



St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Orthodox Church

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Services Schedule

Please see our [online calendar](#) for dates and times of Feast Day services.

Bulletin for Sunday, December 22, 2024

Welcome



Jesus Christ taught us to love and serve all people, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality. To understand that, we need to look no further than to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, it is

offered "on behalf of all, and for all." As Orthodox Christians we stand against racism and bigotry. All human beings share one common identity as children of God. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatian 3:28)

Members of our Parish Council are:

Greg Jankura - Vice President
Carolyn Neiss- President
Sharon Hanson - Member at Large
Luba Martins - Member at Large
Boris Doph - Treasurer

James Ifkovic - Secretary
Brett Malcolm - Member at Large

Pastoral Care - General Information

Emergency Sick Calls can be made at any time. Please call Fr Steven at (860) 322-2906, when a family member is admitted to the hospital.

Anointing in Sickness: The Sacrament of Unction is available in Church, the hospital, or your home, for anyone who is sick and suffering, however severe.

Marriages and Baptisms require early planning, scheduling and selections of sponsors (crown bearers or godparents). See Father before booking dates and reception halls!

Funerals are celebrated for practicing Orthodox Christians. Please see Father for details. The Church opposes cremation; we cannot celebrate funerals for cremations.

Announcements

Upcoming Events hosted by the parish

December 29th - Baptism of Sarah Joseph who will take the patron of St Mary of Egypt

January 18th - Presentation of the life of St Olga of Alaska followed by potluck

February 13th - Lenten Clergy Retreat

February 16th - Lenten Vespers

More details will be forth coming

What Do We, Our Christ, Offer You?

With joy and happiness, the entire world prepares to celebrate the Nativity

of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. During this period, intense preparations keep our days full and long. Bright lights and festive decorations flood the landscape. We are all so busy preparing our gifts for the big celebration.

All of this is great and serves to complement our basic inner need to take a break from life's daily struggles and to sit at the festive table with our loved ones. However, all of this does not automatically help us prepare spiritually for the remarkable and extraordinary event that the salvation of humankind represents.

Let us pause for a moment and consider this: we are all exchanging gifts these days. But to Christ, Who freely bestows on us our salvation, what gift do we offer Him? One of the most beautiful hymns during the festive period of the Nativity theologically provides us with a most complete and telling answer. The hymn asks: What gift can we offer You, our Christ and God? You who came to earth as a man to unite us eternally to You? All Your Creation, participating in the event of the Nativity of the King of Kings, offers You something. Your Angels praise You. The sky offers the star, the Magi rush to offer You gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The shepherds, in amazement and admiration, worship You. The earth offers You the cave and the desert the manger. What do we, our Christ, offer You? We offer the Virgin Mother for You to take human flesh. We offer You the Virgin Mother to be born. You come, our Saviour, our Father, our Creator, to take human nature upon Yourself and to unite us with You. We renounced You in the person of the

old Adam and lost the union, the communion with You. But You did not abandon us. You came into the world and took on human flesh. You became the new Adam. You took upon Yourself the sin of Adam, the denial, the arrogance of humankind, and You enabled us to share and partake of Your divinity. Even our Virgin Mary, this most precious offering of humanity for our salvation, You gave it to us. You embrace us with Your infinite love. You, Who are the eternal God, have mercy on us, Your children. Help us celebrate Your Nativity in peace, love, and joy.

Merry Christmas!

House Blessings

Prayers, Intercessions and Commemorations



Many Years! to Subdeacon Joseph (William) Brubaker, Roderick Seuattan, and Malcolm Littlefield on the occasion of their birthdays and to Fr Steven and to those who take the Name of "Joseph" as their patron on the occasion of their Names' Days.

