



Holy Ghost Orthodox Church
714 Westmoreland Avenue
PO Box 3
Slickville, PA 15684-0003

www.holyghostorthodoxchurch.org

Very Rev. Father Robert Popichak, Pastor

23 Station Street

Carnegie, PA 15106-3014

[412] 279-5640 home

[412] 956-6626 cell

EVE OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST—STRICT FAST!!!

ON THE MEND: Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Archbishop Daniel, Metropolitan Antony, Metropolitan Yuriy, Anastasia [Metropolitan Yuriy's mom], Metropolitan Theodosius [OCA], Archbishop Jovan, Bishop Robert, Father George & Pani Lillian Hnatko, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Elias Warnke, Father Nestor Kowal, Father George Yatsko, Father Paul Bigelow, Father Emilian Balan, Father John & Pani Mary Anne Nakonachny, Father Steve Repa, Protopresbyter William Diakiw, Archpriest Dionysi Vitali, Protodeacon Joseph Hotrovich, Father Adam Yonitch, Pani-Dobrodijka Sonia Diakiw, Father Paisius McGrath, Father Michael Smolynec, Father Lawrence & Matushka Sophia Daniels, Father John Harrold [Saint Sylvester], Joshua Agosto and his family, Eva Malesnick, Stella Peanoske, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Gary & Linda Mechtly, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Sam Wadrose, Isabella Olivia Lindgren, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Erin, Michael Miller, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Liz Stumpf, Theodore Nixon, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Linda Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, George Rocknage, Robert McKivitz, Liz Obradovich, Halyna Zelinska [Archbishop Daniel's mother], Charlotte, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah Finley, Claire Senita, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Nancy Barylak, Patrick Keenan, Khrystyna Chorniy, Anthony Cormier, Nathan Forbeck, Sarah Doyle, Samuel Peters, Esther Holupka, David Vallor, Henry Faraly, Julie Eiler, Dorothy Lednovich, Bob C., Allie—young girl with leukemia, Heather Kramer, Jane Wartinbee, Matthew—young man with

cancer, Nicholas Orlando, Mary Ann Kuznik, Michael Pryhodzenko, Sonia Luciw, Theresa Ditto, Mary Ann Musial, Mary Pelino, Yvonne Christy, Myron & Barbara Spak, Julia Duda, Lisa Pandle, Kris & Julie Hanczar, John Kennedy, Loretta, Nancy, Carol, & Michael Sheliga, Gaelle Kelly, Irma McDivitt, Robin Young, Mckayla, Rachel, Carl & Margaret Reed, Lydia Wilson, Robert Pointon, Walter Cecelia, John Persico, Jeff Miller, Mary Kernick, Glenn Miller, Jean Marie, Donna & Walter McCrackin, Bonnie & Eugene Blair [Pani Gina's parents], David Hoenshell, Barbara Macino, Shelley Hill, Mikaela Kapeluck, Linda Cawley, Gerald Cogley, Helen Bozo, Corey Guich, Robert Vangrin, Pauline Witkowsky, Sera White, Donald Griffey, Deborah Smith, Nancy & Eric Dunik, Julian Strozh [young lady with cerebral palsy], Dr. Kirsten Ream, Patricia Corey, Michelle, Katie Swarm, Richard Dunst, Michelle, Patrick, Linda Morris, Howard Simpson, Chris, David Hiles, Jennifer, Jerry Quinn, Cher Mount, Frank & Janet Horrell, Jim Wandling, Gail, Sirena Sharp, Ron Paulovich, Sandi Anderson, Lina, Shirley, Denny Mader, Ella Campbell, Tom Hyatt, Bill Janiro, Jean Symanko-Andy's sister, William Lemonakis, Barbara McDougall, Alma Wyke, Lindsay Romanczak & family, Virginia Catherine Pynch, Susan Lucas, Neil Carter & family, James Paluh, Mickie Weikel, Evelyn Krempasky, Tammy Strunk, Loida Esbry, Darlene Chicka Deskins, Drew, Alice & Keith Philipa, Kateryna Kocelko, Nancy Heinbaugh, Mira Filipović, Lynn, Jacqueline, Sharon, Zan Cheng, Kristy, Elaine Ellenberger, Brandon, Anna Tranchine, Demetra, Blase Urban, Catherine Hogel & children, Jennifer & Dylan, Ron Schwartz, Lydia Wilson, Flora Tomlin, Howell Swarm, Jane Bielewicz Allred, Manny "Lazarus" Lopez, Glenn & Lucas Burlack, Katie Elizabeth, Mileva, & Michael, Deirdré Straughan, Terri Paluh, Lori & Steve Lucier, Kyranna Cherpas, Pastor Bruce Nordeen, Heather Ried, Carla Perry, Linda Elliot, Dennis McDaniel, Luke Tinsley, Brent, Tricia, Katherine Gorman, Pamela Jaquette, Michael Pawlyshyn, Sherri Walewski, Marika Zeliszczyk, Donna Davis, Jackie Crimbchin, Marta Charron, Mary [Corba], Stella McKeag, Margie Sekelsky, Gary Howell, Fran Fulton, Gina Catanese, Bill Vizza, Jamie Swarm, Kevin Allen (from Ancient Faith Radio), Kathy Flaherty, Tori Reade-Henry's niece, Derick-Glen Burlack's neighbor, Michael, Nichole & Christopher, Ben Douglas, Dianne Donahue, Zachary, Natasha, Noah Willard, Jodi Hanczar, Gregory Cervo, Lisa Bruce, Martha Nezolyk, Kathy Cvetkovich, Judy, Will, Emma, Ginny, Ye-Jin, Maria, John & JoAnn, Jim & Kitty, Phil Bouse, Ralph & Beverly Stoker, Noah Willard, Nikola, Natalie, Nikola, & Nevenka Jovonovich, Julia Collier, Amy Kemerer, Thomas Smith, Tracy Slaughaupt, Louis & Teresa Bercelli, Tom Nolan, Silvia Martin, Sarah

