Christ the Saviour Cathedral

"CATHEDRAL JOTTINGS"



Corner of Garfield Street and Butler Avenue
Johnstown, Pa. 15906
Rectory Office – 249 Butler Avenue; Johnstown, Pa. 15906
Cathedral Church of His Eminence, Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa
of the
American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese
of the
Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople

Cathedral Clergy

Pastor – Very Reverend Protopresbyter Robert A. Buczak, Cathedral Dean
Very Reverend Protopresbyter Frank P. Miloro, Chancellor
Very Rev. John S. Brancho

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E-mail Address (for Father Robert Buczak)……frbuczak@outlook.com
Diocesan Website: http://www.acrod.org ***Facebook***: https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese
Cathedral: http://www.acrod.org/organizations/cathedral ***Twitter***: https://twitter.com/acrodnews
Camp Nazareth: http://www.campnazareth.org ***You Tube***: https://youtube.com/acroddiocese

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Vol. 79 No. 1798 **Sunday, January 2, 2022**



Sunday before the Feast of the Nativity; of the Genealogy

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Sunday, January 2nd, 2022

The Twenty-eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday before the Feast of the Nativity; of the Genealogy

The Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer, Bishop of Antioch

Divine Liturgy – 9:00 am **Sunday School - 10:20 am**

Panachida for +***Mary Pavlik*** (17th Anniversary) offered by Roger Pavlik;
+***Anastasia, John and Andrew Podolak*** offered by family;
+***Ronald Koval*** (2nd anniversary) offered by Susan Koval and family;
+***John Smider*** offered by Anna Smider; +***John Petrick***; +***Alex Stolicza*** (Perpetual);
and +***Matilda Laslo*** offered by Mary Ann Muchesko and family

Resurrection Tone 3 - Tropar & Kondak pages 87 & 129

Epistle: Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40 Gospel: Matthew 1:1-25

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Thursday, January 6th, 2022

The Great Compline of the Nativity of Our Lord - 8 pm

Christmas Carols – 8:45 pm

The Hierarchical Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord – 9:00 pm

Epistle: Galatians 4: 4-7 Tropar & Kondak: pages 132 – 135 Gospel: Matthew 2: 1-12

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Friday, January 7th, 2022

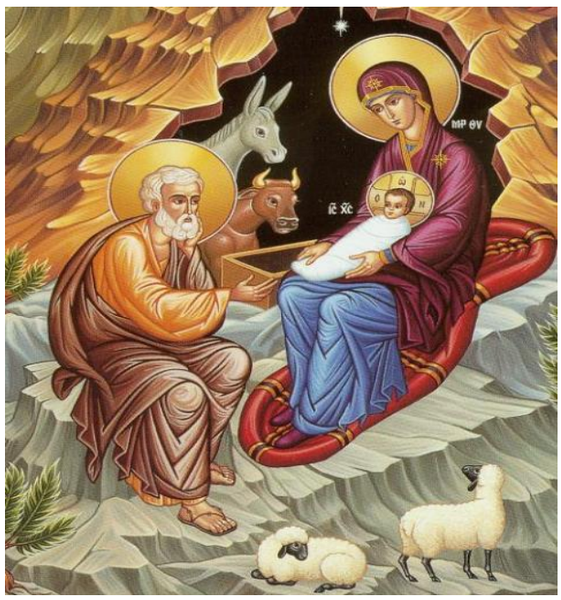
The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord

9:00 am – Divine Liturgy

Tropar & Kondak: pages 132 – 135

Epistle: Galatians 4: 4-7

Gospel: Matthew 2: 1-12



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Saturday, January 8th, 2022

The Synaxis of the Theotokos (Birthgiver of God)

Divine Liturgy 9:00 am

Panachida for + ***the Founders and Benefactors of the Cathedral Parish*** (Perpetual)

Tropar and Kondak pages 132-136

Epistle: Hebrews 2:11-18

Gospels: Matthew 2:13-23

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Sunday, January 9, 2022

Sunday after the Nativity of our Lord
Commemoration of the Holy and Just Joseph, King David and James, the Brother of Our Lord
And
The Feast of The Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen

Divine Liturgy/ Choir Sunday – 9:00 am Sunday School – 10:20 am

Panachida for + ***Stephen Evanisko and the Departed Servicemen of the Cathedral Parish*** offered by the Evanisko Family; +***Mary Radasky Kesselak*** offered by Andrea and Jeff Robel; +***Helen Krompak + Kay Miloro*** offered by the family***; Anna Toth*** offered by the family; ***+Margaret Mley, Emily Terchanik and +Helen Dzura*** (Birthday) offered by Pani Kathy Buczak; ***+Departed Kol'adniki of the Cathedral Parish: Andrew Pavlik, Andrew Medvechy Jr., Constantine Mishurda, John Mishurda, John Kurtz, Nicholas Polak, Joseph Evanisko, Andrew Sakmar, Michael Gritzer, John Duray, Stephen Patrick, John P. Duray, Stephen Matolyak, and John Yurosko*** offered by John and Helen Yurosko; and ***Stephen Brudnak*** offered by Louise Brudnak

Resurrection Tone 4 - Tropar & Kondak: pages 90, 132-137, 138

Epistle: Acts 6: 8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60 Gospel: Matthew 21:33-42

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Thur. 1/13 … ***Vespers for the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord……..6:00 pm***

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Friday, January 14, 2022

Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord and
The Commemoration of St. Basil the Great

Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great - 9:00 am

Epistle: Colossians 2:8-12 Tropar & Kondak: pages 140-141 Gospel: Luke 2:20-21, 40-52

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Sat. 1/15 … Great Vespers.....……..6:00 pm

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Sunday, January 16th, 2022

The Thirtieth Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday before Theophany

The Prophet Malachi

Divine Liturgy – 9:00 am Sunday School - 10:20 am

Panachida for ***+Patricia Pasternak*** offered by Anna Marie Mlinarchik; ***+Joseph Kuzmyak Sr***. offered by Pani Kathy Buczak; +***Joseph, Michael, and Anna Chanda*** offered by Mary Chanda; +***Pani Emily Molchany***; ***+Matthew Lazarak*** offered by Mary Lazarak; ***+Helen Balog***; and ***+Prof. Andrew Panchisin***

Resurrection Tone 5

Epistle: 2 Timothy 4:5-8 Tropar & Kondak: pages 93 & 142 Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

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Services for the week of January 16th

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Tuesday, January 18th, 2022 ---- 6:00 PM

THEOPHANY EVE DINNER

In the Cathedral Auditorium – ALL ARE WELCOME!

We are asking our faithful to bring a covered fasting dish!

Day of Strict Fasting

Vigil Service of Theophany
with the Blessing of Water - 7:00pm

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Wednesday, January 19th, 2022

The Feast of the Theophany of our Lord

Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great – 9:00 am

Tropar & Kondak: pages 145-148

Epistle: Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

Gospel: Matthew 3: 13-17

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Thursday, January 20th, 2022

Synaxis of St. John the Baptist

Divine Liturgy – 9:00 am

Tropar & Kondak: pages 145, 148-150

Epistle: Acts 19: 1-8 Gospel: John 1: 29-34

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Fri. 1/21 ……+David Vreeland offered by Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Vreeland; +Very Rev. John Stefanik offered by the Family; +Rose and John Patrick Sr.; +Betty Ann Lanko Berezonsky offered by John Lanko Jr.; +John Mirilovich offered by Mirilovich family: Rich, Harriet, Richard, Renee, Andrew, Kristen, Michael, Nancy & Marie; and +John & Elizabeth Chrasch offered by John Chrasch (Perpetual).....8:00 am

Sat. 1/22 … Great Vespers…….....……..……6:00 pm

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Sunday, January 23rd, 2022

Sunday after Theophany

Saint Gregory of Nyssa

Divine Liturgy – 9:00 am **Sunday School – 10:20 am**

Panachida for ***+Protopresbyter Nomikos Vaporis*** offered by Subdeacon Michael Vaporis; ***+Michael, Mary, Michael, Anna, John, Susanna, Anna & Martha Prokop***

