

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.



December 24, 2017 – Sunday Before Nativity/Eve of the Nativity | Nun-Martyr Eugenia of Rome

The Sunday before the Nativity of the Lord (December 18-24) is known as the Sunday of the Holy Fathers. On this day the Church commemorates all those who were well-pleasing to God from all ages, from Adam to Saint Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos, those who are mentioned in the genealogy of Luke 3:23-38. The holy prophets and prophetesses are also remembered today, especially the Prophet Daniel and the three holy youths.

The Troparion to the Prophet Daniel and the three holy youths (“Great are the accomplishments of faith...”) is quite similar to the Troparion for Saint Theodore the Recruit. The Kontakion to Saint Theodore, who suffered martyrdom by fire, reminds us that he also had faith as his breastplate (see I Thessalonians 5:8).

The Holy Martyr Eugenia, was a Roman by birth. She lived at Alexandria, where her father Philip was sent by the emperor Commodus (180-192) to be Prefect of Egypt. Eugenia received a fine upbringing and was noted for her beauty and good disposition. Many illustrious youths sought her hand, but she did not wish to marry anyone, for she was determined to preserve her virginity.

Providentially, she became acquainted with the Epistles of the Apostle Paul. She yearned with all her soul to become a Christian, but kept this a secret from her parents. At that time, Christians were banished from Alexandria by the command of the emperor. Wishing to learn more about Christian teachings, she asked permission to visit one of the family estates outside the city, supposedly to enjoy the countryside. She left in the company of her two servants Protus and Hyacinthus, dressed in men's clothes. She and her companions were baptized at a certain monastery by Bishop Elias (July 14), who learned about her in a vision. He blessed her to pursue asceticism at the monastery disguised as the monk Eugene.

By her ascetic labors, Saint Eugenia acquired the gift of healing. Once, a rich young woman named Melanthia turned to her for help. Seeing "Eugene," this woman burned with an impure passion, and when she was spurned, she falsely accused the saint of attempted rape. Saint Eugenia came to trial before the Prefect of Egypt (her father), and she was forced to reveal her secret. Her parents and brothers rejoiced to find the one for whom they had long grieved.

After a while they all accepted holy Baptism. But Philip, after being denounced by pagans, was dismissed from his post. The Alexandrian Christians chose him as their bishop. The new Prefect, fearing the wrath of the people, did not dare to execute Philip openly, but sent assassins to kill him. They inflicted wounds upon Saint Philip while he was praying, from which he died three days later.

Saint Claudia went to Rome with her sons, daughter, and her servants. There Saint Eugenia continued with monastic life, and brought many young women to Christ. Claudia built a wanderers' hostel and aided the poor. After several peaceful years, the emperor Galienus (260-268) intensified the persecution against Christians, and many of them found refuge with Saints Claudia and Eugenia.

Basilla, an orphaned Roman girl of imperial lineage, heard about the Christians and Saint Eugenia. She sent a trusted servant to the saint asking her to write her a letter explaining Christian teachings. Saint Eugenia sent her friends and co-ascetics, Protus and Hyacinthus, who enlightened Basilla, and she accepted holy Baptism. Basilla's servant then told her fiancé Pompey that his betrothed had become a Christian. Pompey then complained to the emperor against the Christians for preaching celibacy and denouncing idolatry. Basilla refused to enter into marriage with Pompey, and so they killed her with a sword.

They dragged Saints Protus and Hyacinthus into a temple to make them sacrifice to the idols, but just as they entered, the idol fell down and was shattered. The holy Martyrs Protus and Hyacinthus were beheaded. They also brought Saint Eugenia to the temple of Diana by force, but she had not even entered it, when the pagan temple collapsed with its idol.