Dorning, Evelyn Burlack, Dena & George, Georgia, Lawanda [Evelyn's niece], Maureen Sams, John Kendall, Judi Danser, Darcy, Denis Strittmatter, Nancy, Ian Brick, Cecilia Barnhart, Logan Magorien, Pam Grant, Debbie & Jerry Novosel, Noah Willard, Bishop Athanasius Akunda of Western Kenya, Sandra Dillard, and Susan Pulcini—Father Ted Pulcini's mom. ARNOLD: Homer Paul Kline. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY to our January babies: Evelyn Burlack on the 1st, Lyndsey Weiser on the 4th, Demetra on the 4th, Marcy Jones on the 8th, Brenna Scott on the 29th, Kristin Scott on the 29th, and Kayla Weiser on the 29th. May God grant them all Many Happy, Healthy, Prosperous, and Blessed Years! God Bless them all!

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS: All Christians and the others in the Middle East who are suffering during this time of great tragedy and unrest. May God watch over and keep them safe! Lord have mercy!

Please remember ALL American service men and women in your prayers. May God watch over them and all American service men and women—and bring them all home safely!

REMEMBER—PRAYERS ARE ALWAYS FREE!

Communion Fasting: nothing to eat or drink after midnight, EXCEPT in cases where your doctor tells you to eat or drink something for medical reasons: medication, diabetes, etc. If you have a question, please ask Father Bob.

AT ANY TIME—if there is an emergency, if you have questions, or if you just need to talk, please CALL FATHER BOB at [412] 279-5640.

