



Protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church

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Celebration of the Holy Mysteries

RECITATION OF THE HOLY ROSARY AND CONFESSIONS: ½ HR BEFORE DIVINE LITURGY

BAPTISM & CHRISMATION / ANNOINTING OF THE SICK / COMMUNION CALLS & VISITATIONS:
CONTACT FR. IHOR TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS

MARRIAGE PREPARATION:
CONTACT FR. IHOR AT LEAST SIX MONTHS PRIOR TO SETTING THE ACTUAL WEDDING DATE

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN:
CONTACT MRS. CHRISTINA VOGEL AT (603) 686-2092 TO REGISTER YOUR CHILDREN

SCHEDULE OF DIVINE LITURGIES:
SUNDAYS: 10 AM (September thru May) MON THRU SAT: AS NOTED IN WEEKLY BULLETIN
 9 AM (June thru August) HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION: 7 PM

DIVINE LITURGY SCHEDULE FOR WEEK OF DECEMBER 17, 2023

Sunday, December 17th – Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

Divine Liturgy: 10 AM Propers: Tone 4 and Festal Tones Vestments: Bright
Epistle: Colossians 3: 4-11 Gospel: St. Luke 14: 16-24
Intention: For all Parishioners followed by Panakhyda for the blessed repose of the soul of +Fr. Robert Smolley

Saturday, December 23rd (7 PM): Vespers Service

Divine Liturgy Intentions and Vespers Service Schedule for December and January

Christmas Week and Theophany Services:

Sunday, December 24th (10 AM): Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

Sunday, December 24th (3 PM): Great Compline Service with Liteeya

Sunday, December 24th (4 PM): Christmas Eve Divine Liturgy (All English Language Liturgy)

Monday, December 25th (10 AM): Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Holy Day of Obligation)

Tuesday, December 26th (7 PM): Synaxis of the Holy Mother of God

Wednesday, December 27th (7 PM): Feast of St. Stephen, Protomartyr

Saturday, December 30th (7 PM): Vespers Service

Sunday, December 31st (10 AM): For all Parishioners

Monday, January 1st (10 AM): Liturgy of St. Basil the Great - Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord

Saturday, January 6th (10 AM): Feast of Theophany with Great Water Blessing (Holy Day of Obligation)

Sunday, January 7th (10 AM): For all Parishioners

Saturday, January 13th (7 PM): Vespers Service

Sunday, January 14th (10 AM): For all Parishioners

Saturday, January 20th (7 PM): Vespers Service

Sunday, January 21st (10 AM): For all Parishioners

Saturday, January 27th (7 PM): Vespers Service

Sunday, January 28th (10 AM): For all Parishioners

Saturday Services

Fr. Ihor is celebrating Vesper services every Saturday at 7 PM. All parishioners are invited to attend this service. Those who wish to have a Divine Liturgy celebrated for a loved one whether living or deceased or for a private intention are still able to do so. Please request your Divine Liturgy by contacting Fr. Ihor at (860) 617-6357 or cantor Jaroslaw Maksymowych at (603) 627-2042. Please note that Saturday Divine Liturgies will now be celebrated only at 10 AM (9 AM June thru August) whenever they are requested. If no Divine Liturgy has been requested for a particular Saturday, then none will be celebrated on that day. The Divine Liturgy schedule in the bulletin will only show Divine Liturgies on Saturdays when they have been requested. If the bulletin does not show a Divine Liturgy for a given Saturday, then this means that particular Saturday is available for your request.

Суботні Богослужіння

Отець Ігор святкує Вечірню кожної суботи у 7-мі годині вечером. Ласкаво просимо усіх парафіян до участі. Парафіяни які бажають замовити Божественну Літургію в суботу для померших або на особисті інтенції можуть дзвонити до о. Ігоря на номер (860) 617-6357 або до дяка п. Ярослава Максимовича на номер (603) 627-2042. Суботні Божественні Літургії будуть відслужені тільки о годині 10-тій ранком (9-тій ранку з червня по серпень) коли замовлені. Якщо Літургія в певну суботу не буде замовлена, то в цей день не буде жодна відправлена. Порядок Богослужінь в бюлетені покаже тільки ті суботні Служби Божі які є замовлені. Якщо в бюлетені не відображається Божественна Літургія на дану суботу, то це означає, що ця субота доступна на Ваше замовлення.