They threw the holy martyr into the Tiber with a stone about her neck, but the stone became untied and she remained unharmed. She also remained unscathed in the fire. Then they cast her into a pit, where she remained for ten days. During this time the Savior Himself appeared to her and said that she would enter into the heavenly Kingdom on the day He was born. When this radiant Feast came, the executioner put her to death with a sword. After her death, Saint Eugenia appeared to her mother to tell her beforehand the day of her own death. (*adapted from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 11:9-10,17-23,32-40

Brethren, by faith Abraham dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

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

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 1:1-25

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife* of Uriah. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon *are* fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ *are* fourteen generations.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

~Christ is born! Glorify Him!~



Office of the Bishop
312 Garfield Street
Johnstown, PA 15906

CHRISTMAS ARCHPASTORAL LETTER
December 25, 2017 / January 7, 2018

Protocol No. 15/2017

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

Dear Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we celebrate this joyous Feast of the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, I wish to share with you one of my favorite Christmas homilies from the Church Fathers concerning this day. St. John Chrysostom spoke on the Incarnation with these words:

“I behold a new and wondrous mystery!

My ears resound to the shepherd’s song, piping no soft melody, but loudly chanting a heavenly hymn!

The Angels sing!

The Archangels blend their voices in harmony!

The Cherubim resound their joyful praise!

The Seraphim exalt His glory!

All join to praise this Holy Feast, beholding the Godhead herein...on earth and man in heaven. He Who is above now, for our salvation, dwells here below; and we, who were lowly, are exalted by divine mercy.

Today Bethlehem resembles heaven, hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices and, in place of the sun, witnessing the rising of the Sun of Justice!

Ask not how it is accomplished, for where God wills, the order of nature is overturned. For He willed, He had the powers, He descended. He saved. All things move in obedience to God.

Today He Who Is, is born! And He Who Is becomes what He was not! For when He was God, He became man while not relinquishing the Godhead that is His...

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him angels, nor archangels, nor thrones, nor dominions, nor powers, nor principalities, but treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Yet, He has not forsaken His angels, nor left them deprived of His care, nor because of His Incarnation has He ceased being God. And behold *Kings* have come, that they might serve the Leader of the Hosts of Heaven; *women*, that they might adore Him Who was born of a woman so that He might change the pains of childbirth into joy; *virgins*, to the Son of the Virgin...

***Infants*, that they may adore Him Who became a little Child, so that out of the mouths of infants He might perfect praise;**

***Children*, to the Child Who raised martyrs through the rage of Herod; *Men*, to Him Who became man that He might heal the miseries of His servants;**

***Shepherds*, to the Good Shepherd Who laid down His life for the sheep;**

***Priests*, to Him Who has become a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek;**

***Servants*, to Him Who took upon Himself the form of a servant, that He might bless our stewardship with the reward of freedom;**

***Fishermen*, to the Fisher of humanity;**

***Publicans*, to Him Who from among them names a chosen evangelist;**

Sinful women, to Him Who exposed His feet to the tears of the repentant woman;

And that I may embrace them all together, all sinners have come, that they may look upon the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world! Since, therefore, all rejoice, I too desire to rejoice! I too wish to share the choral dance, to celebrate the festival! But I take my part, not plucking the harp nor with the music of the pipes nor holding a torch, but holding in my arms the cradle of Christ!

For this is all my hope!

This is my life!

This is my salvation!

This is my pipe, my harp!

And bearing it, I come, and having from its power received the gift of speech, I too, with the angels and shepherds, sing:

Glory to God in the Highest! And on earth peace to men of good will.” Amen.

Personal Greetings:

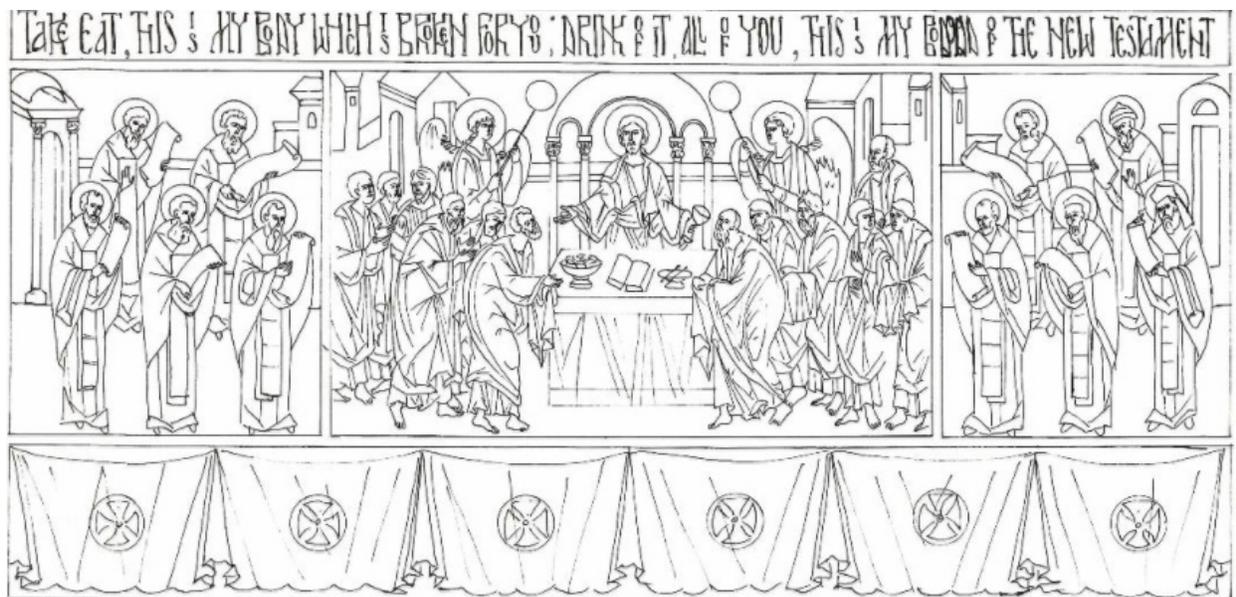
Today may all of us, Priests, Panis, Deacons, Sub-Deacons, Readers, Parish Officers, Parishioners (young and old), Friends, and Supporters of our God-protected American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese experience the joy and wonders of the Shepherds and the awe and respect of the Three Wise Men at the arrival of the Messiah, our new born King. Christ is Born!

Greetings from Johnstown with much love,

+ Bishop Gregory

+Bishop Gregory of Nyssa

To be read as the sermon and distributed in all churches of the Diocese at the Divine Liturgy on the Feast Day of the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ!



ARCHANGEL STUNO MICHAEL KABELUCK - 2017

Beauty Will Save the World (Dostoyevsky, The Idiot)

We are moving forward with the next phase of iconography at St. Thomas, which will complete work in the Narthex (the entry of the church) and in the Holy Place (the curved wall in the altar area). Icons of two Seraphim on the ends of the curved walls will cost \$1,700 each. Icons of the ten Bishops flanking the icon of the Heavenly Banquet in front of the altar (either side of the Banquet already in the Holy Place) will cost \$2,000 each. We will also be moving Gorazd of Prague, a Bishop whose icon currently hangs in the Nave, into the Holy Place with an icon of John of Damascus being put in his place, which can be sponsored for \$600. Four new icons will be completed in the nave, for \$750 each. The writing above the icons, as well as the "tablecloth" below will be completed, and costs have been combined with the sponsorship of the Bishops.

The icons will be installed in 2018. The last time we offered this opportunity to glorify God in His church, the response was tremendous. We are ready to collect funds to complete the project, so if you are interested in participating, please contact Josh Moore by phone at (541) 601-8413 or at jgmoore01@gmail.com.

Please see the Church website for up-to-date sponsorship information and pictures of the icon work to be completed. Any donation of \$500 or more is eligible for a memorial plaque in the social hall. **Currently** we have: Pledged/Received Funds: \$11,517 | Remaining Needed: \$14,883.

The Bishops to be placed in the Holy Place are currently planned to be (\$2,000 to sponsor one): Basil the Great, Gregory the Great, John Chrysostom, Cyprian of Carthage, Athanasius the Great, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch (sponsored), and Peter Moghila.

2 Seraphim in the Holy Place (\$1,700 to sponsor; 1 sponsored).

John of Damascus in the nave (\$600 to sponsor)

In the Narthex: Pr. Daniel, David, Elijah, and Melchizedek. (\$750 to sponsor).