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

SUNDAY, JANUARY 06 DIVINE LITURGY UPSTAIRS 10:30 AM

32ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; EVE OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST; NUN-MARTYR EUGENIA & WITH HER MARTYRS PROTIUS, HYACINTH, BASILLA, & CLAUDIA; VENERABLE NICHOLAS THE MONK

STRICT FAST DAY—HOLY SUPPER AFTER LITURGY--DOWNSTAIRS

Tone 7

Hebrews 11:9-10, 17023, 32-40
Matthew 1:1-25

FAST FREE PERIOD—FROM JANUARY 07 THROUGH JANUARY 17

SUNDAY, JANUARY 13 OBEDNITZA DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CHURCH HALL 10:30 AM
33RD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; SUNDAY AFTER NATIVITY & BEFORE
THEOPHANY; LEAVE-TAKING OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST; VENERABLE
MELANIA THE YOUNGER-NUN OF ROME; SAINT PETER MOHYLA-METROPOLITAN
OF KIEV

Tone 8

Galatians 1:11-19; Hebrews 7:26-8:2
Matthew 2:13-23; John 10:9-16

Litany in Blessed Memory of Stephen Kuzman, Timothy Stutchell, Nicholas
Vetosky, Robert Rohal, & Gary Atutes—Fr. Bob

FRIDAY, JANUARY 18

STRICT FAST DAY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 19 THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS
CHRIST

SUNDAY, JANUARY 20 OBEDNITZA DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CHURCH HALL 10:30 AM
34TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY; AFTERFEAST OF
THEOPHANY; SYNAXIS OF THE HOLY GLORIOUS PROPHET, FORERUNNER, AND
BAPTIST JOHN

Tone 1

Ephesians 4:7-13; Acts 19:1-8
Matthew 4:12-17; John 1:29-34

*******BLESSING OF WATER AFTER SERVICE—DOWNSTAIRS*******

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 06 JANUARY 2019

32ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; EVE OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST;
NUN-MARTYR EUGENIA & WITH HER MARTYRS PROTIUS,
HYACINTH, BASILLA, & CLAUDIA; VENERABLE NICHOLAS THE MONK

STRICT FAST DAY—HOLY SUPPER AFTER LITURGY--DOWNSTAIRS

TROPARION—TONE 7

By Thy Cross, Thou didst destroy death!

To the thief, Thou didst open Paradise!

For the Myrrhbearers, Thou didst change weeping into joy.

And Thou didst command Thy disciples, O Christ God,

To proclaim that Thou art risen, granting the world great mercy!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever,
and unto ages of ages. Amen.

KONTAKION—TONE 7

The dominion of death can no longer hold men captive,
For Christ descended, shattering and destroying its powers!
Hell is bound, while the prophets rejoice and cry:
The Savior has come to those in faith!
Enter, you faithful, into the Resurrection!

PROKEIMENON—TONE 7

READER: The Lord shall give strength to His people! The Lord shall bless His people with peace!

PEOPLE: The Lord shall give strength to His people! The Lord shall bless His people with peace!

READER: Offer to the Lord, O you sons of God! Offer young rams to the Lord!

PEOPLE: The Lord shall give strength to His people! The Lord shall bless His people with peace!

READER: The Lord shall give strength to His people!

PEOPLE: The Lord shall bless His people with peace!

ALLELUIA VERSES—TONE 7

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Thy name, O Most High!

To declare Thy mercy in the morning, and Thy truth by night!



Nativity Epistle of the Permanent Conference of Ukrainian Orthodox Bishops Outside the Borders of Ukraine

To the God-beloved Pastors, Honoured Monastics, and all Faithful Children of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the Diaspora and Ukraine,

"Today, the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One. Angels with shepherds give glory. The magi journey with a star. For unto us is born a young Child, the Pre-eternal God"

(Kondak of the Nativity of Christ).

Christ is Born!

Once again, according to the Mercy of God, we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity. Faithful hearts, full of gratitude to God, again glorify the Pre-eternal Word, the Divine Christ Child, Who for us and our salvation came down to earth and was incarnated from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. Today the soul of every Christian with great spiritual joy cries out "Christ is Born -Glorify Him! Christ from Heaven—Let us meet Him! Christ on Earth—be exalted! Let all the earth sing to the Lord! (St. Gregory the Theologian).

The coming of the Son of God to earth was the most important event in the entire history of the human race. It is an event which the human

mind cannot fully comprehend, the wonder of wonders: "great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16).

