

Holy Assumption Orthodox Church
Celebrating 125 years witnessing to the Apostolic Faith

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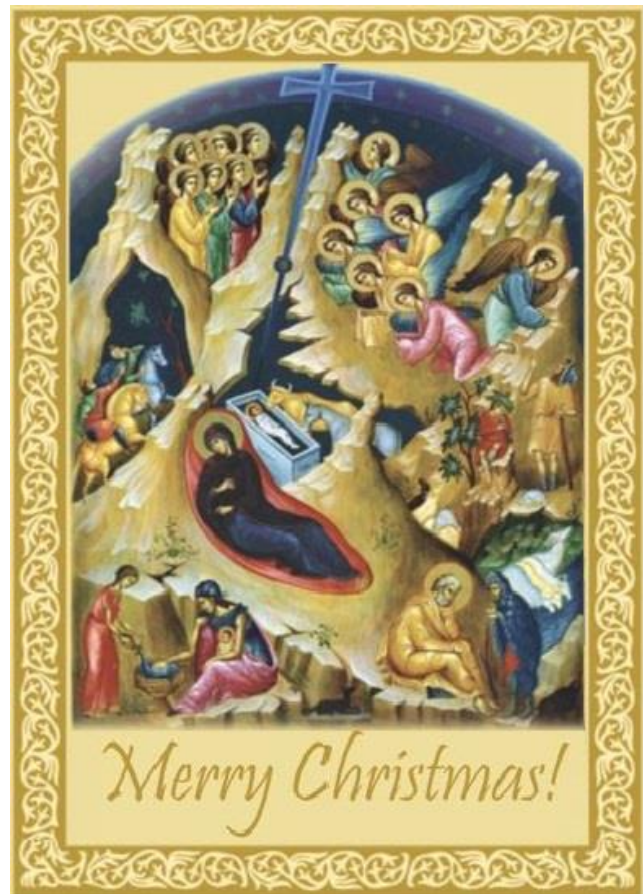
***Holy Assumption Orthodox Church is a parish of the Orthodox Church in America,
Diocese of the Midwest***

DECEMBER 22, 2024

**TWENTY SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY**

EPISTLE: Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40

Brethren: By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon



Nativity of Christ

afraid of the king's command. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon

and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

GOSPEL: Mt 1:1-25

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So, all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” So, all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us.’” Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.





LITURGICAL SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK



MON. Dec 23 Forefeast of the Nativity, 10 Holy Martyrs of Crete;
1 Tim 5:1-10, Mk 10:46-52

TUE. Dec 24 Eve of the Nativity of our Lord; Heb 1:1-12, Lk 2:1-20

4:00 PM GREAT COMPLINE with Litya

WED. Dec 25 NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

9:40 AM HOURS

10:00 AM DIVINE LITURGY



THU. Dec 26 Second Day of the Nativity of our Lord; Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God: Heb 2:11-18, Mt 2:13-23

FRI. Dec 27 Third Day of the Nativity of our Lord, Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen;
2 Tim 1:1-2,8_18, Mk 12:1-12

SAT. Dec 28 Saturday after the Nativity, 20,000 Martyrs of Nicomedia; Gal 5:22-6:2,
Lk 17:3-10

4:00 PM VESPERS

**SUN. Dec 29 27th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST,
*Sunday after the Nativity, Tone 2***

9:10 AM HOURS

9:30 AM DIVINE LITURGY Followed by Coffee Social

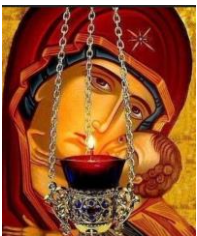


FOR YOUR PRAYERS



Patti Owens, 311 Woodbridge Road, Vermilion, OH 44089; **Basil Glovinsky**, 1007 Glendale Drive, Port Clinton, OH 43452; **Subdeacon Roger Pinta**, P.O. Box 39, Middle Bass, OH 43446; **Ed & Irene Vangeloff**, 454 Strouse Lane, Sandusky, OH 44870

DECEMBER REPOSED



Peter Onyock (1952) No date provided; Anna Mazurik (1968) No date provided; **1-** Helen Elchisco (1990); **3-** Mary Hubicki (2013); **8-** Mary (Marika) Lefas (2019); **12-** Anna Bretz (2002); **13-** Joseph Mazurik (1986); **13-** Archimandrite Seraphim Oblivantseff (1954) Former Pastor; **15-** Michael W. Belenky (1971); **20-** Julia Brosojah Millie (1953); **20-** John Mazurik (2017); **20-** William Pipenur (2003); **21-** Mary Sennich (1985); **22-** Antonima Vecsey (1972); **23-** Steven Danchisen (1982); **24-** Alexandra Turkul (1980); **24-** John Bird No year Provided; **25-** Joe Rose (2022); **29-** Alexandra Dotsenko (1980); **30-** Rita Felenchak (1996); **31-** Jevgeny Cernonok (1980); **31-** Janice Timko (2021)