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The Nativity of Christ.—He has come upon earth, He Who in the beginning created us from earth and breathed His Divine breath into us; He has come Who “gives to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 27:25.); He has come, He Who by a single word called all things visible and invisible from non-existence into existence, Who by a word called into being birds, fishes, quadrupeds, insects, and all creatures, existing under His almighty providence and care; He has come, He Whom the innumerable hosts of Angels continually and joy. And in what humility has He come! He is born of a poor Virgin, in a cave, wrapped in poor swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. Riches, honors, glory of this world! Fall down, fall down in humility, tearful devotion, and deep gratitude before the Savior of men, and share your riches with the poor and needy. Do not pride yourselves on your visionary, fleeting distinctions, for true distinction can only be found in virtue. Glory of this world! Learn here, before the manger, your vanity. Thus, let us all humble ourselves; let us all fall down in the dust before the boundless humility and exhaustion of the Sovereign of all, of God, Who has come to heal our infirmities, to save us from pride, vanity, corruption, and every sinful impurity.

– St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*

Saint Ahmed the Calligrapher and the Antidoron

The Holy New Martyr Ahmed was from Constantinople, having been reared in the ungodliness of the Muslims by his parents. By profession he was a copyist in the Great Archives. In accordance with Ottoman law, since he did not have a wife, he had a slave instead, a Russian woman. Another captive from Russia lived together with her, an old woman, also a slave. Both these women were very pious.

On feast days the old woman would go to church. Taking the blessed bread, or antidoron, she would give it to the young woman to eat. The old woman would also bring her holy water to drink. Whenever this occurred and Ahmed was close to her, he would smell a beautiful and



indescribable fragrance coming out of her mouth. He would ask her what she was eating to make her mouth smell so fragrant. Not realizing what was happening, the slave would say that she was not eating anything. However, he persisted in asking. Eventually she told him that she was eating the bread which had been blessed by the priests, which the old woman brought her whenever she returned from church.

On hearing this, Ahmed was filled with longing to see the Orthodox church and how Orthodox received this blessed bread. Therefore he summoned a priest and told him to prepare a secret place for him, so that he could go when the Patriarch was serving the Liturgy. When the appointed day arrived, dressed as a Christian, he went to the Patriarchate and followed the Divine Liturgy. While he was in church, he saw the Patriarch shining with light and lifted off the floor, as he came out of the altar and through the holy doors to bless the people. As he blessed, rays of light came from his finger tips, but though the rays fell on the heads of all the Christian, they did not fall on Ahmed's head. This happened two or three times and each time Ahmed saw the same thing. Thus, Ahmed came to the faith. Without hesitation he sent for the priest, who gave him rebirth through baptism. Ahmed remained a secret Christian for some time.

However, one day Ahmed and certain noblemen were eating together. Afterwards they sat talking and smoking the narghile (hookah pipe), as is the custom. In the course of the conversation they began to discuss what was the greatest thing in the world. Each gave his opinion. The first guest said that the greatest thing in the world was for a man to have wisdom. The second maintained that woman was the greatest thing in the world. And yet a third said that the greatest thing in the world, and by far the most delightful, was pilaf with yogurt – for was this not the food of the righteous in paradise?

Then it was Ahmed's turn. They all turned to him, asking him for his opinion on this matter. Filled with holy zeal, Ahmed cried out that the greatest thing of all was the Faith of the Christians. And confessing himself to be a Christian, he boldly censured the falseness and deception of the Muslims. At first, on hearing this the Muslims were aghast. Then, filled with unspeakable rage, they fell on the holy martyr and dragged him to a judge, so that he could be sentenced to death. Thus he received the crown of martyrdom, being beheaded by command of the ruler on the third day of May in the year 1682, at the place called Kayambane Bahche. Such was the blessed end of the Holy New Martyr, through whose holy prayers may we be deemed worthy of the Kingdom of God. Amen. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)



PARISH NEWS

- ❖ On Sunday evening at 5:00, a Nativity Vigil followed by the Liturgy of St. Basil will be held at St. Thomas. Please observe at least a 3 hour fast if you plan to receive the Eucharist.
- ❖ We are excited to announce that St. Thomas is forming a choir! Rehearsals will start in February in preparation for Easter. All interested men and women in our parish who enjoy singing are encouraged to get in touch with Adina or Bernard Vallandingham at adinavall@yahoo.com or valland.b@gmail.com.

Follow Our Diocese On-Line

Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

Camp Nazareth: <http://www.campnazareth.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, Santiago Alzugaray, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Deanna Jarrett, Tucker Karl and family, Robert Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectaros and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)