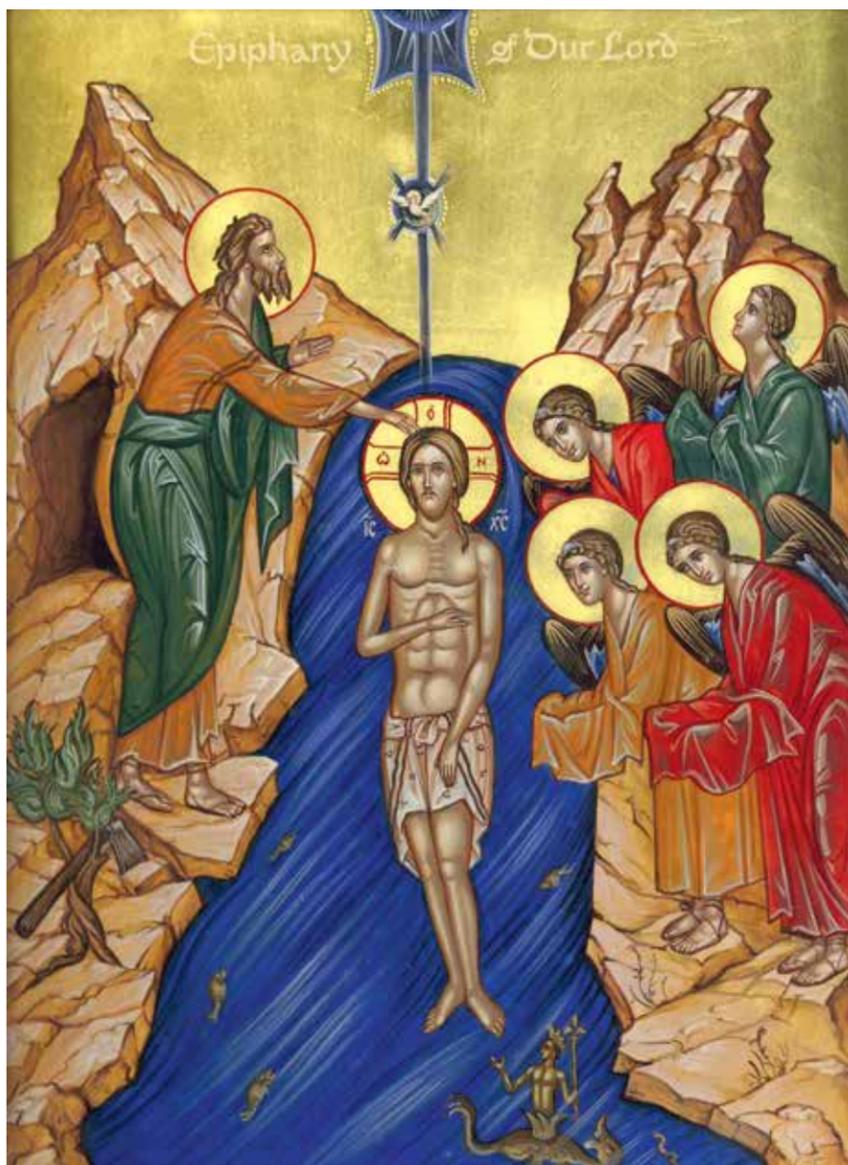




THE ICON OF THE FEAST OF THEOPHANY, THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

By Father Joseph Bertha, Ph.D.



Icon of the Theophany of Our Lord

Icons illustrating the Baptism of Our Lord in the River Jordan, which is commemorated on January 6, depict Our Lord standing in the waters of the Jordan River. These baptismal waters recall the safe crossing of the Red Sea by God's chosen people, and their entrance into the Promised Land forty years later across the Jordan River. Sometimes depicted in the Jordan River are two figures as explained in Psalm 114:4, "The sea beheld and fled; Jordan turned back." The male

figure personifies the Jordan River, he has his back turned to Christ, indicating the change of direction taken by the river after the Baptism of Christ. The female figure signifies the sea and refers to the prefiguration of the Mystery (Sacrament) of Baptism by the crossing of the Red Sea by the Jews.

Theophany, which means *manifestation of God*, is literally depicted as Christ, the Son of God, is in the very center of the icon, being baptized by John the Bap-

tist. The skies of heaven open above, and the hand of God the Father extends towards the earth. In a ray of light extending to Christ, a dove signifying the Holy Spirit, is shown. The Holy Trinity is openly revealed to all the earth.

Both Mark and Matthew describe the Baptism of Our Lord as the manifestation of the divinity of Christ, the Son of God, as the Holy Spirit descends as a dove. Then a voice from heaven, the Father, says: "This is My beloved Son. My favor rests on Him." The icon depicts this moment in the baptism event: the manifestation of Christ as the Son of God.

Christ is shown either without clothing, or clothed with a loin cloth. Interestingly, both depictions have profound significance. In the earliest icons of the Theophany Our Lord is depicted in the waters of the Jordan River wearing no clothes. In this manner iconographers depict the humanity of the New Adam indicating how Christ empties Himself of His divinity (*kenosis*). When Christ is depicted without clothing, He represents the verse from Vespers: "He strips himself, who clothes the heavens with clouds."

On the other hand, when Christ wears a loin cloth, it reminds us of being clothed with the white garment, the *chrisma* after our baptism, which signifies our being clothed with the new garment of Resurrection, after being baptized into His death. After His Baptism Christ is clothed with a cloth, thereby covering the nakedness of Adam, and with him the whole of mankind, in the garment of glory and incorruptibility.

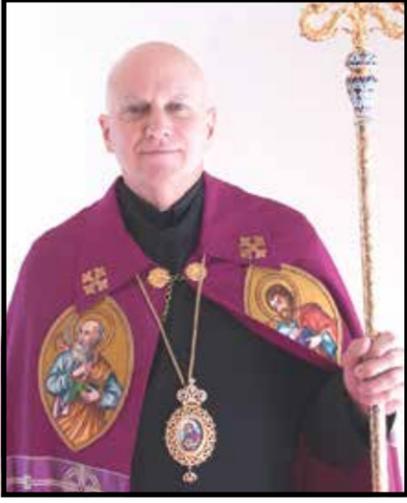
The arrangement of the figure of Christ being baptized and clothed with the garment of salvation also mirrors His depiction on the Cross. Baptism is our death to sin, as we die, we go under the water, and rise again to new life in the

Resurrection. Christ is shown in the Baptism icon in the same manner: He is depicted as on the Cross, dying to sin, rising to new life in the Resurrection.

Angels minister to Christ holding cloths for drying and clothing Him. Curiously, in both the gospels of Saint Mark and Saint Matthew angels are not mentioned serving the Lord until after His forty-day period of fasting in the desert, which immediately follows His baptism.

John the Baptist wears a hair shirt stands on the bank of the Jordan River and extends his right hand over the head of Christ. This is the liturgical gesture for the sacrament (Mystery) of Baptism. This is the crowning moment in the life of John the Baptist, to baptize Our Lord; from this time onwards, he fades in importance to allow the Light of the world, Jesus Christ to shine ever so brightly.

Actually, several moments are conflated together in the Theophany icon. Jesus Christ is baptized in the Jordan River, the Holy Trinity is manifest to the world, salvation shines forth from the darkness of this world of sin. This event is aptly summarized in a verse from Great Compline at the Litija: "Today Christ is baptized; He emerges from the waters and uplifts the world with Him. He beholds the opening of the heavens which Adam had closed for himself and his descendants. The Spirit testifies to his divine nature, for He is in accord with his own. A voice is heard from the heavens, giving witness to the One who has descended; for He is the Savior of our souls."



I LIFT UP MY EYES...

Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt



WHY?