Pray for: All those confined to hospitals, nursing homes, and their own homes due to illness; for all those who serve in the armed forces; widows, orphans, prisoners, victims

of violence, and refugees;

- All those suffering chronic illness, financial hardship, loneliness, addictions, abuse, abandonment and despair; those who are homeless, those who are institutionalized, those who have no one to pray for them;
- All Orthodox seminarians & families; all Orthodox monks and nuns, and all those considering monastic life; all Orthodox missionaries and their families.
- All those who have perished due to hatred, intolerance and pestilence; all those departed this life in the hope of the Resurrection.

Please let Fr. Steven know via email if you have more names for which to pray.

- Departed: Nona, Evelyn, John, Vera, Hansen, Bonnie
- Clergy and their families: Fr Sergei B
- Catechumen: Kevin, Sarah, James
- Individuals and Families: Luba, Suzanne, Rosemary, Daniel & Dayna, Kristen, Charles, Victor, Susan, Bonnie, Gregory, Frank
- Birthdays and Name's Days this Month: Dori Kuziak (B-10 Dec), Bill Brubaker (B-23 Dec), Roderick Seurattan (B-24th Dec), Malcolm Littlefield (B-25 Dec), Daniel Cummings (N-17 Dec)
- Anniversaries this Month:
- Expecting and Newborn: Lynn, David and the new born Mary, Keree, Steve and their unborn child, Katie and Aaron and their unborn child, Megan and her newborn child

- Traveling: Michael, Jason,
- Sick and those in distress: Thomas, Sheri, Joanna, Joshua, Remy, Stormy, Scott, Anne, Noah, Nancy, Cathy, Joe, Susan Hayes, Gail Galena, Sophia, Gregory, Tomas

Today's commemorated feasts and saints

26th SUNDAY AFTER

PENTECOST — Tone 1. Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ. Sunday before the Nativity. Great Martyr Anastasia, “Deliverer from Poisons”, and her teacher, Martyr Chrysogonos, and with them Martyrs Theodota, Evodias, Eutychianus, and others, who suffered under Diocletian (ca. 304).

- Again we pray for those who have lost their lives because of the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East: that the Lord our God may look upon them with mercy, and give them rest where there is neither sickness, or sorrow, but life everlasting.
- Again we pray for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, for those who are suffering, wounded, grieving, or displaced because of the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East.
- Again we pray for a cessation of the hostilities against Ukraine and the Middle East, and that reconciliation and peace will flourish there, we pray thee, hearken and have mercy.

Parish Calendar

St Alexis Parish

December 22 to December 30, 2024

Sunday, December 22

Sunday before Nativity
Greatmartyr Anastasia
9:30AM Divine Liturgy

Monday, December 23

Forefeast of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ
William Brubaker
8:00AM Akathist of the Nativity

Tuesday, December 24

Roderick Seurattan
Eve of the Nativity of Christ
Nativity Eve
8:00AM Royal Hours
5:30PM Vigil of the Nativity

Wednesday, December 25

The Nativity of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ
Malcolm Littlefield
Nativity of Our Lord
8:30AM Liturgy for the Nativity

Thursday, December 26

Synaxis of the Holy Theotokos
8:00AM Akathist to the Theotokos

Friday, December 27

Stephen, Archdeacon & First Martyr
8:00AM Akathist to St Stephen

Saturday, December 28

20,000 Martyrs burned in Nicomedia
8:00AM Akathist to Prophet David*
5:30PM Great Vespers

Sunday, December 29

Sunday after Nativity
Baptism of Sarah Joseph
9:30AM Divine Liturgy

Monday, December 30

Anysia the Virgin-martyr of Thessaloniki

Saints and Feasts

December 22

Sunday before Nativity

On the Sunday that occurs on or immediately after the eighteenth of this month, we celebrate all those who from ages past have been well-pleasing to God, beginning from Adam even unto Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos, according to genealogy, as the Evangelist Luke hath recorded historically (Luke 3:23-38); we also commemorate the Prophets and Prophetesses, and especially the Prophet Daniel and the Holy Three Children.

