



“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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Volume 57, Issue 1

January 2024

Dear parishioners and friends of Orthodox IX Parishes!

Once again, we enter the time of the year with the special greetings: **Christ is born!** – we joyously exclaim!

And responding to this we pronounce **Glorify Him!**

This historical Event, in the light of the Lord’s Holy Resurrection, embraces all our life, and we do not need any other greetings or benefits of this life – the New Life is being born, and the Hope to partake in this Life is starting to renew and grow in us.

The whole wisdom of this life, in the persons of the blessed magi, is happy to rush to its Source!

The whole meekness, diligence, and vigilance of this life, in the persons of the shepherds in the fields, having heard the good news of great joy, which is for all the people, happily run to Bethlehem to greet their Beginning!

The whole happiness of this life is finally being fulfilled, in the family of Joseph and Mary who gave birth today to the Baby, in Whom the essence and life of men and the Essence and Life of God reunited!

During the first three centuries, in the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Cyprus, the Nativity of Christ was combined with the Feast of His Baptism on January 19, and called Theophany (‘Manifestation of God’).

This is because He never used any of His power and did not seek happiness for Himself but He is born today to become ‘the Lamb of God’, as the great Forerunner and Baptist John called Him during Theophany – to sacrifice Himself for us and for our salvation. Amen



Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Have a Blessed Nativity of Christ and a peaceful New 2024 Year!

Christmas Message from His Grace Matthew, Bishop of Sourozh, Temporary Administrator of the Patriarchal parishes in Canada



Dear fathers, brothers and sisters!



By the mercy of God we have once again come to the celebration of the holy and joyful feast of the birth on earth of the Saviour of the world, the incarnate Son of God. On this momentous day we hear the good news of the amazing self-abasement of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, when, we see Him, diminishing Himself to the age of a baby, making Himself of no reputation, even unto lying in a manger.

The Lord, Who in the beginning according to His love placed Man higher than all creation, did not cease to love him when Man, rejecting love divine and thereby falling into sin, decided to build his life without God. Becoming incarnate on earth, the Lord gave to humanity which had departed from Him everything necessary for its renewal. “It is not you, who have sinned, who have come to God, but rather the Son of God, against Whom you sinned, that has come to you! He calls all to Himself, He grants forgiveness to all who thirst for it” – so writes St John of Shanghai.

The return of lost humanity to the embrace of the loving God which was accomplished on the night of the Nativity was indeed a source of great joy for the whole creation. “Angels joined the choirs of men, men had fellowship with the angels, and with the other powers above: ... and angels to earth continually descending, and hope abundant touching things to come”. – exclaims St John Chrysostom.

Today we also together with the angelic hosts worship the divine Christ child lying in the manger and sing the heavenly doxology: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!” (Lk. 2: 13-14).

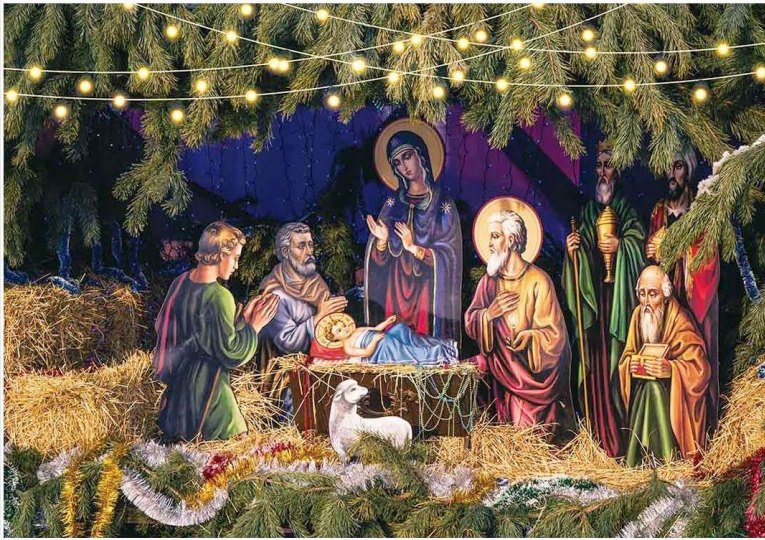
On this holy day I warmly congratulate all of you on the great feast of the Nativity of Christ. Let us thank God for the time given to us for the obtaining of the divine grace and discovering the spiritual experience of salvation in Jesus Christ. May the New Year be for us a year of the good favour of God, a time of prayer, of strengthening in faith and love, of prospering in virtue and of the accord with the good and perfect will of God.