Liturgical Propers, Readings and Sermon for Sunday

Liturgical Propers for the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

Resurrectional Tropar – Tone 4: When the women disciples of the Lord* learned the glorious news of the resurrection from the angel* that the curse of our ancestors was abolished,* they ran with joy to the apostles and cried to them:* “Death is conquered! Christ our God is risen,* granting great mercy to the world!”

Festal Tropar – Tone 2: Through faith, O Christ, You justified the Patriarchs; for through them You made a commitment to a Church with Gentiles. These Saints are glorified, because from them descends the Virgin who gave You birth. Through their prayers, O Christ our God, have mercy on us.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and forever. Amen.

Festal Kondak – Tone 6: You did not worship a man-made image, O thrice-blessed Youths, but were glorified in the test of fire, protected by a power beyond description. From the searing flames you cried out to God, saying: Hasten to help us, O merciful Lord, for in Your greatness You can do whatever You will.

Prokimen (Tone 4): How are great are Your works, O Lord,* in wisdom You have made them all.
VERSE: Bless the Lord, O my soul; O Lord my God, You are great indeed.

Prokimen (Tone 4): How are great are Your works, O Lord,* in wisdom You have made them all.

НЕДІЛЯ СВВ. ПРАОТЦІВ

Апостол (Кол 3: 4-11)

До Колосян послання св. апостола Павла читання.

Браття, коли ж Христос, ваше життя, з'явиться, тоді й Ви з Ним з'явитесь у славі. Умертвлюйте, отже, ваші земні члени: розпусту, нечистоту, пристрасті, лиху пожадливість, зажерливість, що є ідолопоклонство. За все це падає гнів Божий на неслухняних. Ви самі нещодавно поводитися так само, коли жили в тому. Тепер же відкиньте й Ви все те геть від себе: гнів, лютість, злобу, наклеп, сороміцькі слова з ваших уст! Не говоріть неправди один одному, бо Ви з себе скинули стару людину з її ділами й одягнулися у нову, що відновлюється до досконалого спізнання, відповідно до образу свого Творця. Тим то немає грека, ні юдея, ні обрізання, ні необрізання, ні варвара, ні скита, ні невольника, ні вільного, а все й у всьому - Христос.

Epistle Reading for the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers (Colossians 3: 4-11)

Brethren: When Christ our life appears, then you shall appear with Him in glory. Put to death whatever in your nature is rooted in earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and that lust which is idolatry. These are the sins which provoke God's wrath. Your own conduct was once of this sort, when these sins were your very life. You must put that aside now: all the anger and quick temper, the malice, the insults, the foul language. Stop lying to one another. What you have done is put aside your old self with its past deeds and put on a new man, one who grows in knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his Creator. There is no Greek or Jew here, circumcised or uncircumcised, foreigner or Scythian, slave or freeman. Rather, Christ is everything in all of you.

Tone 4: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

VERSE: Moses and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel was among those who called upon His name.

Tone 4: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

VERSE: They called upon the Lord and He answered them.

Tone 4: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

VERSE: Мойсей і Арон між Його священиками, і Самуїл між тими, що Його ім'я прикликають.

Tone 4: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

VERSE: Вони Господа прикликали, і Він відповідав їм.

