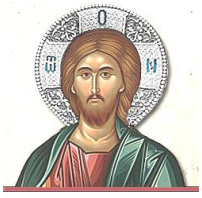
"ORTHODOX IX" PARISHES BULLETIN

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
Holy Ascension - CALMAR
Whitsuntide (Holy Trinity) - THORSBY
St. John the Baptist - VEGREVILLE
St. John the Baptist - HOREN
St. Onuphrius - FOAM LAKE (SK)
Dormition of Theotokos -MACNUTT (SK)
Sts. Peter & Paul - INSINGER (SK)

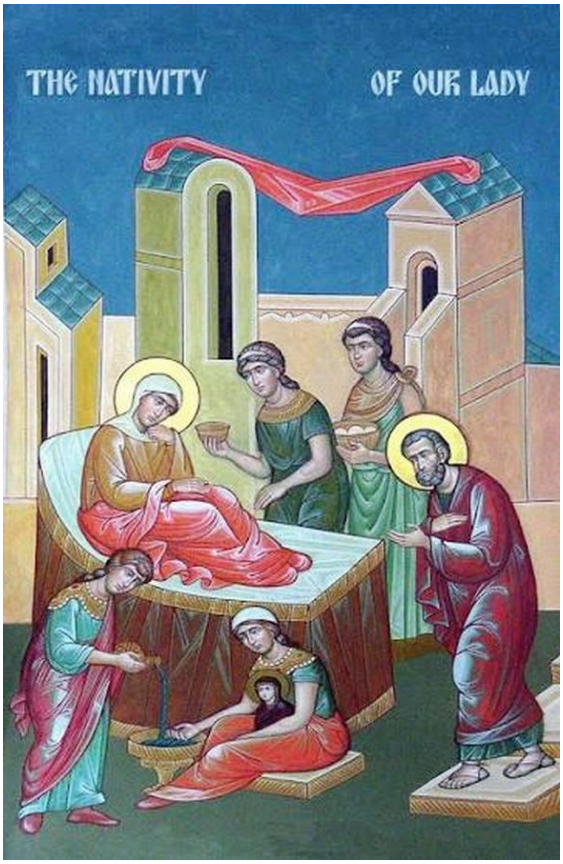


Very Rev. Evheniy Protsenko, Parish Priest
10812 - 108 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta, T5H 3A6
Home Phone: (780) 426-5163 Cell Phone: (780) 818-7343
Facebook.com/St. Mary's Russian Greek Orthodox Church
E-mail: pokrova70@gmail.com; web: http//www.orthodox-canada.com



Volume 88, Issue 8 **September 2026**

September the 21st – The Nativity of the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary



With the Patronal Feast, dear brothers and sisters, the parishioners and friends of St. Mary's Church in Nisku!

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos — that quiet, radiant beginning without which, as St. Photius reminds us, none of the other feasts bearing her name could exist. Before she became the Mother of God, Mary was first a long-awaited daughter, born to Joachim and Anna after years of prayer, at an age when hope for a child had nearly faded. And yet God turned their patient waiting into a joy so great that the hymns of the Church still sing of it: "the barren one gives birth to the Theotokos and Nurturer of our Life."

That same joy, born in one small household so long ago, is the joy she has been bestowing on all of us ever since. Her birth was the first light before the Sun of Righteousness rose, the opening of the door through which our salvation would enter the world. And though she would carry sorrows of her own, she was born to bring all people, in every generation, closer to her Son, Who is also the Only-Begotten Son of God.

On this feast day, may the Mother of God — our unfailing intercessor — watch over you and those you love, and may the patience and faith of Joachim and Anna be an example to us all, that we too may trust God's timing even when the answer to our prayers seems long in coming. Through her prayers, may the Lord grant you health, peace, and abundant joy.

Happy Feast Day, and many blessed years!

Most Holy Birth-Giver of God, pray God for us!

The Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God In the Church History and the Iconography



The Holy Scripture of the New Testament says little about the Blessed Virgin and contains absolutely no information about Her Nativity. The Church however keeps her Holy Tradition telling us about St Mary's birth and the life of Her holy parents, Joachim and Anna.

The fact is that the texts of early Christian literature take very little interest in general in the daily details of their heroes' lives, their actions or their family relationships. The Gospels even speak very sparingly about the childhood of Jesus. The Gospel of St. Mark begins with the Lord's Baptism, and the Gospel of St. John, after a prologue on the Logos, also goes straight to the Baptism. As for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, there are stories from Jesus's birth and childhood. However, these stories were written not in order to inform us about some additional details of daily life. For example, Matthew presents Christ's ancestry in order to connect the Old Testament story with the New Testament. The evangelists took little interest in the simple, ordinary details (for example, what Jesus looked like, the color of his eyes and hair).

Additionally, the early Christians had the feeling (that is appropriate for us too) that the end of the world was near, that it could come any day, and therefore historical details of everyday things were not important to them. What was important was that a new era, and new world which was about to begin. This is what was in the center of attention of the first generation of Christians. When the apostle Paul experienced his conversion in Damascus, people were still alive who had seen Christ. He could have gone to them and asked them about everything more particularly (as any of us would do if given the chance!). But the Lord's appearance to him was enough for the Apostle; he did not go to the apostles who knew Christ in His earthly life to ask about this; he did not go and ask people made of "flesh and blood" to learn the details of Christ's life (Gal. 1:15–17). This was not important to him.

When decades and more had passed after Jesus's life, the end of the world was no longer looked at as a close reality; it was postponed to an imprecise future, in part, for the sake of those who read these words now. And then interest grew in the events with which the Christian life began, to the tiniest details of how those people spoken of in the Gospels lived. Although there were no longer any witnesses, the desire appeared to fill out the Gospel, to decorate it. That is how and when the stories of Jesus's childhood and of the Virgin Mary's childhood and her parents became more popular. Of course there is a core of truth in such them, however it is not always historical truth but symbolic and moral truth, and in some certain dogmatic sense.

The entire story of the Nativity of the Holy Virgin is revealed in the iconography of this feast, particularly, in three icons. The first one is the icon of the Conception by St Anna of the Most Holy Theotokos, telling us about the events closely associated with / and immediately preceding Her Nativity. The second icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos is the central icon of the feast. The third one is the icon of Mary Caressed by Her Parents; it serves as an "epilogue" to the events associated with the feast. Let's dwell on the three icons in a bit more detail.

The Conception of the Holy Virgin (The Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate)



This icon serves as a background to the Feast of Nativity of the Theotokos.

Joachim and Anna did not have children, but they continued to ask the Lord to send them a child. On the upper margins of the icon we can see an angel appearing to both Joachim and Anna and announcing to each of them that God would send them a child that the whole world would speak of. After hearing the good news, Joachim and Anna hurried in joy to see each other, and met at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem. Their meeting is depicted in the icon.

The meeting place of the saints is symbolic, since, according to Jewish tradition, it is the same gate through which the Messiah was supposed to enter Jerusalem, as it is indicated in the book of the prophet Ezekiel 44:2: “The Lord said to me: This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut”. The Church also associates the words of this prophecy with the Theotokos and Her everlasting virginity, in the sense that only the Lord will “enter through those gates” and only the Lord will be born of the Virgin Mary.

Icon of the Nativity of the Most Holy Virgin



Nine months after the aforementioned meeting, the Blessed Virgin was born.

The icon of the feast depicts the righteous Anna after giving birth, resting on a bed and supported by maids. St Anna is usually portrayed facing the newborn Mary, although some later versions omit this detail, which somewhat belittles the expression of Anna’s love for Mary, originally contained in the icon. St Anna’s friends coming to greet her on the occasion are sometimes depicted holding gifts.

Mary Herself is represented in the arms of a maid preparing a font for ablutions. On some icons, there is a rather delicate and quivering detail: the maid is carefully checking the water temperature before placing Mary in the font.