With love in Christ the Born,

+ MATTHEW

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

12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS – THE CHRISTMASTIDE



In the Christian tradition of both East and West, the twelve days of Christmas refer to the period from Christmas Day to Theophany – the period of Christmastide.

This is one of those rare times in the life of the Church where all fasting is suspended, and the fullness of Christ’s incarnation is on full display.

Once St. John Chrysostom brought the celebration of Christmas (from Rome) to the Church of Antioch, it soon spread to the rest of the eastern Sees. Theophany was kept as the end of this 12-day Christmas feast. The compound celebration of

Theophany and Nativity on January 6 is still observed by the Armenian Christians.

The Nativity of Christ is a three-day celebration: the formal title of the first day is “The Nativity According to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ”, and celebrates not only the Nativity of Jesus, but also the Adoration of the Magi: Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar, and the commemoration of the shepherds in Bethlehem who were watching their flocks and came to see the Lord.

Christmastide is fast-free, but not for the sake of gluttony. Rather, because we are celebrating the purification and redemption of creation that is wrought by Christ’s incarnation—all foods are sanctified and acceptable for Christians by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We traditionally give gifts to one another, imitating the magi who brought gifts to the Savior, the Theotokos who offered Christ as a gift for the life of the world, and the example set by St. Nicholas.

On the day after Christmas (Jan. 8), a *synaxis*—a bringing together or gathering—of all the feasts related to the life *of the Most Holy Theotokos* is celebrated. By giving birth to Christ, she became an instrument of salvation through the incarnation of God. (One will rarely see an Orthodox icon of Mary where Christ is not present.) Mary served as the prototype of a living temple of the Holy Spirit, and those of the Church after her—both individually and collectively—imitate her in this regard.

This celebration of Mary is followed by the commemoration of the first Christian martyr following Christ’s ascension: **Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen** (Jan. 9). A hymn of this feast tells the story beautifully:



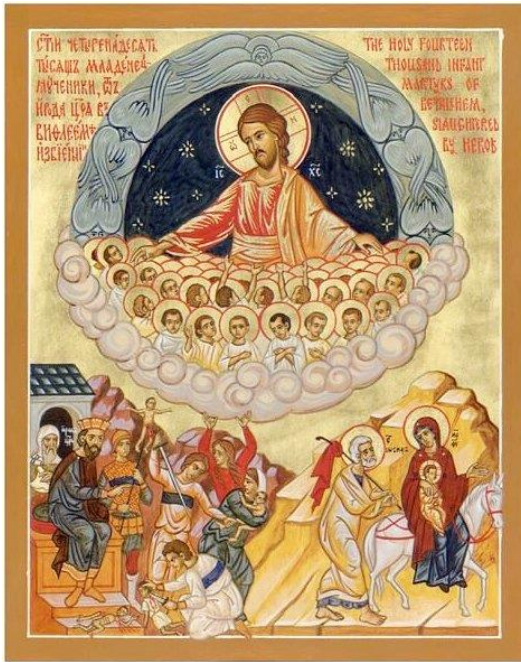
Yesterday the Master arrived in the flesh; today the servant departs from the flesh.

Yesterday he who reigns was born; today the servant dies for him by stoning.

