momentary change of decoration! In the moment of Adam's fall, Adam was surrounded by nothing but disobedience. Next to him was the disobedient Eve. And there, the main bearer of disobedience and pride—the spirit of disobedience, satan. And there was all of nature, disobedient, rebellious, and mad. The fruits that were up to then sweet and melted in man's mouth begin to torment him with bitterness. The grass that spread like a silken carpet under his feet begins to scratch him with prickles. The flowers that gladdened their king when he breathed in their fragrance begin to arm themselves with thorns in order to push him away from them. The beasts that nuzzled

him affectionately like lambs begin to attack him with sharp claws and eyes blazing with anger. **Everything takes a position toward Adam that is rebellious and threatening. Thus the richest of all created nature now felt himself to be the poorest. Dressed earlier in garments of archangelic glory, now he felt humiliated, lonely, and naked—so naked that he was forced to borrow clothing from nature for his nakedness both bodily and spiritual. For his body he began to borrow skins from the animals and leaves from the trees, and for his spirit he began to borrow from all things—from things!—Knowledge and abilities.** He who before drank from the abundant source of life now had to walk after the animals, bend down to the dirt and drink from the animal tracks in both his physical and spiritual thirst.

Take a look now at our Lord Jesus Christ and His those around Him. They are all obedience and humility themselves! Archangel Gabriel, a representative of angelic obedience and humility; the Virgin Mary—obedience and humility; Joseph—obedience and humility; the shepherds—obedience and humility; the Oriental Magi—obedience and humility; the stars of heaven—obedience and humility. Obedient storms, obedient winds, obedient earth and sun, obedient people, obedient animals, and even the tomb itself is obedient. **All is obedient to the Son of God, the New Adam, and all humble themselves before Him, for He Himself is infinitely obedient to His Father and humble before Him.**





We know that along with many earthly seeds that man sows and cultivates, certain other grasses and plants eagerly grow up that were not sown or cultivated. It is the same with the virtues: **If you try hard to sow and cultivate obedience and humility in your soul, you will soon see that next to them grow up a whole bouquet of other virtues. One of the first is simplicity both inward and outward.** The obedient and humble Virgin Mary is at the same time adorned with chaste simplicity. It is the same with righteous Joseph, the apostles and Evangelists. Only see with what inimitable simplicity the Evangelists describe the greatest events in the history of man's salvation, in universal history! Can you imagine how broadly and theatrically a worldly author of literature would have described, for example, the resurrection of Lazarus should he have been the accidental witness to that event? Or what a high-sounding and pompous drama he would have written about all that happened in the soul of Joseph, an obedient, humble, and simple man, in the moment he found out that his ward and betrothed was pregnant? But the Evangelist in today's [Nativity] Gospel reading describes all of this in but a few simple sentences:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost (Mt. 1:18). Before this the Evangelist described the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ, or more precisely, the genealogy of Righteous Joseph of the tribe of Judah, the seed of David. In this genealogy the Evangelist enumerates people born of people in the natural way and manner, as all mortals are born in the world. Then suddenly he begins to describe the Nativity of the Lord and says, Του δε Ιησου Χριστου η γεννησις ουτως ην..., wanting by this δε ("now," "however") to show the unusualness and supernaturalness of His Birth, which is completely different from the manner of birth of all the enumerated ancestors of Joseph. His mother, Mary, was betrothed to Joseph. In the eyes of people this betrothal could have been considered a certain preface to married life, but in the eyes of Maria and Joseph it could not have been considered as such. The Virgin Mary was the answer to her parents' fervent, tearful prayer, and they had promised to dedicate her forever to God. She too had voluntarily accepted her parents' vow, which can be seen by her many years of service in the Jerusalem temple. Had it been a matter of her own will, she would have undoubtedly remained in the temple to her very death, like Anna the daughter of Phanuel (Lk. 2:36–37). But the law prescribed something else, and something else had to be fulfilled. **She was betrothed to Joseph not in order to live in marriage, but in order to avoid marriage.** All the details of this betrothal and its significance are kept in Church Tradition. And if people were to value the Tradition connected with the Mother of God, with Righteous Joseph, and with all the personalities mentioned in the Gospel as much as they value traditions that are often very silly, connected with worldly kings, generals, and pundits, then the meaning of Mary and Joseph's betrothal would be clear to anyone. (Holy Hieromartyr Ignatius says that the Virgin was betrothed "so that His Birth would be hidden from the devil and so that the devil would think of Him as born from a lawful wife, and not from a virgin." Blessed Jerome in his *Explanation of the Gospel of Matthew*, and St. Gregory of Neoceasaria in his *Two Homilies on the Annunciation* say the same.)