The Nativity of Christ was the event which ushered in a new cultural life rooted in love for God and neighbor, an event which initiated the Kingdom of Christ on earth. Many things have happened and happen on our earthly planet. But none of them have been discussed and preached for ages as has the event of the Nativity of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Nativity of Christ is for all of us a great and joyful feast. St. John Chrysostom writes: "The day of Christ's Nativity is the most important day among all the feasts, for it is shown to be the mother of all feasts. Without the Nativity of Christ there would be no Resurrection." Humanity awaited the coming into the world of the Saviour with great impatience. The Lord, yet in the earthly paradise of Eden, after the sin of Adam and Eve said that He would send them a Saviour Who would return to them and to the entire human race their lost happiness and conquer the power of the devil.

Adam's sin is the history of the sin of all mankind and every person individually. The transgression of Adam is repeated in each one of us when we turn from God and commit sin.

The greatest and deepest mystery of the Christian faith is the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God. The Pre-eternal God becomes a small child without ceasing to be God. As St. John the Evangelist writes, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14).

Christ "for the sake of us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens and took flesh from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man" so that He might destroy the barrier between man and God which arose due to human sin. And every time we Christians celebrate the Nativity of Christ a meeting takes place in our heart and soul with God Himself. We meet the Messiah—Christ—in the Mystery of the Eucharist. Through Holy Communion our human flesh is filled with His Divine power, which strengthens us spiritually and physically. We meet the Saviour in the other mysteries of our Orthodox Faith, which open to us the path to eternal life. We meet Christ in our daily life, sensing in everything His care and presence. And so, every year Christ is born in the hearts and souls of faithful people.

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

In 2018 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches in the USA and in Canada. We thank God for all His grace and bounties poured out upon us in the past. We beseech Him

that in the coming century the Lord would continue to preserve and protect our Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the diaspora.

We especially beseech the Divine Christ Child that in this new year He would bless our ancestral homeland of Ukraine with peace, spiritual and economic growth, and our God-beloved Ukrainian people with unity, brotherly love, and a united Orthodox Church in Ukraine which is recognized by all other local Orthodox Churches.

We extend our gratitude to the Mother Church—the Great Church of Constantinople, and especially to His All-Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomew and the Holy Synod for all that they have done on behalf of the daughter Church, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, during the past year of 2018.

We beseech Christ the Saviour, who said “I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” (Mt. 16:18), that in the new year the Lord will preserve His One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church from schism.

From sincere hearts and the depth of our souls we greet all of you on the occasion of the great feast of the Nativity of our Lord, the New Year of God’s goodness 2019, and the Holy Theophany. We prayerfully wish you God’s limitless mercies.

May the Newly-born in Bethlehem Lord and Saviour of world grant all of you good physical health, spiritual peace, familial warmth, joy, and prosperity.

Bowing before the manger in Bethlehem, we offer the New-born Christ Child our sincere and heartfelt prayers, and thank Him for all that we have.

May the joy of the Nativity enter into every Christian heart, be present within every family, and ever abide among all of you.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

With Hierarchical Blessings,

†**YURIJ**, Metropolitan, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

†**ANTONY**, Metropolitan, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA and in the Diaspora

†**JEREMIAH**, Archbishop, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Brazil and South America

†**DANIEL**, Archbishop, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA and Western Europe

†**ILARION**, Bishop, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

†**ANDRIY**, Bishop, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

Prot. No. 1099

PATRIARCHAL PROCLAMATION FOR CHRISTMAS

+ B A R T H O L O M E W

By God’s Mercy Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church
Grace, Mercy and Peace from the Savior Christ Born in Bethlehem

Venerable brothers and beloved children in the Lord,

We glorify the Most-Holy and All-Merciful God, that we are again deemed worthy this year to reach the festive day of Christmas, the feast of the pre-eternal Son and Word of God's Incarnation "for us and for our salvation." Through the "eternal mystery" and "great miracle" of the divine Incarnation, the "great wound," namely humankind sitting in darkness and shadow, is rendered into "children of light and day,"^[1] while the blessed road of deification by grace is opened for us. In the theandric mystery of the Church and through her holy sacraments, Christ is born and takes shape in our soul and existence. Maximus the Confessor theologizes that "the Word of God, though born once in the flesh, is ever willing to be born spiritually in those who desire Him. Thus, He becomes an infant and fashions Himself in us by means of the virtues; indeed, He reveals Himself to the extent that we are capable of receiving Him."^[2] God is not an abstract "idea," like the god of the philosophers, or an unapproachable God enclosed in absolute transcendence. He is "Emmanuel," "God with us,"^[3] closer to us than we are to ourselves, "more akin to us than our very own selves."^[4]