St Joachim is usually depicted on the very outer margins of the icon (in the doorway or in the window) or not depicted at all. This can be explained by the Jewish tradition of that time, not allowing men to enter the room for some time after childbirth. The fact that Joachim, despite the tradition, is trying to see the child as soon as possible speaks of his strong anticipation. Some medieval icons represent St Joachim immediately next to the bed, which distorts the original idea of the icon.

The Most Holy Theotokos Caressed by Her Parents

The icon is the culmination of the Nativity story. The parents who have been barren for so long are finally able to hold and cherish their baby. The great joy of having a child is multiplied here by the long anticipation that Joachim and Anna had to come through before they became parents in their advanced years.



This supreme happiness makes the icon one of the most touching works of the Orthodox iconography. Its different versions depict the parents embracing or kissing the infant Mary while She Herself is holding Anna by the neck. Often, we can also see a maid admiring the scene.

One of the known iconographic versions contains a highly remarkable detail. Anna is depicted firmly holding the Mother of God in her arms while Joachim is reaching with his arms towards the baby. This can be viewed as a scene observed in families where one of the parents simply cannot have enough communication with the child and therefore hesitates to hand it over to the other.

Conclusion

Although the Holy Scriptures do not carry any information about Mary's birth, the Holy Tradition and its visible expression through iconography brings us closer to understanding the Nativity of the Holy Virgin as a precious pearl in sacred history, comparable to the events recorded in Scripture. The special attitude of the church towards this feast becomes obvious when we study its iconography, conveying to the beholder the most reverent and humble feelings.

Foma.ru: Sergei Milov spoke with Mikhail Seleznev.
Translation by Nun Cornelia (Rees), 12/22/2021

Catalog.obitel-minsk.com: by Reader John Malov,
Reader, theologian, member of The Catalog
of Good Deeds team, September 21, 2021

Heartfelt Gratitude



We would like to express our sincere gratitude to those who undertook the important task of putting up a new roof on the Bishop's house.

This achievement became possible through the coordinated efforts of our whole Church: our Bishop, His Grace Matthew of Sourozh; the Parish Councils and rectors of St. Barbara's Cathedral and St. Mary's Church in Nisku; the parishioner of the Cathedral, servant of God Marina (Starlit Restoration company); and the servant of God Andrii, whose company, All In One Exterior, did the work promptly, professionally, and with a generous discount, with the front-line workers doing a perfect job — David, Michael, and Andrew.

26th St. Tikhon Orthodox Children's Camp

Dear friends!

From July 26 to August 2, 2026, the 26th St. Tikhon Orthodox Bible Children's Summer Camp took place, organized by the Patriarchal Parishes in Canada and held, as in previous years, in the beautiful setting on the shore of Pigeon Lake in the province of Alberta.

I want to express special gratitude to the staff, teachers, counselors, cooks, kitchen helpers, those who organized crafts and sports activities, the photographers and correspondents, and to everyone who donated money, food, and time to help us with our camp. Without this help, our Children's Bible Camp would not have taken place, and it would not have been as successful. Thank you to all the parents who sent their children to our camp. THANK YOU ALL!!!

We welcome more volunteers and look forward to seeing you next year!

With love in Christ, Father Igor, Priest and Camp Director



A distinctive feature of our 26th children's camp this year was the large influx of children wanting to attend – just look at the picture! (along with an expanded geography of where our campers came from). This, of course, meant great responsibility and a great deal of work for all our staff and helpers. We tried to account for this back at the preparation stage: there were quite a few meetings before camp, where we did a kind of "lessons learned" review and tried to communicate the camp's requirements more clearly, and so on. This year was also expected to bring a lot of rain, since the whole region was still receiving a record amount of precipitation.

We opened the season on July 27, and, as always, it wasn't easy: taking over the facilities, registering everyone correctly, assigning rooms, introducing everyone to one another, putting up our prayers on the walls of our main dining hall, cleaning and lighting the stoves for the traditional first barbecue, and so on. Our first thank-you goes to everyone who agreed to help welcome the children to camp!