Tone 4: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Євангелія (Лк 14: 16-24)

Сказав Господь причту оцю: Один чоловік справив вечерю велику й запросив багатьох. Під час вечері послав він слугу свого сказати запрошеним: Ідіть, усе готове. Тоді всі вони однаково почали відмовлятися. Перший йому сказав: Поле купив я, мушу піти на нього подивитись, вибач мені, прошу тебе. Другий сказав: П'ять пар волів купив я і йду їх спробувати; прошу тебе, вибач мені. А інший мовив: Я одружився і тому не можу прийти. Повернувся слуга й розповів це панові своєму. Розгнівався тоді господар та й каже до слуги свого: Іди щоскоріш на майдани й вулиці й приведи сюди вбогих, калік, сліпих, кульгавих. Пане, - озвався слуга, - сталося як ти велів, і місця ще є. Сказав пан до слуги: Піди на шляхи та огорожі й наполягай увійти, щоб дім мій наповнився. Кажу бо Вам: Ніхто з отих запрошених не покуштує моєї вечері. Бо багато є покликаних і мало вибраних.

Gospel Reading for the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers (St. Luke 14: 16-24)

The Lord told this parable: "A man was giving a large dinner and invited many. At dinner time he sent his servant to say to those invited, 'Come along, everything is ready now.' But they began to excuse themselves, one and all. The first one said to the servant, 'I have bought some land and must go out and inspect it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen and I am going out to test them. Please excuse me.' A third said, 'I am newly married and so I cannot come.' The servant returning reported all this to his master. The master of the house grew angry at the account. He said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame.' The servant reported, after some time, 'Your orders have been carried out, my lord, and there is still room.' The master then said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedgerows and force them to come in. I want my house to be full, but I tell that not one of those invited shall taste a morsel of my dinner.'"

Sermon for the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

Glory to Jesus Christ! My Dear Brother and Sisters in Christ!

The two last Sundays before the Nativity of Christ are called the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and the Sunday of the Holy Fathers. The Holy Forefathers and Fathers are the Old Testament relatives according to the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, beginning with the holy ancestors Adam and Eve, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, and his sons, the holy patriarch Abraham, and so on up to the glorious Nativity of Christ.

It is precisely for this reason that on the final Sunday before the Nativity of Jesus, on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers, at the Liturgy is read the first synoptic Gospel, the first in order

according to the Gospel of Matthew, where the genealogy of the Lord God, our Savior Jesus Christ is recounted. On the one hand, this was established by the Church in order that we would know and be interested in the lives of these Old Testament righteous ones, finding much that is fascinating and, especially, instructive in them. On the other hand, this established order is testimony to the fact that Jesus Christ is a real, historical person—and not just an historical person, but God incarnate in human nature, become a real Man, who took on our sins, healed us with His redeeming deed, and Who ascended in glory to the right hand of God the Father.

Furthermore, brothers and sisters there is a reason why this year at the Liturgy on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers the Gospel parable of the wedding feast of the king's son is read (Lk. 14:16-24). The powerful of that world rejected Christ, but the lame on the byways accepted Him and were triumphantly led to the wedding feast. Who are "the maimed, the lame, and the blind" in the Gospel, who were called to the feast of faith? Of course they are, first of all, the holy forefathers and fathers, and after them all Christians who sincerely consider themselves spiritually sick—sick with sin, and therefore, they weep and lament over their sins and seek their most important Healer, God the Father Almighty Himself. They seek Him and they find Him.

Why is this Gospel lesson recounted in our Church at the time of the anticipation of the Birth of Jesus Christ, just before the Great Feast of His Nativity? God became a man in order to teach people that all their aspirations should be directed toward Heaven, and not toward material possessions. But we humans, demonstrating an outstanding stubbornness, do anything possible to leave a material legacy on this earth. We make great efforts to invest our unspent energy and funds into something that we call "eternal", but what in reality is very materialistic: our house, our career, our social status and our reputation. We still rely on our lands, on our possessions, and on our heirs, completely forgetting that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption" (Cor.1:15). In other words, even the best things in life, if they are put in the place of God, in a vain attempt to substitute for Him, cease to be good and kind... Possibly, that is the motive why Almighty God, while being extremely patient us, the fallen and stubborn human race, and loving us, His creatures, often disrupts our so-called "achievements" that obscure the light of Heaven from us.