Here is a question for you. It's one of those questions popularly called "trivia" today. Trivia seems to mean facts that are generally public knowledge, but you might have to think about for a minute. You are sure you know that answer, but you might have to rummage through your memory to find out that answer. Games magazine recently ran a fascinating article about the game "Trivial Pursuit." I suppose that game put the word "trivia" into common parlance. Many of us remember when it swept through the world, at least the English-speaking world, rather like a pandemic. It seems that on December 15, 1979, a photo editor and a sports editor for two Canadian magazines wanted to play a game of Scrabble. There were pieces missing, and they decided instead to invent a new game, and Trivial Pursuit was born. After its public release in 1981, more than 30 million games were sold by 1988. By 2014, more than 100 million games have been sold in 26 countries and 17 languages. The word "trivia" comes from an ancient Latin word that meant the meeting of three roads, and so it came to mean a public place.

Well, I promised you a question at the beginning of the article that would make you think. It is a question for which you should know the answer, but perhaps not. The first time I heard this mentioned in a sermon, I realized that it was new to me, and I've been thinking about the question ever since. Here is the question: What is the first thing Jesus Christ said? If you are a deep theological thinker, you might think it is a trick question, because Jesus Christ is the Word of God. So, you could say that the first thing He said was, "Let there be light!" or perhaps earlier, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Those are both correct answers, depending on how you understand the question, but what is the first thing Jesus Christ said after He took flesh and "became man"? When I ask people this question, some people, even members of the clergy will answer, "Change your heart, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Indeed, that is the first thing that Jesus says in His public teaching, at least according to Saint Matthew. However, even in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, Jesus does speak earlier as an adult. When He argues with Satan, He first says, "It is written, man does not live by bread alone, but every word that comes from the mouth of God." Well, the first thing that Jesus says as an adult depends on which Gospel you look in. According

to Saint Mark, Jesus' first words are, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is at hand. Have a change of heart and believe the good news." According to Saint John, Jesus' first recorded words are, "What do you want?", when He sees two of the disciples of John the Baptizer following Him. After they say, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"; He replies, "Come follow me."

I hope you don't mind if I interrupt the flow for a funny story. When I lived in Rome, there was a very beautiful monsignor from Long Island who was assigned to the Vatican for a couple of years to help out. I called him beautiful because he had a truly beautiful personality, the kindest of gentlemen, but he also looked like a monsignor should look, with an aquiline nose and flowing white hair. The Vatican monsignors are asked to help distribute ashes on Ash Wednesday in their purple robes. When they distribute ashes, the priest can say either, "Remember man that thou are dust, and unto dust, thou shalt return." Or he can say, "Repent and believe in the Gospel" — those first public words of Jesus from the Gospel of Saint Mark. Our monsignor chose the second option, but his Italian was a little rusty. Instead of "*vangelo*" which means

Returning to the original question, we looked at the first words of Jesus as an adult in three of the Gospels, but Saint Luke gives us something much earlier. If you recall, Saint Luke tells us something that Jesus said when he was only twelve. Recall that Mary and Joseph lost track of Jesus and after three days they found him in the temple. When I ask the question, what was the first thing Jesus said, some people have answered, "Didn't you know I must be in my Father's house?" That is a very good answer, but in fact, Jesus said something before that, something we don't usually think about. He said, "Why were you searching for me?" In the flow of the story, it seems clear that the first question is a rhetorical question, that is, He didn't expect an answer. In the context of the story, Jesus seems to be saying rhetorically, "you should have known where I was without searching." That is one way to interpret the saying. However, we are reading the sacred word of God. It seems to me that if something is the very first thing that Jesus Christ says that is written down in the scriptures, it is reasonable to take it seriously. If we were reading a carefully written novel by a human author, then we would interpret it as good craftsmanship, good storytelling. But we are reading the Gospels, the word of God,

After Jesus rose from the dead and entered the locked room, what was the first thing He said to his astonished disciples? He said, "Peace be with you." I believe with certainty that the first thing Jesus said to his disciples was not something that came to Him on the spur of the moment. In the context of the event two thousand years ago, you could reasonably conclude that He said, "Peace be with you," because they were in turmoil: they just saw him tortured to death and most of them abandoned Him. They needed reassurance. But I also believe that the words are important to the whole universe, not just to his astounded and ashamed disciples. If the first thing Jesus says to his disciples after his horrific death is "Peace be with you," He must be speaking that to all of us. He says to each of us in our fear of death, our guilt, our loss, our failures, our sorrows, he says to each us, "I have conquered death. I have conquered sin. I have won for you eternal life in paradise."

I also believe that His first recorded words must be primal for the whole universe as well, not just His parents who were upset at the time. Jesus asks all of us, "Why were you looking for me?" The answer to that question may be the same for everyone in some respect, but in some ways different for each of us. The answer to that question goes to the deepest core of our souls. It is no accident that Jesus asks His parents the question. As a rhetorical device, it is colorful because a boy who is missing for three days should be looking for his parents. Most boys would be tearful and excited. His parents might have asked, "Why weren't you looking for us?" A priest friend told me about a day when he took a youth group to a large roller coaster park. The entire park was locked down because of a bomb threat and they were all separated for quite a few hours. When they were reunited, they all cried and hugged for joy and relief. If Jesus were an ordinary boy, He might have even put up a front and said, "I was looking for you too." Instead, He turns the table on them and asks them a profound question, a question that echoes through the whole cosmos to this day, "Why were you looking for me?"

There was an evangelization campaign some years ago in which Christians had bumper stickers that said, "I found it." Predictably, it spawned a whole series of jokes. I don't know how successful it was, but I saw the bumper stickers everywhere. I assume it sparked some worthwhile conversations with curious people. For those of us who found Jesus, or think we always had Him because we were raised in the faith, it might not occur to ask ourselves, "Why was I looking for Him?" But there must be a reason He proposes that question in the scriptures as the first thing He says, first to his parents and then to us.



Icon of Mid-Pentecost or The Boy Jesus Teaching in the Temple

Gospel, he said, "*vongole*." You see, he had been eating out a lot, and had the word "*vongole*" in his head. So he was telling people in Italian, "Repent, and believe in the clams."

God's revelation to us in the Word made flesh. It's reasonable to look at the question not just as trivia, but as an important question that God is asking when we read the scriptures. "Why were you looking for me?"

I have heard of retreat masters who structured a retreat around certain questions that Jesus asks, such as, "Who do you say that I am?" It seems that the answer to that question is closely linked to the first one he asked us, "Why were you looking for me?" The great Greek Orthodox writer and preacher, Anthony Coniaris, wrote a book called, *The Great I Came's*. It is a series of essays or sermons studying the times that Jesus said, "I came." In fact, Jesus gave quite a few of these teachings. "I came not for the righteous but to call sinners to repentance." "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost." "The Son of Man came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give his life as a ransom for many." And finally, He says to Pilate, "The reason I was born, the reason I came into the world was to bear witness to the truth." Any one of those profound teachings could be part of the answer to the question, "Why were you looking for me?"

Father Coniaris wrote a similar book, a series of essays or sermons, called *The Great I Am's*. In that book, he ponders the different times that Our Lord said, "I am..." He said, "I am the Good Shepherd." He said, "I am the Vine. You are the branches." He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." He said, "I am the light of the world." These sayings climax when He says, "Before Abraham was, I am." In that sentence, Jesus Christ says clearly that He is the God who spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. When Moses asked God His name, God said, "Tell them I am who am. Tell them I am sent you." When Jesus says in the very temple in Jerusalem, on the

spot where King David witnessed the angel of death sheath his sword, "Before Abraham was, I am," Jesus is telling us He is perfect essence, and the cause of the whole Universe, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Once again any of the teaching of Jesus could be part of the answer to the question, "Why were you looking for me?"

There are a lot of questions in the Bible that start with "why." King David asks in the Psalms, "Why do the nations rage and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth and the rulers conspire against the Lord and against his Christ." Another psalm asks, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And another asks, "God, why have you rejected us? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture?" And then there are Jesus's own questions that start with "why." Jesus said to the rich young man, "Why do you call me good? Only one is good." "Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, and not the plank in your own?" "Why are you afraid?" "Why do you harbor evil thoughts?" "Why do you not judge for yourself what is right?" "Why are you anxious about clothes?" And most sobering, "Why are you trying to kill me?" I read that Jesus asks 370 questions in the Gospels. All these questions build our self-understanding and help us to answer that first question, why are we looking for Him?

