



# **“ORTHODOX 9” PARISHES BULLETIN**

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN CANADA

Monthly Newsletter for the family of Orthodox Churches including:



**St. Mary’s (the Nativity of the Holy Virgin) - NISKU**

**Sts. Peter & Paul - BONNYVILLE**

**St. John the Baptist - HOREN**

**Holy Ascension - CALMAR**

**St. Onuphrius - FOAM LAKE (SK)**

**Whitsuntide (Holy Trinity) - THORSBY**

**Dormition of Theotokos -MACNUTT (SK)**

**St. John the Baptist - VEGREVILLE**

**Sts. Peter & Paul - INSINGER (SK)**



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***My dear parishioners and friends of Orthodox IX Parishes!***

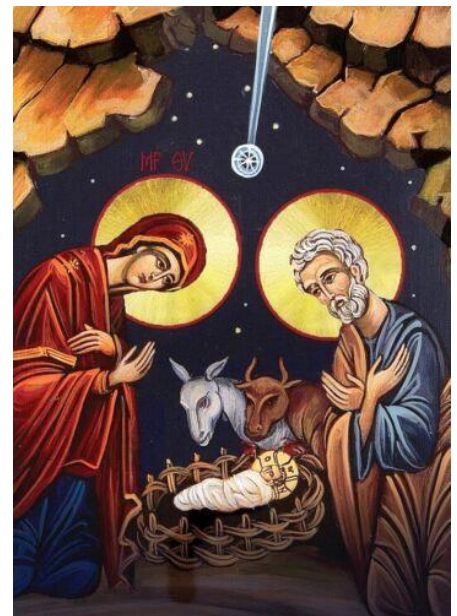
***Christ is Born! Glorify Him!***

**With the ineffable gift of God's Love and Mercy to us sinners - with the appearance of the Son of God on earth, who came down from heaven by the all-good will of God our Father and was incarnated by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human for our salvation!**

*“Christ is born; glorify him; Christ is from heaven; go up and meet him; Christ is on earth; be exalted!” (St. Gregory the Theologian, 4<sup>th</sup> c)*

With joy, let us sing the Nativity of the Savior Christ, contemplating the pre-eternal Greatness – and voluntary Humility of the One Born of the Virgin today!

Who is this Baby that the Blessed Mary holds in Her most pure hands? This is God, the Existing One, Who brought everything from non-existence into being, Who by His power contains all creation and by His providence builds the world. This is the Highest Artist Who created disembodied spirits and all flesh, combining those in the crown of His Creation, in His Own image and likeness - man!



Then, having departed from the will of God, we fell under the dark power of the devil; we found ourselves in the land and shadow of death; some - in mortal fear, others - in the bonds of hell...

And now, the Lord, Who could stand it no longer to see how the devil torments the human race, leading us further and further away, clouding the mind and heart, by attachment to earthly, by various sins and iniquities and the charm of idolatry – He has come to deliver us from the work of the enemy.

For this reason, the Most High God comes down to earth, so that to raise us up to heaven.

Oh, our Most Merciful Lord! Who for our salvation, is being born now in a cave and is put into a manger, - we, Your unworthy servants, praise Your saving providence for us, - and we bow down to Your most pure Mother in the flesh, who served such a great and adorable Sacrament, and to all your Saints who have been keeping our eyes open for Your Holy Gospel!

***Христос рождается! Славимо Його!***

***Have a Blessed Nativity of Christ and a peaceful New 2023 Year!***

**Christmas Message from His Grace Matthew, Bishop of Sourozh,  
Temporary Administrator of the Patriarchal parishes in Canada  
to the Pastors, Deacons, Monastics and All the Faithful  
Children of Patriarchal Parishes in Canada and the USA**



Dear fathers, brothers and sisters!



I heartily congratulate you all on a blessed holiday - the Birth of the Lord our God and Savior Jesus Christ!

In these holy days full of Christmas joy, all our hearts with trepidation and reverence rush to the *"great mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."* (1 Tim. 3:16).