It always somehow escapes our mind that the real "eternal memory" was earned by those who abandoned the insane pursuit of earthly fame, fortune and passions. "The poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind" through their "poverty in spirit" (Math.5; 3) acquired the right to enter and fill the Kingdom of Our Heavenly Father. They deserved it only because they were not tied by any type of bond to the earthly kingdom. They were not ensnared either by oxen, or by lands, or by the embraces of their beloved – by nothing.

And being called through the Holy Mystery of Baptism to eternal bliss with our God, we constantly refuse it in our everyday life. We refuse it ourselves, according to our own will and

not being forced by anyone or anything. While going "to see the land", "to test the oxen" and declining the Vesper Supper of our Lord "for the sake of the family and the kids," we, the contemporary Christians, place ourselves in the position of those traitors, about whom the exasperated Master of the House said directly: "None of those who were invited shall taste of my supper" (Luke 14:24). For "Many are invited, but few are chosen" (Math. 22:14).

Brothers and sisters! Let us therefore be attentive to God's voice and His invitation, remembering that there is an end to our earthly existence, that the time will come when God's mercy, which now calls us to repentance and correction, will give way to Gods' righteous judgment and wrath. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, today is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2). Let us cleanse ourselves by repentance and be corrected, in order to greet the feast of the Nativity of Christ with a pure conscience and spiritual joy; and from the fullness of joy and love, let us chant to the Divine Child born in Bethlehem: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will toward men (Lk. 2:14).

Проповідь на Неділю Свв. Праотців

Слава Ісусу Христу! Дорогі в Христі браття і сестри!

Дві неділі до свята Різдва Христового наша Церква нагадує нам про його наближення і готує до гідної його зустрічі. У нинішній, перший підготовчий до свята вона згадує святих, що жили до Різдва Христового, - старозавітних пророків і усіх благочестивих людей, з вірою тих, що чекали пришествия Спасителя, чому і тиждень цей називається тижнем святих праотців. Цим спогадом вона переносить нас думками в часи старозавітні, для спонукання нас до морального самоочищення поставляє перед нами цілий сонм великих праотців, що засяяли своїм богоугодним життям.

Уривок з євангелія, який читаємо в цю неділю, замикає серію повчань Ісуса в якому можна окреслити як своєрідні уроки з етики Божого Царства: спочатку розповідь про суботнє зцілення хворого на водянку містить заклик завжди чинити діла милосердя, потім в кількох притчах Ісус повчає про смирення та гостинність, відтак вкінці притчею про велику гостину, дає образний опис втраченої можливості та демонструє унікальність Божої благодаті.

В Євангелії цієї неділі мова йде про одного чоловіка, що справив велику вечерю і запросив багатьох. Запрошені відкидають запрошення, вважаючи, що мають важливі речі до роботи, потрібні справи, якими займаються серйозні люди. Перш за все йдеться про запрошення! Ісус завжди запрошує, не насилує нікого. Не каже, «Ти повинен!», хоча наші проповіді інколи насичені тими «ми повинні...», ми повинні...», а в Євангеліях цього слова немає. Ісус Христос запрошує, кличе... Проте нікого не змушує... Євангеліє – це благовість духовної свободи. Єдиною потребою є сприймати те, що життя дає. В притчі про запрошених на вечерю Ісус чітко дає зрозуміти – багато людей можуть втратити місце у Царстві через те, що ставлять інші пріоритети вище, ніж відповідь на запрошення Господа.

