



Newsletter

Of the Eastern Orthodox Church of the Annunciation

Christmas: the Birth of God in the Flesh

As we approach Christmas the question is “Who is Jesus Christ and why does His birth matter to us?” Is He simply an innocent baby born in a stable who by word and example teaches us how we should live—like one of the prophets? Or is He truly God who comes Himself to save His creation whom He loves?

For Orthodox Christians, Jesus Christ is our Lord, God and Savior. God did not send a messenger to His people, but humbled and emptied Himself to lie in that foul manger, to be hunted down by Herod, to flee as a persecuted refugee to Egypt with His Mother and Joseph, to suffer insults from His kinfolk and townspeople, to be rejected and ultimately crucified—all to save an ungrateful and ignorant mankind, His very own creation.

The intimacy once enjoyed but lost by Adam now becomes possible for man through Jesus Christ. He became poor so that we might become rich [2 Cor 8:9]. He became as we are so we might become as He is [Eph 4:22-24; 2 Peter 1:3-4]. In the words of St. Athanasius the Great, “God became man so man might become god.”

Ironically, the Bible records Jesus was first worshiped and acknowledged as God—not by His own people—but by Gentiles, the Magi, who brought adoration and gifts.

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Axios!

Recently we had the blessing of an Archpastoral visit from His Eminence Bishop Benjamin. Normally His Eminence comes every other year for our Matronal Feast of Annunciation. Being an evening Vespereal Liturgy it does not allow for a full Hierarchal Liturgy. Nor does it allow for a context for ordinations for consecrations.

It was a wonderful opportunity for our parish to experience the visit of our Archbishop in a full liturgical context.

We are able to see in the event of the Liturgy the ancient maxim, “Where the Bishop is, there is the Church”.

As he stands in the Nave with the faithful we see the context of His Eminence's Archpastoral care and authority.

This was also the opportunity for several consecrations--those of three new readers and a subdeacon.

The new readers are Christopher Banke, Michael Lowery and Gerald Daily. Christopher, Gerald and Michael have each been in preparation for consecration as readers over the past several years. As a parish committed to a strong and serious liturgical life, we need to always be raising up new readers to fulfill this mission. We welcome these talented men to the rank and blessing of Readers!

Craig Sayre has faithfully served in the altar over the past many years. It became very clear that he should be elevated to the formal position of a Subdeacon.

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Their gifts reveal Who Jesus is: gold identifies Him as King and Ruler; frankincense, used in worship, is fitting for God; myrrh, used in Jewish burial customs, prophesied He is born to die.

Next, He who was born as the Good Shepherd of His people Israel, is worshiped—not by the High Priest or any other religious leader or functionary of the Temple—but by those on the very bottom of the social scale: poor, illiterate shepherds. Christ's miracles testify not only to the power, but to the very Presence of God over His creation. Who but God Himself is able to drive out demons, still the forces of nature, multiply the loaves, heal the sick, make blind men see, restore the crippled, raise the dead and destroy the power of Satan as we see Jesus Christ do in the Gospel accounts? Only God has authority to forgive sins and make us new men!

The prophets begin their oracles by stating in Whose name they speak, "Thus says the Lord ..." Jesus, however, astounds the masses because He speaks on His own authority, "Verily, verily I say unto you ..."

After our Lord walks on water, He climbs into the boat with His disciples and they worship Him [Matt 14:33]. The man born blind, who receives his sight in the temple after Jesus anoints his eyes with clay, falls down and worships Him [John 9:38]. The Resurrected Jesus is worshiped by the Myrrh-bearing Women, who come to the tomb to anoint His body [Matt 28:9]. He is worshiped by the disciples just prior to His ascent back to heaven [Matt 28:17]. The

Elders in the Book of Revelation fall down and worship the Lamb (i.e., Jesus Christ) [5:14]. In the Acts, when Peter is worshiped by Cornelius [10:25] and when Paul and Barnabas are mistaken for gods [14:13], the Apostles reproach the people. Significantly, when Jesus is worshiped, however, He does not rebuke.

The joy Christians feel at Christmas is precisely because of Whom the Child, born in Bethlehem so many centuries ago, is. More than just a good man or a heavenly messenger, superior to all the prophets, He is "Immanuel", which means "God with us!" [Matt 1:23] Our lives are not futile or meaningless. God loves us and wants to be with us; God comes to us and now beckons us to come to Him. With Jesus Christ, hope is more resilient than despair, good more powerful than evil, love mightier than hate, life stronger than death.