PRAYER LIST

Parishioners & Family: Greg Twarek / Heidi Golob / Ron & Bobbie Royhab / Rodney Clevenger / Jennifer Heffernan / Tom Hileman / Pam / Jim Twarek / Ed Garrity / Patti Owens / Barbara Wroblewski / Michal Tomáš / Helena Tomášova / Ruth Sheller / Basil Glovinsky / Dale / Sophie / Carol / David Martin / Fred Soski / Chris Hannon / Subdeacon Roger Pinta / Ed Vangeloff / Irene

Vangeloff / Sonja Rose / Ron Royhab / James Bargdill / John Beadle / Carole Conaway / Gary Conaway / Sharon Dietrich / Michael Glovinsky / Shirley Gresh / Joseph Habegger / Elaine Hileman / Betty Kovach / Child Stella Miller / William Pipenur / Earl Rindfleisch / Helen Jean Rofkar / George Royhab / Marianne Royhab / Kathy Jacob / the child Bodhi Cassell / Clifford / Gleice, Sophie & Chloe / Carol / Nora.

Other Requests: Catechumen Blake Shoemaker / Catechumen Nickolas Dawenport / Matushka Melania / Sharyn Osborne / Christine Zahm / Amy / Bill Byrnes / Michael Heffernan / Susanne / Barbara Heffernan / Charles Schlett / Kathy Debevits / Maxwell Chaney / Sidharth Bijilani – friend of Subdeacon Roger and Debbie Pinta / Anthony / Archpriest Ján Čižmár / Archpriest David Lis / Archpriest Emilian & Matushka Laryssa Hutnyan / Donald Gresh / Mark Ludvik / Robert Piznar / Mark Masica / Valerie Ritzenthaler / William / Rick Rowe / Chris.

Military: Craig Cassell / Jake Ellithorpe / Jordon Fulton / Justin Issler / Tikhon / Nicholas / & All Military



VIGILS FOR DECEMBER 15

Susan Guzy 1 Safe travels for brother Gary, In memory of Ruth, Vichnaya Pamyat!

Laura Kovach 3 For health and/or healing of Heidi G., Jerry P., Matushka Melania, Ron R., Betty K., Margaret M., David M., Hannah S., Mark M., Dana M., Bodhi C., Kathie J., Ed & Irene V.

Birthday blessings to Natalia. Happy 72nd Anniversary to Ed and Irene. Many years!
Memory Eternal to Ruthe Flewelling

Sandy Martin 1 Special Intentions

Darlene Mazurik 1 Prayers for thanksgiving, health and guidance

Natalie Twarek 8 For health and recovery of Greg, Memory Eternal for Ruthe Flewelling, Anniversary blessing and good health to Ed and Irene, For the health Fr Peter & Matushka Michelle, For the health & recovery of Matushka Melania, For the health and recovery on Ron, Rodney, Betty, Carol, Kayla, Bill, Ruth, Pam, Jim, Jerry, Heidi, Father Emilian, Barbara Heffernan, Health and healing for Father's parents Michal & Helena and Matushka's mom Barbara, and Walter, For the health of Jen, Tony, Bev, Ed, Irene, Father David, Judy, Tina, Carole, Gary, Sharon, Tina's dad, Earl, Sonya, Margi & Joe, Jackie, MaryAnn & Bob, Bodhi, Stella, Jake, Pat, special intentions

DECEMBER CANDLE SPONSORS



Altar Candles: Jen Fela and the Havrilla Family, In Loving Memory of Bernadine Havrilla (\$50); **Chandelier:** Sonya Rose, In Loving Memory of Joe Rose (\$50); **Eternal Light & Icon Screen:** Angela Bricker, For the Health and God's Blessings for Holy Assumption's Parishioners, Family, and Catechumens this Nativity Season; Jean Hileman In loving memory of my father, William (\$25); **Candles at the Cross:** Laura Kovach, Birthday blessings to Ben (\$20); **Candles at St. Tikhon Icon:** For Safety and Health of Nicholas, Tikhon, Gleice, Sophie & Chloe (\$20)

READERS LIST



Sunday Dec 22 – Tim
Wednesday Dec 25 – Jake
Sunday Dec 29 – Tim
Sunday Jan 5 – Jake