We live in an era called "the new evangelization." It is called that because parts of the world that were evangelized two thousand years ago, fifteen centuries ago, one thousand years ago, and so on, are returning to pagan religion, or

worse, complete materialism. I find it fascinating that in Russia, where atheistic materialism was taught both by pressure and by clever arguments for several generations, the entire nation has returned to the Gospel. When I traveled there not long after the fall of communism, it seemed to me that all the women had returned very naturally to their ancient faith, while the men were struggling to follow suit. The men wanted to believe what their women did, but they were still trapped in the slogans of the communists, "I can't believe in what I can't see." What a silly argument! Scientists will tell you of any number of things that exist that we can't see. As a matter of fact, even the men have now returned to faith. On the internet, you can watch a video in which Vladimir Putin answers a reporter about his own discovery of faith in God. One Russian author that I read some years ago was still staunchly atheist while writing books about supernatural characters (ironically). In his newer books, the characters are believers in both the Orthodox faith and the Scriptures. One of the greatest miracles of world history is the resurrection of the faith in this formerly atheist country — and not just atheist, but homicidally imperialistically atheist.

At the same time that eastern Europe is recovering from its nightmare of the twentieth century, here in the United States, Marxism is embraced by the educators. A whole generation of Americans is being formed by Marxist ideology in our schools. How can we bring the light of Christ to these young people? How can we tell them that they are not a chemical accident? How can we

tell them that they are already beautiful and made in the image and likeness of an all-powerful God who loves them more than anything else? We cannot bring them the light of the Good News unless we know it ourselves, unless we think about the deep question, why am I looking for Jesus Christ?

At a meeting, I asked our senior active priest for some wisdom, and he told all the priests simply, "Every day, get closer to Jesus." How can we get closer to Jesus? One way is to ask that question every single day, the first question that Jesus ever asked us, "Why were you looking for me?" We don't have to answer the question without help. God has revealed more wisdom than we can absorb in a lifetime. In the scriptures, every teaching about Jesus, every teaching by Jesus, is revealed to us for a reason, and each revelation osculates those questions that reverberate in the depths of our souls, "Who am I?", "What is my purpose?", "How can I be happy?", "Why am I looking for Jesus?" And the answers are in the scriptures, "I am looking for the Good Shepherd, because I am a sheep who needs to be guided and fed and watered." "I am looking for the Vine, because I don't want to be fruitless and to wither and die." "I am looking for the way, the truth, and the life." "I am looking for the cause of my existence." "I am looking for the Father of mercies and all consolation." "I am looking for the Alpha and the Omega."

+Kurt Bunette

SISTER EMMA PAULINE FEDORCHAK ENTERS INTO ETERNAL LIFE



Early in the evening of Monday, December 14, 2020, Sister Emma Pauline (former Sister Hilaria) fell asleep in the Lord at Mount Macrina Manor. In two weeks, she would have observed her 100th birthday. The Lord Jesus, however, chose a better "birthday" for her, this one to be celebrated in His Kingdom.

Sister Emma Pauline was born in Donora, PA, the daughter of the late Michael and Anna (Oras) Fe-

dorchak. She entered the community from Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church in Donora, PA, on September 27, 1936, and made her Final Profession of Vows on April 23, 1946.

For a little more than 40 years, Sister Emma Pauline was engaged in catechetical and elementary education as her main ministry. With two degrees in this field, she was especially gifted in teaching the youngsters in the primary grades. One of her students from those years, still remembers her fondly. He credits Sister with forming him in the faith from the time she prepared him for First Communion.

At the juncture of halfway through her ministry, Sister Emma Pauline's energies shifted to pastoral care, volunteering for three years at Mount Macrina Manor, then seven years at Saint George Byzantine Catholic Church in Linden, NJ, where the late-Monsignor George Billy was pastor. He later became a resident at the Manor, and Sister was very faithful in visiting him during her time in pastoral ministry. Her care

for Monsignor Billy was deeply appreciated by his family, as she was so well-known to them.

In 1996, Sister returned to the monastery, and, shortly after, began to volunteer again at Mount Macrina Manor until 2002, when she retired from active ministry. Sister's final years of life were spent as a resident at the Manor.

At the Liturgy, Father Stephen Wahal briefly spoke to the fact that you can find holiness, commitment and love anywhere, and it is especially needed in our world today. Religious life, for Sister Emma Pauline, was her way of living out this holiness, commitment, and love.

In his homily, Father Jerome reflected on the imminence of the Feast of the Birth of Jesus. Each passing day brings us closer to this Feast, but more importantly closer to our life with Jesus. This is the life that Sister Emma Pauline now enjoys, and every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, we share this heavenly life with her.

Sister Emma Pauline was preceded in death by her parents, her brother Leonard, and her sisters, Irene Womeldorf, Helen Lisante, and Anna Ramult. She was the last surviving member of her immediate family.

Father Jerome Botsko, Monastery Chaplain, celebrated the Funeral Divine Liturgy in the Monastery Chapel on Friday, December 18, with Father Stephen Wahal, pastor of Sister's home parish in Donora, as concelebrant. Due to the coronavirus restrictions, there was no public viewing.

May God grant to his handmaiden, Sister Emma Pauline, eternal memory and blessed repose. Vičnaja jej pamjat'!



PEOPLE YOU KNOW AROUND THE EPARCHY

IN RAHWAY...

Saint Nicholas Visits Saint Thomas the Apostle Church in Rahway

By David Brighthouse

On Saturday, December 5, and Sunday, December 6, Saint Thomas the Apostle Church in Rahway, served by Father James Hayer, celebrated the Feast of Saint Nicholas in a very special way. Following the Divine Liturgy, Saint Nicholas took photographs with all the children in attendance and gave them small goody bags and gifts. They were a big hit, especially when the children discovered that the gifts were Make-Your-Own-Gingerbread-House kits! Additionally, all the families left with prepared, prepackaged meals and desserts, in lieu of the traditional sit-down Saint Nicholas dinner typically offered at the church.

Of course, no one needs a reminder of how challenging and uncertain this year has been for everyone, especially church communities and their young families. It was with this in mind that Saint Thomas made a special point of welcoming back to church the Eastern Christian Formation (ECF) students

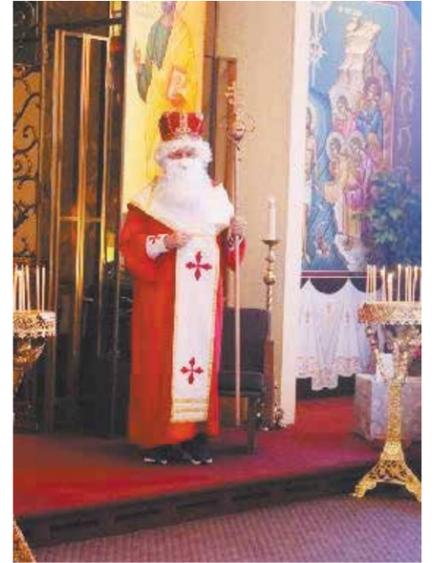
and their parents. Many of the children had not been to church since March, and during the weekend, Saint Thomas enjoyed its highest numbers in eight months, with approximately 70 people in attendance during the two days.

The Saint Thomas families, and particularly the ECF students, were extremely excited to be back. One parent, new to the ECF program, said, "Though many things are difficult and unusual at the moment, I consider Saint Thomas such a blessing and feel so happy to be here that it's hard for me not to have constant gratitude. I really appreciate everyone's hard work and concern that made the day possible." His eight-year-old son, a third grader, echoed these feelings in his own way. Asked about the liturgy and Saint Nicholas's visit, he said, "It was so fun and totally amazing."

Colleen Horniacek, co-director of the ECF program and one of the chief organizers of Saint Nicholas's visit and

all the festivities, was very pleased with how everything unfolded. She said, "I'm so happy with how everything turned out despite still dealing with the pandemic. Every child who attended on Sunday left with some special gifts and, most importantly, smiles on their faces."

Father James Hayer is assisted at Saint Thomas Parish by Deacon Charles Laszkowski and Deacon Thomas Shubeck.