December 22

Anastasia the Great Martyr

This Saint, who was from Rome, was a most comely, wealthy, and virtuous maiden, the daughter of Praepextatus and Fausta. It was her mother who instructed her in the Faith

of Christ. The Saint was joined to a man named Publius Patricius, who was prodigal in life and impious in disposition, but she was widowed after a short time. Henceforth, she went about secretly to the dwellings of the poor and the prisons where the Martyrs of Christ were, and brought them whatever was needed for their daily subsistence. She washed their wounds and loosed them from their fetters, and consoled them in their anguish. Also, because the Saint, through her intercessions, has healed many from the ill effects of spells, potions, poisons, and other harmful substances, she has received the name "Deliverer from Potions." Since the fame of her deeds had spread about, she was arrested by Diocletian's minions, and after enduring many torments she was put to death by fire in the year 290.

December 24

Eugenia the Righteous Nun-martyr of Rome and those with her

This Martyr was the daughter of most distinguished and noble parents named Philip and Claudia. Philip, a Prefect of Rome, moved to Alexandria with his family. In Alexandria, Eugenia had the occasion to learn the Christian Faith, in particular when she encountered the Epistles of Saint Paul, the reading of which filled her with compunction and showed her clearly the vanity of the world. Secretly taking two of her servants, Protas and Hyacinth, she departed from Alexandria by night. Disguised as a man, she called herself

Eugene while pretending to be a eunuch, and departed with her servants and took up the monastic life in a monastery of men. Her parents mourned for her, but could not find her. After Saint Eugenia had laboured for some time in the monastic life, a certain woman named Melanthia, thinking Eugenia to be a monk, conceived lust and constrained Eugenia to comply with her desire; when Eugenia refused, Melanthia slandered Eugenia to the Prefect as having done insult to her honour. Eugenia was brought before the Prefect, her own father Philip, and revealed to him both that she was innocent of the accusations, and that she was his own daughter. Through this, Philip became a Christian; he was afterwards beheaded at Alexandria. Eugenia was taken back to Rome with Protas and Hyacinth. All three of them ended their life in martyrdom in the years of Commodus, who reigned from 180 to 192.

December 25

The Nativity of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ

The incomprehensible and inexplicable Nativity of Christ came to pass when Herod the Great was reigning in Judea; the latter was an Ascalonite on his fathers's side and an Idumean on his mother's. He was in every way foreign to the royal line of David; rather, he had received his authority from the Roman emperors, and had ruled tyrannically over the Jewish people for some thirty-three years. The tribe of Judah, which had reigned of old, was deprived of its

rights and stripped of all rule and authority. Such was the condition of the Jews when the awaited Messiah was born, and truly thus was fulfilled the prophecy which the Patriarch Jacob had spoken 1,807 years before: "A ruler shall not fail from Judah, nor a prince from his loins, until there come the things stored up for him; and he is the expectation of the nations" (Gen.49:10).

Thus, our Saviour was born in Bethlehem, a city of Judea, whither Joseph had come from Nazareth of Galilee, taking Mary his betrothed, who was great with child, that, according to the decree issued in those days by the Emperor Augustus, they might be registered in the census of those subject to Rome. Therefore, when the time came for the Virgin to give birth, and since because of the great multitude there was no place in the inn, the Virgin's circumstance constrained them to enter a cave which was near Bethlehem. Having as shelter a stable of irrational beasts, she gave birth there, and swaddled the Infant and laid Him in the manger (Luke 2:1-7). From this, the tradition has come down to us that when Christ was born He lay between two animals, an ox and an ass, that the words of the Prophets might be fulfilled: "Between two living creatures shalt Thou be known" (Abbacum 3:2), and "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib" (Esaias 1: 3).