Faith in the inaccessible and fleshless Divinity does not transform our life; it does not remove the polarization between matter and spirit; nor does it bridge the gap between heaven and earth. The Incarnation of the Divine Word is the revelation of truth regarding God and humankind, which saves the human race from the dark labyrinths of materialism and anthropomorphism, as well as from idealism and dualism. The Church's condemnation of nestorianism and monophysitism signals the rejection of two broader tendencies of the human soul: on the one hand rendering anthropocentrism absolute, and on the other idolizing an idealistic understanding of life and truth, both of which are especially widespread deviations in our age.

Contemporary "nestorianism" is expressed as a spirit of secularization, as scientism and the absolute prioritization of utilitarian knowledge, as the absolute autonomy of economy, as self-saving arrogance and atheism, as the "non-civilization" of individualism and eudemonism, as legalism and moralism, as the "end of decency" and identification of sacrificial love and repentance with the so-called "morality of the weak." By the same token, "monophysitism" is today represented by tendencies to demonize the body

and natural man, by puritanism and the syndromes of “purity,” by fruitless introverted spirituality and various mysticisms, by disregarding the intellect, art and civilization, by denying dialogue and rejecting differences, with the dangerous expresser—supposedly in the name of the “one and only truth”—namely a religious fundamentalism nurtured by absolutism and rejections, while feeding violence and division. It is evident that both a nestorianizing deification of the world and a monophysitizing demonization of it leave the world and history, civilizations, and cultures, exposed to the powers of the “present age,” cementing their autonomy and impasses.

Christian faith is the certainty of our salvation by the God of love, who graciously assumed our nature and once again granted us “the likeness” lost through the fall, making us worthy of true life in His Body, the Church. The theandric mystery is expressed throughout the entirety of life in the Church. The Incarnate Savior received “the flesh of the Church”^[5] and showed, “first and alone,” “the true man, who is perfect on account of both character and life as well as all other aspects.”^[6] The Church of Christ is the place of “common salvation,” “common freedom,” and hope in the “common kingdom.” It is the way of living the liberating truth, the core of which is expressing the truth in love. This love transcends the boundaries of mere human action, because its source and prototype lie in divine philanthropy, which transcends human reason. “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us... Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”^[7] God is present wherever love exists.

This saving truth must also be expressed in the way we celebrate the sacred Nativity of our Savior, who visited us from on high. A feast is always a “fullness of time,” a time of self-knowledge, of thanksgiving for the magnitude of divine philanthropic love, of witness to the truth of the theandric mystery and of freedom in Christ. The Christ-pleasing celebration of the Divine Word’s Incarnation is an act of resistance against secularization, against discoloration of the feast and its conversion into a “Christmas without Christ,” as well as against a celebration of Having, of consumerism and vanity—indeed, into a world filled with social tensions, reversal and confusion of values, of violence and injustice, where the “Jesus child” is once again faced with the inexorable interests of numerous, multifaceted powers.

Honorable brothers and beloved children,

Generations come and pass, while forthcoming developments are difficult to foresee. Genuine faith, though, does not face dilemmas. The Word became flesh, the “truth has come” and “darkness has subsided.” We already participate in the Kingdom while still on our journey toward the completion of the incarnate Divine Economy. We possess the unshakeable certainty that the future belongs to Christ, Who is “the same yesterday and today and forever;”^[8] that the Church of Christ is and shall remain a place of holiness and godliness, a renewal of man and world, a foretaste of the glory of the Kingdom; that it will continue “to give the witness of the Gospel” “to distribute the gifts of God in the world: His love, peace, justice, and reconciliation, the power of resurrection and expectation of eternity.”^[9] The contemporary ideology of some “post-Christian” age is baseless. “After Christ,” everything is and remains “in Christ” to the ages.