FOR IT WAS YOU WHO FORMED MY INNERMOST BEING

by Deacon Stephen Russo



Icon of Our Lady, Protectress of the Unborn

"It was you who formed my innermost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are

your works; that I know very well." —Psalm 139 13-14

What a beautiful reminder from the psalms that God knows each of us from

the moment of conception when life begins! It is that moment when the Heavenly King, the Spirit of Truth, the Giver of life begins to form a new person in all the splendor of the image of God! During the great feast of the Incarnation, we are reminded that Christ Himself took the form of a child in the womb. How precious and sacred life is and how important it is for us to pray for and protect the most vulnerable among us.

At the parish of Saint Nicholas in Danbury, CT, we felt the need to pray more intensely for the unborn and to have an image that could help bring people to a greater appreciation and respect for the sanctity of life. We felt that we needed a window into the creation of a new person who is created in the image of God. We looked at many icon images, but nothing seemed to convey what we were trying to achieve. After much discussion we contacted Professor Taras Tymo of the Icon School at Ukrainian Catholic University in L'viv, Ukraine. After discussing the concept Professor Tymo introduced us to an amazing young iconographer, Maria Pompa. Maria worked with us to create the icon of "Our Lady Protectress of the Unborn." This icon was intended to be a prayer for expectant mothers and the children growing within them. The icon pictured here portrays Our Lady holding in her arm of motherly protection a depiction of a womb with a child growing within. In her other arm the Christ Child with hand raised blessing the unborn child. In the upper corners the angels taking those children who

may not have been allowed to live to the heavenly abode. When you first gaze upon this icon, it is clear that it was written with extreme love and prayer.

We had the opportunity to interview Maria, the iconographer, after we had received the icon and it had been blessed by Father Ronald Hatton, our pastor. I would like to share the interview with you which gives a vision into a life truly inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Maria, when did you start writing icons?

When I was a little girl, I loved to redraw the icons I saw. At the time of The Soviet Union, as you know, the Greek Catholic Church was persecuted and banned. During the summer holidays, I stayed with my grandmother, who was a very religious person. In her rooms hung large skillfully painted icons. One summer I found a sheet of old paper, a broken pencil, and I redrew the saints in the icons. It came easy and natural for me; I was fascinated.

Sometimes in my dreams I saw wonderful icons that I had never seen in my life. The faces of the saints on them shone bright and attracted me. I woke up and tried to draw them.

Do you have a background in art and painting?

I have a degree in psychology. In 2011, I received my art education at the Icon School of Ukrainian Catholic University. My teachers were wonderful re-

storers and icon writers from Ukraine: Pavlo Petrushak, Anastasia Chaban. My talent was noticed and, after one year of study, I was asked to become an instructor.

I also had a good teacher of icon writing from Romania, Mihai Cucu. For eleven years, I worked at the school of iconography, taught, and fulfilled orders in a workshop for customers from Ukraine, Europe, and America. I am currently developing my own *Icon for You* Iconography studio.

What inspired you to start writing icons?

Since childhood, I was inspired by nature and all living things that surround us. But I also saw as a child, how fragile life is.

I am an adult now, but I continue to admire and be inspired by nature and animals. Every day, thanks to my Labrador Retriever, I start my morning with the nature. Walking my dog in the park, among the trees and animals, I listen to the birds singing and the rustle of the wind swaying the trees. I hear the sounds of water in the stream; I play with children and dogs.

They give me strength and energy for the whole day and inspiration to create an icon. Of course, daily prayer is a must in my life. But it is in nature that I have a daily dialogue with God, after which I return home with great inspiration to create divine images.”

What did you feel when you were originally designing and writing this Icon?

When I received the request to sketch a drawing for the icon, *Our Lady, The Protectress of the Unborn*, I was very enthusiastic about the idea of creating just such an icon that will carry such an important mission. I believe that an icon should be written with pure thoughts and prayer. During the writing of the icon, I was full of love and wanted to convey this state in the icon. So, I selected and combined colors in detail and spent a lot of time on small details. When I create an icon, I lose the feeling of time and the feeling of hunger. It is such a great force and energy that attracts like a magnet. It is the feeling of a Creator who creates with love.

The most important intention was to create the icon, which can attract people with its pure beauty and love omitting even the importance of its concept. I felt a strong wish and great inspiration to depict endless love of mother to her child and the child’s love to his mother, happy and blessed maternity. I was painting *Our Lady* as a tender and caring mother and Jesus as a peaceful and kind Son with big eyes, looking directly into the soul and touching it to wake people up. As we know, Jesus is love and He accepts us as we are and forgives us. I was thankful for such a wonderful order! It was a great honor and great experience to paint the Icon of *Our Lady the Protectress of the Unborn*. I hope I was able to convey motherly tenderness and divine forgiving love.”



Iconographer Maria Pompa

How does your faith guide your life?

One day, I invited God into my heart, and since then I have never felt lonely. I thought so, but in fact, even earlier, I met God, and received a great gift during my birth on this earth. I am sure that each of us has a gift from God, but not everyone knows about it. As a child I grew up and saw the process of life and God’s hand all around me, for example, how an animal is born and becomes independent. I was very happy to see the birth of a new life, really, as an innocent child can do. For me, it was a real miracle!

The icon of *Our Lady, Protectress of the Unborn* is now in its home at Saint Nicholas Church in Danbury, CT, where Father Ron Hatton is pastor, and will be available for prayer and medita-

tion for expectant mothers and the children forming in their womb.

From the book of Jeremiah the Prophet:

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.

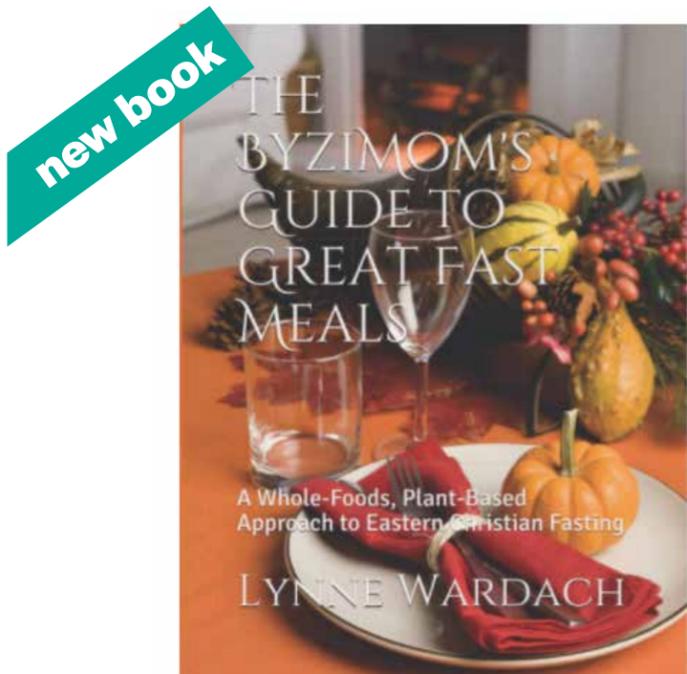
Our special thanks to the Enriquez Family, parishioners of Saint Nicholas in Danbury for underwriting the icon. Maria lives in L’viv, Ukraine. May God continue to bless her and her work.

NEW BYZANTINE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY FORMING IN GREATER CHARLOTTE, NC, AREA
 Divine Liturgies at the Byzantine Catholic Mission of Fort Mill, SC for the month of December will be broadcast online. Please contact Ron Somich by email at ron.somich@gmail.com for the link and dial in information. <https://carolinabyzantine.com/>
January: 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

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

When traveling to the South, please visit our churches

All Saints 10291 Bayshore Road North Fort Myers, FL 33917 1-239-599-4023	Ormond Beach, FL 32174 1-386-677-8704
Saint Anne 7120 Massachusetts Ave. New Port Richey, FL 34653 1-727-849-1190	Saints Cyril and Methodius 1002 Bahama Avenue Fort Pierce, FL 34982 1-772-595-1021
Epiphany of Our Lord 2030 Old Alabama Road Roswell, GA 30076 1-770-993-0973	Our Lady of the Sign 7311 Lyons Road Coconut Creek, FL 33073 1-954-429-0056
Saint Basil the Great 1475 N.E. 199th Street Miami, FL 33179-5162 1-305-651-0991	Saint Nicholas of Myra 5135 Sand Lake Road Orlando, FL 32819 1-407-351-0133
Holy Dormition 17 Buckskin Lane	Saint Therese 4265 13th Avenue North Saint Petersburg, FL 33713 1-727-323-4022



The ByziMom's Guide to Great Fast Meals
 A Whole-Food, Plant-Based Approach to Eastern Christian Fasting
 Have you ever wished for a little support as you attempt to keep the Eastern Christian fast? Healthy and delicious ideas and family-approved recipes for every meal of the day!