But while the earth gave the new-born Saviour such a humble reception, Heaven on high celebrated majestically His world-saving coming. A wondrous star, shining with uncommon brightness and following a strange course, led Magi from the East

to Bethlehem to worship the new-born King. Certain shepherds who were in the area of Bethlehem, who kept watch while tending their sheep, were suddenly surrounded by an extraordinary light, and they saw before them an Angel who proclaimed to them the good tidings of the Lord's joyous Nativity. And straightway, together with this Angel, they beheld and heard a whole host of the Heavenly Powers praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men" (Luke 2:8-14).

December 25

The Adoration of the Magi: Melchior, Gaspar, & Balthasar

December 26

Synaxis of the Holy Theotokos

This Synaxis - which is to say, our coming together to glorify the Theotokos - is celebrated especially in her honour because she gave birth supernaturally to the Son and Word Of God, and thus became the instrument of the salvation of mankind.

December 27

Stephen, Archdeacon & First Martyr

Saint Stephen was a Jew, by race, and, as some say, a disciple of Gamaliel, the teacher of the Law mentioned in Acts 5:34 and 22:3.

He was the first of the seven deacons whom the Apostles established in Jerusalem to care for the poor, and to distribute alms to them. Being a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, he performed great signs and wonders among the people. While disputing with the Jews concerning Jesus, and wisely refuting their every contradiction, so that no one was able to withstand the wisdom and the spirit whereby he spake, he was slandered as a blasphemer and was dragged off to the Sanhedrin of the elders. There with boldness he proved from the divine Scriptures the coming of the Just One (Jesus), of Whom they had become the betrayers and murderers, and he reproved their faithless and hardheartedness. And finally, gazing into Heaven and beholding the divine glory, he said: "Lo, I see the Heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." But when they heard this, they stopped up their ears, and with anger cast him out of the city and stoned him, while he was calling out and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then, imitating the long-suffering of the Master, he bent his knees and prayed in a loud voice for them that were stoning him, and he said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," And saying this, he fell asleep (Acts 6, 7), thus becoming the first among the Martyrs of the Church of Christ.

December 28

20,000 Martyrs burned in Nicomedia

All these Saints, some 20,000 in number, were burned alive in the year 303, while

they were gathered in church. This came to pass during the reign of Diocletian and Maximian. According to the Synaxarion, this took place on the day of Christ's Nativity. Eusebius (Eccl. Hist. VIII, 6) says that, of the Christians then living in Nicomedia, all were slain by imperial decree - some by the sword, and others by fire, and that, because of their divine and inexpressible ardour, both men and women cast themselves into the fire. Besides those burned in church, the following, who were slain in the same Persecution, are commemorated today. Indus, Gorgonius, and Peter were cast into the sea; Glycerius the Presbyter and Mardonius were burned; Dorotheus the Prefect and Zeno were beheaded; Theophilus the Deacon was stoned; Mygdonius was buried alive; and Domna, who had been a priestess of the idols, believed in Christ, and was baptized, was beheaded and cast into the fire. See also the account of Saint Anthimus on September 3.

December 29

14,000 infants (Holy Innocents) slain by Herod in Bethlehem

The infant-slaying Herod mentioned here is the same one that ruled at the time of Christ's Nativity. In those days, certain Magi, who were wise and noble men, perhaps even kings, set forth from the East, and came to Jerusalem, seeking the King of the Jews, Who had been born; and they said that in the East, where their homeland was, an unusual and strange star had appeared two years before, which, according to an

ancient oracle (Num 24:17), was to signify the birth of some great king of the Jews. "For we have seen His star in the east," they said, "and have come to worship Him" (Matt. 2:2). Hearing these things, Herod was troubled, and the whole city together with him. Then, having inquired and been informed by the high priests and scribes of the people that, according to the prophecies, Christ was to be born in Bethlehem, he sent the Magi thither and ordered them that, when they would find the Child, to inform him, so that he also - as he affirmed - might go and worship Him. But the Magi, after they had worshipped, departed by another way to their own country by a divine command. Then Herod was wroth and sent men to slay all the infants of Bethlehem and the parts round about, from two years old and under, thinking that with them he would also certainly slay the King Who had been born. But this vain man who fought against God was mocked, since Jesus the Child, with Mary His Mother, under the protection of Joseph the Betrothed, fled into Egypt at the command of an Angel. As for those innocent infants, they became the first Martyrs slain in behalf of Christ. But their blood-thirsty executioner, the persecutor of Christ, came down with dropsy after a short time, with his members rotting and being eaten by worms, and he ended his life in a most wretched manner.