Before they came together—these words do not mean that they later united as husband and wife; the Evangelist does not even think about this. The Evangelist is interested in this case in the Nativity itself of the Lord Jesus Christ, and nothing else. And he writes the words cited above in order to show that His Nativity happened without the unification of husband and wife. Therefore, you should understand the words of the Evangelist exactly as if he had written: *and without their unit-*





ing it happened that She was with child in her womb from the Holy Spirit. **Only from the Holy Spirit could be born He Who was to restore the Kingdom of the Spirit of light and love amidst the kingdom of darkness and wickedness.** How could he have fulfilled His divine mission in the world if he had come into the world through earthly channels, enclosed in sin and the reeking rottenness of death? In that case the new wine would have smelled of old wineskins, and He Who came to save the world would Himself be in need of salvation. The world could only be saved by a miracle—a miracle of God; the whole race of man on earth believed in this. And **when God's miracle happened, it behooves us not to doubt it but to bow our heads before it and find medicine and salvation for ourselves in this miracle.** What does Joseph do when he learns that Mary is with child?

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily (Mt. 1:19). He wants to do this in accordance with the law of God. He is obedient to God's will in the form and extent that God's will had been proclaimed to the people of Israel up to that time. He acts also out of humility before God. *Be righteous overmuch* warns the wise Solomon (Eccl. 7:16). That is, **do not be too severe towards those who have sinned, but remember your own infirmities and sins, and strive to dissolve severity with mercy in relation to sinners.** Nurtured by this spirit, Joseph did not even think to commit the Virgin Mary to judgment for a suspected sin: *and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.* **Joseph shows us this plan as an exemplary man, exemplary in both righteousness and mercy**—the highest that the spirit of the Old Testament law could raise. **Everything with him is simple and clear, as could only be in the heart of a man who fears God.**

But no sooner did Joseph come up with a convenient way out of this uncomfortable situation, than heaven suddenly intervenes in his plans, giving him an unexpected command:

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost (Mt. 1:20). The angel of God, who before had announced to the Most Pure Virgin the coming into the world of the God-Man, now goes to prepare the way for Him and make His paths straight. Joseph's doubts are one of the obstacles on His path, and a very powerful and dangerous one at that. These obstacles must be removed. **In order to show how easy it is for the powers of heaven to do what is very hard for people, the angel appears to Joseph not openly but in a dream.** Calling Joseph the son of David, the angel wants at the same time to both show him honor and to bring him to reason. As the descendant of King David, you should rejoice at this divine mystery more than other people, and you should also understand it better than others. But how then does the angel call the Virgin his wife? *Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife.* In the same way that the Lord on the Cross said to His Mother: *Woman! Behold thy son,* and then to His disciple: *behold, thy Mother (Jn. 19:26–27)!* **Truly, heaven is thrifty with words and says nothing superfluous.** If it weren't appropriate for the angel to say it, would he have said it? Although this naming of Mary as Joseph's wife is a stumbling block for some unbelieving people, it is a shield of purity against unclean spirits. **For not only people hear the word of God, but all the worlds both good and evil. Whoever would wish to penetrate all the mysteries of God should have divine vision for everything created, visible and invisible.**

For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. This is God's business, and not man's. Do not look at nature and do not fear the law. Here a Greater nature is at work, and a Stronger law, without Whom neither would nature have life, nor the law have force.





From the angel's message to Joseph it is clear that the Virgin Mary never told the latter about the appearance of the great archangel to her earlier; it is likewise clear that now, when Joseph intended to put her away, she did not justify herself in the least. The archangel's tidings, like all the heavenly mysteries that were gradually revealed to her, *she kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart* (Lk. 2:19; 2:51). In her faith in God and obedience to God, she didn't fear any kind of humiliation before people. "If my sufferings are pleasing to God, then why shouldn't I endure them?" Certain martyrs of Christ would say later. Living in ceaseless prayer and divine contemplation, the Most Pure One could have said, "If my humiliation is pleasing to God, then why shouldn't I endure it? If only I'm right before the Lord Who knows the hearts—but let people do with me as they please." **She also knew that the whole world cannot do anything with her if God does not allow it. What good-natured humility before the Living Lord, and what marvelous faithfulness to His will! And besides that—what heroism of spirit in a tender Virgin!** *The Lord is the strength to them that fear Him, and His covenant shall be manifested unto them* (Ps. 24:14). If sinners now, as throughout all times, even seek false witnesses for themselves, the Virgin Mary, having as witness not a man but the Most High God, does not justify herself, is not disturbed but remains silent—she is silent and waits, that God Himself might justify her in His own time. And God soon hastened to justify His chosen one. The same angel who revealed to her the great mystery of her Conception now rushes to speak, instead of the silent Virgin. Thus, explaining to Joseph what has already happened, the angel of God now goes further and explains to him what things must come to pass:

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). "He did not say, 'She will bring you forth Son,' but said simply, 'bring forth'". For she will bring (Him) forth not to Joseph but to the whole world" (St. John Chrysostom). The angel instructs Joseph to treat the Newborn as would a real father, and therefore he says, and *thou shalt call his name Jesus*, which means, "Savior". That is why the second sentence begins with *for*; which means: *And you shall call Him Savior, for he shall save his people from their sins.*