ATTENDANCE

12/07 Vespers, **6** attending; **12/08** Divine Liturgy, **25** attending (7 guests); **12/13** Akathist, **8** attending



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

23 – Teri Cassell *; **25** – Darlene Mazurik *; **26** – Fr. John Adamcio *; **31** – Fred & Christi Soski Anniversary *



UP-COMING EVENTS IN OUR PARISH – MARK YOUR CALENDARS



- Dec. 24th** Christmas Eve - GREAT COMPLINE with Litya at 4:00 PM (*Tuesday*)
- Dec. 25th** NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST – Divine Liturgy at 10:00 AM (*Wednesday*)
- Dec. 31st** New Year’s Eve – Vespers at 6:00 pm (*Tuesday*)
- Jan. 1st** Circumcision of Our Lord, St. Basil the Great – Div. Liturgy at 10:00 pm (*Wednesday*)
- Jan. 5th** Eve of Theophany – Vespers at 6:00 pm (*Sunday*)
- Jan. 6th** THEOPHANY (BAPTISM) OF OUR LORD – Divine Liturgy 9:30 AM (*Monday*)



Please Note: All the days between December 25th and January 4th are fast free. Sunday, January 5th is a day of Strict Fast.



SUNDAY OFFERING

Sunday, December 15, 2024

Tithe	\$ 665.00
Donations	\$ 55.00
Candles	\$ 221.00
Vigils	\$ 25.00
Flowers Donation	\$ 40.00
Chandelier	\$ 50.00
Total:	\$1,056.00

May the Lord reward you for your financial and spiritual support!



CHARITY OF THE MONTH

“Bistro 163” is the charity we donate to for the month of December.



CLEANING SCHEDULE

- Dec 23, Roddie & David
- Dec 30, Natalie
- Jan 6, Basil & Tim
- Jan 13, Susan





CHRISTMAS SALE – THANK YOU!

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Natalie, Laura and Roddie for helping with the orders of our Christmas Sale yesterday. The total profit from the sale was **\$1,145.29**. May Our Lord reward you for your time and energy with good health, peace, and happiness for Many Happy and Blessed Years!



COFFEE HOUR SPONSOR LIST

- Dec 22 – Matushka Michelle
- Dec 29 – Natalia
- Jan 5 – Roddie
- Jan 12– Greg

Please sign up to host coffee hour. Signup sheet is located in the Social Hall



NEW CATECHUMENS IN OUR PARISH

We wish to express our best wishes and ask Our Lord to bless our new Catechumens **Ryan Stamp, Joshua Schulden, Danielle & Josh,** and **little Wrenley Paull** who were received to the Catechumenate today before the Divine Liturgy. May Our Lord and God grant them long life, good health, peace, and happiness for Many Happy and Blessed Years! Na Mnogaya Leta!



Merry Christmas

May peace and harmony be yours this Nativity Season
and throughout the new year!

With love, Fr. Peter and Matushka Michelle



CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA PLANTS DONATIONS 2024

The following is the list of sponsors who made donations in Memory/Good Health of their loved ones

The Adamcio Family

In loving memory of Robert Dowdell, Philip and Mary Kobb, Ted and Bonnie Jean Dowdell

Dennis Bird –

In memory of Marguerite Bird and Jim Heffernan

Susan Guzy –

For the health of Gary, Paul, Valerie, Susan Alfred and all parish members, families & friends
In loving memory of Departed Guzy, Felenchak, Szoldra & Gulla family members, For Carole and Jay

- Jean & Tom Hileman – For the health of the Hileman & Pipenur families
In loving memory of members of the Hileman & Pipenur families,
Memory Eternal
- Sandy & Dave Martin – For the health of family and friends
In loving memory of departed family and friends
- Donna Schoonmaker – In loving memory of Glenn, Mary, Sutlana & Peter
- Stamp family – For the health of Larisa, Arcadie, Lefterii, William, Randee
- Natalie & Greg Twarek – For the health of our family and friends and our parish
In loving memory of our parents, grandparents, God parents and all
departed family and friends
- Fr. Peter and Mat. Michelle – For the health of Barbara Wrolewski and Michal & Helena Tomas
In loving memory of deceased of the Tomas, Drozd, Wroblewski,
and Dubee families

We would like to thank the following parishioners for their donations for wine and incense

- Jean & Tom Hileman – incense
- Fr. Peter & Mat. Michelle – wine

May Our Lord and God reward you all for your generosity and grant you His Special blessing throughout this Nativity Season!