+Bethany (Haschak) Schilling offered by her family; +***Dolores Muchesko*** offered by Mary Ann Muchesko; ***+Michael and Anna Zahoran*** offered by Joanne Berkey; ***+Peter Knaze*** offered by grandson Steve; and ***+Anna Marie Dudak***

Resurrection Tone 6 - Tropar & Kondak: pages 145, 96 and 150

Epistle: Ephesians: 4:7-14 Gospel: Matthew 4:12-17

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CHRISTMAS BRUNCH – January 7, 2022

All are invited to join us for a Christmas Brunch Christmas morning, January 7th, 2022, after the Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral Auditorium. Please use the sign-up sheet found in the Cathedral Auditorium.

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THANK YOU – We would like to thank everyone who sent warm wishes, Christmas cards, or special gifts during this festive time of the year. May the Lord bless you for your thoughtfulness and kindness. -*Father Robert and Pani Kathy Buczak*

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SAINT NICHOLAS DAY SEMINARY COLLECTION

Thank you to all who offered funds for our Saint Nicholas Day Seminary Fundraiser. Together we collected $2,680.00 in much needed funds for the education of our future priests. God Bless!

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BIRTHDAY PRAYERS – ***Joe Satkovich (1/2), Ivan Palaski (1/4), Kurtis Dutko (1/4) Mary Ann Savering (1/4), Zachary Tvarozna (1/10), Melanie Dudak (1/10), Anna Furman (1/11), Luke Tvarozna (1/13), Sydnee Lauren Satkovich (1/13), Jerees Noah Zreigat (1/15), Steve Muchesko (1/17), Joshua Horner (1/17), Jodi Billetdeaux (1/17), Richard Kesselak (1/17), Michael Haschak (1/18), Maria Richards (1/18), Amanda Dutko (1/19)***; ***Katie Abele (1/22), George Evanisko (1/23), Nicholas Benc (1/24), Stephanie Kennedy (1/25), Father Frank Miloro (1/26), Andrea Robel (1/26).*** You were remembered in Proskomedia!

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CATHEDRAL CHARITY BOX - REMINDER

Did you know that the Cathedral has a charity box for the less fortunate of the parish? On the back of the last pew on the "Virgin's side" of the church is a small wooden box in which you may put your offering to help those in need. Thank you for your stewardship of our parish!

A SPECIAL THANK YOU – to ***Barry, Julia, and Amanda Gilchrist*** for their generous gift of $400.00 to the Cathedral Special Fund for the needy in memory of their dearly departed mothers and grandmothers Helen Yuhas and Helen Gilchrist and fathers and grandfathers John Yuhas and Robert Gilchrist.

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ROSES ON THE ALTAR - are offered in memory of Sister Nymphodora (Eleanor Dussling) and her beloved mother, Anna Burik-Schober by an anonymous donor.

THE ETERNAL LAMP – is offered the week of January 2nd in memory of ***Anastasia, John and Andrew Podolak by the Podolak Family.***

THE ALTAR CANDLES – are offered the week of January 2nd in memory of ***Mary Pavlik by Roger Pavlik.***

THE ETERNAL LAMP – is offered the week of January 9th in memory of ***Very Reverend John A. Baranik Jr. by Subdeacon Michael Oleksa.***

ALTAR FLOWERS – The Altar is beautified with flowers on January 23rd in honor of the birthdays of ***George Evanisko (1/23), Evalyn Evanisko (1/31), Nicholas Benc (1/24) and Father Frank Miloro (1/26) offered by the Benc family.***

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ED CENTER NEWS

Thank you to all the volunteers who helped with the Saint Nicholas Breakfast and Halupki Sale. The Halupki sale raised $1,165.92! Thank you to Apryle Horbal for her kind and generous donation towards the Saint Nicholas Breakfast! A special "Thank you" to Emilie Sprinz for the beautiful decorations in the Banquet Hall and for the Christmas tree donated by Sharon Kuzmyak. We wish everyone a Blessed Christmas Season. - The Educational Center Officers