Hymns of the Day



Tone 1 Troparion (Resurrection)

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews, while the soldiers were guarding Your most pure body, You rose on the third

day, O Savior, granting life to the world. The powers of heaven therefore cried to You, O Giver of Life: "Glory to Your Resurrection, O Christ! Glory to Your Kingdom!// Glory to Your dispensation, O Lover of mankind!"

Tone 2 Troparion (Holy Fathers)

Great are the accomplishments of faith, for the three Holy Youths rejoice in the fountain of flames as though in the waters of rest; and the Prophet Daniel appeared a shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep.// So by their prayers, O Christ God, save our souls!

Tone 4 Troparion (Forefeast)

Prepare, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all! Adorn yourself, O Ephratha, for the Tree of Life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave! Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the Divine Fruit; if we eat of it, we shall live forever and not die like Adam.// Christ is born to raise up again what fell in former times, His image.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

Tone 1 Kontakion (Fathers)

Rejoice, O Bethlehem! Prepare yourself, O Ephratha! The Lamb is on her way to give birth to the Chief Shepherd she carries in her womb. The God-bearing Forefathers will rejoice, beholding Him,// and with the shepherds, they will glorify the Virgin nursing Him.

now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Tone 3 Kontakion (Forefeast)

Today the Virgin comes to the cave to give birth to the Eternal Word. Hear the glad tidings and rejoice, O universe! Glorify with the angels and the shepherds// the Eternal God, Who is willing to appear as a little child!

COMMUNION HYMN

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the highest! Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous; praise befits the just! Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Gospel and Epistle Readings

Epistle Reading

Prokeimenon. 4th Tone. Daniel 3.26,27.

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers.

Verse: For you are just in all you have done.

The reading is from St. Paul's Letter

to the Hebrews 11:9-10; 32-40.

BRETHREN, by faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundation, whose builder and maker is God.

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets - who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Gospel Reading

Sunday before Nativity

The Reading is from Matthew 1:1-25

The book of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa, and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud

the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.

Wisdom of the Fathers

Pray, my brethren, to the Mother of God when the storm of enmity and malice bursts forth in your house. She, Who is all-merciful and all-powerful, can easily pacify the hearts of men. Peace and love proceed from the one God, as from their Source, and Our Lady - in God, as the Mother of Christ the Peace, is zealous, and prays for the peace of the whole world, and above all - of all Christians.

St. John of Kronstadt

My Life in Christ: Part 1, Holy Trinity Monastery pg. 179, 19th century

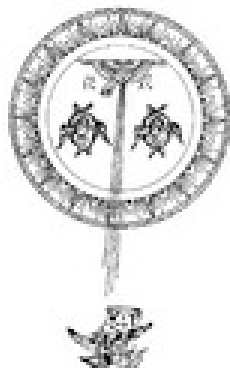
Through their prayers for, and alms on behalf of, the deceased, Christians display the relationship between this world and the world to come. The Church in this world and the Church in the other world are one and the same the one Body of Christ one the Church Militant and the other the Church Triumphant. It can be compared to a tree which has roots beneath the earth comprise as well as branches above the earth, but both the roots and the branches comprise one organism. This metaphor also illustrates how we on earth who comprise the Church Militant can receive help from the saints and the righteous ones in the Heavenly Church Triumphant. Saint Athanasios says: 'As it happens with wine inside a barrel which, when the vineyard blooms in the field, senses it and the wine itself blossoms