Sunday before the Nativity

Commemorated on December 22

The Sunday before the Nativity of Christ we commemorate Adam and Eve (the first-created), the righteous Abel, son of Adam, the righteous Seth, son of Adam, the righteous Enos, son of Seth, the righteous Kenan, son of Enos, the righteous Mehaliel (Maleleim), son of Kenan, the righteous Jared, son of Mehaliel, the righteous Enoch, son of Jared, the righteous Methuselah, son of Enoch, the righteous Lamech, son of Methuselah, the righteous Noah, son of Lamech, the righteous Shem, son of Noah, the righteous Japheth, son of Noah, the righteous Arphachshad, son of Shem, the righteous Canaan, son of Arphachshad (in some versions of the OT, Canaan is called the son of Ham), the righteous Shelah, son of

Canaan (some versions of the OT call Shelah the son of Arphachshad), the righteous Eber (from whom the Hebrews take their name), son of Shelah, the righteous Peleg, son of Eber, the righteous Ragab (Reu), son of Peleg, the righteous Serug, son of Ragab, the righteous Nahor, son of Serug, the righteous Terah, son of Serug.

The holy Patriarchs: the righteous Patriarch Abraham, son of Terah, the righteous Patriarch Isaac, son of Abraham, the righteous Patriarch Jacob, son of Isaac, the righteous Patriarch Reuben, son of Jacob and Leah, the righteous Patriarch Simeon, son of Jacob and Leah, the righteous Patriarch Levi, son of Jacob and Leah, the righteous Patriarch Judah (Christ was of this tribe), the righteous Patriarch Zebulun, son of Jacob and Leah, the righteous Patriarch Issachar, son of Jacob and Leah, the righteous Patriarch Dan, son of Jacob and Bilhah (Rachel's maid), the righteous Patriarch Gad, son of Jacob and Zilpah (Leah's maid), the righteous Patriarch Asher, son of Jacob and Zilpah, the righteous Patriarch Naphthali, son of Jacob and Bilhah, the righteous Patriarch Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel, the righteous Patriarch Benjamin, son of Jacob and Rachel.

The righteous Pharez and Zerah, twin sons of Judah, the righteous Hezron, son of Pharez, the righteous Aram, son of Hezron, the righteous Aminadab, son of Aram, the righteous Nahshon, son of Aminadab, the righteous Salmon, son of Nahshon, the righteous Boaz, son of Salmon, the righteous Obed, son of Boaz and Ruth, the righteous Jesse, son of Obed.

The holy Prophet-King David, son of Jesse, King Solomon, son of David, King Rehoboam, son of Solomon, King Abijah, son of Rehoboam, King Asa, son of Abijah, King Jehosaphat, son of Asa, King Joram (Jehoram, an evil king), son of Jehosaphat, King Ochoziah (Ahaziah), son of Joram, King Jotham, son of Uzziah (Oziah), King Ahaz (a faithless king), son of Jotham, King Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, King Manesseh, son of Hezekiah, King Amos (Ammon), son of Manesseh, King Josiah, son of Amos, King Jechoniah, son of Josiah.

Shealtiel, son of Jechoniah, Zerubbabel (who led captives back to Jerusalem, and laid the foundations of the new Temple), son of Shealtiel, Abiud, son of Zerubbabel, Eliachem, son of Abiud, Azor, son of Eliachem, Zadok, son of Azor, Achim, son of Zadok, Eliud, son of Achim, Eleazar, son of Eliud, Matthan, son of Eleazar, Jacob, son of Matthan, St Joseph the Betrothed, son of Jacob.

The righteous Melchizedek, King of Salem, the righteous Job, the holy Prophet Moses, the priests Hur and Aaron, Joshua, son of Nun.

The holy prophet Samuel, the holy prophet Nathan, the holy prophet Daniel, the three holy youths Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

The righteous Sarah, wife of Abraham, the righteous Rebecca, wife of Isaac, the righteous Leah, first wife of Jacob, the righteous Rachel, second wife of Jacob, the righteous Asineth, wife of Patriarch Joseph the all-comely, the righteous Miriam, sister of Moses, the righteous Deborah, Judge of Israel and prophetess, the righteous Ruth, wife of Boaz, the righteous woman of Zarephath, to whom Elias was sent (3 Kings 17), the righteous woman of Shunem, who was hospitable to Elisha (4 Kings 4), the righteous Judith, slayer of Holofernes, the righteous Esther, who delivered Israel from death, the righteous Hannah, mother of the prophet Samuel, the righteous Susanna.



Animals Witnessing the Nativity: Unraveling Their Mysterious Presence

By Natalia Kharpaleva

The ox, the donkey, the sheep — how did these humble creatures find their way to the manger in the cherished Nativity scene? This tableau, with its donkey, calf, and curly white lambs surrounding the Christ Child, warming Him with their breath, is both familiar and heartwarming. Yet, it's intriguing to ponder their origins in this sacred setting.