The Archangel is God's messenger of truth. He speaks what he learns from God; he sees the truth in God. For him, nature with its laws literally don't exist. He knows only about the omnipotence of the living God, as once Adam knew. Having said, *he shall save his people from their sins*, **the archangel foretold Christ's main work. Christ had to come in order to save people not from some secondary evil, but from the main evil, from sin, which is the source of all evil in the world.** He must save the tree of mankind not from one swarm of caterpillars, which attacked it during a certain year with the desire to eat it bare, but from the worm at its root, from which the tree is withering. **He comes not to save a man from another man, or a nation from another nation, but in order to save all people and all nations from Satan—the sower and ruler of sin. He comes** not like the Maccabees, or Barabbas, or Bar Kokhba to start a rebellion against the Romans, who just like a swarm of caterpillars had attacked the Israelite people, desiring to destroy it; **but as the immortal and all-healing doctor, before Whom the Israelites, the Romans, the Greeks, the Egyptians, and all nations on the earth are sick, mortally sick, withering from the same germ, from sin.** Christ later fulfilled the archangel's prophecy completely. *Thy sins are forgiven thee*, were his victorious words throughout the course of His whole service on earth amidst people. **In these words, there are both the diagnosis and the medicine. Sin is the diagnosis of the illness, and forgiveness of sins is the medicine.** And Joseph was found worthy to be the first of mortals in the





New Creation to learn of the true goal of the coming of the Messiah and the true nature of His service.

What the archangel spoke to Joseph was enough so that in obedience to the new and direct law of God, he would reject his own thoughts, as he did the plan to put Mary away. **Heaven commands, and Joseph submits. But the usual method of heaven is to not give people a command without an appeal toward human understanding and self-determination.** It was important for God from the beginning that man act as a free being. Without freedom, man would be no more than an artificial, mechanical tool of God, which God would maintain and set in motion exclusively according to His own will. God has enough of such mechanisms in nature—but He vouchsafed to man an exclusive position, giving him freedom to make his own decision to be before God or against God, for life, or for death. **This position is of high honor, but at the same time very dangerous.** Therefore, God does not simply command Adam. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, *Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, and he immediately adds, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen 2:16–17).* By this last sentence God gives man an argument for his mind and a motivation for his will, so that he won't eat of the forbidden tree. For the day that you taste of it, you will surely die. The archangel does the same now with Joseph. Having given him the command to accept Mary and not put her away, and explaining that the Fruit of her Virgin womb is from the Holy Spirit, the archangel reminds Joseph also about the clear prophecy of the great prophet: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, which means, God is with us (Is. 7:14).*

What was said earlier, *and ye shall call his name Jesus, does not contradict what is said now, namely, and shall call his name Immanuel, which means, God is with us.* In the first case, Joseph is commanded to call His name Jesus, which means Savior; but in the second case it is confirmed that the Child will be called by the people and nations, Immanuel, which means, God is with us. **Both names, each in their own way, express the most important meaning of Christ's coming to the world and His service in the world. Namely, He will come in order to forgive sins, in order to have mercy and save people from sin—and therefore He will be called the Savior—Jesus.** But, *Who can forgive sins, but God only? (Mk. 2:7)?* No one in the world; no one in heaven, nor on earth has the authority or the power to forgive sins and save from sins—only God can do that. **For sin is the main worm of the whole world's sickness. And no one knows the bottomless horror of sin like God.** And because Jesus forgave sins and through this made people healthy, then He is God amongst people. If we wanted to present the names in a cause-and-effect connection, then the name Immanuel should come before the name Jesus. For in order for the Newly Born to do the work of the Savior, he should be Immanuel—that is, He should come as God amongst us. But in this order the meaning also remains the same. It is all the same one way or another how we say it—the meaning doesn't change if we say, “Immanuel and therefore Savior,” or “Savior, and therefore Immanuel”. (“But who shall call His name Immanuel? Here it is a matter of indifference. No one called Him Immanuel. In name, no one, but in essence, everyone. Those who believed agreed that God is with us, although He lives amongst us as a Man”—Monk Euthymios Zigabenos, *Explanation of the Gospel of Matthew.*). In any case, **there is one thing that is clearer than anything in the world: That there is no salvation for this world if God does not come into it; and there is no medicine for us people if God is not with us.** If God is not with us, and at that not as an idea or a beautiful dream but with us, like us: with a soul, like us; in the flesh, like us; in