That evening we had our first campfire by the lake, and the next morning, our first morning exercise session, led by our young counselors.

After exercises, we headed to the small church we already knew so well — the spiritual center of our camp life. We learned to use (or reviewed how to use) the prayer books published especially for the children's camp, and reviewed the rules of behavior in church. Every morning, in addition to morning prayers, we read the Gospel and reflected on it together, then prayed for our mentors, parents, and friends.



Long before wake-up, our cooks were already hard at work in the kitchen, so that right after prayers we could gather in our spacious dining hall, say grace, and have a hearty meal before a day full of events.

Every day we tried to teach the children something new, and above all, to live in cleanliness and order — which is why there was always a morning cleanup of the grounds and all the buildings. And most importantly: on one hand, this was followed by a lecture, where this year, with the help of our clergy and counselors, we tried to learn about the Sacraments of the Church; on the other hand — while one group was at the lecture — the other group took part in art class (always interesting, always something new), creating beautiful and original crafts. This year we would especially like to thank our lead and only art teacher, Svetlana Storozhenko! And all her helpers.

I'd like to say a special word about the weather, which surprised us with how steady it was: all around us there were storms and downpours, while we had only a few rain showers — and even those mostly during meals or activities — and lots of sunshine! But we didn't have that unbearable heat that makes it hard even to eat. Naturally, this meant quite a few mosquitoes, but our ever-faithful camp nurse, "Mama" Tatiana Popovskaya, supplied us with a huge amount of bug spray, and the counselors gave instructions on how to use it. Of course, children will be children, and some of them still had to build up a bit of immunity to mosquito bites.



As has become tradition, after one of the rains we were again treated to a beautiful double rainbow stretching across the whole sky!

Like a real family, we celebrated the children's birthdays! In the kitchen, under the direction of our head cook and organizer, Natalia Ilyina, delicious cakes were baked; we sang "Mnogaya Leta" and Happy Birthday, and the birthday children blew out their candles.

On the feast day of the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Great Prince Vladimir, we had a Divine Liturgy, served by our clergy, Father Igor and Father Evgeny. Our counselors sang, and the children went to confession (or learned how to) and received Holy Communion.

On one of the camp days, we learned how to pitch tents — the boys did this, splitting into teams after the instructions to see who could do it fastest and most correctly. Meanwhile, the girls learned the culinary arts, baking delicious cupcakes under the guidance of our cooks and our teacher Elena Ivanova (cupcakes, some of them may remember from childhood).

The camp is equipped with several sports areas, including tennis courts and basketball courts, and a purpose-built mini soccer field, while the game room (in the same building as the lecture hall) has table tennis and a cozy movie theater.



Our kitchen always smelled of something delicious — and it was different every time. Here are just a few of the dishes prepared with love by our wonderful cooks: Olivier salad, pigs in a blanket, meat patties, vareniki (dumplings), milk porridge, homemade pirozhki, borscht, cheese casserole, and stuffed cabbage rolls. Everything was tasty, healthy, and nourishing — just what the children needed to keep up with their constant activity!

For the third year in a row, a petting zoo came to visit us! It once again brought the children enormous joy and delight. Fellow parishioners of the Patriarchal Parishes, Allan and Carol Boris, made quite a journey with a large trailer carrying a whole variety of animals. They set up a pen and gave the children not only the chance to see their sweet animals, but to hug them, groom them, feed and water them, play with them, and learn something about their lives!

This year we had several quests (games). In one, the children had to find "treasure" hidden around the campgrounds by solving a series of clever clues. In another — a great favorite among the kids — they had to break open a box of candy while blindfolded.



Although the lake was quite full this year and not entirely suitable for swimming, our camp director, Father Igor, had planned for this, and we still had plenty of the children's favorite water games and activities.

Despite how busy they were, the children spent the whole camp preparing a performance for the concert (the Saturday presentation). On Saturday, they presented the lives of the saints assigned to their groups in the form of short skits or even presentations — showing their usual resourcefulness and revealing their talents.