On one hand, the creche, traditionally depicted as a cave, was likely a shelter where shepherds housed their livestock. It's easy to imagine the animals' surprise at finding the Divine Child nestled in their manger, an unexpected holy presence in their humble abode.

However, the New Testament itself makes no mention of animals at Christ's birth. The inclusion of oxen, donkeys, and sheep is a product of Church tradition, with holy Fathers and theologians over the centuries offering various interpretations of their symbolic presence in the Nativity story.

Furthermore, if we consider the actual circumstances logically, it seems probable that when Joseph and Mary arrived, the cave was... empty.

Understanding the nature of this cave is crucial. Professor Alexander Lopukhin, in his “Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures,” explains, “The New Testament’s reference to a manger, a place for cattle feed, suggests that the Virgin Mary and Joseph found shelter in a cattle pen attached to an inn. With all rooms taken and the common area unsuitable due to Mary’s impending labor, they were lodged in this enclosure. According to ancient texts, this pen was within a cave not in, but near Bethlehem” (citing Justin the Philosopher’s “Dialogue with Trypho” and Origen’s “Against Celsus”). Thus, Lopukhin posits that this cave, adjacent to an inn, housed animals brought by travelers to Bethlehem.

Another perspective is offered by St. Demetrius of Rostov. He describes a cave to the east of Bethlehem, near the well of David, embedded in the stone mountain upon which Bethlehem sits. This cave, belonging to Salomia, a Bethlehem resident and relative of both Mary and Joseph, served as a refuge. Unable to find lodging in the crowded city, due to the influx of people for the census, Joseph and Mary sought refuge in this cave, as there was “no room for them in the inn,” especially as evening approached. Thus, according to St. Demetrius of Rostov, Mary and Joseph, after finding no space in the inns of Bethlehem, logically retreated to this familial cave, a shelter typically used for cattle.

Tracing the Journey of the Ox and the Donkey to Bethlehem

The presence of the donkey and the ox in the Nativity scene is not just a picturesque detail but a narrative enriched with profound symbolism.

Joseph, a carpenter, and his betrothed wife Mary were temporarily residing in Nazareth. Though both natives of Bethlehem, the census compelled them to return. Alexander Lopukhin insightfully notes, “Mary’s advanced pregnancy was the primary reason Joseph could not leave her alone in Nazareth for an extended period. The journey to Bethlehem was long, and in Nazareth, she would have been defenseless.”



The three-day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was a challenge for Mary, given her condition. Therefore, she was carried on a donkey. Whether the animal was owned or borrowed by Joseph is uncertain, but it is clear that this donkey accompanied them from Nazareth.

The ox’s presence, however, is intriguing. St. Demetrius of Rostov suggests that Joseph brought the ox to Bethlehem intending to sell it. This was to pay the tribute demanded by Caesar and to cover essential expenses. Archimandrite Nicephorus Bozhanov describes Joseph as “a righteous and pious man living a modest life in Nazareth, sustaining himself through hard work.” The ox, then, was a crucial asset for the elderly carpenter to fund the unforeseen journey and stay in Bethlehem. The sale of the ox possibly facilitated the Holy Family’s move into a house, as the Gospel of Matthew recounts the Magi visiting them in a house, not a cave (Matthew 2:11). This suggests that after the initial rush of the census, Joseph was able to provide a more comfortable dwelling for Mary and the newborn Jesus, likely financed by the sale of the ox.

The Nativity Scene and its Symbolic Animals

Returning to the creche at the moment of the Nativity, St. Demetrius of Rostov poignantly describes the ox and the donkey warming the Christ Child with their breath in the cold of winter, serving their Lord and Creator in humble reverence.

In the Holy Scripture, every detail carries multiple layers of meaning. Although the New Testament does not mention these animals, the Old Testament does. Isaiah’s prophecy vividly states: “...the ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not

understand” (Isaiah 1:3). Thus, on Christmas, this prophecy finds its fulfillment: the animals bowing before Christ symbolize both the Gentiles (the donkey) and the Jews (the ox). St. Augustine of Hippo elaborates on this symbolism: “In the person of the shepherds and wise men, the ox has recognized its owner, and the donkey its master’s manger. The Jews, symbolized by the horned animal, were unwittingly preparing the horns of the cross for Christ. The Gentiles, represented by the long-eared animal, were prophesied to obey swiftly: ‘A people I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they obey me’ (Psalm 17:44-45).” In the humility of the manger, the ox and the donkey, representing Jews and Gentiles alike, found their sustenance in the Word made flesh.