As a holy martyr, Stephen was a true “witness” (the Greek word for martyr) of Christ’s incarnation.

On the 3rd day of the Afterfeast, January the 10th, a great number of Martyrs - the **20,000 Martyrs of Nicomedia** is celebrated! Including Hieromartyrs Glycerius, priest, and the deacons Theophilus and Migdonius, Martyrs Zeno,

Dorotheus, Mardonius, Indes, Gorgonius, Peter, and Euthymius, Virgin-martyrs Agape, Domna, Theophila, and others, who suffered for Christ and us on the Feast of the Nativity of Christ in the year 302 after the Nativity.



On January the 11th, we remember the horrific slaying of **14,000 infants - Holy Innocents** - by Herod, due to his fear and jealousy of the coming Messiah. In fact, this massacre included the death of his own child. This day implores Christians to emphatically not be like Herod in our own attempts to remove Christ from our lives. A life in Christ is a life of martyrdom (as shown by Stephen) and submission (as shown by Mary); in other words, it is a life of humility. By fearing this humility, Herod “lamented that his power would soon be destroyed” (Kontakion of the day) and sought to destroy Christ instead.

January the 12th is marked by the celebration of **Virginmartyr Anysia** at Thessalonica (298), who upon the death of her parents sold everything she owned, distributing her riches to the poor, and began to lead a strict life of fasting, vigil, and prayer; and when she refused to go to the pagan festival of the sun, was run through with a sword. And the **Hieromartyr Zoticus, Protector of Orphans**, who built a place of treatment for the sick,

a shelter for the homeless, where he took in those afflicted with leprosy, rescuing them from the soldiers who had been ordered to drown them in the sea, but was unjustly accused of the theft and executed.

The Afterfeast of the Nativity actually continues until January the 13th – that day is known as the Apodosis or “leave-taking” of the Nativity, and also the **Saturday before the Theophany**. With the reading from the Epistle (1 Tim 6:11-16), which is, also, about the final Theophany of Christ – His Second Coming! And the reading of the Gospel according to St. Matthew (Ch. 12), with an outstanding citation from the Prophet Isaiah (42, 15-21): “Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. He warned them not to tell others about him. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: *“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.”*

The Sunday after Nativity has its own liturgical commemoration in honour of **The Righteous Ones: Joseph the Betrothed, David the King and James the Brother of the Lord**. [But in this year of 2023, since we have the Nativity of the Lord on Sunday, this commemoration is being transferred to the Monday after the Nativity.]



Joseph the Betrothed, the elderly man entrusted with the care of the virgin Mary, believed in the Lord through an angel and overcame the temptations of Satan. With the magi of the east, he too bowed down and worshipped the newborn King.

David, the king and psalmist is an image of true repentance, providing the people of God with an abundance of prayers and songs for both our own repentance and the continual praise of Christ. These psalms also provide poignant reminders of Christ’s birth, life, death, and resurrection in the continued worship of the Church.

And James, the brother of God—being either the son or nephew of Joseph from a prior marriage—was the first leader of the church of Jerusalem:

*As the Lord's disciple, O righteous One, you received the Gospel;
as Martyr, you have unwavering courage;
as the Lord's brother, you have forthrightness;
as Hierarch, intercession. (Dismissal hymn)*



The **circumcision of Christ** is then celebrated (Jan. 14), not only as a fulfillment of the ceremonial Torah and the transition of God's revelation to mankind (after the fall) from shadow (Heb. 8:5) to reality, but also for naming the child *Jesus* (which means 'Savior'). We too receive a new name through the Church in the mystery of Baptism—the Christian fulfillment of circumcision—following the example of both Christ and our forefathers. Through this sacramental act, a Christian's whole life is dedicated to Christ through the intercession of Saints (Heb. 12:1; Rev. 8:4) and the protection of angels (St. Matt. 18:10; Jude 1:9).