У цій притчі є декілька причин відмови відгукнутись на запрошення. Перша і друга причина відмови мають економічний характер. Перша причина відмови – це посілості: Поле купив я, мушу піти на нього подивитись; вибач мені, прошу тебе. Не маю часу! Не можу! Людина, чого дуже бажає, за тим і піде, як каже Христос: «Де скарб ваш, там буде й ваше серце» (Лк 12,34). Це те зерно, яке падає між тернину..., клопоту, багатства й життєві розкоші душать зернини і вони не дають плоду (пор Лк 8,14). Закономірно люди, ласі на багатство, себе відчужують від духовних потреб, не приймають запрошення. Мають інші пріоритети.

Друга причина відмови – це бізнес, заробіток. П'ять пар волів купив я і йду їх спробувати; прошу тебе, вибач мені. Хто купує і продає, також не має часу на справи Божі. Він постійно зайнятий. Навіть не зважає, коли те, що купує і продає, є дуже шкідливим, як наприклад наркотики, а також про трафік продаж дівчат і дітей. І наші заробітки можуть бути перепорою до сприйняття Господнього запрошення. Багато разів ми чули тут: «Ми приїхали заробити гроші, а не ходити до церкви!». Приїхали на заробітки! Правильно! Проте заробіток не може стати перепорою до прийняття Божого запрошення. Може таке статися, що в неділю наша праця нам не дозволяють піти на Літургію, а ця праця на «хліб насущний», проте можливо знайти інший час, а навіть інший день, щоб прийняти Господнє запрошення, щоб не залишитися поза Господнім бенкетом.

Третя причина – це женячка, життєві розкоші: Я одружився і тому не можу прийти. В цій самій главі, два уривки далі, Ісус говорить: «Коли хтось приходить до мене, і не любить мене більше від свого батька й матір, жінку, братів, сестер, та ще й своє життя, той не може бути моїм учнем» (Лк 14,26). Жінка і чоловік не можуть бути перепорою для прийняття запрошення. Якщо перші два чоловіки цієї притчі ще просять вибачення, третій навіть не робить цього. Навіщо? Звичайно, життєві насолоди заглушують Боже запрошення, і людина не чує потреби думати про якість вищій пріоритети.

Отже, три причини відмови на запрошення – посілість, бізнес-заробіток і життєві розкоші. Іншими словами, ця притча перегукується спокусами багатства, влади і слави, які засліплюють людину, яка не здатна прийняти запрошення до Божого Царства, до Царства любові, яке відображається діленням хліба, служінням одні одним, слуханням і відчуттям потреб одні одних. Запрошені не прийняли запрошення на вечерю. Вони мають дуже серйозні справи. Приймають запрошення інші: «вбогі, каліки, сліпі, кульгаві». Приймають богобоязні, смиренні, голодні (пор. Лк 1,50-53), бідні, полонені, пригноблені (пор. Лк 4,16-19), плачучі, зненавиджені, зганьблені, викинуті та збезчещені людьми Сина Чоловічого ради (пор. Лк 6,20-23). Перед Господом всі люди однакові. Проте не всі здатні приймати, слухати голос Божий, не всі здатні приймати запрошення. Господь пропонує вічне життя усім, проте Господь не може нас спасти без нашої участі. Якщо не приймаємо дару спасіння, як тоді можемо спастися?

Тому пам'ятаймо, дорогі браття і сестри, що всі ми є покликаними в Царство Небесне. Через те, будемо уважні до голосу Божого, бо є межа нашому земному існуванню. Очистимо себе покаєнням і ділами милосердя, щоб свято Різдва Христового зустріти з чистою совістю і духовною радістю і оспівати народженому у Вифлеємі Богонемовляті: «Слава у вишніх Богу і на землі мир, в людях благовоління!». Амінь.

Communion Verse: Хвалить Господа з небес, хвалить Його на висотах. Радуйтеся праведні, у Господі, бо правим належить похвала. Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the highest. Exult in the Lord you just ones for praise is fitting from the righteous. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Parish Announcements

We Welcome You!

If you are visiting our church today, our parish family is delighted to welcome you here! Thank you and God bless you for visiting with us today! We welcome all our visitors and guests who worship at our parish. We invite families and individuals who wish to become members to register by calling Fr. Ihor at (860) 617-6357.