Exploring the Symbolic Presence of Animals in the Nativity Scene

The presence of other animals traditionally depicted near the Nativity crib is a matter of artistic interpretation and theological symbolism.

Sheep may have been present, not at the exact moment of Christ’s birth, but shortly thereafter. St. Luke the Evangelist notes: “Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:8). The Messiah was believed to be born in the “tower of the flock” near Bethlehem, where sheep intended for temple sacrifices were herded. The shepherds, possibly connected to the Jerusalem temple, were chosen by the angel of the Lord to herald a new era – a time when sacrifices would cease, as the Son of God Himself would become the ultimate sacrifice. If these shepherds brought their flocks to the cave, the lambs there would also witness their Savior.

Alternatively, the angel’s announcement to the shepherds could symbolize the Savior’s preference for the humble and pure-hearted over the wealthy and influential. This aligns with the portrayal of Christ as both the Great Shepherd and the Lamb.



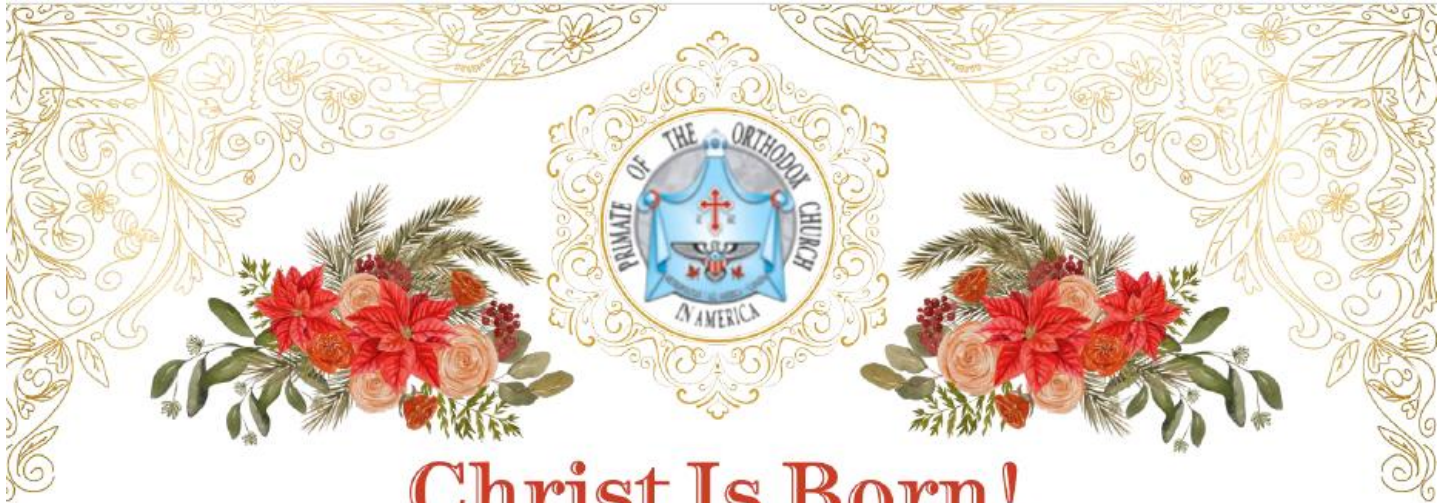
In some Nativity scenes, a dog is included. While it may seem unusual, shepherds have long relied on dogs for guarding their flocks. Aleksey Uvarov, in his book on Ancient Christian symbolism, notes that early Christian grave monuments often featured images of dogs, symbolizing fidelity to Church doctrine and vigilance against heresy.

Other creatures frequently depicted include doves, representing the Holy Spirit, and roosters with hens and chicks, with eggs symbolizing life and resurrection. Occasionally, camels appear, reflecting the journey of the Magi who brought

gifts from the East, as foretold by Isaiah: “The multitude of camels shall cover your land... they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord” (Isaiah 60:5-6).

Thus, in the Nativity scene, every creature finds its place and meaning, embodying the universal joy of Christ’s birth. As the Matins hymn of the Nativity Feast proclaims: “Today every creature rejoices and is glad because Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.” This joy transcends the human realm, encompassing all of creation – people, animals, and heavenly beings. Christ is born, glorify Him!





Christ Is Born!

December 25, 2024

12/001

To the Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

My Beloved Children in the Lord,

Christ is born! Glorify him!

Let the heavenly fires burn silently and let them fearfully gaze upon a humble corner of the universe, upon the black earth, and upon the most precious part of that corner—the grotto that is giving birth to God.