Another celebration of this day is the memory of **St. Basil the Great**, one of the Church's most remarkable theologians – the Universal Teacher. Once, *in the year 375, on the feast of*

Theophany, the Emperor himself entered the Basilica in which Basil the Great was performing the Divine Service. The Emperor was struck by the harmoniousness of the singing of those praying and by the reverence of the bishop, who, it seemed, did not even notice the Emperor's arrival. When Valens made his offering, none of the deacons could bring himself to accept it without the permission of the bishop, and the Emperor, who was used to the servility of the court bishops, was so upset that he staggered and would have fallen, had not one of the clerics supported him. The hierarch then gave a sign that the Emperor's offering be accepted. By steadfastness, tact, personal charm and sensible tractability, Basil the Great triumphed over his adversaries. Valens tore up the decree that had already been signed concerning the exile of Basil the Great and, departing from Caesarea, left him rich donations for works of philanthropy. The saint died from exhaustion on this day of January 14, 379, at the age of 49.

The **Forefeast of Theophany** is celebrated on January the 15th. The Holy Gospel acc. to St. Mark is read (ch. 1:1–8): *John the Baptist Prepares the Way for the Lord!*

On January 16th, the **holy prophet Malachi** is commemorated. Malachi prophesied from within the Persian court of Artaxerxes that a "Sun of Righteousness" would enter the world with "healing on his wings" (Mal. 4:2; ca. 5th century B.C.).

On the following day, January 17th, the original **seventy apostles** are commemorated (Luke 10:1-16), being first sent into the world with the Gospel message. They remind us that, as we have received the infant Christ in his Nativity, it is now our turn to share him with the rest of the world. We take this message of an infant King of Kings, along with the good news of his life, death, and resurrection, into all creation (Mark 16:15), just as these first apostles and disciples of Christ did.

The **Eve of the Theophany** (18 January) is a day of strict fasting, follows the same general outline as Christmas Eve. That morning is the celebration of the **Royal Hours and then the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil** combined with Vespers, at the conclusion of which is celebrated the **Great Blessing of Waters**, in commemoration of the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. According to Orthodox theology, the steps that Jesus took into the Jordan River were the first steps on the way to the Cross. That night the All-Night Vigil is served for the Feast of the Theophany.



And finally, we conclude the 12 Days of Christmas with the **Great Feast of Theophany** (sometimes called Epiphany) on January 19th. In the baptism of Christ, by the hands of John the Forerunner, the divinity of Christ and the full mystery of the Trinity are made manifest. Theophany means “divine manifestation”, and we are reminded continually, in the life of the Church and her worship, of this manifestation of Christ as the God-Man, along with the unique and incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity. In fact, the abundance of our rituals regarding the sanctification of this created order—including within our churches—is a reflection of this incarnational mystery:

And we sing in the festal hymn:

You appeared to the world today, and Your light, O Lord, has left its mark upon us.

We must share this light with the darkness of the world, working together with the Spirit of God in the redemption of creation through Christ our Lord. This Lord entered our world in the humility of a child born to die—being wrapped as an infant in burial cloths, as depicted in the Nativity icon—by his own death triumphed over death itself.

Ultimately, then, the meaning of both the Nativity of Christ and the entirety of the 12 Days of Christmas is the receiving and giving of Christ, who is truly the gift and the giver, the one who is received and distributed.

In the Eucharistic mystery, we imitate the Mother of God in our sharing Christ with the world. We imitate Stephen in our being a true witness or martyr for Christ, to a world that would seek to be Herod. We imitate a life of true repentance as with David, and a life of simple, prayerful obedience like the elderly Joseph. We imitate the Theophany of Christ with our own manifestation of his light in the darkness. And we reflect the unity of the three Persons of the Trinity with our unity, communion, and mutual love as the Church.

In other words, we receive the uncreated light of the Christ-child on Nativity, and are prepared to share that light with the world by the end of the 12 Days of Christmas.