We humbly kneel before the Divine Infant of Bethlehem and His All-Holy Mother, who holds Him in her arms, while venerating the Incarnate “most perfect God,” and bestow upon the children of the Holy and Great Church of Christ throughout the world—from the ever-vigilant Phanar—our Patriarchal blessing for the Holy Twelve Days of Christmas, wishing you a healthy, fruitful and joyous new year in the Lord’s favor.

Christmas 2018

+ Bartholomew of Constantinople

Your fervent supplicant before God

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

8-10 East 79th St. New York, NY 10075-0106 * Tel: [\(212\) 570-3530](tel:(212)570-3530) Fax: [\(212\) 774-0237](tel:(212)774-0237)

www.goarch.org-Email: communications@goarch.org

News Release

Contact: PRESS OFFICE Stavros Papagermanos pressoffice@goarch.org

Date: December 20, 2018

ARCHIEPISCOPAL ENCYCLICAL FOR THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST (2018)

Protocol Number 217/18

December 25, 2018 The Nativity of Christ

“And His name shall be called the Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6

To the Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ according to the Flesh is depicted throughout our churches in the familiar and radiant icon of the Nativity. Every element of the Gospel account, historically and

theologically, appears before our eyes to inspire wonder, worship, and peace. In every detail, the icon proclaims without words that the Child born this day in Bethlehem is none other than *the Prince of Peace*. For by His birth, peace entered into a world plagued by hatred, hurt, and conflict.

Our Lord came to bring *peace between heaven and earth*. We see this depicted in the shepherds as they hearken to the voice of an angel. The Evangelist Luke tells us that they were *greatly frightened* at the angel's appearance (Luke 2:9). But in the icon their faces manifest reverence and attention, not terror or guilt. As the great company of the heavenly host chanted *Glory to God in the highest*, the shepherds received and believed their message of *Peace on earth, goodwill towards mankind* (Luke 2:14). In that peace they journeyed to Bethlehem to seek the Child of promise. There, the shepherds witnessed God's answer to sin and death, as forgiveness, reconciliation, and life shone forth from the cave in the face of the Prince of Peace.

Our Lord came also to bring *peace among the peoples of the earth*. We see this depicted in the figures of the Magi. The Evangelist Matthew tells us that these astrologers from the East followed the rising of a star (Matthew 2:2) and left their homes, traversing for many months and long miles to reach the place where the newborn King dwelt. The Magi came in peace, bearing gifts in order to honor the newborn Messiah, even as the prophets had foretold: *Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn* (Isaiah 60:3).

Our Lord came to bring *peace within the realm of nature*. We see this depicted in the animals who kneel in worship before the manger. Strange wonders happen before them; unfamiliar visitors crowd their stable. But the animals neither cower nor flee; they calmly remain to witness the miracle. *The ox knows his owner, and the donkey his Master's manger*, as was foretold again by Isaiah (1:3). For so many millennia, the story of human development has been a history of cruelty towards animals; but on this night, and by Christ's birth, there was serenity and peace.

Our Lord came to bring *peace to our fallen human nature*, beset by weakness and mortality. In the center of the icon we behold the Virgin Mother bowed down in adoration before her Son and God. She shows no hint of pain or trauma, even after a long journey and childbirth. For with His entrance into this world, Jesus Christ came only to heal and save, not to harm or destroy. He caused His mother no injury in His birth. In her immaculate body, the destiny for all humanity is revealed: health, restoration, and resurrection. Already at His Nativity, the icon declares,

Christ is the master of life and death, and in Him is the ancient curse abolished (cf. Genesis 3:16). The Prince of Peace will destroy the final enemy, which is death (1 Cor. 15:26).

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

We glorify the Prince of Peace by spreading the peace He granted to us in His Birth. In this Christmas season—as we gather with family and friends, as we worship in the house of the Lord, as we break bread and share the bounties of our lives—let us also strive to be people of peace.