– St. Nikolai Velimirovic, Prayers by the Lake 49

Today is the bright and wonderful, yet secret and humble, culmination of a season spent in hidden anticipation. Unlike Great Lent, when we blow the trumpets to announce a fast (Joel 2:15), the forty days of the Nativity Fast are spent quietly, in the darkness of night—the same night by which the shepherds once kept watch over their flocks (Lk. 2:8). In this darkness, the darkness of the shadow of the Law (Heb. 10:1), we kept company with the holy prophets—Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Daniel, and the Three Holy Children. We heard the first strains of song celebrating Christ's Nativity on November 21, as the *katavasiae* at the canon. On St. Andrew's Day, St. Nicholas Day, here and there, a hymn sang of the one who is to come. Our expectation mounted during the forefeast, and crescendoed with the Vespertine Liturgy and Vigil of Christmas Eve.

Now, upon us who sat for those forty days in great darkness, an even greater Light has shone forth (Is. 9:2). Our Hope has come; our Expectation has arrived.

The one whom we awaited in the dark and silence is now manifest to us in the same dark and silence—the dark and cold of midnight, in the black and moonless night of our sin, in the deep cleft of



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the cave, contained in the trough of the manger. But, despite the darkness pressing all around, he shines, a clear and pure and innocent Light. Despite the pressing silence, his very presence, his very identity, is that of Word, the Word, the Word that was in the beginning (Jn. 1:1).

He is the Light shining on us from the Father; he is the Father's Word to the human race. He is the fulfillment, source, and sustenance of all our hopes.

His light is the light of purity, of unearthly and all-giving love. His word is a word of peace—not a duplicitous, hypocritical, self-serving peace full of false comfort such as the world gives (Jn. 14:27), but true peace, peace with God, the peace of the Cross. And his hope, unthinkable to the earthly-minded, is the hope of unending life that is not like this life: it is a life fully given to the Other, fully given to God, a life unconcerned with passing pleasures and fading achievements, but solely with self-giving communion and self-emptying love.

The birth of this holy Infant, our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, the Light and Word and Peace of God, takes place not only in a cave of stone: it is also takes place in the soul of every one of the elect. To become worthy dwelling-places for this hidden light, we have spent forty days in preparation, and today, Christ is born unto us; unto us a Child is given (Is. 9:6). And, in him, all our hopes are fulfilled. The One born of the Virgin speaks to us in one of St. Nikolai Velimirovic's *Prayers by the Lake*:

I am thy tomorrow, from today until the end of time. Everything good that thou hast been expecting from the days of tomorrow is within me. Today, thy tomorrow is fulfilled in me. And no day, from now until the last day, will bring thee what I am bringing thee. Lo, I am the day that has no beginning and no end.

I am the treasury of every future that exists and I am the way to that treasury. The future in its entirety cannot give thee so much as a kernel of good, unless it borrows from me.

Thus, with his Nativity—in Bethlehem and in the heart—Christ is with us, bringing every good, every blessing, with him.

But, in another sense, we are still waiting: our entire life is a period of Advent, a period of watching for the coming of Christ. If he is born in a hidden way in our soul in this age, nevertheless we await the full and definitive revelation of his unimaginable splendor in the age to come, when the elect will be revealed as shining vessels of his presence forever. Thus, our whole life is a period of joyful waiting, expecting the fullness of the Joy which we already know in part.

“Hopelessness sits idle. But my hope cleans and washes continually; it airs out and censes the quarters where it will receive thee,” says St. Nikolai in another of his prayers. And the greatest expression of this expectation of ours is precisely prayer itself. Again, as St. Nikolai says: “Prayer is necessary for me lest I lose sight of the salvation-bearing star, but the star does not need it to keep from losing me.” Moreover, prayer is not merely an expression of expectation, of longing, of hope: it is also the path to



fulfilling those expectations. The more we pray, the more we open ourselves up to the action of the divine energies, to communion with the Divinity, the more our expectations are fulfilled, even in this life.

Therefore, as we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, let us gather in spirit before his crib and pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, who art everywhere present and fillest all things, come and make thy presence known in us.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, born of the Virgin for our salvation, come and be born anew in our heart.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, born in our heart through thy holy Mysteries, come and dwell with us forever.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Child given unto thy faithful, who art with thy Church always, even unto the end of the age, make us to be worthy dwelling-places for thee in the endless ages to come, when thou, together with thy Father and thine All-Holy Spirit, shalt abide in thine elect as Light and Peace unto the ages of ages. Amen.