This is one of the many mysteries of the spiritual world that are invisible to us – the mystery of the Incarnation, in which the unfathomable power and depth of the infinite love of God's Son to the mankind as a whole, and to every and each one of us. He came into the world to bring hope to our hearts and open the way to salvation for us.

And today, in the days of difficulties and trials, we wholeheartedly trust in the Lord, because we believe that the Lord God is "the eternal Rock" and in Him "our strength and eternal salvation" (Isaiah 26:4).

Sharing with you the joy of the great holiday, with all my heart I wish you all spiritual and bodily health and pray with you that the feast of the Nativity of Christ becomes for all of us a day of our spiritual enlightenment and rebirth, and the New Year of 2023 was filled with peace and prosperity.

May the Christmas light of the Star of Bethlehem sanctify us with divine grace and fill our hearts with endless joy, the blessed spirit of peace, love and hope.

I call upon you all the blessings of God.

With love in Christ the Born,

+ MATTHEW

Bishop of Sourozh, Temporary  
Administrator of the Patriarchal  
parishes in the USA and Canada

***“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3, 3)***

## One of the two Feasts to follow the Nativity of the Lord

Not long after Christmas we celebrate two salvific events: the Great Feast of Circumcision, and then, right after it one of the Twelve Greatest – the Feast of Baptism. And this very close continuity - is not a coincidence, but the indication of the succession.



One of the outstanding hierarchs who laboured in the North America in the previous century, Metropolitan Benjamin Fedchenkov, whose life is the example of the loyalty to the Church and love for every soul even during the civil war and the persecution of the Church at the beginning of the last century, once tackled an interesting phenomenon of this Great Feast being over-shadowed and not quite understandable to the people; thus he dedicated a separate work in his “Letters about Twelve Greatest Feast” to this one, that is not among them...

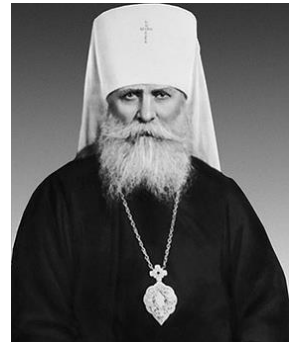
This reflection is called “The Day of the Circumcision of the Lord”, to which let us attend today, on the eve of both the Circumcision and the Baptism – to better understand the meaning and message of both.

### **Inconspicuous**

The feast of Circumcision usually goes unnoticed. And you don't know if it's a Twelve [one of the Twelve Greatest] holiday or not.

With the great light of the feast of the Nativity of the Lord and with the coming Baptism, the Epiphany of the Trinity – this feast of Circumcision, pressed between them, is lost like a star under two suns.

Add to this the memory of such a great luminary of the Church as Basil the Great [who is commemorated on the same day]; this triumph also weakens Circumcision.



But the very fact that the Lord was pleased to accept circumcision... and finally, the fact that the Church has established this holiday makes you think about it... Maybe something will be revealed to us? Or in any case, we will find out what the Church thinks in its services.

### **The Feast of the Law of God**

The Lord came to establish a New Law, and He had to fulfill the Old One. And so, from the very moment of His birth (circumcision is the first sacrament after birth), He immediately begins to fulfill the law. The legislator is the first to obey the law.

If our Lord fulfilled the law, then we, following His example, are obliged to do the same. That is, before reaching high spiritual contemplations, we must first fulfill the commandments about deeds; before praying with our prayers, we need to fulfill the church rite; before reaching freedom of spirit, we need to learn the discipline of obedience; before entering the realm of grace, we need to go through the law; before reaching dispassion, we need to lead the struggle with passions and especially with "own will"; before you reach the perfection of love, you need to learn to fulfill at least the commands of the authorities, the Church (for example, about fasting); before you enter into the spirit, into the inner, you need to do by the book, the outer. In a word, before you become a New Testament man, you still need to overcome the old one in yourself, that is, fulfill the Old Testament requirements.

But furthermore, as this is just the beginning. ... It is necessary to reach the New Testament state as perfect, salvific, free, truly spiritual, and not deathly ceremonial. Indeed, it is necessary to enter into a covenant with God, and not formally outwardly stop at the book, at the rite.