together with it, so it is with the souls of sinners. They receive some relief from the Bloodless Sacrifice offered for them and from charity' performed for their repose. Saint Ephrem the Syrian cites that same example with wine and the vineyard and concludes: 'And so, when there exists such mutual sensitivity even among plants, is not the prayer and sacrifice felt even more for the departed ones?' '[At the Eucharist] the bread itself and the wine are changed into God's body and blood. But if you enquire how this happens, it is enough for you to learn that it was through the Holy Spirit, just as the Lord took on Himself flesh that subsisted in Him and was born of the Holy Mother of God through the Spirit. And we know nothing further save that the Word of God is true and energises and is omnipotent, but the manner of this cannot be searched out. But one can put it well thus, that just as in nature the bread by the eating and the wine by the drinking are changed into the body and blood of the eater and drinker, and do not become a different body from the former one, so the bread of the table and the wine and water are supernaturally changed by the invocation and presence of the Holy Spirit into the body and blood of Christ, and are not two but one and the same.'

St. John of Damascus

An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Book 4: Chapter 13; Eerdmans pg. 83, 8th century

Beyond the Sermon



The genealogy of our Lord, always read on the Sunday before the Nativity, reminds us of two fundamental truths. First, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, Who is the Logos, took upon Himself our human nature. He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was named

Jesus, who is the Christ, that is the Messiah. He entered human history, and although He was "begotten of the Father before all ages," as we say in the Creed (the symbol of faith), He took for Himself a human Mother and, therefore, also grandparents, great-grandparents, and other family relationships. He is truly Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." He unites in Himself history and eternity, God and man, heaven and earth. He unites past, present, and future.

The second truth we learn is that God took on human nature to save us. He is named Jesus, meaning "God saves." As the Son of God and God Himself, He has always existed and therefore has no genealogy. However, as the Son of the Virgin, He was born in time and space, and He has a human genealogy through her, even though He has no biological human father. He is a Son without a human father, Who is begotten of God the Father before

all ages. He becomes incarnate for our salvation.

From the beginning, the Gospel of Matthew emphasizes that this is the “genealogy of Jesus Christ.” The word Christ (Χριστός) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. “Christ” and “Messiah” both mean the “Anointed One,” that is, the One who is anointed with the Holy Spirit to be Prophet, Priest, and King to His chosen people. His genealogy, therefore, locates Him in the history of humanity, particularly in the context of Jewish history, in which He was born. Genealogies were very important to the Jewish people because they established their identity as the people of God. Similarly, the Church is also validated, in part, by its history, particularly its “apostolic succession.” This succession — a type of ‘genealogy’ — links our present hierarchs with the very first apostolic hierarchs. The Apostles appointed Bishops as their successors, who in turn appointed their own successors, and so on. We have these genealogical records intact, which means the Church recognizes communion and canonicity among the hierarchy. For instance, records show that His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is the 270th successor to the Apostle Andrew. This succession is also seen in spiritual ways, especially in monasticism, as there are spiritual lines from saints to elders (in Greek, Γέροντες) and likewise to their spiritual children. These are not genealogies of ecclesiastical or administrative authority but rather of spiritual grace and virtue. A holy person with a particular spiritual gift called charisma (in Greek, χάρισμα) is likely

to pass on that gift to spiritual children through their teachings and spiritual training.