With my blessing and prayers for all of you on this most joyous feast,
Sincerely yours in the newborn Christ,

+Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada





Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

Wednesday, 25 December 2024

The Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ

№. 200

ARCHPASTORAL GREETINGS OF

THE MOST REVEREND DANIEL

ARCHBISHOP OF CHICAGO AND THE MIDWEST

ON THE RADIANT FEAST OF OUR LORD'S NATIVITY – 25 DECEMBER 2024

Make ready, O Bethlehem!

Let the manger be prepared!

Let the cave show its welcome!

The Truth comes and the shadow flees.

God is born of a Virgin and is revealed to men.

He is clothed in our flesh and makes it divine.

Therefore Adam is renewed and cries out with Eve:

“Thy favor has appeared on earth, O Lord,

for the salvation of the human race.”

(from the Royal Hours of the Nativity of Christ)

Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers, Venerable Monastics, and Beloved Faithful,

“God is born of a Virgin and is revealed to men”: as we sing these words, we recall the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. Gathering in these holy days to celebrate in the churches and chapels throughout our Diocese, to reflect

upon this great mystery, let us also turn our thoughts to the one who was instrumental in fulfilling God's plan for our salvation: Mary, the "One who gave birth to God the Word" and "truly Theotokos."

We are first introduced to Mary of Nazareth at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke when, just after having spoken her "yes" to the angel in the moment of the Annunciation, she begins her trip "in great haste" from her hometown of Nazareth to the hill country of Judah, to be with her elderly relative Elizabeth in her time of need. The angel Gabriel had revealed to Mary that Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy (Luke 1:26-38). This explains why Mary, who carried within her an even greater mystery, goes to see Elizabeth and stays with her for three months, until Elizabeth gives birth to John, the Forerunner and Baptizer of Christ.

In the meeting between these two women, it is the young one, Mary, who offers the first greeting. The Gospel tells us: "she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth" (Luke 1:40). After this greeting, Elizabeth feels enveloped in great wonder as she is filled with the Holy Spirit. This wonder and joy is echoed in her response to Mary: "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

In celebrating the Nativity, we ourselves are called to recognize the moments of the miraculous which are part of our daily lives. And what are these miraculous moments in everyday life? The first place is in *the other*, in those around us, in whom we recognize a brother or sister, because since the birth of Jesus occurred, every human face is marked with the image of the Son of God. Above all, we encounter this miraculous presence of Christ in the face of the poor, because God Himself entered the world poor, and it was to the poor, in the first place, that He revealed Himself.

Another place in which we recognize the miraculous is within history, the chronicle of human life and experience. However, we run the risk of reading history backwards and outside of its Christian context. For example, we generally think that history is defined by the rise and fall of governments, wars and conflicts, regulated by business and finances, and dominated by the powers of this world. But it is God, the God of Creation who entered human life, who defines and rules over human history. As Mary sings in the *Magnificat*, it is the Lord who puts down the mighty from their thrones and exalts those of low degree, who fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty (Luke 1:52-53).

Yet another miraculous encounter is within the Church. To perceive the Church as miraculous means not limiting oneself to consider it only as a religious institution, but to embrace the Church as a mother who, despite any blemishes and wrinkles, allows the features of the beloved Bride of Christ the Lord to shine through—a Church that is able to recognize the signs of faithful love that God continuously sends her. This is the Church that always has her doors open wide, and her arms open to welcome everyone. Moreover, the Church, our Mother, goes out from her own doors to seek with a loving smile and warm embrace all those who are far off in order to bring them to the mercy of God. The Church herself provides this miraculous moment which we are invited to experience in these holydays of light and love.

God has given us all of Himself by giving His Only Son, who is all His joy. It is only with the heart of Mary, the humble and poor daughter of Zion, who became the Mother of the Son of the Most High, that it is possible to rejoice and be glad for the great gift of God and for His unpredictable surprise. Through the birth of Jesus, may she help us to perceive the miraculous which surrounds us every day—in our brothers and sisters, in the lived experience of history, and within the Church. In the birth of Jesus may we recognize the Gift of Gifts, the undeserved Gift who brings us His salvation.

In the spiritual atmosphere of joy and peace of the Nativity of Christ, I greet all of you with the joy of the Feast. Once again, I state my prayerful wish for peace: peace in families and homes, peace in parishes, peace in the ministry of our clergy and faithful, and peace for those who are suffering the horrors of war throughout the world, especially our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and in the Middle East.

As you gather with family, with your parish communities, and with all your loved ones, I send you my sincere fatherly greetings and archpastoral blessings. May the Lord grant you a bright and blessed celebration of the Birth of Christ and a New Year filled with an abundance of heavenly blessings.

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

With love in the Incarnate Son of God,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D'.

DANIEL

Archbishop of Chicago and the Midwest