However, first you need to go through the "school" of legalism in order, firstly, to feel how hard it is (the operation of "circumcision" of your will), secondly, to understand that we deserved it, this slave school, with our sins, and thirdly (and this, perhaps, is the most important thing) — to experience that the school of law itself (books, rituals even in Christianity) does not achieve the goal, does not save, does not comfort, does not saturate, does not deliver from evil. And that, therefore, it is necessary to look for some other way of salvation. And this is grace. There, a person only comes to life spiritually, receiving the "Life-Giving Spirit".

So the Lord, before receiving in the sacrament of Baptism the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who descended in the form of a dove, first fulfills the law. In the same way, in order to truly become blessed, to be finally reborn, we still need to fulfill various laws, canons, "rules", "obediences", ranks, and so on. The law, therefore, must be executed first.

### **"For the sake of the people"**

The Jews were extraordinary "lawyers".

And therefore, anyone who (as the Lord) wanted to do something among this legalistic people, of course, had to be at the height of the law himself. Otherwise, they wouldn't have listened. And the Lord fulfilled all the prescriptions. And then He challenged the Jews by an open question: "Which of you will convict me of unrighteousness?" (John 8:46). Therefore, His accusers could not give evidence of His violation of the law. Then there was only one fault left: "Are you the Son of God?"

So afterward the apostles had to reckon with this legalistic psychology of the Jews; both the apostle Peter in Antioch (Gal. 2) and the apostle Paul did this repeatedly. The latter circumcised his disciple Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman and a Greek, for the sake of the Jews (Acts. 16:3), the apostle Peter was "hypocritical", as if, in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-20), although both were against circumcision, even for Jews.

### ***...give him the name Jesus***

During circumcision, the Jews were given a name. Now this has also been revealed. Extremely important.

... And if you look through the Bible ..., you will easily see that the names were given not by chance, but with meaning. It usually meant the realization of something expected, or the destiny of the born, and the like.

... And in Hebrew, the Savior (Jesus is the Greek word from the Hebrew) is Yehoshua (or abbreviated Yeshua, Yeshu), which means "God is his salvation", or — "God the Savior".

...This name was given even before birth, at the Annunciation, by the Archangel Gabriel, that is, by the command of the Most Holy Trinity (Mt. 1:21) with the explanation that He, Jesus, would deliver (therefore, His entire future is

already indicated in this name: redemptive service to the world. "He will save His own people from their sin" (Mt. 1:21). He will save; they will not be saved "by themselves"...

And now it is clear why circumcision should have been the first holiday after the Nativity of Christ: here is the bond of the Old and New Testaments, the end of one and the beginning of the other. This is the definition of the whole subsequent task: this, therefore, should have been indicated at the very beginning. Therefore, the holiday fell between Christmas and Epiphany. Not only because circumcision was to be performed on the eighth day, but also according to the meaning, the relationship of events: first the birth, then the beginning of His ministry, and only then going out to preach, [and] — baptism.

### **What is circumcision?**

This is how it is first mentioned in the Word of God, in the Bible (Gen. 17): The Lord appeared to Abraham and promises him, childless, to produce many nations from him. And therefore he also changes his name from "Abram" to "Abraham". And he makes a covenant with him; and with all his offspring: *I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.* ... *"As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ...and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and you. And the baby will be circumcised for you in your last days, every male in your family... Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."* (Gen. 17:10-14).

And the 99-year-old elder Abraham with all his family was circumcised on the same day. And this covenant was so strictly fulfilled that because of its violation, the "friend of God" Moses himself almost died.

When, after the appearance of God to him at Horeb, he returned from the land of Midian to Egypt to save the people, and went along with his wife Zipporah and son (and the latter was uncircumcised; apparently, his mother pitied him and did not want to fulfill this Jewish custom, and his father, Moses, did not insist on condescending tenderness to his wife), then The Lord, who endured this in a foreign country, did not tolerate it when Moses went to his own, and moreover with such a high purpose of God. And God appeared at night and wanted to strike Moses with death. Then the wife took a sharp stone and circumcised her son... And the Lord spared Moses (Exodus 4:24-26). God's covenant was so strictly followed!