**Compiled by Archpr. Yevheniy Protsenko in 2023-24, after:
'Twelve Days of Christmas' by Fr. Damian, and 'An Orthodox
Reflection on the 12 day of Christmas' by Gabe Martini**

Congratulations on the Baptism!

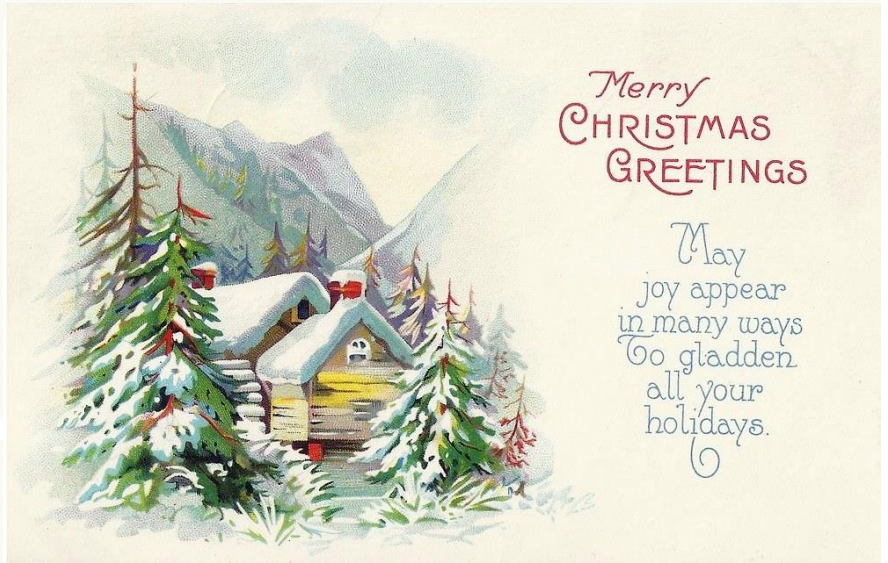


We cordially congratulate our parishioners, the young family, Matthias and Ryleigh Impey and their daughter Florence with the Holy Baptism event that took part in St. Mary's Church in December. This is a great joy for us to have you baptized and to have you as our parishioners! We are very much grateful to God for you, and for your blessed obtaining the unperishable treasure of the Orthodox Faith through our Orthodox community! May God keep you and grant you all necessary for a good and peaceful life and the salvation of soul! May your newly born and baptized daughter Florence be granted good health and all furtherance in the spiritual life for many years!!!

Thank you from and to the Orthodox IX Christian Community!

The Nativity of the Lord – Christmas – the Joy to the World, and the New Beginning to the World! This is what fills every New Year with imperishable sense, it blesses our time, that is what we have done good and what we are resolute to do, the very best of us, because God is with us, as we sing today!

So, it is meet and right to express our mutual gratitude for what has been done! And to express:



- 🔔 the warmest gratitude to the priesthood of the Patriarchal Parishes, as well as all our sister Churches, for guidance and co-serving, for their care for the people; and all our parishioners of Orthodox IX, St. Barbara Cathedral, and Orthodox V, and the parishioners of all the sister Churches for participation and contributions to our common Liturgical labour, in our souls salvation and glorification of the Holy Trinity!
- 🔔 the warmest gratitude to constant and devout members of our Church Boards (Parish Councils) for providing your special care for organizing and leading the church life and for tending over the church buildings, their protection, and renovation; and for suffering and withstanding the challenges when this world intrudes into our holy of holies; for your friendly collaboration with each other in that, and for the eagerness to stand in the gap and cover it with your personal time, finances, worries, health, courage!
- 🔔 the warmest gratitude for reading and singing in our churches, for cleaning and decorating, for caring for the churches' shrines and their and priests' vestments, and to those people who back you up in the meantime at the families' frontline or your workplaces.
- 🔔 the warmest gratitude to those who organized the Patronal Feasts, and all our wonderful events, or meetings, reunions and gatherings; and to those who responded to the calls of the ones in charge, who came to our church events and gatherings, and brought families and friends! To everyone who openly or secretly, and substantially and timely, aids our Church and neighbors every year!