Prepare well for this approaching Great Feast Day. Fast. Pray. Give Alms. Read the Bible. Read a good book (the lives or writings of saints), something dealing with the history or teachings of the Church, Dostoyevsky or some other worthwhile author. Prepare for and make a good Confession. Prepare yourself and come to Communion throughout Advent and especially on the Feast Day itself. Have a blessed Christmas!

In Christ,

- Fr. John Mancantelli



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With this consecration Craig is able to perform duties in the altar especially assigned to a subdeacon. This will allow our services to add a quiet but needed dimension set aside for a subdeacon. We welcome each of these new Readers, and our new Subdeacon to the rich liturgical life of our parish.

It is a blessing for all of us to have a more robust liturgical life, and we thank each of them for their willingness to make the sacrifices necessary to be consecrated to serve the Church in these ministries.

Axios! Axios! Axios!

- Fr. Matthew Tate

Annunciation's Annual Harvest Fair a Success!

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

We could not have asked for a better day for our September Harvest Fair! God provided the most perfect weather, and we used our beautiful church grounds to the fullest. Thank you to Seraphima and Anna who delighted us with a lovely Russian Teahouse setting to sip tea and enjoy delicacies. The open spaces of our church grounds were used for relay races, apple dunking, donuts on a string, and just good ole' soccer and football games.

Gail, Kelly and Joel were fantastic game organizers and offered fun prizes for

each relay! Anne Peugh and Lori provided us with a craft table to make a lovely, handsome autumn banner. There was a stage decorated with pumpkins, scarecrows and old-timey quilts which was the backdrop for much entertainment provided by our parishioners: music, singing and story-telling as well as a fun, impromptu play that had us rolling off the hay bales with laughter. Thank you to all the performers!

Connie Shank did an excellent job as the Dessert Contest Coordinator but we expect the competition to build exponentially for next year's festival! In the midst of much teahouse fellowship and playing children, Fr. Matthew and Boris were busy at the barbecue grill offering fresh Alaskan Salmon, which disappeared rather quickly.

In planning the festival, we really had no idea of how many people were going to attend. However, we wanted to try something new with our farm-to-table theme. Instead of having a long buffet line, everyone put their side dishes somewhere on the long table and we provided platters of chicken. This proved very successful in that everyone sat down together at one very long table and partook of an amazing harvest feast. We think the Harvest Festival hosted about 90 people that day!

Much appreciation is given to the Jensen family for helping to set up the stage, tables and chairs and for the Reynolds girls for helping with the flower preparation and table set up. Let's not forget our *chicken ladies* and for all the participants who had the whole area cleaned up by the time Vespers began at 7:00.

I believe our mission was fulfilled that day. There are so many members at



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Volume 1 No. 2

November-December 2015

Annunciation, and often there is not enough opportunity for us to spend time together. The Harvest Festival provided a day on our green to relax, to converse and even see some talents that had not been evident before. For this, we are all thankful. Glory to God!

- **Mat. Molly Shaw**

Two Saints Canonized

On September 5 this year, two clerics who served in North America in the late 19th and 20th centuries--Bishop Mardarije Uskovic and Archimandrite Sebastian Dabokich--were canonized at St. Steven Serbian Orthodox Cathedral in Alhambra, CA. Archbishop Benjamin of San Francisco represented His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon at the canonization along with many visiting hierarchs, civil dignitaries and others. In Belgrade, on 5/29/15, the members of the Holy Assembly of Hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church announced their intention to glorify Bishop Mardarije and Archbishop Sebastian as "preachers of the Gospel, God-pleasing servants of the holy life, and inspirers of many missionaries" for their pastoral labors in American and their homeland. The annual commemorations of St. Mardarije of Libertyville, Bishop of America-Canada, and St. Sebastian of San Francisco and Jackson will be observed on Nov. 29 and Nov. 17, respectively.