Saint Athanasius of Alexandria says, “The Word was made man so that we might be made divine. He displayed himself through a body, so that we might receive knowledge of the invisible Father.” Again, as Saint Gregory the Theologian says, “The deity is made man, so that manhood may be deified.” Jesus becomes “God with us” in such a manner that He is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Baby Jesus was born in a cave and placed in a manger (feeding trough). In the original Greek, it was a “fatni” (φάτνη), where the food is placed for animals to eat. The Bread of Life came to be our food from the beginning, as we receive His Body and Blood in Holy Communion. The Lord Jesus, the Creator and Sustainer of all things comes to redeem the world, but He comes not in His unveiled glory. He is born not in a palace fitting for a King, but in a humble place — a manger. The King of Kings comes in humility. He comes as a Baby who needs to be cared for, fed, nourished, protected, and loved. God becomes a Man, so He does not merely relate to humanity externally, as it were, as One Whom we only encounter as a stranger. Without ceasing to be God, He Who is without sin takes humanity upon Himself completely so that He can live not only with us, but also in us. As the Baby Jesus is born, He is wrapped in cloths and laid on a manger. As depicted in the Nativity icons, the same kind of cloths would be used later for His burial. Jesus Christ came to live and to die for us and to rise from the dead to destroy

the power of death. He is placed in a manger, the feeding place for livestock. He is born in Bethlehem, which, in the Hebrew language, means the House of Bread. Bethlehem becomes indeed the house where Jesus, the Bread of Life, is given for the life of the world. Christmas is a great time to join family and friends to give and receive gifts. The greatest gift we can give each other, however, is love. God's greatest gift has been given to us, His only Son, because He is love. The gifts the wise men brought Jesus had symbolic significance. The gift of gold symbolizes that Jesus is the King of Israel, even of the entire universe. The gift of frankincense symbolizes that Jesus is God, since incense is for worship, and only God may be worshipped. The dead were anointed with myrrh, as Jesus was at His burial. Therefore, the gift of myrrh symbolizes that the great King had come to die as the perfect sacrifice to redeem us through His Resurrection from our sins. Humanity has been redeemed in Christ. Christ has sanctified birth, and He has sanctified death. He has sanctified riches and poverty, time and space, history, and all peoples. When we struggle and feel like we live merely to survive, Christ assures us that His birth opens the possibility for us to be born anew to abundant life in Him each day. The Incarnation reminds us that Christianity is not merely a set of timeless ideas but a Faith of flesh and blood, which redeems the soul, the heart, and the whole body. Christ Jesus redeems women and men, the elderly and the young, the rich and the poor, and people from all races, from every tribe, tongue, and nation. He redeems

the whole cosmos. Let us open our hearts to the King of Glory so that He may enter and be born in our lives. Let us bring Him forth as the Light of the world. He is our life. May our hearts become more spacious than the heavens, for the Creator of the universe, the Son of God, lives in us. The Light has shone in the darkness, and our lives are enlightened and redeemed by His Birth. The Lord Jesus comes to us, who are His own. As we receive Him, we become children of God. As He is born in us, through Him we are born to a new life by the Holy Spirit. Christ is born, and we are brothers and sisters with Him. The Eternal God has united Himself with us, joining Himself with our history, heritage, and humanity in His birth of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. Let us now, in love and gratitude, join ourselves to Him — through prayer and love toward God and neighbor — so that we might rejoice together in the wonder of His Birth!

MARY KARR

DESCENDING THEOLOGY: CHRIST HUMAN

Such a short voyage for a god,
and you arrived in animal form so as not
to scorch us with your glory.
Your mask was an infant's head on a limp stalk,
sticky eyes smeared blind,
limbs rendered useless in swaddle.
You came among beasts
as one, came into our care or its lack, came crying
as we all do, because the human frame
is a crucifix, each skeleton borne a lifetime.
Any wanting soul lain
prostrate on a floor to receive the poured sunlight
might—if still enough,
feel your cross buried in the flesh.
One has only to surrender,
you preached, open both arms to the inner,
the ever-present embrace,
which props one up, out-reaches every grasp.
It's in the form imbedded,
love adamant as bone. The miracle's not just
that you became us, but also
those breathed-in instants allotted to us each
(even poor Brother Judas),
when one relinquishes self and will and want.
Then you're laid bare in us,
and for some briefly gentle eyeblink
we bloom and are you.