- Breakfasts: Smoothies, oil-free granola, pancakes, puddings, casseroles fit for potlucks, and coffee hours too!
- Kid-friendly Lunches: Lynne’s family has listed their favorites, including Macaroni and Cheese, lenten style, without dairy, but not without taste! Even the homeschool co-op kids couldn’t tell the difference!
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VERONICA SEKELICK, MOTHER OF EPARCHIAL PRIEST, FALLS ASLEEP IN THE LORD

On December 16, 2020, Veronica Sekellick, a long-time resident of Duncott, Cass Township, PA, fell asleep in the Lord at the age of 102. She was born July 14, 1918, in Duncott, one of thirteen children of the late Peter and Mary Verbosh. Veronica, affectionately known as Bunny, began working in Philadelphia towards the end of WWII at a garment factory sewing shirt collars. Bunny can be counted among the "Rosie the Riveters," running a drill press and later, spray painting aircraft wing parts at the Budd Company, an aircraft parts manufacturer in Philadelphia. Her then-boyfriend, John, always waited for her at the end of her 3 to 11 PM shift to walk her home. They were later married in Philadelphia in 1943. A few years later, they relocated to Duncott, where they settled and raised their family. Through the course of her life, Bunny voted in fourteen presidential elections, dating back to Franklin D.

Roosevelt's time in office. During gatherings at the kitchen table, she would talk of the challenges of growing up during the Depression years. Bunny's passion in life was her love of her family, cooking, and planting beautiful flowers in her garden. Veronica was a devout Byzantine Catholic and a member of Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church in Minersville, PA, where she was a member of Saints Peter and Paul Ladies' Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Bunny also volunteered at Hillcrest Hall where she joined a group of parishioners who made pirohi, holupki, and city chicken for social events. She could most often be found in her own kitchen preparing those same and other traditional meals, as she was a mother to everyone who came through her door. Immediately after greeting you, she would ask, "Are you hungry?" Friends and relatives came from miles to eat at her table and never left

hungry. Veronica's husband, John D. Sekellick, passed away January 2012; her son, Monsignor John T. Sekellick, went to his eternal rest January 2017. Veronica was preceded in death by her brothers, Michael, Peter, Andrew, John, George, and Joseph Verbosh; her sisters, Mary Verbosh, Anna Gavaletz, and Julia Ryan. Left to cherish her memories are her daughter Irene, husband John D. Gombola of Chantilly, VA; daughter, Therese, husband Bret Bennett, and their two children, RJ and Valerie of Dallas, TX; her sisters, Helen Platko of Pottsville, PA, Bertha Petrishko of Saint Clair, PA, Irene Dalago of MarLin, PA and an abundance of nieces and nephews. Veronica's unconditional love for God, Church, and family will live on through her children and grandchildren. She will be missed as immeasurably as she was loved. The Funeral Divine Liturgy was celebrated on December 19 at Saints Peter and



Paul Byzantine Catholic Church, Minersville, officiated by Father Gregory J. Noga, Pastor. Interment took place at Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Parish Cemetery, Llewellyn, Pa. *Vičnaja jej pamjat'! Eternal Memory!*

ANTOINETTE DE FRONZO, MOTHER OF EPARCHIAL PRIEST, FALLS ASLEEP IN THE LORD.

Antoinette G. (De Angelis) De Fronzo, 103, of Wethersfield, CT, entered into eternal rest on December 11, 2020, ten days after testing positive for Covid-19. She was the beloved wife of Michael L. De Fronzo Sr., who predeceased her in 2001 after sixty-six years of marriage. Born in Hartford, CT, on August 26, 1917, she was the daughter of the late Providenza (Li Rosi) and James DeAngelis. After raising her children, she was employed by the Travelers Insurance Company in data entry and was a member of the Travelers Retirees Board.

She will be dearly missed by her son, Father Anthony R. De Fronzo, two daughters, Barbara (Francis) De Robertis, Judyth (Kenneth) Marzi; beloved daughter-in-law, Anna (Fitzgerald) and James Nolan; grandchildren, Gene (Rosemarie) De Robertis, Ronald De

Robertis, Kevin (Dianne) Marzi, Kristin (Peter D.) Campbell and James (Michelle) Nolan, as well as her great grandchildren and great-great grandchildren. In addition to her husband, Antoinette was predeceased by her son, Michael, Jr.; grandson, Michael III; her sister, Helen Accolla; and brother, Vincent DeAngelis.

Antoinette's family extend their heartfelt gratitude to the staff of the Jerome Home who cared so lovingly for her. A mass in celebration of her life will take place at a later date. In lieu of flowers, donations in Antoinette's memory may be made to the House of Bread, 1453 Main St., Hartford, CT 06120 or Foodshare, 450 Woodland Avenue, Bloomfield, CT 06002. To leave online condolences, please visit www.desopo-funeralchapel.com. *May her memory be eternal!*

PROFESSOR MICHAEL ARTIM PASSES INTO ETERNAL REST

Professor Michael Artim, former cantor and choir director in the Eparchy of Passaic, passed into eternal rest on Saturday, November 21, 2020, at the age of 95. He was born on September 15, 1925, in McAdoo, PA, and was baptized at Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church there. Upon graduating from McAdoo High School, he attended Saint Procopius Seminary in Lisle, IL, for two years. Although he did not enter the priesthood, he became a cantor and choir director, a vocation which spanned nearly thirty years. His longest assignment began in 1947 at Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Jersey City, NJ, where he sang all liturgical services; transcribed the sacred music of the great Russian masters – hand-writing musical charts for both junior and senior choirs; and taught catechism to countless classes of First Communicants. Michael dedicated his time and talents to making a joyful noise in every Byzantine



Catholic Church graced by his voice. *May his memory be eternal! Vičnaja jemu pamjat'!*



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"Who are the Rusyns?" is a DVD presented by John Righetti, President emeritus of C-RS. It was released in 2019 for the 25th Anniversary of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society. This professional presentation clarifies the confusion and complicated history of the Rusyns and how they almost became extinct. Not only will it be watched more than once, it is great to share with family and friends. The DVD can be ordered by making a check payable to: Carpatho-Rusyn Society for \$25, which includes postage and handling. Please mail with name of recipient(s) to Bonnie Burke, 1101 Tanner Crossing Lane, Indian Land, SC 29707. Orders will be processed immediately upon receipt. The information can also be found on www.c-rs.org at the bottom of the homepage. Visit Carpatho-Rusyn Society YouTube for our most recent educational videos.

EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE
(USPS 165-600) (ISSN 0894-9786)

Official Publication of the
Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic
Subscription Rate: \$15.00 per year.

News and Photo Services:
Member of the Catholic Press Association of America.

Published monthly by the
Eastern Catholic Press Association

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

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

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

Most Reverend Bishop Kurt Burnette
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LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

FROM EMPTY MANGER TO FULL HEART

The year 2020 has made its long overdue exit, and we look forward to a New Year that is much less chaotic, and certainly much healthier. It's been a hard year on so many fronts, fraught with the loss of life, livelihoods, and even hope. We often look back at year's end with nostalgia, perhaps wishing that we could stop the progression of time, a movement that seems to speed up as we grow older. Not so for the year just passed! Each of us is ready to move on and begin again. This is the blessing that comes with each turn of the page on the calendar: an opportunity to make a fresh start.