Saint Sebastian was born Jovan Dabovich in San Francisco, CA in 1863—in the midst of the U.S. Civil War. From his early youth he was devoted to the Church and spent much of his time at the city's Holy Trinity Cathedral where

he later served as a reader and teacher. In 1884, he was assigned to assist at Archangel Michael Cathedral, Sitka, AK. Shortly thereafter, he was sent to Russia for training and formation as a missionary priest. After completing three years of studies at the Saint Petersburg and Kyiv Theological Academies, he was tonsured to monastic rank and ordained to the diaconate in 1887.

Returning to San Francisco, he served as a deacon at the cathedral and taught in the newly established pastoral school. On August 16, 1892, he was ordained to the priesthood and assigned to pursue missionary work in California and Washington. The following year, he succeeded Father [now Saint] Alexis Toth as rector of Saint Mary Church, Minneapolis, MN and taught at the Missionary School.

In 1894, Father Sebastian returned to California, where he established the first Serbian Orthodox parish in the U.S. in Jackson, CA. Two years later, he was reassigned to San Francisco's Holy Trinity Cathedral while continuing his missionary efforts in Jackson. In recognition of his abilities, Archbishop Tikhon assigned him as part of the North American Mission's Administration. During this time he wrote a book titled *The Ritual, Services and Sacraments of the Holy Orthodox Church*. In 1902, he was transferred to Alaska, where he served as Dean of the Sitka Deanery. With the development of additional Serbian parishes in the U.S., Archbishop Tikhon reassigned Father Sebastian to head the Serbian Mission in America in 1905. The Mission was based in Chicago where Archimandrite Sebastian had organized and served as rector of Holy Resurrection Serbian Orthodox Church. He continued to guide the Serbian Mission through July 1910 when, at his own request, he returned to missionary work. With the opening of Saint Platon



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Seminary, Tenafly, NJ in 1913, he served as a member of the faculty and also was involved in numerous conferences and discussions with non-Orthodox Christian confessions. In these meetings, he was sympathetic and understanding, yet firm in his desire to reveal Orthodox Christianity as the fullness of truth and the Church of Christ.

Archimandrite Sebastian felt the calling to minister in his ancestral Serbia. He served as a chaplain to the Serbian Army during the Balkan War and World War I. In 1916, he requested a release from the North American Mission to serve in Serbia, where he ministered for the remainder of his life. He fell asleep in the Lord on November 30, 1940 and was interred in the Monastery of Zicha by his friend and Father Confessor, Bishop Nikolai [Velimirovic].

Saint Mardarije was born Ivan Uskokovic in Podgoritsa, Montenegro, in 1889. In 1907, he embraced monasticism at the Studenitsa Monastery and then relocated to Russia to study at the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy. After graduation, he was ordained by the Russian Orthodox Church and sent as a missionary to America. In 1919, he was one of five Serbian Orthodox priests who participated in the Second All-American Sobor, held in Cleveland, OH in February 1919, at which time it was recommended that the Serbian Church in Belgrade advance him to the episcopacy to organize a Serbian Orthodox Diocese in America. Unfortunately, at this most chaotic time in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, it was impossible to secure the written blessing of Patriarch [now Saint] Tikhon of Moscow.

Later in 1919, Archimandrite Mardarije returned to Belgrade, where he was assigned as head of the Rakovitsa Monastery and principal of its monastic school. Subsequently, Bishop [now Saint] Nikolai [Velimirovic] of

Ohrid was sent by Patriarch Dimitriye to administer the fledgling diocese. Having likewise returned to America, Archimandrite Mardarije served as Saint Nikolai's Deputy for two years, and continued to administer the diocese after the latter's return to Belgrade. On April 26, 1926, Archimandrite Mardarije was consecrated to the episcopacy in Belgrade. Prior to his episcopal consecration, he had carried out most of the actual work of organizing the Serbian diocese. He also served as parish priest in Chicago and purchased with his personal funds the land for Saint Sava Monastery in suburban Libertyville. From the moment of his return to America, Bishop Mardarije undertook a wide range of ministries. He did not spare himself, nor did he fear work, although he knew that he was gravely ill with an advancing case of tuberculosis. In 1927, he convened the first National Church Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox American-Canadian Diocese to address a variety of organizational issues. At a clergy conference held in Youngstown, OH in 1931, he renewed his appeal for all to work for the unity and good of the diocese. His kindness, patience and reluctance to use punitive measures resulted in a great measure of unity within the diocese by the time of his repose on December 12, 1935 at the age of 46 years. He was interred at Libertyville's Saint Sava Monastery.