Dear parishioners of Christ the Saviour Cathedral, the Ed Center is continuing the sale of subs from Tony's Subs. Rather than a traditional sub sale where you order and pick-up ready-made subs, this is a sale where you buy a ticket and at your convenience take the tickets to Tony's and they will make the sub in front of you fresh. The tickets are good for a year after printed. Regular ham subs are $12 and Premium subs which are Turkey, Roast Beef etc. are $14. To order please contact Justin Dutko after Divine Liturgy or at 814-525-4425. Additionally, the Center will continue its sale of Gertrude Hawk candy bars downstairs after Liturgy if you would like some for Christmas; please use the above info to order. Thank you for your support.

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SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

The Gertrude Hawke Christmas Candy fundraiser went well. Kurtis Dutko was the top seller with great help from his mother. The Sunday School realized an increase of over $500.00 from the sale. Thanks to all who bought or sold the candy. A special "Thank you" to Nancy Kobal for her help in organizing the orders.

It is time for our annual soup collection. Cans of soup, soup products, noodles, crackers and packages of soup may be placed on the stage in the Cathedral Auditorium through February 6th or given to any teacher or student. Our "Souper Bowl" project goal is 150 cans of soup. Items are donated to the West End Food Pantry.

The children and teachers of the Sunday School wish all parishioners a blessed celebration of Our Saviour's birth. Our prayers go out to all for health and safety for everyone in 2022.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

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OFFICIAL NOTICE

The Christ the Saviour Educational Center of the People of American Carpatho-Russian Diocese will hold a special annual meeting ***Sunday, January 30th, 2022*** in the Cathedral Auditorium at 11:00 am. All Cathedral parishioners are encouraged to attend. This is the first official announcement of this meeting.

Proposals for the Annual meeting are being accepted in the Cathedral office in written form until ***Sunday January 23, 2022.***

The Annual Meeting of the ***Christ the Saviour Cathedral Parish*** will be held ***Sunday, February 6th, 2022*** immediately following the Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral Auditorium. All parishioners are encouraged to attend. This is the first official announcement of the meeting.

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THANKS FOR THE CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Father Robert and Pani Kathy Buczak– In memory of Metropolitan Nicholas and in honor of Metropolitan Gregory

Father Robert and Pani Kathy Buczak – In memory of Joseph and Helen Rogel and Bernie Buczak

Ann Melanie Yurcisin– In memory of the Very Reverend Protopresbyter John and Pani Anna Yurcisin

Roger Pavlik - In memory of Parents and Grandparents (2)

Louise Brudnak – In memory of Stephen and Anna Brudnak, Dolores Brudnak, Robert and Evalyn Brudnak & Joseph Kuhar

Lynne Hood - In memory of my parents Eli and Betty Gvozdich

Very Reverend Protopresbyter Frank and Pani Connie Miloro

Stephanie Kobal and Family

George and Evelyn Evanisko

Patty and Dave Gable

Michael Teplica

Nicholas and Anita Teplica

Donna Zizan – In memory of husband John Zizan

Subdeacon Michael Oleksa – In memory of grandparents Samuel and Brunislava Gzvodich, and great-grandparents Michael and Suzanna Oleksa

Rich and Harriet Mirilovich – In memory of parents John and Mary Mirilovich

Rich and Harriet Mirilovich – In memory of sister Nancy Horvath

Andrew and Luann Dzura – In memory of the departed members of the Dzura family

Andrew and Luann Dzura – In memory of the departed members of the Semivan family

Dee, Zachary and Luke Tvarozna – In memory of Dan Tvarozna

The Tvarozna Family – In memory of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Dutko

The Tvarozna Family – In memory of Mr. and Mrs. John Sprintz

The Tvarozna Family – In memory of Mr. and Mrs. Emil Sprintz

The Gregory Family (2)

Diana Gvozdich Smith - In memory of my parents Mila and Stanko Gvozdich

Diana Gvozdich Smith - In memory of the Giesey family

Halee Karashin – In memory of Frank and Elizabeth Zahoran, Alice Joann Berkey and Julia Holko