Like many of us, I somehow found myself at times even busier despite pandemic related restrictions and quarantine. Even the holidays, as low key as they became, found me scrambling to grade papers, write Christmas cards, and send some gifts to relatives with whom I couldn't celebrate in person. I am ashamed to admit it, but the emphasis on temporal matters relegated the spiritual to almost an afterthought, until I realized it was two days before Christmas and I needed to go to Confession! Pressed for time, I went to a Roman Catholic church near my home on the afternoon before Christmas Eve, and found a number of like-minded penitents lining the aisles waiting to receive forgiveness. After my turn, I sat in a pew near the sanctuary to pray and make my penance. The Nativity scene was situated in front of the altar, its large figurines visually recounting the events of Christmas. They were all there: Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and Wise Men, and a few barn animals, all poised to pay homage to the newborn King. In the center, where the story's protagonist should have been, was an empty manger. No baby Jesus in this creche, for His hour had not yet come. I found myself rather unexpectedly transfixed by the uninhabited manger, and focused my thoughts and my prayer there. I became aware of how impatient I am, how difficult it is to wait – to simply *be* – in stillness and anticipation. It is in that “middle place” where God often speaks to us so clearly and definitively; when we lean into our helplessness and lack of control and allow Him to guide our thoughts and actions. The empty manger is a sign of hope, surrender and trust.

My contemplation brought me forward to Christmas Day, when the Christ Child would occupy His place in that Nativity scene, a bed of straw for His throne. Here I was to receive the Holy Mystery of Confession, given yet another chance to be

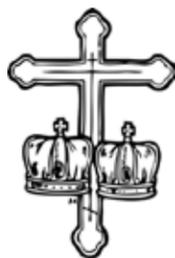
reconciled to God and be fortified by His grace so that I can persevere in holiness. This gracious gift, this undeserved opportunity is afforded to me *because He took flesh*, willingly making Himself vulnerable – first in a manger and later on a Cross – freeing you and me from the bondage of sin to make each day on this earth a pilgrimage back to Him. Sitting there in silence, occasionally glancing over at the growing lines of penitents, I imagined all of us gathered there beside Mary, Joseph and the others holding vigil in the Nativity scene, waiting for the Lord to come. We all know that the events of Salvation really happened more than two thousand years ago, but perhaps that tenet of faith, important as it is, has lost its significance for us. We may take it for granted as we do so many things in our lives, but what if the manger had *remained* empty? What if He hadn't come to save us? Where would be without God's tender mercy and overwhelming generosity?

As I neared the end of my prayer time the empty manger granted me

one final inspiration. The Incarnation of our Lord was a moment in time, an instant in which the God of the universe entered His creation and became part of it. First, He was nestled in the womb of the Virgin, then on a bed of straw in a cold, dark cave. He grew up, preached and ministered to thousands, until He was arrested, tortured, and put to death. Entering His earthly life humbly as a baby, resting in a manger, He left it as a man crucified like a criminal, finally resting in death in a borrowed tomb. On the third day He rose from the dead, and even now He sits at the Father's right hand, interceding for us and preparing us for His return. Jesus came to us and accomplished His redemptive mission, and the manger need not be occupied by Him again; nor will the tomb. Yet the more I stared at that empty manger, the more it occurred to me that the *new manger* is within me (as it is within you). My heart is meant to be the Lord's resting place, and it is within me that He wishes to dwell. But just as the Child was not meant to remain forever in the man-

ger, so He must not remain selfishly contained in me. Mary conceived and gave birth to God for our salvation. Now I am called to conceive Him in my heart and spiritually give birth to Him in the world.

At every Divine Liturgy we proclaim that we have “seen the true Light, received the heavenly Spirit” and “have found the true Faith.” In professing these truths, we are also promising to share the Light, the Spirit and the Faith. God is with us, and through us He desires that the world will know Him. As we begin this new year, somewhat weary but maybe a bit wiser, we must cling to that Faith with hope and resolve. But let's not lose sight of the manger and the hopeful expectation that God is and will remain with us! Christmas is over and the Fast is around the corner, but making a dwelling place for God in our hearts and giving birth to Him in all we do and to everyone we meet is never out of season. **ECL**



CROWNED IN LOVE A Byzantine Pre-Cana Program Sponsored by the Syncellate for the State of New Jersey

When? Saturday, March 20, 2021. 9am to 4pm.

Where? Via Zoom.

What? You bring the gifts that Jesus Christ will transform to make your relationship a sacrament where He Himself is present. Discover how the

“ordinary” ways you share your life as a couple and a family can participate in this mystery. Couples planning to marry before Spring 2022 are urged to attend.

Cost: \$75.00

PRESENTERS

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



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



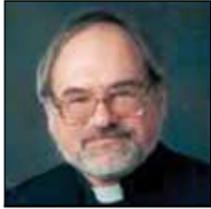
Michael and Lisann Castagno were married in 1994 and have three daughters. They have been involved in marriage preparation and youth ministry in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for many years, speaking especially about the beauty of God's design for marriage, by proclaiming the good news of Natural Family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



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

**For more information, contact
St Michael's Cathedral office
973-777-2553 or
passaiccathedral@gmail.com**





THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

THE ANAPHORA: THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Our faith is that the gifts we offer in the Liturgy in the form of bread and wine are really no longer simply bread and wine, but have become truly the precious Body and Blood of the risen Lord. This, of course, cannot happen through the power of the priest saying the Anaphora, for he is only a human being with human powers. God Himself receives our offering and makes the offerings we bring to Him to be the reality of His incarnate Son, so that by communing in them, we “may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.” (2 Peter 1:4) The priest, as Saint John Chrysostom said, “stands in the place of Christ.” He repeats the words Christ said, “This is my body,” and “This is my blood” – not the body and blood of the priest but of Christ, and not the dead Christ, but the Lord who has risen in glory. As in every divine action, this takes place in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Anaphora of Saint Basil expresses this very clearly. The priest offers the Body and Blood of Christ “in this form,” that is that we receive in Communion what seems to be and to taste like bread and wine but is truly our Lord. Saint Basil observes that this is not by the power of the priest, “for we have done nothing good upon this earth,” but that it is “according to the good pleasure of Your kindness, Your Holy Spirit,” so that “so that all of us who become partakers of this one bread and cup may be united with one another in the communion of the one Holy Spirit.” These words help explain the mystery, as Saint Basil in another place comments: “Have any saints left for us in writing the words to be used in the invocation over the Eucharistic bread and the cup of blessing? As everyone knows, we are not content in the liturgy simply to recite the words recorded by Saint Paul or the Gospels, but we add other words both before and after, words of great importance for this mystery.” (*On the Holy Spirit* 27.66)

Both the anaphoras of Saint Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom say that the coming of the Holy Spirit was both for the sanctification of the congregation and of the gifts. This is one of the goals of the invocation (epiclesis): the sanctification, by the power of the Holy Spirit, of those who shall partake of the gifts. This is why the effects of the coming of the Spirit are the transformation of the community, as in the anaphora of Saint John Chrysostom: 1) spiritual sobriety; 2) forgiveness of sins; 3) fellowship in the Spirit; 4) the fullness of the kingdom; and 5) confidence in God. The anaphora of Saint Basil more simply prays for fellowship in the Spirit and the gifts not be received for judgment or condemnation (1 Corinthians 11:29). After the Council of Constantinople (381), which defined the divinity of the Holy Spirit, the Spir-

it was explicitly invoked to change the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Of course, when we are speaking of the activity of God towards creation, it is beyond question that “to show, (the word used by Saint Basil)” “to reveal,” or “to manifest” the gifts as anything would mean for the divine action to effect that which is being requested.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, a contemporary of this Council, taught of the power of the Holy Spirit, “We beseech the merciful God to send forth His Holy Spirit upon the gifts lying before him; that He may make the bread the body of Christ, and the wine the blood of Christ, for whatsoever the Holy Spirit has touched, is surely sanctified and changed.” (*Catechetical Lectures*, Lecture 23, *On the Mysteries* 5, 7). Saint John of Damascus connects the action of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation of

our Lord when He announced to Mary then that she was to become the Mother of God and now in the Divine Liturgy that we celebrate, “For just as God made all that He made by the energy of the Holy Spirit so also now the energy of the Spirit performs those things that are above nature and which it is not possible to comprehend unless by faith alone. ‘How shall this be,’ said the holy Virgin, ‘seeing I know not a man?’ And the archangel Gabriel answered her: ‘The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you.’ And now you ask, how the bread became Christ’s body and the wine and water Christ’s blood? And I say to you, ‘The Holy Spirit is present and does these things which surpass reason and thought.’” (*On the Orthodox Faith* 4, 13) When we offer the sacrifice of the Liturgy, then, Christ is as really present to us as He was to Mary.