Feasts and Fasts

The Entrance (Presentation) of the Theotokos into the Temple (November 21):

O ye gates of the sanctuary, into the Holy of Holies receive ye a Virgin, the spotless Tabernacle of God the Almighty (Presentation of the Theotokos, Small Vespers)

This feast celebrates the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple as a young child, where she would live until she was 12 years old. The story of the Entry of the Mother of God is not recorded in the Old or New Testaments but was well known to the early Christians. The earliest record of the story is to be found in the *Gospel of James*, also known as the *Protoevangelium* (First Gospel) of *James* or the *Infancy Gospel of James*, written around 145 A.D. (St. James was certainly not the true author.)

When Mary was 3 years old, her parents fulfilled their promise to offer her to the Lord, to serve Him all the days of her life. Mary's father, Joachim, gathered the young girls of the neighborhood to go before Mary carrying lighted candles so that she might be delighted in following this procession to the temple and joyfully enter the temple unafraid.

The High Priest Zacharias (future father of John the Baptist) welcomed Mary and placed her on the third step of the altar "...and the Lord God poured out grace upon her. And she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her" (*Protoevangelium of James*). Zacharias escorted her into the temple to begin her life there. She remained in the temple until the age of 12, when Zacharias betrothed her to Joseph.

The icon of this feast depicts the story told in the *Protoevangelium*: Zacharias stands at the top of the stairs and holds out his hands (like Simeon in the icon of the presentation of Christ) to receive the 3-year-old Mary. She is shown ascending the steps towards him, carrying a lamp in one hand and holding out the other hand. Her parents are behind her, looking at each other and pointing to Mary. A group of virgins carrying lamps is nearby. The icon combines this image of the entry itself with another of Mary seated high above the temple beneath a canopy. She takes the bread brought by the Archangel Gabriel, who blesses her.

As we celebrate the Mother of God's preparation to become the true Ark of the Word of God, we are reminded of our own bodies as temples of God. This is one of the purposes of our fasting during Advent.

The Nativity of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ (December 25):

Hearken, O heaven, and give ear, O earth. Let the foundations be shaken, and let trembling lay hold upon the nethermost parts of the world. For our God and Creator has clothed Himself in created flesh, and He who with His strong arm fashioned the creation reveals Himself in the womb of her that He formed. O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and his ways past finding out! (Christmas Eve, 6th Hour)

The two feasts of Christ's birth and of His baptism are closely linked together so as to form one single and undivided



observance. Both feasts are preceded by a forty-day fast, and both feasts are preceded by Sunday Gospels which prepare us to enter into these liturgical seasons. There is a period of no fasting after these feasts as well. Following Christmas, there is a 10-day period of no fasting.

The second Sunday before Christmas is the Sunday of the Forefathers, which calls to remembrance the ancestors of Christ according to the flesh. The Sunday that follows broadens this scope by commemorating all the righteous men and women who pleased God from the beginning of time. Thus, we are able to see the Incarnation of Christ as the culmination of a long process that extended over thousands of years.

At the Liturgy on Christmas Day, instead of singing the Trisagion before the scripture is read, we sing the song of baptism - "As many as have been baptized into Christ..." This change highlights our own rebirth in Christ as an important aspect of the celebration of Christ's birth.

The days following Christmas are dedicated to those who were nearest to God at His Nativity: His mother, Mary, and his foster father, Joseph. On December 26, we celebrate the Synaxis of the Mother of God. The first Sunday after Christmas commemorates Joseph, the Betrothed, along with David, the ancestor of Our Lord, and St. James, the brother of God. On December 29, the Massacre of the Innocents is commemorated, and on January 1, the Circumcision of Our Lord.

The Nativity Fast

The Nativity fast will begin on Sunday, Nov. 15, and continue through Dec. 24. During this time, we do not partake of meat, eggs, or dairy products. Fish, wine and oil are allowed on the following dates: Nov. 15, 16, 21, 22, 28, 29, 30; Dec. 5, 6, 12, 13, 19. Wine and oil (no fish) are allowed on these dates: Nov. 17, 19, 24, 25, 26; Dec. 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 15, 17, 23. (This information is taken from the *St. Tikhon's Lectionary Wall Calendar*.) If you are under a doctor's orders for your diet, or if you have other questions and concerns about fasting, please talk with your spiritual father about this.