Andrea and Phil Penatzer

Mr. and Mrs. Michael Haschak – In memory of Bethany (Haschak) Schilling

Mr. and Mrs. Michael Haschak – In memory of Mr. and Mrs. John Haschak

Thomas Fultz – In memory of the departed members of the Fultz family

Thomas Fultz – In memory of the departed members of the Tomchik family

Julie Messner – In memory of her husband Leonard F. and parents Michael and Anastasia Pirich

Lynn Brudnak-Kelly, Michael and Conner Kelly – In memory of Robert and Evalyn Brudnak, and the Departed members of the Brudnak, Kovalik and Kelly families



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Christmas Customs

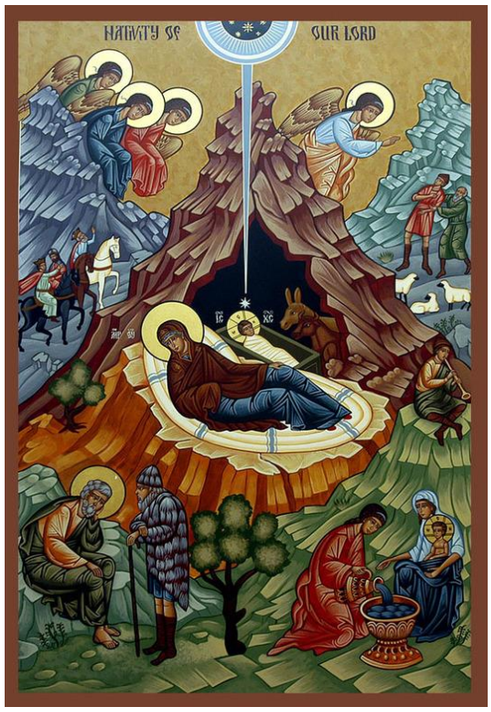


As the first star of the evening appears, the festivities begin. The father comes into the room, extends Christmas greetings and spreads hay over the floor. Next, he places a sheaf of wheat and other farm products (a sample of each) on the table. With a prayer, he ties the four legs of the table with a chain, asking God's blessing and protection from all corners of the world. He also prays that the family be always united like the links of the chain and that those separated from the family be united to them in spirit. This being done the candles are lighted and a star with a candle is placed in a window as a sign of welcome to any stranger who is hungry or needs shelter. **Blessing** - After thus the mother sprinkles everyone present with holy water. Then the father takes the holy water to the barn to bless the animals and to make sure that on this holy night they are well fed. Now a traditional toast is offered. Then the mother takes a clove of garlic, dips it in some honey, and makes the sign of the cross upon the forehead of those present. The honey symbolizes the sweetness of life, the garlic symbolizes the bitterness. Thus, each is reminded to bear sweetness and bitterness of life during the coming year. **Menu** - The supper consists of mushroom soup (with sauerkraut juice); bobalky (small biscuit like breads mixed with nuts or poppy seeds); beans; stewed fruits and/or vegetable dishes; fish; kolachy (Christmas cakes) and tea. The menu varies according to the custom of the village. However, whatever the menu, NO MEAT is served. In some places, the abstinence includes dairy products. (There are traditionally twelve courses served, reminiscent of the Twelve Apostles, with one empty place setting at the table for any unseen, or unexpected guest -- perhaps even Christ himself disguised as such). Prayers are offered during supper for a prosperous growth of products during the coming year. Carols are sung, presents exchanged. An exciting part of the evening for the children would be the hunt for nuts and fruit hidden in the straw on the floor by the father of the house. The games are interrupted by the carolers who make the rounds of the village.