Out of the stable of Bethlehem, peace from heaven shines forth: let us therefore be quick to forgive and ready to reconcile with all those around us. From the lowly manger in Judea, peace prevails over man and beast: let us therefore be diligent as faithful stewards of God’s creation, neither exploiting nor misusing His gifts through overconsumption, materialism, or waste. Through the gifts of the Magi, peace for all peoples is foretokened: let us therefore through almsgiving and generosity be strong advocates of justice, equality, and compassion. From the face of the Holy Theotokos, peace overflows, royal and radiant: let us therefore embrace purity and complete dedication to Christ in our minds and bodies and spirits, giving glory to the Prince of Peace who came to save us.

May the peace, good will, and glory of the Christmas season be yours today and always, and unto the ages of ages. **“Christ is Born! Glorify Him!”**

With paternal love and heartfelt wishes in the Incarnate Lord,
† D E M E T R I O S, Archbishop of America

Self-Worth Comes from the Inside-Out from Fr. John Angelis

Self-Worth comes from the Inside-Out, not from the opinion of other people for us, the shape of our body or the clothes we wear.

It comes rather from our relation to God and from the witness of our conscience, our inner self. If our conscience approves us, if our daily life is inspired and lived according to the gracious commandments of God for our relations with each other, then we are happy, we are content with our life. We enjoy living and bearing fruit where God has placed us.

Let me share with you an example. As children we grow with the love of our mother and father and our brothers and sisters, if we have siblings. Will we exchange the love and security of our loving parents with any material things? Unhappy are the children who have not experienced the loving embrace of their parents, as we learned from the orphans in one Country during the Communist era.

It is the love and security of our parents that we carry within us as the most valuable treasure of our life. This love and security is anchored in the love and protection of God for us.

If we preserve this Godly love and reliance on God in us, then we will be happy and content in life, wherever we are, of how we look and where we live. As our social status changes in life, we will adjust accordingly, without losing our inner security and reliance on God with the approval of our conscience.

Therefore, let us not be misled by the worldly artificial standards of happiness from outside-inside happiness. Rather, let us preserve or recover our God-given reliance on our loving family values and the inner voice of our good conscience in order to experience true happiness and meaning for our life.

THE MAN WHO INVENTED CHRISTMAS? Christmas Sermon 2018 Fr Luke A Veronis

How many of you have ever seen some version of Charles Dickens' "The Christmas Carol?" It's probably one of the most famous and beloved Christmas classics that countless people watch every year. Kids at Shepherd Hill go see it at the Hanover Theatre each year. There are many local productions throughout towns around the country. Even Hollywood seems to come out with some new version of this story almost every year. Google it and you will literally find dozens of different productions of The Christmas Carol.

Well, Pres. Faith and I followed our annual tradition when we watched the musical version of "The Christmas Carol," starring Kelsey Grammer, a couple weeks ago. This is one of our favorites. And then, last week, we decided to watch a movie that just came out last year entitled, "The Man Who Invented Christmas." Despite its heretical title, it proved to be another delightful and quite creative version, telling how Charles Dickens came to write his Christmas classic. Dickens wrote it in only six weeks, right before Christmas in 1843, at a time following three literary flops and as his debt was increasing following his best selling Oliver Twist.

What is it about The Christmas Carol that holds our attention year after year? Is it that it's a story of redemption, compassion, kindness, generosity, and love?!? Is it the power of seeing Mr. Scrooge's miserly, greedy, pathetic, egocentric, lonely, and depraved worldview transformed by the spirit of Christmas?

And yet as much as I enjoy it, every year when I watch this classic, I can't stop asking myself where is Jesus in it all? Isn't Christmas centered on

the birth of baby born in Bethlehem who changed the history of the world? Where is that in The Christmas Carol?