The Work of Salvation

It is through the Liturgy that one finds and works out one's salvation. In the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church, we find the Mind of the Church, which is the Mind of Christ. Through regular participation in the cycle of services throughout the year, and the Holy Mysteries, we absorb and acquire this Mind and make it our own, enabling us to learn how not only to think, but also how to understand the world, God, ourselves, and each other.

We must never see the Liturgy and the liturgical life of the Church as something extra. It is through the grace that we receive at each Liturgy that we are enabled to enter eternity, and are empowered to escape corruption, sin, and death, because what we are offered and receive is nothing other than the Life of God Himself....



The Liturgy informs the heart and changes us imperceptibly. St. Maximus the Confessor tells us that just being present at the Liturgy ontologically alters us for the better, from a lower to a higher state.... The Church's Liturgy and a life of personal prayer prepare us to live in God's presence, to endure God's presence, and to love God's presence.

- Archimandrite Sergius (Bowyer),
Acquiring The Mind of Christ: Embracing the Vision of the Orthodox Church

Astoria Mission

Have you ever noticed that Fr. Kevin, Dn. Cuthbert, and Rdr. Seraphim are usually missing from our clergy on the 1st Sunday of every month? They are not away on vacation on those Sundays! They have gone to Astoria, Oregon, to the mission church that Church of the Annunciation serves there.

This mission began in Kelso, WA, in 1997 when an Orthodox doctor offered a space in his clinic for a small chapel. Fr. Kevin served Liturgy there for many years before the doctor moved away. Many of those who comprised this mission actually lived on the Oregon coast, who upon losing their chapel in Kelso, requested that a priest come to the Astoria area to serve Divine Liturgy.

Fr. Kevin and others on this mission team have been going to the Astoria area for almost two years now. There are 12-14 active parishioners at the Holy Nativity

Mission. They rent space in St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church at 867 Fifth Avenue in Hammond, OR, just south of Astoria. In addition to Liturgy once a month, Rdr. Seraphim and Jacinta often do a reader's serve there on the third Sunday of the month.

This mission is not yet large enough for official diocesan mission status (which requires 25 tithing members), but our hope and prayer is that this seed in Christ's vineyard will grow. Do you know someone in that area who you would like to introduce to the Orthodox Church? Or would you like to attend a service to support this mission?

Most of all, we can pray that Christ will strengthen these Orthodox Christians in our local mission field and that other souls will be drawn to The Church through them. The mission has a website that you can visit: holynativityeasternorthodoxmission.yolasite.com

- Mat. Connie Shank



"When we say grace, do we look up at Heaven, or down at the food?"



Recipe

Editor's Note: In every issue we will include an easy recipe that can be used for Fast Days or Fish and Oil days on the fasting calendar.

Flax Eggs

It is difficult to do your Christmas baking during the Nativity Fast without eggs, but here is a recipe for “flax eggs” that will make your baking easier. This recipe is helpful as a binder in pancakes, breads, and other baking.

Ingredients:

1/3 cup ground flax seeds (you can find these pre-ground flax seeds in packages at Bob's Red Mill store; keep them in the freezer after opening the package so they do not go rancid)

1 cup water

Put the 1/3 cup of ground flax seeds into a small food processor or a blender. Slowly add the water while blending until the mixture resembles a thick milkshake. Transfer this mixture to a sealable container and store it in the fridge. (It will keep for 3 - 6 days.) This recipe makes the equivalent of 6 eggs.

How to prepare for Confession

The focus of our confessions is always Jesus. Looking at Him, we realize to what we are called and how we fall short of that calling. Basically in Confession we acknowledge how we should live and those areas in which we fail and need God's help. Fr. Thomas Hopko encouraged the reading of the following excellent passages before coming to Confession:

- Matt 5, 6, & 7 [Sermon on the Mount],
- Luke 6:17-49 [Sermon on the Plain],
- Romans 12-15 [St. Paul's ethical teachings],
- 1 Cor 13 [beautiful passage on Love],
- 1 John [entire epistle—don't worry, it's short, but very powerful]

Fr. John Mancantelli

If you have submissions for the newsletter, please e-mail them to
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