Liturgical Observance - By evening all begin to prepare for church. The Christmas Eve services consist of the Great Compline - an evening service. The church resounds with the chanting of verses taken from the Book of Isaiah: God is with us; all you nations understand and do penance for God is with us! After the church services the men of the village call upon each other offering Christmas greetings to neighbors or favorite friends. Children are often chosen to extend these greetings. The most eloquent receives a special reward from parents, grandparents or godparents. These well-wishers are eagerly awaited at every home. If by chance a high-ranking official of the village or county drops in as a well-wisher it is considered not only an honor but a good omen. By the time the well-wishing is complete, the church bells call the people to Christmas Divine Liturgy. Usually those who were shepherds were given a position of honor during this Liturgy. They came with their bagpipes and after Liturgy played Christmas Carols. Afterwards everyone journeys home and quiet reigns in the village until the afternoon when the church bells again call the people for Christmas Day Vespers. More carol singing follows and the festivities of Christmas extend until the feast of Theophany (January 6/19). Carol Singers - A popular practice is the carol singing carried on by the Yaslichkary who carry a Nativity Shrine in the shape of a small church. Angels lead the singers while the old wise shepherd (Kuba or Guba) tags along. They visit every home - every family expects them. They are dressed in white garments with high cylinder-shaped hats, with ribbons of flashy colors across their breast. The Kuba is the comedian of the group, chasing children with his wooden hatchet and threatening to kidnap the bad ones in the bag he carries into which he also collects the gifts the Yaslichkary receive. The caroling continues during the three-day observance of Christmas.



AN EXPLANATION OF THE NATIVITY ICON



The focus of the icon, of course, is on the birth of our Lord from His most pure virgin mother Mary; She is shown larger than any of the other figures, reclining on a mat, and looking not at her new-born Son, but rather with love and compassion towards us, inviting all to come and worship her new-born son. Our Lord is shown in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, "for there was no room for them in the inn." *(cf. Luke 2)* The back-drop for the manger is a dark cave, which immediately reminds us of the cave in which our Lord was buried 33 years later, wrapped in a shroud. In the cave are an ox and donkey, details not mentioned by the Gospels, but which are an invariable feature of every icon of the Nativity; the scene is included to show the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "the ox knows his Owner, and the donkey his Master's crib, but Israel does not know Me, and the people has not regarded Me" *(Isaiah 1:3)*.

The scene at the top center of the icon depicts the three divine rays of the triune God. In so showing this, the icon depicts that the Trinity - Father, the pre-eternal Son and Holy Spirit are at the heart of the event. The Incarnation is not only about the birth of the Son, but also involves the other two members of the Trinity because all three are of one and the same essence (the Greek word for this is "Homoousios"). In another way the rays are referred to also as the divine star of Bethlehem that shone and provided the direction for all the players of the Incarnation event. The divine light thus provides a canopy for the infant birth of the Saviour and lightens the universe for the proper understanding of the truth – that God became man so that man can become potentially God-like.

At the top of the icon, on both sides of the mountain, are found two groupings of angels who often are looking downwards, sometimes to the side or upwards. They serve a two-fold role. First, they are the messengers of the spiritual world bringing glad tidings to mankind and secondly, they are the true adorers of Christ's birth, the "marvel of marvels". The angelic hosts as such unite heaven and earth and together glorify the "new born King". The angel of the Lord, found on the top extreme right-hand side of the icon, is depicted looking down upon an amazed shepherd, announcing to him the good news of great joy. The fact that Jewish shepherds and heathen magi were among the first to worship our Lord shows us the universality of this great event, meant for the salvation of all mankind.

On the left-hand side of the icon are found three figures of the Magi or wise men. They are depicted following the star, shining above the cave, and brining their royal gifts to a Babe in a poor cave. The wise men represent the humanity that has not been exposed to the Old Testament – often referred to as the Gentiles. Yet they have a mission to find the "King of Kings" and have travelled far for this event. Their search reaches an end, "following the star of Bethlehem", and they accept of the Son of Righteousness without hesitation. The three wise men are usually depicted in three different age brackets. The one of the extreme left is very young, the middle one is middle-aged and the one on the right is an elderly person. Thus, all ages of humanity are called to accept Christ. The wise men were the first fruits of the Gentile world to venerate and worship Christ. In so doing they show that the ultimate sense of human knowledge is in the contemplation and worship of a Living God, "born unto us as a young Child".