We closed the camp on the 9th Sunday after Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Prophet Elijah, with a Divine Liturgy, assisted by Deacon Alexander and the altar servers of St. Barbara's Cathedral in Edmonton.

* * *

This report was put together in an unusual way — through the wonderful daily photo chronicle of our camp, created and updated every day by our photo correspondent Elena Dianova on WhatsApp and Telegram. Thanks to her, parents could stay at ease and happy for their children, and we now have a warm and very complete photo record of this wonderful week spent at our church children's camp!

Once again, a huge thank you to all the counselors, teachers, helpers, volunteers, and our doctor. A special thank you to everyone who worked in the kitchen, to our priests, to the organizers, and to everyone involved! We bow low before you all. May the Lord keep you! And God willing, we'll see you again next summer!

September 1/14 – Church New Year
Evolution and the Fall: A Theological Reflection — Part II (Conclusion)

Today the Church keeps her liturgical New Year, the day on which she commemorates the creation of the world by God. It seems a fitting day to conclude the reflection begun in our August issue — on how the biblical teaching of creation and the Fall might be understood alongside what science tells us of the world's vast age. Part I traced the positions held within the Church and introduced St. Maximus the Confessor's distinction between the logos and the tropos of created things. We continue from there.

"This Is What It Looks Like — Without Me"

Here, I believe, the central image is born.

The fallen world is a world in a state of separation from God. Not a world from which God has departed — He does not depart, for even the fallen world is sustained by Him. But a world that has rejected life in Him and been left to live by its own fallen will. God, as it were, says to creation: *this is what it looks like — without Me.*

The struggle for existence, selection through death, the survival of the fittest, billions of years of creatures consuming one another — this is not the Creator's original design. This is the face of being left to itself. The Apostle Paul speaks of this thus: "the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly… the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" (Rom. 8:20–22). The entire cosmos, not only man, bears the mark of the Fall.

On the Limit of Every Description

Evolution, then, does not refute faith. It describes what the world looks like in a state of separation from God. Or, in words that seem to me most precise: the Fall did not merely introduce death into the world — it brought into being the very temporal order in which death became the law of life. Evolution is the history of that order.

This world can be studied and described. But any description of it is a description of the fallen world — not the world as first created.

This is not a reproach to anyone. It is simply the marking of a boundary. The world before the Fall, the world of a different mode of time, lies beyond any method by definition. Of that world, only Revelation speaks.

A Stone Cast into the Waters of Time



If we ask not merely what existed before the Fall and what came after, but how the Fall itself changed the very nature of time, then perhaps one image may help — offered, I confess, with some daring.

The Fall of man — the center and priest of creation — is like a stone cast into the waters of time. The wave spreads in every direction: reaching back to the very beginning, and there laying a new beginning suited to man's fallen condition — a development without God, a godless evolution (which, in this sense, bears witness to sin itself) — and reaching forward to the very end, to that moment when "there should be time no longer" (Rev. 10:6). But this whole image holds only because time is understood here not as an absolute, but as part of creation itself. Otherwise,

the very question — "how could the event of the Fall determine the entire history of the world that preceded it?" — would remain unresolvable.

Sin wounded the very beginning of creation. Man found himself without God — as if from the very beginning. And in the place of God — an immense span of godless time: the whole of evolution.

In Place of a Conclusion

Let me be honest: what is offered here is not "Church teaching" in a dogmatic sense. The Church teaches that God is Creator, that man was made in His image, that he fell and is saved in Christ. How exactly the time of the fallen world is ordered — this she leaves to our reverent reflection.

And yet this reflection is not idle. It removes a false choice — "either faith or reason" — in which so many people lose one or the other. It restores to the Fall its true cosmic scale: not a minor transgression by two people in a garden, but a catastrophe that determined the very mode of being of the created world.