sorrows and suffering, like us; and finally, in what makes us most different of all from God—in death—like us. Because **every faith is false that teaches that God did not come in the flesh and cannot come in the flesh**, for it imagines God as powerless and unmerciful; it imagines Him as a stepmother and not a mother. It imagines Him as powerless, for it ever guards Him from the greatest field of battle—the field of battle with satan, sin, and death. Satan must be bound, the growths of sin must be torn up from the root of the human soul, the sting of death must be destroyed—ah, **the greatest and hardest work must be done, as if the whole world needed to be held on His shoulders. Our God was able to endure this battle, and victoriously at that.** People of other faiths are afraid even in their thoughts to allow their gods such a battle in which their opponents could win. And what sort of a mother would she be who wouldn't lean down to the earth out of love for her child to comfort him, sing him lullabies, and coo at him? Especially if the child were in the flames or amongst wild animals! O Lord, forgive us for asking such questions! What sort of merciful Creator would You be if You wouldn't come down to us in Your mercy, if You had only looked at our unhappiness from a misty and sorrowless distance, and never stretched out a single cold finger to our flame, or stepped a foot into the pit where the wild animals are tearing us? Truly, You came down to us, and even lower than earthly love would require. You were born in the flesh in order to live with the fleshly and save the fleshly. You partook of the suffering of Your whole creation. You did not share this cup of bitter communion with anyone, but drank it all Yourself to the dregs. Therefore, You are our Savior, for You were God amidst us; You were God amidst us, and therefore could You be our Savior. Glory to Thee, Jesus Immanuel!

As for Joseph, he with fear and trembling saw ever more clearly that next to him was being woven a cloth that is longer than the light of the sun and wider than the air; a cloth for which the Most High Himself is the warp, and the angels and all creation are the weft. The lot had not fallen to him of serving as the instrument of God in the very center of the cloth of the New Creation. **Until man feels that God is doing His work through him, he will feel weak and infirm, undetermined, and have contempt for himself. But when a man feels that God has taken him in His hands like a smithy takes iron for smithing, he will feel at once both strong and humble, clear in his actions, glorifying his God.**

And Joseph rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife. And he knew her not till she brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS. When we read the Holy Gospel, we should bring the mind of the Gospel into ourselves, and not our minds into the Gospel. Himself marveling, the Evangelist tells about the miracle of the Nativity of the Savior. For him the most important thing is to show that this Nativity came about it a miraculous way. Here is now the fourth proof of this brought by the Evangelist Matthew in today's Gospel reading. First, he said that the Virgin Mary is only *betrothed* to Joseph: *When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph...* Second, he says: *she was found with child, of the Holy Spirit.* Third, Matthew informs us that the angel in the dream announces her pregnancy as miraculous and supernatural. And now, fourthly, the Evangelist repeats the same thought with the help of the words: *And he knew her not till she brought forth her firstborn son.* Thus it is clear as day that Matthew doesn't even think of saying that after this Birth, Joseph joins with Mary. What did not happen till she brought forth her firstborn son did not happen later either, when she had given birth to her Son. If we say of a certain person that as long as services are going on in the church, he does not pay any attention to the priest's words, then we don't even think of saying that the man paid attention to the priest's words





at the end of the service. Or, if we say of a shepherd that he sings as long as the sheep are grazing, we don't mean that the shepherd doesn't sing when the sheep stop grazing. ("As it is said of the time of the Flood, that the crow did not return to the ark while the earth was not yet dry—it would mean that it didn't return afterwards either. (Or) as Christ says, and lo, I am with you always, even till the end of the word—won't He be with us afterwards also?"—Blessed Theophylact.) The words firstborn son relates exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ (Ps. 88:28; compare 2 Kings 7:12–16; Heb. 1:5–6; Rom. 8:29), *Who is the firstborn of all kings and the firstborn amongst many brethren* (Rom. 8:29); that is, amongst the saved and adopted people. If the word firstborn were written with a capital F, like a personal name, there would be no ambiguity. Or if before the word firstborn were a comma, there would likewise be no ambiguity and no perplexity. Meanwhile, the word firstborn should be read as if it were a personal name and with a comma before it: *She brought forth her Son, Firstborn*. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Firstborn as the Creator of a new Kingdom, as the New Adam.

It is told of St. Ammon (*Lives of the Saints*, October 4) that he was lawfully married for eighteen years without having any physical union with his wife. Holy Great Martyr Anastasia (December 22) also lived several years in marriage with Publeus, the Roman senator, without having any physical contact with him. We give only two examples out of thousands. In her most pure virginity, before *Childbirth*, in *Childbirth*, and after *Childbirth*, the Virgin Mary throughout the history of the Church provided inspiration for virginal life to thousands and thousands of maidens and youths. Beholding her virginity, many lawful wives tore up their marriages and dedicated themselves to virginal purity. Beholding her, many inveterate harlots rejected their depraved lives, cleansing their defiled souls with tears and prayer. So then how could anyone think that the Most Pure Virgin, the pillar and inspiration of Christian purity and virginity over so many centuries, could be lower in virginity than Anastasia, Thecla, Barbara, Catherine, Parasceva, and numberless others? Or how could anyone think that she who bore in her body the passionless Lord could at any time have had even the shadow of bodily passion? She, who bore God and gave birth to God, "was a Virgin not only in body but also in spirit," says Holy Hierarch Ambrose. St. Chrysostom, comparing the Holy Spirit with a bee, says, "As a bee will not fly into a foul-smelling vessel, do also the Spirit will not enter an impure soul."