Вітаємо Вас!

Якщо Ви відвідуєте нашу церкву сьогодні, наша парафіяльна громада рада вітати Вас тут! Щире спасибі Вам, і нехай Бог благословить Вас за Ваші відвідини з нами сьогодні! Ми запрошуємо сім'ї та осіб, які бажають стати членами, зареєструватися у нас по телефоні о. Ігоря на номер (860) 617-6357.

Please Pray for our Sick and Homebound Parishioners, Family Members and Friends

Fr. Ihor Papka, Fr. Zbigniew Brzezicki, Oleh and Valentina Babski, Michaelle Baker, Rick Barr, Marylou Blaisdell, Tracy Crews, Carmel Horangic, Josephine Housty, Christine Kolagji, Helen Kucman, Martha and Ray Majkut, Karen and Jaroslaw Maksymowych, Jean Mandych, Sherri Martel, Katherine Masso, Jennifer McMillan, Katharine McNaughton, Jackie Morales, Lauren Morales, Jonathan Morales, Tanya and Ronald Morales, Elizabeth Mozina, Alan Pasicznyk, Lina Puciw, Billie Sheesley, Derek Stanley, Pauline Stanley, John Terninko, Elisha Wallace, Cindy Wilson, Dr. Mark Windt, Lenora Zelenski. Please contact Fr. Ihor if you would like to add a friend or loved one to this prayer list.

+Fr. Robert Smolley

Our parish mourns the loss of +Fr. Robert Smolley who passed into eternal life last week. +Fr. Robert served as our parish priest from 2006 until his retirement in 2015. Please remember +Fr. Robert in your prayers and pray for the blessed repose of his soul. May his memory be eternal!

December Birthdays

The following parishioners are celebrating a birthday this month:

December 5 – Martha M.

December 5 – Ray M.

December 9 – Mykola S.

December 9 – Zhanna S.

December 19 – Dawn H.

Our parish community wishes this month's birthday celebrants peace, joy, love and good health on their special day as well as throughout the year. May our dear Lord grant all of you many more healthy, happy and blessed years. Happy Birthday and На Многая літа! (Na Mnohaya Lita!).

Thank you

Our parish sincerely thanks all those who made the St. Nicholas dinner a success last Sunday including those who helped to prepare the lunch, those who brought dishes to share, and those who stayed and helped clean up afterwards. We also thank everyone who came on Saturday to clean and decorate the church for Christmas. May God bless you abundantly for your caring, kindness and hard work.

Parking Update

The owner of the lot across the street where many of our parishioners park during Sunday services, reminds us not to park in the space along the fence line nearest the alley way. This space is reserved for the personal vehicle of the residents of that building, and that space is clearly marked. Please do not park in that space or our parishioners will lose their parking privileges at that lot. If you have any questions regarding parking, please ask a Trustee.

November, 2023 Financial Summary

Total Income from November Donations: \$4,198.00

Total Expenditures for November: \$4,369.00

Deficit for November: \$171.00

Average attendance in November: 48

Thank you and God bless you for your generous support of our parish.

Weekly Reflection:

Learning about our Ukrainian Catholic Faith – The Season of Giving

Ruth went to her mailbox and found only one letter there. She picked it up and looked at it before opening it, but then she looked at the envelope again. There was no stamp, no postmark, only her name and address. She read the letter:

Dear Ruth:

I'm going to be in your neighborhood Saturday afternoon and I'd like to stop by for a visit.

Love Always,

Jesus

Her hands were shaking as she placed the letter on the table. "Why would the Lord want to visit me? I'm nobody special. I don't have anything to offer." With that thought, Ruth remembered her empty kitchen cabinets. "Oh my goodness, I really don't have anything to offer. I'll have to go to the store and buy something for dinner." She reached for her purse and counted out its contents. Ten dollars and forty cents. "Well, I can get some bread and cold cuts, at least!" She threw on her coat and hurried out the door. A loaf of French bread, a half-pound of sliced turkey, and a carton of milk, leaving Ruth with a grand total of twelve cents to last her until Monday. Nonetheless, she felt good as she headed home, her meager offerings tucked under her arm.