Now, maybe one could argue that "The Christmas Carol" conveys the spirit of Jesus, the virtues that he incarnated, and the good news that Christ proclaimed—that life is about love, compassion, kindness, and generosity, along with a hope of redemption for each and every one of us, even if we are as pathetic as Mr. Scrooge. Yes, Dickens conveys these virtues in such a moving and inspiring way, and yet, I still feel that as much good as he conveys, he leaves out the essence of Christmas. And this most recent title of the movie we just watched confuses people all the more with its title, "The Man Who Invented Christmas."

Did Dickens invent Christmas? It is said that his book in 1843 led the British to celebrate Christmas in a different way—with gatherings around one's families, offering good will toward suffering human beings all around us, and trying to bring out the side of light and love in our lives during this festive season? So maybe Dickens helped to create the atmosphere we think of when we celebrate Christmas. And the more our American society embraces its secular spirit, it's interesting how it doesn't eliminate our religious holy days in the yearly calendar, but it does change these holy days into something that leaves out the essence, the depth, and the heart of the religious feast itself.

Christmas isn't simply a season when we try to show more love, compassion, kindness, and generosity to one another, but it's all about the Creator of the universe seeing the world lost in its darkness and depravity, and then audaciously acting in a unique and profound manner to address this fallen situation! The Creator of the universe decides to become a part of His creation, to transform His creation! Almighty God, "the One who is, who was and who is to come, the Lord Almighty," the Infinite One decides to become a tiny, finite human being, even becoming a vulnerable, little baby. Incomprehensible! Inexplicable! Unthinkable!

Sometimes I hear people question certain aspects of the Christmas story, as well as the fundamental beliefs of our faith. This past Sunday, Nicholas Kristof, one of my favorite NY Times writers, wrote his semi-annual religious op-ed piece. He always does this around Christmas and Easter, where he will interview various religious leaders, asking them about Christmas or Easter, and sharing his own admiration for the man Jesus of Nazareth, and all his teachings, but also voicing his skepticism about various tenets of the Christian faith. He especially doubts anything miraculous. So, once again, he published a nice Christmas interview, but as he always does, he asked if he could still be a Christian even though he doesn't believe in the "Virgin Birth." How are such

things possible, he asks, that a virgin can become pregnant and give birth to a child?

Of course, Kristof is focusing on a little detail while ignoring the more fundamental, earth-shattering truth—Christmas isn't mainly about a virgin birth, but it's all about the God of the Universe became Himself a human being! The Divine becoming one of us with one goal in mind - to life up humans into His divinity, to sanctify our lives in a new way. If it is possible and true that God Himself would become human, then any other miracle, like a Virgin birth, is small stuff!

So, let us never forget that Christmas isn't simply about being "the most wonderful time of the year," because of our family gatherings, because of all the Christmas music we hear for two months, because of all the gifts we give and receive, and for the general good cheer we all share during this season. Christmas is the "most wonderful time of the year" because of the radical "good news of great joy" which the angel proclaimed to the shepherds! God's light has shined in the darkness of this world in a unique manner, and it offers the promise to change humanity!

Christmas is all about God becoming a human being and changing our understanding of what a true human being is! It is all about God becoming man, so that we can be filled with His Divine presence and become like God. Jesus, the God/Man showed us what true agape love, divine compassion, kindness, generosity and hope are. He incarnated these virtues in a person, and then challenged each one of us to follow His example. And even though our fallen human nature tries to lead us away—to the miserly greedy, egocentric and lonely life of a Mr. Scrooge—Christmas opens to us a new life!

If we truly want to become loving, kind, generous, and compassionate, let us never forget that the Source Itself of these virtues is Jesus Christ Himself! Let us truly know Him. Let us embrace His way of Life. Let us invite Him to be born anew in our lives and allow His Spirit to live within us! This is the good news of great joy that Christmas proclaims. We have a new path in life, a transformative path, that will not only change our own lives—making our lives all the more meaningful and filled with purpose—but will inspire and motivate us to become the agent of change for others, helping them discover this path of new life!

Dicken's The Christmas Carol is a beautiful story, but let us never leave out the Source of all good virtues, Jesus Christ Himself! Here is the essence and center of Christmas!

And as Tiny Tim says, "And may **God bless us, everyone!**"