What, then, does this all mean? Saint John Chrysostom proclaims that the transformation of the gifts is for our salvation: “The priest stands, bringing down not fire, but the Holy Spirit; and he offers prayer at length, not that a fire may be kindled above and destroy the offering (1 Kings 18:34), but that grace may fall on the sacrifice through that prayer, and kindle the souls of all.” (*On the Priesthood* 6,4) Clearly the eucharistic gifts we offer become, indeed, the real body and the real blood of Christ. The bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ because Christ is interacting with us in a particular way in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The eucharist is not simply the body and blood that “repose” on the altar, but the Word of God transforming us into the divine nature through the tremendous love of the cross and resurrection. **ECL**

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

A BIBLICAL BESTIARY

From Abraham (1850 BC) to Saint John (died AD 96) the Bible covers a period of two thousand years and stretches across the map from Persia to Rome and from Iraq to Egypt and Ethiopia. Within that broad expanse, the pages of Scripture contain a menagerie of animals, some domesticated and common, others exotic and even frightening to the Hebrew authors and audience. Saving fish and birds, sheep and shepherds, and the hardworking donkey for other columns, let's have a look at some of the land animals that caught the Bible's attention.

Cats get just one very unflattering mention in the book of Baruch (6:21; also known as the Letter of Jeremiah verse 21) as one of the animals perching on top of pagan idols along with "bats, swallows and other birds." Dogs hardly fare better, despite some forty appearances.

The biblical dog was a scavenger, roaming in packs and feeding on refuse and corpses. Proverbs 26:11 remarks that "The dog returns to its own vomit" (repeated in 2 Peter 2:22), and Jesus seems to use "dog" as an insult when He says to Gentile woman that "It is not right

to throw the children's food to the little dogs" (Matthew 15:26-27; Mark 7:27-28). The woman's response, however, suggests that dogs may occasionally have been pets for Gentiles if not for Jews: "Even the little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' tables."

Proverbs 30 includes a number of observations about animals including ravens, eagles, serpents, ants, locusts, lizards, lions, cocks, hens, and a he-goat. Ancient literature in many cultures used animals as illustrations for human behavior, both good and bad. Some scholars believe that a greyhound may be mentioned in Proverbs 30:31. This is a problem with biblical animals. Some animal names occur only once in Hebrew and some cannot be identified accurately. For example, Psalm 104:18 mentions *ophanim*, some sort of rock-dwelling rodent (also found in Proverbs 30:28 and elsewhere). Ancient Jewish translators into Greek were already unsure what animal was meant and chose "rabbits" instead.

A similar problem occurs with jackals, a larger, dog-like animal that also travels in packs, feeds on carrion, and damages agriculture. They are mentioned often

enough in the Old Testament (never lovingly!), but are unknown in Europe. So translators into Greek, Latin and Slavonic opted for smaller and less dangerous "foxes" instead. We see this, for example, in Psalm 63:11 (one of our Matins Psalms). The Hebrew condemns the king's enemies to fall by the sword and their corpses to be devoured by jackals; Greek, Latin and Slavonic versions envision them being nibbled by foxes. Like other ancient texts, the Bible equates actual foxes with slyness and cunning (Ezekiel 13:4; Luke 13:32).

Scripture takes a kinder view of deer and gazelles. Both were admired for their speed and grace but there is one important difference between them. Deer are not kosher while gazelles, a type of antelope, were an important source of game for Israelites. The Song of Songs (2:9) and Proverbs (5:19) use these animals' names as terms of endearment for lovers (think: "my deer," not "my dear"). "Gazelle" was also a popular female name (1 Chronicles 8:9, 2 Kings 12:1, Acts 9:36).

Bears and lions were among the most dangerous animals in the Holy Land

but, while still a teenager, David boasted of killing one of each (1 Samuel 17:36-37). The Prophet Amos (5:19) warned his contemporaries that the Lord's intervention in their sinful lives would be "as though a man fled from a lion and met a bear." Through the prophet Hosea (13:7-8) the Lord unleashed a whole zoo on sinners: "I will be to them like a lion; like a leopard by the road I will lurk; I will meet them like a bear deprived of her cubs."

Of course, the lion was also admired for its dignity, courage, and strength. In his deathbed prophecies, Jacob compared his son, Judah, to a lion: "Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who shall rouse him?" (Genesis 49:9). The lion thus became the symbol Jerusalem's kings and, in a particular way, of Jesus, descendant of the royal house of Judah according to the flesh. Revelation 5:5 sees the risen and glorified Lord as "the Lion of Judah" and, from the mid-3rd century, the Fathers of the Church understand the reference to rousing the sleeping lion to point to Jesus' three-day burial and glorious resurrection. **ECL**

SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian



REFRAIN FROM ANGER AND FORSAKE WRATH

No matter how hard life may get, you can be sure anger doesn't help (Js. 1:20). That "anger problem" is actually a sinful tendency that needs your immediate attention. Get to work on overcoming it for the love of Jesus Christ. Anger only makes things worse (Ps. 37:8).

The opposite of anger is meekness. Meekness, or gentleness, is one of the favorite virtues of Jesus Christ. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Mt. 11:29). Jesus is the "Lamb of God" not only because of His atoning death on the Cross but also because of the meekness, gentleness, and humility demonstrated in His Passion and Death. Heaven is the home of the meek and gentle. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt. 5:5). "The Christian is one who imitates Christ in thought, word, and deed," says Saint John of the Ladder. Pray: "Jesus, make me gentle and humble of heart."

Anger and deep humility cannot co-exist. When we see ourselves as miserable sinners, deserving of God's righteous judgment, we will be gentle with irritating people and patient in challenging

circumstances. If we distinctly understand our own need for forgiveness, then we will forgive those who hurt us. To overcome our lousy temper, let us remember our past sins and frequently and thoughtfully pray, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."

Saint Mark the Ascetic tells us to consider the humility of Our Lord in His sufferings. "If you continually recall [Christ's Passion] with all your heart, bitterness, anger and wrath will not master you" (Letter to Nicolas the Solitary). Be like Jesus who "when He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly" (1 Pt. 2:23).

The saints tell us to begin our day with a particular anger inhibiting meditation. Try to foresee the circumstances that may arise and arouse impatience and anger. Say to yourself something like: "Today, I will have unexpected distractions, meet with difficult people, run into obstacles and inconveniences, endure criticism, be insulted, and perhaps hear some bad news or have to deal with a crisis at work or home." Foresee the typical problems that generally

arise, resolve to bear them patiently, and commit to not getting flustered, stressed out, or enraged.

Practice abandonment to divine providence. It is a rationally certain and a divinely revealed fact that nothing happens in the entire universe unless God wills it or wills to permit it. No one can harm us unless God allows it for His glory and our salvation (Rm. 8:28). Whatever happens, say with the patriarch Joseph, "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). God did it! God meant it for good. (We may not understand why until we get to heaven.)

Abandon the hydraulic view of emotions that says, you have to vent, you have to let it out, or you will explode. This view is not accurate, physically, psychologically, or spiritually. Don't vent. Don't "let it all out." When we vent our anger, we risk making a mess of things, at work, in our family, or in our friendships. It is impossible to take back angry words or actions after we let them fly. Saint John Chrysostom says, "One fire is not extinguished by another." Saint Alphonsus says that after venting, "we shall find that we are much

more disturbed than before." Saint Francis De Sales said, "I have never been angry without afterward repenting of it."