And then the reverse becomes clearer — the Resurrection of Christ. If the Fall left creation in time without God, then the Resurrection is the return of God into creation — and the beginning of a new mode of being, where "time shall be no more" (Rev. 10:6). Dinosaurs, for all their ancient vastness, bear witness to one thing: the whole world, in all its depth and age, groans and awaits that Deliverance which has already begun in the empty Tomb.

Very Rev. Evheniy Protsenko, 2026

Author's Note (Addendum)

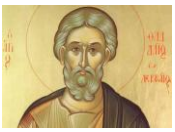
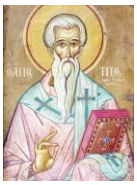
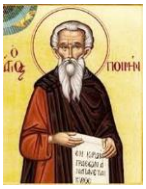
After completing these reflections, I came upon a lecture by the paleontologist Alexander Khramov (Candidate of Biological Sciences, of the Paleontological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences), recorded as a conversation with the philosopher Alexei Gaginsky. There they discussed the concept of Alterism (from the Latin *alter* — "other," "different"): a theological approach according to which the world originally created by God was fundamentally different from the one we observe today, and the whole observable universe — including the evolutionary process — already exists on this side of the Fall. This approach has roots in the Eastern Fathers, among them St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Maximus the Confessor; in our own time Bishop of Washington Basil (Rodzianko) came close to it in his book *The Theory of the Decay of the Universe and the Faith of the Fathers* (Moscow: Palomnik, 1996), and it has been developed systematically by Alexander Khramov in *The Ape and Adam: Can a Christian Be an Evolutionist?* (Moscow: Nikeya, 2019).

To my surprise, this proved very close to the direction in which my own thoughts had independently taken shape — so that what is offered here may simply belong to the broader tradition of Alterism, with perhaps a slightly different emphasis. Where that tradition describes two states, before and after the Fall, I have tried to dwell on the transition itself: not only *that* the world became other, but *how* the Fall gave rise to the very order of time within which all the history studied by science unfolds. (Admittedly, I really do offer only an image here.)

What matters most, in the end, is a single conviction: time is not absolute. It is created, subject to God, and cannot serve as the final framework for understanding reality. When we quietly take linear time — time that runs toward death — to be the only horizon of being, we begin to grant it what belongs to God alone; and to absolutize time is, in a subtle way, to deify it, which the Christian faith cannot allow. That time is created, and therefore not absolute, is no novelty: it is, in essence, what the Fathers of the Church testified to long before these modern debates arose.

For the complete version of this reflection, please see:
https://reginarusparish.com/evolution-and-the-fall-a-theological-reflection/

September 2026

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1 "Donskaya" Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos 	2	3 Apostle Thaddeus of the Seventy (44) 	4	5 **9:00 a.m. – Divine Liturgy – Foam Lake –** ***Katy Bonar commemoration and Thanksgiving Service***
6 **9:00 a.m. – Divine Liturgy – Mac Nutt –** ***Thanksgiving Service***	7 Holy Apostle Titus of the Seventy (1st c.) 	8	9 St. Poemen the Great, of Egypt (ca. 450) 	10	11 ***Beheading of the Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John*** 	12 **10:00 am – Liturgy at Horen, St. John's Church – Thanksgiving Service**
13 **10:00 am – Liturgy – Thorsby** ***Thanksgiving Service***	14 **Church New Year**	15 Sts. Anthony and Theodosius, of the Kiev Caves 	16	17 Holy Prophet and God-seer Moses (1531 b.c.) 	18	19 **6:00 pm – Vespers & Matins of the Patronal Feast – Nisku**
20 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy & Blessing of Water **Patronal Feast, Festive Luncheon at St. Mary's Church, Nisku**	21 **The Nativity of the Mother of God** 	22	23 St. Paul the Obedient, of the Kiev Caves 	24	25 St. Athanasius, disciple of St. Sergius of Radonezh 	26
27 **Elevation of the Holy Cross** **10:00 am – Liturgy – St. Mary's Church at NISKU**	28	29 Greatmartyr Euphemia the All-praised, of Chalcedon 	30			