The question is: what is the meaning of this symbol? Circumcision speaks of death...

The foreskin is the way of human life. At the same time, it is the focus of passion. So, whoever wants to have a covenant with God, he must overthrow his passions or sins: live blamelessly. Therefore, the prophet Jeremiah says: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts, you people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, or my wrath will flare up and burn like fire because of the evil you have done — burn with no one to quench it." (Jer. 4:4). Saint Moses says the same thing (Deut. 10:16).

Anyone who wants to have a connection with God must give up everything, even his very life: to love God, to be devoted to Him to death, completely, as if in advance to give himself up to death for God's sake or to sacrifice himself. To die for oneself and live for God.

This is the strong meaning of this rite. And this clearly leads us to two conclusions: to the Cross and to baptism.

## **Circumcision and Redemption**

So, therefore, circumcision served as a prototype of the Calvary Death. And, being circumcised on the eighth day after birth, the Lord was already predicting His Atoning Sacrifice. Being circumcised by human circumcision, He took upon Himself the sins of people; and in His flesh He showed the world that He undertook to fulfill the Law instead of them, to be blameless in covenant with God; and for their sins He would die. Thus the connection of circumcision with Redemption is revealed.

Another connection is with our baptism. The Apostle Paul speaks about this quite clearly in the Epistle to the Colossians, where he compares these two types of the covenant: Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism. There — circumcision of the flesh, here — circumcision of the heart; there — handmade; here — not made with hands; but both there and here — a connection with God.

*<sup>9</sup> For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, <sup>10</sup> and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. <sup>11</sup> In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. (St. Paul to Colossians)*

Here, in baptism, this connection is expressed only in a different rite, but its meaning is the same: death for God's sake. A person, plunging into the water, dies (as if in a coffin) for the former sinful life, in order to revive with faith and purity, a new, Christian life.

The Lord brought this new way: the mystery of baptism; and He Himself was baptized. But first He performed the Old Testament rite of foreshadow. As at the Last Supper, He translated the eating of the Old Testament lamb into the Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

### **For our sins**

Now it remains for me to note only one side of the meaning of circumcision.

In every act of the Lord we see the manifestation of a Redemptive feat for us. "He was baptized with our baptism," "crucified for our" sins, "ascended with us," and so on.

Circumcision also meant execution, punishment for sins. And this execution is now accepted by the Sinless — who, therefore, was not subject to punishment. And in this case, He begins to suffer for others, for us. And therefore, we can say: "is circumcised with our circumcision."

### **An oath under the law**

In this regard, the question of the oath should also be clarified. The Word of God clearly states the connection of the law with the oath: "Christ redeemed us from the lawful oath, having been sworn by us" (Gal. 3:13). "God has sent his only begotten Son, born of a wife, who is under the law, that He may redeem the law, that we may receive the sonship" (Gal. 4:4-5).

And now the Lord has begun to fulfill the law.

**Metropolitan Benjamin (Fedchenkov).**  
**"Reflections on the Twelve Great Feasts".**  
**(Shortened by archpriest E. Protsenko)**

## A warm thank you from and to the Orthodox IX Christian Community!

Summing up the results of last 2022 year, in the midst of the Christmas grace of the new year of 2023, the main thing that I should do – is to express a heartfelt gratitude to all our clergy, all our Parish Councils and parishioners, all our friends and benefactors!

Last year had a lot of temptations for nearly all our parishes, some of them being quite painful and unpleasant. But the way you have withstood them was impressive and encouraging! Always with profit for the Church!

Some routine things were no less challenging, but you have coped with them through perseverance and a lot of patience!

You sacrificed your best time, your health and peace for the sake of the Holy Churches and the Gospel! You have been irrational for the sake of God!

Once again you have applied your administrative, creative, professional, vocal, organizational, and other personal talents to the glory of God and the true and unperishing profit of your neighbors.

You went this Way yourself, and you invited, encouraged, and urged the other people to go and choose this only salvific Path! You kept open your eyes and ears for Gospel and helped the others in that. And you tried to organize your family life closer to the Churches.