Make a firm resolution to conquer anger. Saint Francis De Sales said, "I have made a covenant with my tongue, never to speak while my heart is disturbed." Let us make a similar commitment and say, "no matter how many times I fail, I will pick myself up and start again, and by the grace of God, I will overcome angry thoughts, feelings, words, and actions."

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). There is no room for rage in a Spirit-filled soul. Anger only makes things worse.

"Refrain from anger and forsake wrath! Don't be angry; it tends only to evil" (Ps. 37:8). **ECL**

SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Father Ronald Hatton



OUR CELEBRATION IS NOT OVER!

It has been one of the strangest Christmases many of us have had in a long time. The continued pandemic has kept families apart. But if we have the true spirit of the Nativity and God-with-us in our hearts, we still have the joy in the knowledge that God has come to earth in the flesh and dwells among us. But for most of the world, Christmas ended, and the world has moved on to other things. But not so the Church. We have a definite timeline that continues, for the most part, for 40 days after the Feast of the Nativity, and this month contains very important feasts.

No sooner than we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord, while the rest of the world (those who follow the Gregorian Calendar) celebrates the coming of the new year, the Church celebrates the feast of the Circumcision of our Lord, eight days after His birth. Circumcision is an important ritual in Judaism, as it makes the male child a child of the Covenant between God and Abraham: "And God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male

throughout your generations, whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring.... So shall My covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant'" (Genesis 17:9-14). On the eighth day, the child was also formally named: "And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb" (Luke 2:21). We see this also with the birth of John the Baptist: "And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they would have named him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said, 'Not so; he shall be called John.' And they said to her, 'None of your kindred is called by this name.' And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, 'His name is John'" (Luke 1:59-63). Both these names have great significance for us, as "John" (Gr. *Ioannes*, from the Heb. *Yochanan*) means "YHWH is Gracious," and "Jesus" (Greek *Iesous*, Aramaic, *Yeshu'a*, from the Heb. *Yehoshu'a*; Anglicized as, "Joshua") means "YHWH is Salvation." So, just as Joshua in the books of Exodus and Joshua is identified with the successor to Moses who brought the Israelites into the Promised Land, showing the fulfillment of God's promise and His grace to His people, so, too, our

Joshua, Jesus, is the fulfillment of God's promise to be our Salvation.

January 1 is also the feast day of Saint Basil the Great (one of the Three Holy Hierarchs celebrated on January 30), Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (in present-day Turkey), and is traditionally the author of our Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great, which we celebrate on this day as well as Sundays of the Great Fast and other major holy days.

In His love for the human race, the Savior condescended and willed to be wrapped in swaddling clothes. Eight days old according to His mother and eternal according to His Father, He did not look down upon the circumcision of the flesh. Therefore, O believers, let us cry out to Him: You are our God; have mercy on us! (Vespers for the Feast).

The great feast, of course, is the Theophany of our Lord on January 6. The origin of the Feast goes back to Apostolic times, and it is mentioned in The Apostolic Constitutions (Book V:13). From the second century, we have the testimony of Saint Clement of Alexandria concerning the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord, and the night vigil before this Feast. The name

itself refers to a manifestation of God. In the Western tradition, this day is devoted to the Visit of the Magi, and thus His manifestation to the Gentiles. In the East, it is devoted to Jesus' manifestation as the Son of God at His Baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist and, further, the manifestation of the Holy Trinity (cf. Matthew 3: 13-17, Mark 1: 9-11, and Luke 3:21, 22). Thus, it is an important day for us both as an affirmation of the dogma of the Trinity and as the day when we traditionally celebrate the Great Sanctification of Water, in some parishes not only with the Blessing of Water in the parish on the eve of the Feast, but also with the blessing of a nearby body of water, usually a river, on the day of the Feast.

The True Light has appeared to bestow enlightenment upon all. The all-pure Christ is baptized with us; He sanctifies the water and it becomes a cleansing for our souls. All that which appears outward and visible is earthly, and that which is understood by the mind is greater than the heavens. Salvation is bestowed through washing, and the Spirit is received through water. By descending into the water, we ascend to God. How wonderful are Your works, O Lord; glory to You! (Matins for the Feast). **ECL**

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Save the Dates!

Young Adult Convocation in Eastern Europe

June 21st – July 5th 2021

Open to all Eastern Catholic young adults 18 – 35

The young adults from the US, will meet with young adults from Eastern Europe for 2 weeks of events covering: faith, career, family, heritage. Starting in Lviv, Ukraine traveling to Uzhhorod for the 375 Anniversary of the reunification, then across Slovakia and ending in the magical city of Vienna, Austria

The planning committee comprised of an international team is planning, lectures, pilgrimages, mountain hikes sight seeing, networking events and more. Don't miss this once in a lifetime event for additional information

theosislnaction@gmail.com
Or follow us on Facebook








EPARCHIAL PARISHES LIVE-STREAM THE DIVINE SERVICES
Below are just a few examples from our eparchy

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

CONNECTICUIT

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

NEW JERSEY

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

NEW YORK

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

PENNSYLVANIA

Saint Michael Byzantine Church—Mont Clare, PA
Saint Mary Byzantine Church—Wilkes-Barre, PA
Saint Mary Pokrova—Kingston, PA

Saint John Byzantine Church—Wilkes-Barre, PA
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic—Mahanoy City, PA
Saint John Byzantine Church—Wilkes-Barre, PA
Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church—Lansford, PA
Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church—Bethlehem, PA
Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church—Old Forge, PA
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church—Taylor, PA
Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church—Minersville, PA
Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church—Dunmore, PA
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church—Hazleton, PA
Saint John Byzantine Catholic Church—Hazleton, PA
Holy Dormition Friary—Sybertsville, PA
Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church—Jessup, PA
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Church—Levittown, PA
Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church—Scranton, PA
Saint Ann Byzantine Catholic Church—Harrisburg, PA

GEORGIA

Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church—Roswell, GA

VIRGINIA

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

FLORIDA

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

NORTH CAROLINA

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

SOUTH CAROLINA

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

MARYLAND

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

Monthly Byzanteen Gatherings

- January 17th: Sunday of Zaccheus (Sunday's @ 6pm)
- February 21st: Sunday of Orthodoxy
- March 21st: St. Mary of Egypt
- April 18th: Sunday of the Myrrhbearers
- May 16th: Power of the Holy Spirit
- June 13th: Saints of all Time and for all Time
- July 1st - 4th: Byzanteen Rally

Other events: Ascension, Pentecost, The Great Fast, Pascha, Ss. Peter & Paul.

For Monthly Meetings: FrDeaconTom@gmail.com

Byzanteen Rally
Last day of Early Registration: May 1st - \$325
Last day of Registration: June 16th - \$350

Mount St. Mary's
"Soaring on Eagles Wings"

Eastern Catholic Life

Circulation Department
445 Lackawanna Avenue
Woodland Park, NJ 07424

Next Issue:
February, 2021

Copy Deadline:
January 20

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

UPCOMING EPARCHIAL AND PARISH EVENTS

JANUARY, 2021

- 1 The Circumcision of Our Lord
Our Holy Father Basil the Great
*Solemn Holy Day * Chancery closed*
- 6 Holy Theophany of Our Lord
Solemn Holy Day Chancery closed*
- 17 Sunday of Zaccheus
- 24 Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee
- 30 Three Holy Hierarchs
Simple Holy Day
- 31 Sunday of the Prodigal Son

FEBRUARY, 2021

- 2 Holy Encounter of Our Lord
*Solemn Holy Day * Chancery closed*
- 6 First All Souls' Saturday

THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC
subscribes to the

*Charter for the Protection of
Children and Young People*

adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Eparchy, within all its parishes, institutions and programs, is committed to assuring a safe environment in ministry for its children and young people that conforms to Charter requirements. For further information regarding the Eparchial Safe Environment Program please contact:

Father David J. Baratelli, Ed.S., M.Div.
Safe Environment Program Coordinator • 973.890.7777

Dr. Maureen Daddona, Ph.D.
Victim's Assistance Coordinator • 516.623.6456

All Wedding Jubilarian Celebrations are moved to next year.