But let us interrupt our conversation on what should be given less talk and more admiration. Where there is obedience to the living God and humility before Him, there is also purity. God heals His obedient and humble servants from all earthly passions and lusts. Therefore, let us dedicate ourselves to cleansing our consciences, our souls, our hearts, and our minds, that we also might be counted worthy of the grace-filled power of the Holy Spirit; that the earth would finally cease to sow its seed in our inner man—and the Holy Spirit would conceive a new life and a new man within us, like unto our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be honor and glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity One in Essence and Undivided, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

St. Nikolai (Velimirovic)

Source: *Pravoslavie.ru*





NATIVITY WORD FIND

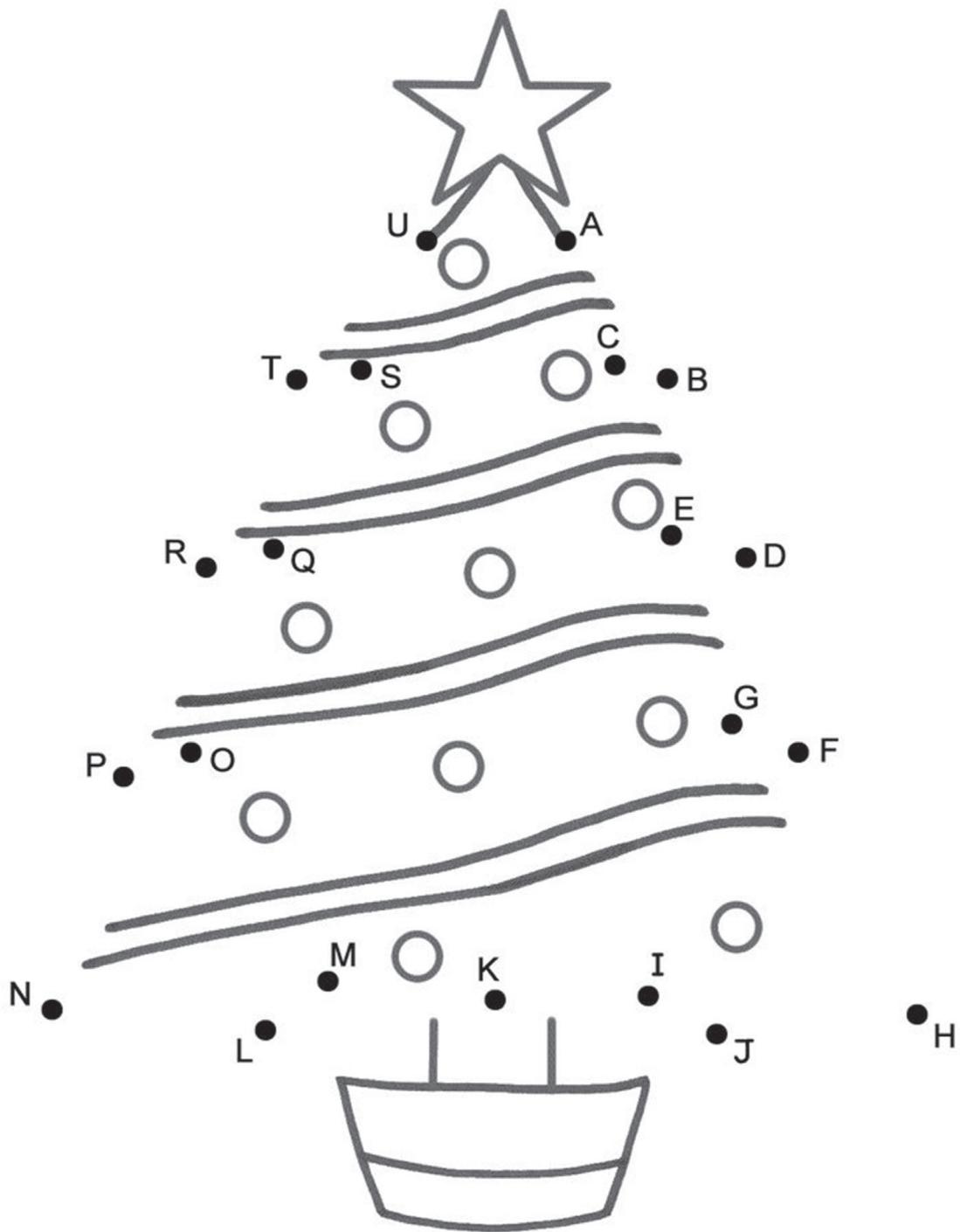
Find the words below about the Nativity of Christ.