A single shepherd or sometimes several are found on the right-hand middle side of the icon. These are the first of the Israelite people – the Jewish people, to accept and worship the Lord. These shepherds are simple, unsophisticated and ordinary citizens who hear the divine message in the course of their labors and fully accept the Virgin birth. In fact, the shepherds are akin to the simple fishermen that Christ will call in the Gospels "to follow Him".

(Continued next page)

Joseph is depicted as an elderly man, sitting in a contemplative or meditating position, turned away from the main event of the icon. The posture of St Joseph is one of doubt and inner trouble, for he wondered if it might be possible that the conception and birth were not by some secret human union. In our Orthodox tradition, Joseph is considered the guardian of Christ and His Mother, thus he is pictured as an aged man compared to the youthfulness of the Mother of God. In his pensive stature, Joseph seems confronted or plagued by doubts about the puzzling mystery of God's incarnation from a Virgin. The pose of Joseph indicates that the true fatherhood of Christ is through the Virgin and the paternity of the Holy Spirit. This thus corresponds to the Nicene Creed's verse: "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man". Often Orthodox icons show Joseph confronted by an elderly shepherd or Satan-like figure, always depicted in dark colors. This figure is the tempter, tempting Joseph into not accepting the miraculous birth of the Saviour from the Virgin. This same objection has been raised throughout the history of the Church during the last two thousand years, in different forms and ways, by those who do not accept this miracle. Thus Joseph is not the "father" of Christ while his struggle with the meaning of the virgin birth is symbolic of the struggle of all of mankind in accepting the "miracle of miracles".

On the lower right-hand side is depicted an important bathing scene. The origin of this scene is not Scriptural or apocryphal. The first mention of the bathing of Christ was made in the travelogue of a late seventh century pilgrim to Palestine, a certain bishop Arnulf. He relates that close to the Nativity cave in Bethlehem, he was shown a stone water basin which was believed to be the one in which the Divine Child had been washed after birth. Early art depictions of the bathing scene are found from as early as the fifth century. This bathing scene illustrates that Christ was truly a human being and had the fullness of human nature while at the same time he also had a divine nature and was the second person of the Trinity. Every young child has to be bathed, washed and cleaned, upon entrance into this world and Jesus was no different. This scene also serves as an argument against those heretics that did not want to acknowledge Christ's full humanity and placed only emphasis on his divinity (At the Fourth Ecumenical Council this heresy, known as Monophysitism, was defeated). Thus, the two bottom scenes complement each other, showing both the theological teaching of Christ's full divinity (the pondering of Joseph of the miracle birth-incarnation of God, the second person of the Trinity – Jesus Christ) and His full humanity (the important bathing scene). Christ as such is truly GODMAN, a term coined at the Fourth Ecumenical Council in 451.

Finally, as we look at the icon as one united composition, we can only be filled with joy, not only because of the bright colors and the festive activity depicted thereon, but for the joyous news of our salvation so clearly proclaimed by it. In it, all creation is rejoicing at the birth of our Lord: the heavens (a star and angels); the earth (the mountains, plants and animals}; and especially mankind, represented most perfectly in the figure of the new Eve, the most-pure Mother of God. The icon of the Nativity harmonizes six separate scenes of the festal narrative. Their depiction produces a balanced and well-organized theology of the Nativity feast. The icon is truly a pictorial illustration of the KONTAKION (liturgical hymn) of the feast written by St. Romanos the Melodist which proclaims:

"Today the Virgin gives birth to Him Who is above all being and the earth offers a cave to Him whom no man can approach. Angels with shepherds give glory and Magi journey with a star. For unto us is born a young Child, the pre-eternal God."



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On this day we also commemorate the shepherds who beheld the Lord

Shepherds, not far from the cave, are spoken of by the Evangelist Luke: “And shepherds were in the same country, living out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the Glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were afraid with a great fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Cease being afraid; for behold, I announce to you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord, was born to you today in the city of David. And this shall be a sign to you: You shall find the new-born Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in the manger.’ And suddenly there came to be with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men. (Luke 2:8-14).”

The shepherds watched the flocks destined for sacrificial services, in the very place consecrated by tradition as where the Messiah would first be revealed.