"Hey lady, can you please help us?" Ruth had been so absorbed in her dinner plans she hadn't even noticed the two figures huddled in an alleyway. It was a man and a woman, both of them dressed in little more than rags. "Look lady, I don't have a job, and my wife and I have been living out here on the street. And, well, now it's getting cold and we're getting kind of hungry and, well, if you could help us. Lady, we'd really appreciate it."

Ruth looked at them both. They were dirty, they smelled bad and frankly, she was certain that they could get some kind of work if they really wanted to. "Sir, I'd like to help you, but I am a poor woman myself. All I have are a few cold cuts and some bread, and I'm having an important guest for dinner tonight and I was planning on serving that to Him." "Yeah, well, okay lady, I understand. Thanks anyway." The man put his arm around the woman's shoulders, turned and headed back into the alley.

As she watched them leave, Ruth felt a familiar twinge in her heart. "Sir, wait!" The couple stopped and turned as she ran down the alley after them. "Look, why don't you take this food. I'll figure out something else to serve

my guest." She handed the man her grocery bag. "Thank you lady. Thank you very much!" "Yes, thank you!" It was the man's wife, and Ruth could see now that she was shivering. "You know, I've got another coat at home. Here, why don't you take this one." Ruth unbuttoned her jacket and slipped it over the woman's shoulders. Then smiling, she turned and walked back to the street without her coat and with nothing to serve her guest. "Thank you lady! Thank you very much!" said the couple as they disappeared down the alleyway.

Ruth was chilled by the time she reached her front door, and worried too. The Lord was coming to visit and she didn't have anything to offer Him. She fumbled through her purse for the door key. But as she did, she noticed another envelope in her mailbox. "That's odd. The mailman doesn't usually come twice in one day." She took the envelope out of the box and opened it.

Dear Ruth:

It was so good to see you again. Thank you for the lovely meal. And thank you, too, for the beautiful coat.

Love Always,

Jesus

The air was still cold, but even without her coat, Ruth no longer noticed.

In St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews we read, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." (13:2). Maybe this should be expanded to say, 'for by this some have encountered the Lord without knowing it' or maybe 'without being aware of it'. We know that the Lord dwells in each of us, but it is a matter of awareness and of being open to His presence in the circumstances of our daily lives.

How often do we see the homeless or the refugee and make immediate judgments about them? How often are we afraid when we encounter someone whom we do not know or do not 'approve of'? This is not to say that we should live imprudently or let down our boundaries, but sometimes we let our boundaries extend too far and we may alienate someone in need because of our judgments and fears. Ruth could have walked away and missed her encounter with the Lord, but she did not. She could have ignored her heart and told herself that she needed to be prepared for her guest, and actually missed her 'Guest' and her 'Lord'.

As we enter this season of giving, may we readily let go of our fears, our judgments, and our biases, and may we learn to see one another as human beings who sometimes live in prosperity and sometimes in hardships. May we allow ourselves to give to those in need, whether it is through monetary help or a bit of our time or simply a smile, acknowledging one another with kindness and caring. Chances are, we will be meeting angels or even the Lord, from time to time. Chances are, we will leave our encounter with a different outlook, with a bit more joy, and with a bit more love in our hearts. During this time of preparation for the birth of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, may we become more and more aware that it is through our actions that others can feel that "God is with us!" "God is with us indeed!" and, when we allow it, He touches others through us.

If you were to receive a letter from Jesus, would it be a 'Thank you' for a wonderful encounter, or a 'Sorry I missed you; will try again, soon.'? It is truly *your* choice. May our Lord help you to make the right choice and may He abundantly bless you during this most holy time of year.



Jesus

is the **Reason**
for the **Season.**