KIDS CORNER

Z	X	B	Y	M	P	J	Y	R	A	M	N	I	G	R	I	V	H
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M	L	P	S	Z	X	T	H	E	O	T	O	K	O	S	H	B	Y

JESUS CHRIST	VIRGIN MARY	THEOTOKOS	JOSEPH
BETHLEHEM	SHEPHERDS	ANGELS	MAGI
CAESAR AUGUSTUS	CENSUS	SWADDLING CLOTHS	MANGER
INN	GOOD TIDINGS	CITY OF DAVID	GLORY TO GOD
HEAVEN	IMMANUEL	JUDEA	HEROD
JERUSALEM	KING	PROPHECY	STAR
FLOCKS	GOLD	FRANKINCENSE	MYRRH





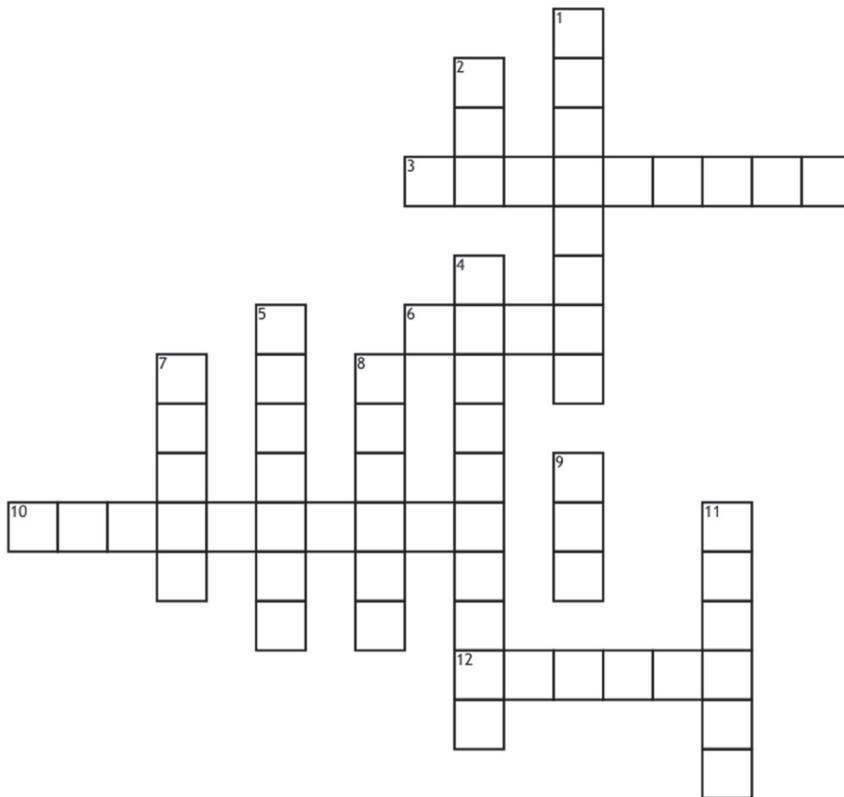
Color the Nativity icon of Christ





Name: _____

THE LITURGICAL YEAR



Across

3. The feast of Epiphany is celebrated during the _____ Season

6. Advent lasts _____ weeks.

10. Holy Thursday remembers the

_____ (2 wds)

12. What season begins the church year?

Down

1. We use the color green during _____ Time.

2. Lent begins on _____ Wednesday

4. Jesus' death on the cross is remembered on

_____ (2 words)

5. Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter are called The _____.

7. The color for Christmas Season is _____.

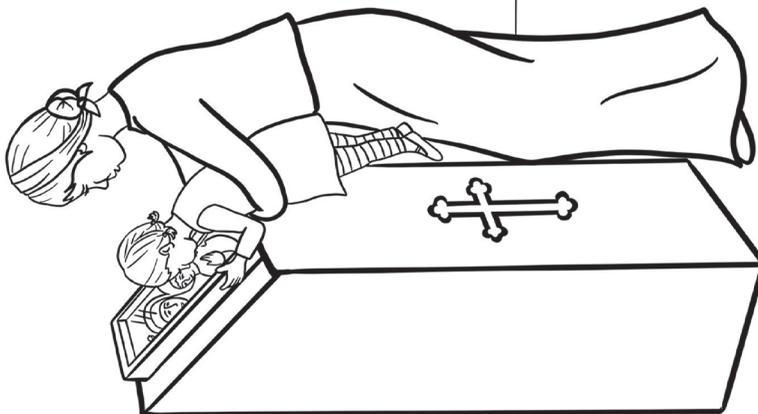
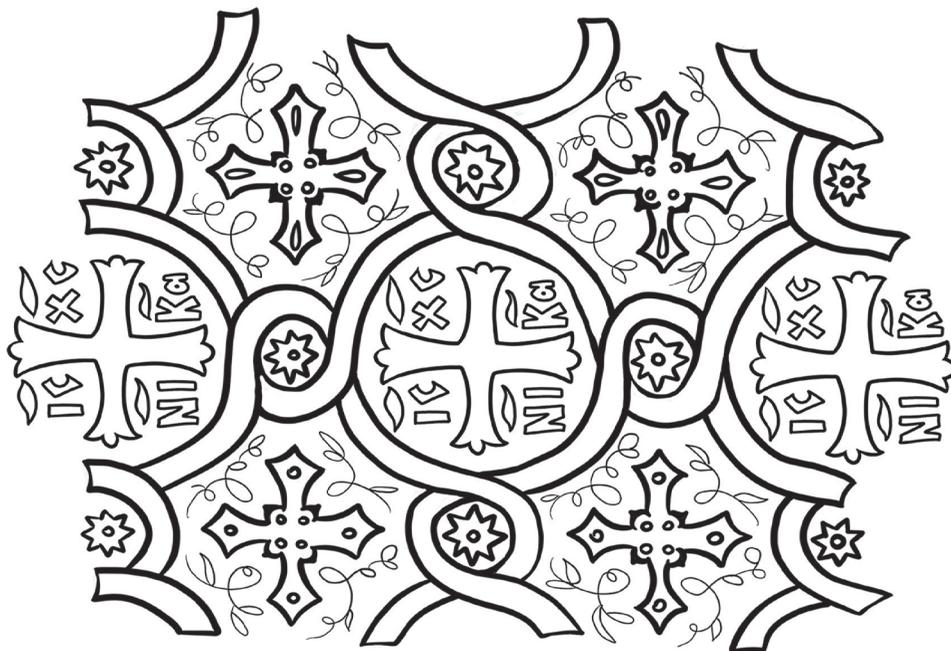
8. The color used in church for the season of Lent.