Not only the earthborn were amazed, but even the heavenly hosts were filled with wonder at the divine condescension. “Before Thy nativity, O Lord, beholding with trembling Thy mystery, the noetic hosts were struck with wonder: for Thou Who has adorned the heavens with stars was well pleased to be born as a babe, and Thou Who holds all the ends of the earth in the hollow of Thy hand are laid in a manger of dumb beasts”.

Saint Kosmas the Poet writes: “The shepherds abiding in the fields, received a vision of light that filled them with terror. For the glory of the Lord shone around them, and an angel cried aloud: “Sing praises, for Christ is born.” Then at the announcement of the one angel, he was joined by myriads of others. “At the word of the angel, the hosts of heaven suddenly cried aloud: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men; Christ has shone forth.’

Another hymn makes mention that the angels exhorted the shepherds to put aside worldly occupations: “As shepherds were piping songs, a host of angels stopped them and called out, saying: ‘Cease now, you who abide in the field at the head of your flocks; cry out and sing that Christ the Lord is born, Whose pleasure it is, as God, to save mankind.’

Scripture continues and says; “And it came to pass, as the angels went away from them into the heaven, also the men, the shepherds, said to one another, ‘Let us now pass through as far as Bethlehem and see this thing which is spoken of as having come to pass, which the Lord made known to us. (Luke 2:15).”



Thus, we see in the nativity icons, angels performing a twofold service; they glorify God and bring good tidings to men. In this festal icon, we also often see angels looking upwards in a posture of singing glory to God or leaning downward toward men, to whom they announce good tidings.

(Continues on the next page)



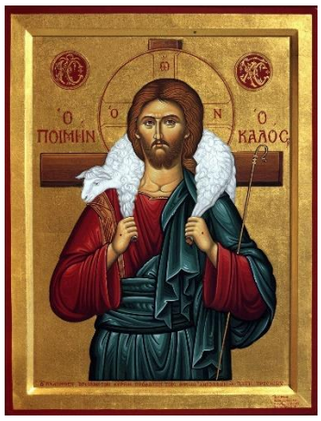
"And having hastened they came and found out both Mary and Joseph, and the new-born Babe lying in the manger (Luke 2:16)."

Saint John of Damascus attempts to described the thoughts of the shepherds. "The choir of shepherds abiding in the fields was overwhelmed by the strange sight they were counted worthy to behold: For they looked upon the all-blessed Offspring of an all-pure bride; and they say also the ranks of bodiless angels, who sang in praise of Christ the King, incarnate without seed."

Saint Ephraim put the following words into the shepherds' mouths: "The shepherds came near and worshipped Him with their staves. They saluted Hm with peace, prophesying the while, 'Peace, O Prince of the shepherds!' The rod of Moses (Ex 4:2) praise Thy rod, O Shepherd of all."

Saint Kosmas adds that the shepherds, "coming to Bethlehem, worshiped with her who had given Him birth." Saint Ephrain poetically chants: "Thee then the shepherds praise, because Thou has reconciled the wolves and the lams within the fold."

The very animals present therein, the ox and the ass, having Him in their midst, tirelessly attended Him. Then that what was fulfilled which was spoken by the Prophet Isaiah, "The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know Me, and the people has not regarded Me (Is 1:3)."



Saint Ephraim then mentioned the gifts brough by the shepherds, "The shepherds came laden with the best gifts of their flock: sweet milk, clean flesh, befitting praise! They brought and presented a suckling lamb to the paschal Lamb, a firstborn to the Firstborn, a sacrifice to the Sacrifice, a lamb of time to the Lamb of truth. Fair sight to see the lamb offered to the Lamb!" And, "The lamb bleated as it was offered to the Firstborn. It praised the Lamb, that had come to set free the flocks and the oxen from sacrifice (Ps 49:9); yea that paschal Lamb, Who handed down and brought in the Passover of the Son."

Now when the shepherds beheld the Christ, "they made known publicly concerning the saying which was spoken to them about this little Child. And all those who heard wondered about those things which were spoken to them by the shepherds…. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God over all the things which they heard and saw, even as it was spoken to them (Luke2:17-20)."

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