When the weather (and the roads) was inclement – you still chose to take the adventure and visit the churches; during the best days of the year – you preferred the beauty of the Holy Services to the natural beauty!

You thought and cared about the temples, you were glad to come there and greet the other people; if you could not come – you have sent greetings, and timely donations; you have said a kind word, you have attended to the word of God that we tried to deliver to you by any means; you did not leave the congregation, you have had good intentions and plans for the spiritual life and the Church!

You smiled, were kissing and hugging, giving the unexpected benefits (gifts and meals) and advice, were supportive, tolerable, and loving!

**Thank you ever so much! And may God remember you in His Kingdom and replenish your strength and health, make tangible your faith and hope by the means possible only for Him! Amen.**



## 2023- Dates to remember

- *February 25. Saturday – 10:00 am – Divine Liturgy; 11:30am – The Annual Diocese meeting will be held , with the location TBC*
- *February 27. Monday – GREAT LENT BEGINS*
- *March 4. Saturday – 10:00 pm – The Annual “Orthodox IX” Parishes meeting will be held at St. Mary Parish Hall, Nisku.*
- *March 5. Sunday of Orthodoxy*
- *March 11. Saturday – 1:00 pm – The Annual St. Mary’s Parish meeting will be held at Parish Hall, Nisku.*
- *April 16. – Easter Sunday – **HOLY PASCHA – THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST***



## Joy to the world! The Lord has come!



Dear little brothers and sisters!

Have you ever been so excited or happy about something you didn't even know? Did you celebrate your birthday or a holiday? Did your team win a big game? Did you get a new brother or sister? Maybe you laughed. Maybe you danced. Maybe you hugged somebody, or someone you love was hugging you, especially when you did not see the one for a long time. Maybe you expected it to be not so good, but it was perfect and awesome! Maybe you waited for this moment for a long time, and now it is going to happen! Maybe you did not quite believe it is possible, but it was much better than you even expected! Maybe you even do not understand why your parents and all your family is so happy, but you look at them and you become happy and joyful just because they are. Sometimes we might be so happy that we don't know what to do!



And today we celebrate the joy that is so much greater than even all our joyful moments, and in addition to that – **this joy is for everyone, for the whole world!**

**Today is Christmas, and we celebrate the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ, our True and Loving God, Who came to save us and to let us be with Him in peace forever!**

*"I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people,"* (Luke 2:10) – says the Angel. And the people, who saw the sign of the Christmas Star *"rejoiced exceedingly with great joy"* (Mat. 2:10).

We can join this Great Joy because we have found Jesus Christ too. **Christ is born! Glorify Him!**

### Christmas carol "Joy to the World"

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come  
Let Earth receive her King  
Let every heart prepare Him room  
And Heaven and nature sing  
And Heaven and nature sing  
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing*