9. How many weeks does lent last?

11. Jesus' Resurrection is celebrated on _____.



Color the Pictures!



Look down from heaven on those who
have bowed their heads unto You.



HOLY UNCTION
Holy and Great Wednesday





PALM SUNDAY



Getting ready for the Christ's Entrance into Jerusalem.





THE PASCHA OF OUR LORD
AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST









CELEBRATION OF OUR SLAVA
SUNDAY OF ST. THOMAS





WEDDING OF SEVA AND IVY





FUND RAISING EVENTS



CHICKEN BBQ

We want to thank everyone in our Parish for coordinating these successful events and everyone that gave of their time to help our Parish.





FUND RAISING EVENTS
BAKE & POTATO FILLING SALE



We want to thank everyone in our Parish for coordinating these successful events and all those that gave of their time to help our Church financially, during these challenging times of the Pandemic.



SUNDAY SCHOOL WORKSHOP













BAPTISMS

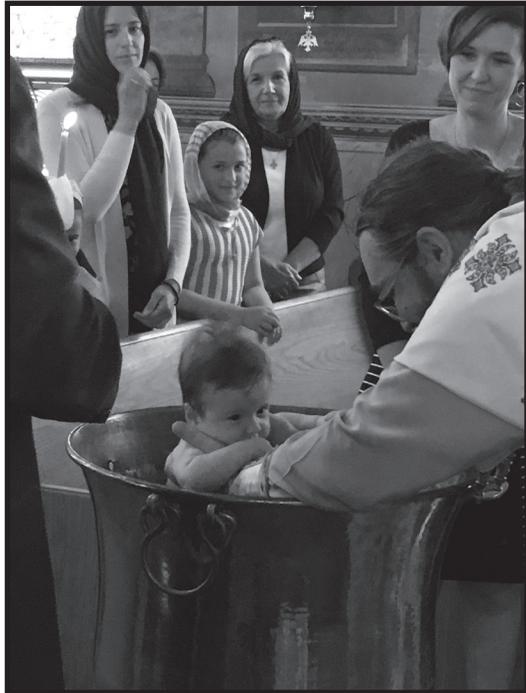
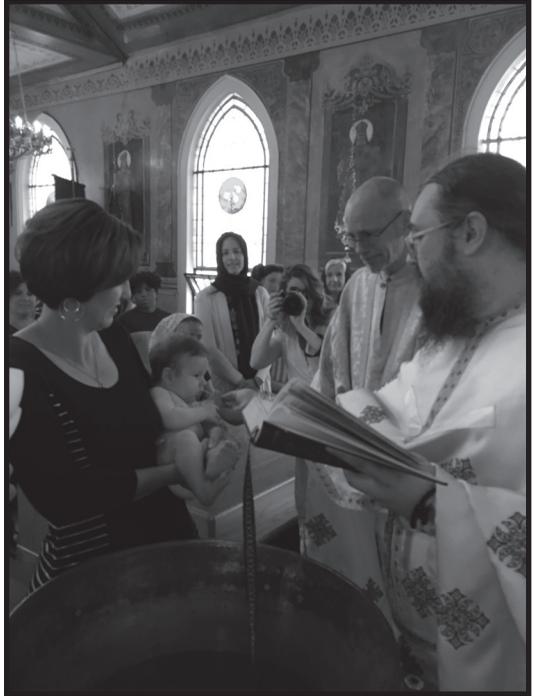
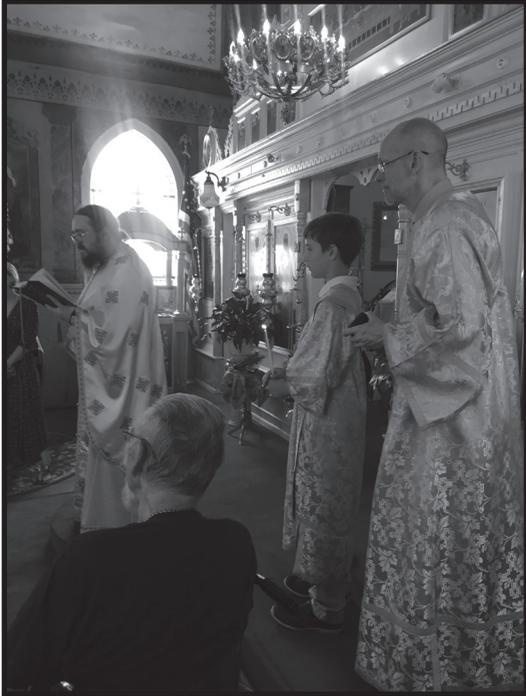