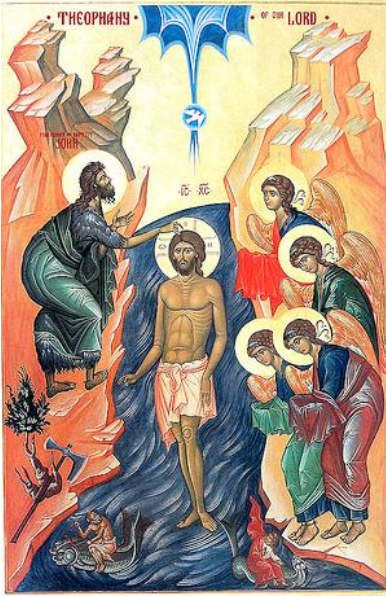
May God retribute you with His Treasures Incorruptible – the Grace of the Holy Spirit and keep you happy, safe, and sound for many years!

2024 – Dates to remember

- *March 2. Saturday – 10:00 am – The Annual “Orthodox IX” Parishes meeting will be held at St. Mary Parish Hall, Nisku.*
- *March 9. Saturday – 1:00 pm – The Annual St. Mary’s Parish meeting will be held at Parish Hall, Nisku.*
- **March 18. Monday – GREAT LENT BEGINS**
- **March 24 – Sunday of Orthodoxy**
- **April 7. Sunday – Annunciation of the Mother of God**
- **April 27 – Lazarus Saturday**
- **April 28 – Palm Sunday**
- **May 2, 3, 4. – Great Thursday, Friday and Saturday**
- **May 5 – Easter Sunday – HOLY PASCHA – THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST**

To Children About the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ

by Archpriest Yevheniy Protsenko



There is history, which is the events of the life and communication of people in the past. And there is the Holy History, which is the greatest events from the communication of people with God.

There are two very important events of the Holy History, written in the Holy Scripture, the Bible, that we remember and celebrate in the month of January. These are the blessed Birth, or Nativity of Jesus Christ, which is also called Christmas, and the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These two events are not very close in time – 30 years passed from the first – the Nativity – to the second – the Baptism. But the God-created Church celebrates them as one Great Event, and not only because both happened within one month of January, January the 7th and January the 19th.

The Church calls them Theophany, which is the Greek word, that means the moment when God *opened* Himself to people. He opened (revealed) Himself to people when He was born from the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. This may be easy to understand,

but why is the Baptism also called Theophany?

In the Old period of the Holy History, baptisms were the moments when people gathered and were bathing in the water but not to wash the regular everyday dirt, not to clean their clothes or body, but they used that water to clean their heart, or soul, or spirit. They did it as if they were washing, but before going into the water they had to remember all the bad things, that are called sins, that they did against God or the other people, and had to feel sorry for that, and become better; and if they could not remember or understand what was bad (or wrong) they were reading the Holy History or asking the Holy People to help them to see their sins and tell them how not to do bad anymore. That is why that kind of bathing in the water was a special – spiritual cleaning, and was called baptism.

Until the age of thirty, Jesus Christ lived in Nazareth with His Most Pure Mother, the Virgin Mary, and the elder Joseph. Do you remember what kind of craft Jesus Christ did? Carpentry, or creating different useful good things from wood. If someone needed a door, a table, or a bench, they went to Joseph's house. And Joseph and Jesus Christ made it for the people.