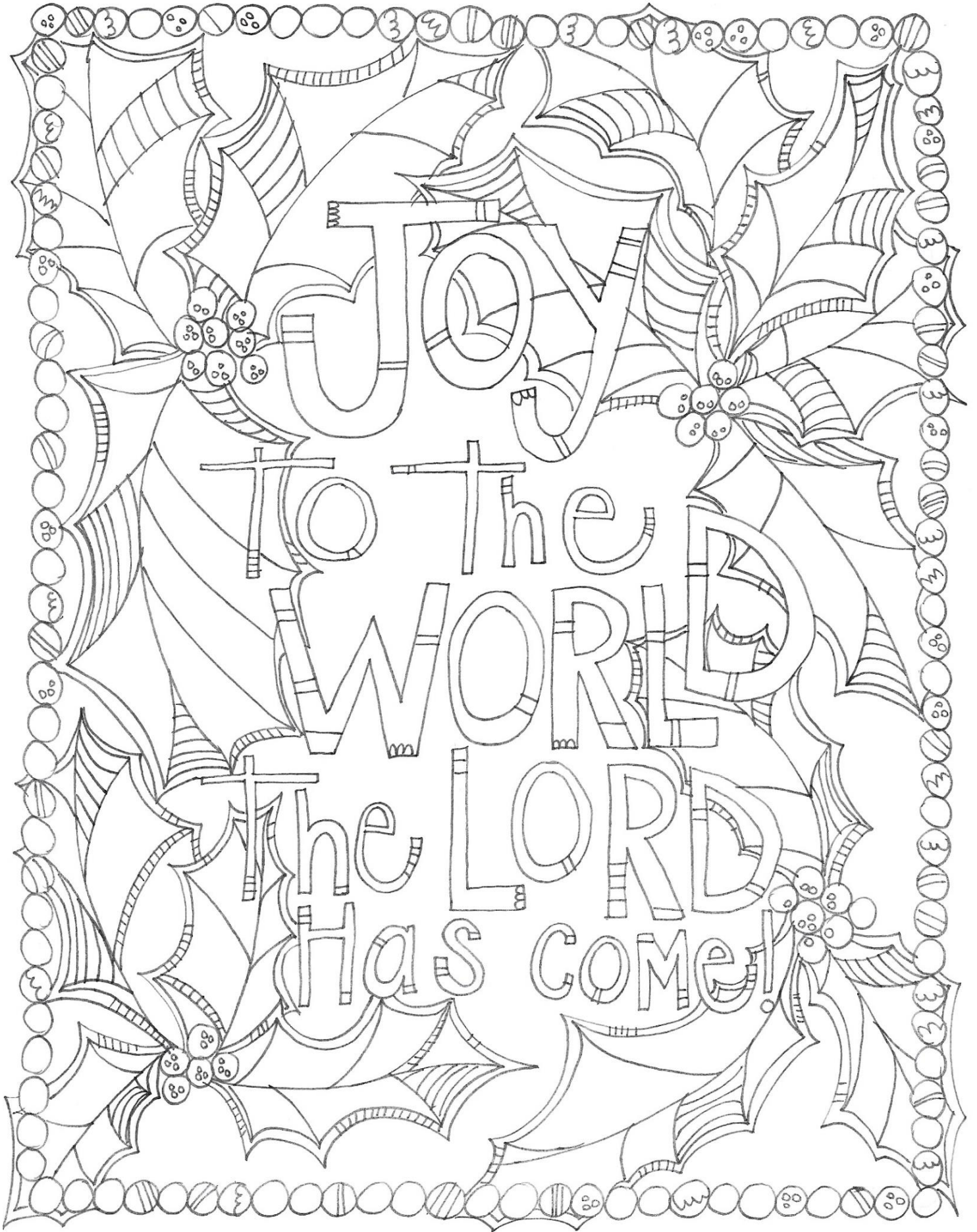
*Joy to the Earth, the Savior reigns  
Let all their songs employ  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy  
Repeat the sounding joy  
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy*

*He rules the world with truth and grace  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness  
And wonders of His love  
And wonders of His love  
And wonders, wonders, of His love*



*Let us help the shepherds find their way  
to their Joy - the newborn Jesus Christ!*





# January 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					<u>6</u> <b>Christmas Eve</b> 2:00 p.m. – <b>Christmas Vespers &amp; Matins - Nisku</b>	<u>7</u>  <b>Nativity of Christ</b> 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy
<u>8</u> 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy at St. Barbara  <i>Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos</i>	<u>9</u> Protomartyr Archdeacon Stephen 	<u>10</u> Apostle Nicanor, of the Seventy 	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u> <b>Virginmart.</b> Anysia at Thessalonica 	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>  <i>Circumcision of the Lord, St. Basil the Great, Julian New Year</i>
<u>15</u> 10:00 am - Liturgy at St. Barbara	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>18</u> Epiphany Eve (strict fast) 	<u>19</u> <b>The Baptism of our Lord</b> 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy (Nisku) with water & houses blessing	<u>20</u> Synaxis of John the Baptist 	<u>21</u>
<u>22</u> 10:00 am - Liturgy at St. Barbara	<u>23</u> <b>St. Dometian of Melitene</b> 	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u> Martyr Tatiana 	<u>26</u>	<u>27</u> St. Nina (Nino) 	<u>28</u>
<u>29</u> 10:00 am - Liturgy at St. Barbara	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u> St. Cyril of Alexandria 				