We would like to welcome into our Church the newly baptized children in Christ: Maximus, Nikita, Polina, Luka.



May God embrace them with His Divine Grace and grant them and their parents and godparents many blessed years of spiritual advancement.







BAPTISMS



We would like to welcome into our Church the newly baptized in Christ Maximus, Nikita, Polina, Luka.

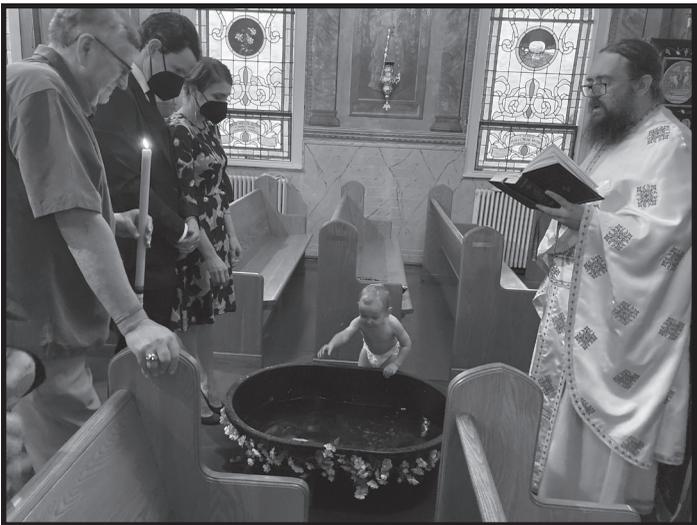


May God embrace them with His Divine Grace and grant them and their parents and godparents many blessed years of spiritual advancement.





Baptism of Luka





BAPTISM OF POLINA







SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

EVERY FRIDAY

at 6:30 PM PARAKLISIS

EVERY SATURDAY

at 6:00 PM VESPERS

EVERY SUNDAY

at 10:00 AM HOLY LITURGY

THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 2022 - NATIVITY EVE/BADNJE VECE

9:00 AM Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great with Vespers

THURSDAY, JANUARY 6, 2022 - NATIVITY EVE/BADNJE VECE

6:00 PM Orthros, with the blessing of the Badnjak and Christmas Eve.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 7, 2022 - FEAST OF THE NATIVITY/ BOZIC/ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΓΕΝΝΑ

10:00 AM Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 2022

at 9:00 AM Divine Liturgy - Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 2022

at 6:00 PM Vespers.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 9, 2022 - HOLY APOSTLE PROTOMARTYR STEPHEN.

at 10:00 AM Orthros, Divine Liturgy

FRIDAY, JANUARY 14, 2022 - (CHURCH NEW YEAR)

FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD/ST. BASIL'S DAY
9:00 AM Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15, 2022

at 6:00 PM VESPERS





SCHEDULE OF SERVICES... CONTINUED

SUNDAY, JANUARY 16, 2022

at 10:00 AM Orthros, Divine Liturgy

TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2022

at 6:00 PM VESPERS before Theophany

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2022 - FEAST OF THEOPHANY

9:00 AM Divine Liturgy **with Greater blessings of water**

THURSDAY, JANUARY 20, 2022 - ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

9:00 AM Divine Liturgy

FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2022

at 6:30 PM Paraklisis

SATURDAY, JANUARY 22, 2022

at 6:00 PM VESPERS

SUNDAY, JANUARY 23, 2022

10:00 AM Orthros, Divine Liturgy

THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 2022 - ST. SAVA THE FIRST ARCHBISHOP OF SERBIA

9:00 AM Divine Liturgy

FRIDAY, JANUARY 28, 2022

at 6:30 PM Paraklisis

SATURDAY, JANUARY 29, 2022

at 6:00 PM VESPERS





*Visit our Parish Church web site on: <http://holysurrectionofchrist.com/>
and our Facebook page: Holy Resurrection*

HOLY RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Serbian Orthodox Church of Lebanon,
Pennsylvania (Contact: ☎ 717 272-
8132)