When Jesus Christ turned thirty years old, one of the greatest people in the whole Holy History, Jonh, the son of the priest Zechariah, was given an order from the Lord to start a baptism for the people. All the people knew that John, now called the Baptist, was very good and godly because John gave all his life to God; he was fighting with sins all his life and did not even live an ordinary life for that, but lived in the desert! That is why all who loved God came to this baptism. And that is why Jesus also came to the Jordan to be baptized by John.



Icon in the public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Write the correct number on the appropriate line.

Jesus Christ God the Father Holy Spirit

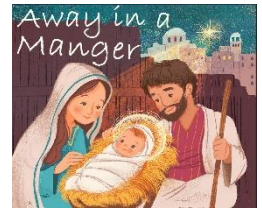
St. John the Baptist Angels

(continued on page 9)

But John the Baptist did not want to baptize Jesus in the water, because John could see Who was standing in front of Him; and John even cried out: *It is You Who must baptize me and all the people, to clean all our sins! This is (or, You are) the Lamb of God!* But Jesus, Who is the real Son of God, gave John an order to still baptize Him, and said: You are right, but you have to baptize Me because through that we shall fill the baptism with new sense and power, and God's grace! If you baptize me, I will become the sacrifice and be killed for you like you kill the sacrificial animals for your sins, that is why this Baptism will have a great power – so that to forgive not only the minor sins but the very origin of the sin, and so this Baptism will give New Life to all the people on earth!

And at that moment when they were speaking like that, and especially when John was baptizing Jesus, they heard the voice of God the Father from Heaven confirming that Jesus is His Son, but not only that – the Holy Spirit came from Heaven in the form of a dove and *found his rest* on the Son of God, Jesus Christ!

So, this event was also Theophany because the Whole Holy Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the Whole God opened Himself to people! As loving and eager to save us.



Away in a manger,
no crib for His bed,
The little Lord Jesus
laid down His sweet head;
The stars in the heavens
looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus
asleep on the hay.
The cattle are lowing,
the poor Baby wakes,
But little Lord Jesus,
no crying He makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus;
look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle
till morning is nigh.
Be near me, Lord Jesus;
I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever
and love me I pray!
Bless all the dear children
in Thy tender care,
And fit us for Heaven
to live with Thee there.
Away in a manger,
no crib for His bed,
The little Lord Jesus
laid down His sweet head;
The stars in the heavens
looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus
asleep on the hay.

NATIVITY I-SPY

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January 2024

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	<u>1</u> <i>Civic New Year</i> 	<u>2</u> Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ	<u>3</u> Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ	<u>4</u> Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ	<u>5</u> Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ	<u>6</u> Christmas Eve 2:00 p.m. – Christmas Vespers & Matins - Nisku
<u>7</u>  Nativity of Christ 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy	<u>8</u> Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos Righteous Joseph the Betrothed, David the King and James the Lord's Brother	<u>9</u> St. Theodore confessor (840) 	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u> St. Lawrence of Chernigov (1950) 	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u> St. Peter (Mogila), Metrop. of Kiev (1646) 
<u>14</u> Circumcision of the Lord, St. Basil the Great, Julian New Year 10:00 am - Liturgy at St. Barbara	<u>15</u> Forefeast of the Theophany	<u>16</u> Forefeast of the Theophany	<u>17</u> Forefeast of the Theophany	<u>18</u> Epiphany Eve (strict fast) 	<u>19</u> The Baptism of our Lord 10:00 a.m. - Divine Liturgy at Nisku with water & houses blessing	<u>20</u> Synaxis of John the Baptist 
<u>21</u> 10:00 am - Liturgy at St. Barbara	<u>22</u> Martyr Polyeuctus in Armenia (259) 	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u> St. Michael fool-for-Christ 	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u> St. Eleazar of Anzersk Island (1656) 	<u>27</u>
<u>28</u> 10:00 am - Liturgy at St. Barbara Afternoon – Blessing of houses at Vegreville	<u>29</u> St. Honoratus, archbishop of Arles (429) 	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u> Athanasius the Great (373) 			