

Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross

Fr. John Shimchick, Rector ☩ (856) 665-2491

www.holycrossmedford.org

28th Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, December 25, 2022



Christ Is Born! Glorify Him!

*The most wise
Lord comes to
be born,
Receiving hospi-
tality from His
own creatures.
Let us also re-
ceive Him,
That this divine
Child in the cave
may make us
His guests
In the paradise
of delights!*



The Birth of Christ has always been celebrated and hymned by Christians in some way or other, as it is central to the Faith. The Word of God in past times may have appeared as an angel of the Lord, or the divine fire of the burning bush, but now, from this time onwards, He has become one of us; and not just as a fully-grown man descended from Heaven, but in humility God is born of a woman, and comes to us as a tiny, speechless, infant. This is what is shown in the Nativity Icon, and around this central historical event other stories surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ are depicted.

The common form of the Nativity Icon, with few variations, dates from around the 15th century, though it draws upon sources much older: the Old Testament Prophecies, the New Testament Gospel accounts, and ancient narratives on the life of the Virgin Mary.

The New Testament in the Nativity Icon

The child-Christ and His mother are shown in a cave, surrounded by impossibly sharp, inhospitable, rocks which reflect the cruel world into which Jesus was born. The Gospels record that Joseph and Mary could not find a room at any inn

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Liturgical and Events Schedule

Sunday, December 25 *Nativity*

10:00 AM: Christmas Divine Liturgy

Thursday, December 29

11:00 AM: Baptism - Kathryn Aiello

Saturday, December 31

5:00 PM: Great Vespers

Sunday, January 1 *New Year's Day*

10:00 AM: Divine Liturgy

KATHRYN AIELLO BAPTISM

All are welcome to join us as we welcome Kathryn into the Orthodox Church! The service is Thursday, December 29th at 11 a.m.

Please join the Skuby family for cake and coffee afterwards!

Home Blessings

Fr. John is available for Home Blessings this year. Contact him to schedule it for after January 6, 2023.

The invitation to the priest to come and bless your home is an invitation to ask for the mercy of God upon the household. The sprinkling of the Holy Water is a sign of God's presence in the home as an extension of His Holy House, the Church. It is a time to renew our commitment to God as we begin another year in His mercy and love for mankind.

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when they came to take part in the census at Bethlehem, and so Jesus was laid in a manger, an animal's feeding trough.

Common to the time, animals were not sheltered in wooden barns, but in caves and recesses in the hills, and so this "stable" is shown in the Icon.

High in the skies is a star which sends down a single shaft towards the baby Jesus. This star is being followed by the Magi, the wise Persians from the East, who are bearing gifts to the Christ. But they are shown in the distance, still on their journey. They are not there.

Thronged in the skies are a host of angels bringing the glad tidings of the birth of the world's Saviour. On the right, the shepherds – people not regarded by anyone else – are the first to be given the Good News of Jesus' birth. But they are also shown outside of the cave, still by their flocks. They too are not at Christ's side yet.

Besides His mother, the only company Jesus Christ has in the first few hours of His earthly life are a lowly ox and donkey. This is the humility of God's incarnation on earth.

The Old Testament in the Nativity Icon

The humbleness of Christ's origins should not surprise us, as the manner of His birth was prophesied many hundreds of years prior to the event. The presence of the Ox and the Donkey in the Nativity icon fulfills one of many prophecies in the Old Testament book of Isaiah: *"The ox knows his owner, and the donkey his master's crib"* (Isaiah 1:3) . Here the animals are also shown providing warmth to Jesus by their breath.

Also found somewhere in most icons of the Nativity is a "Jesse Tree." Named after an Old Testament patriarch, the tree's presence is to remind us of another fulfilled prophecy from Isaiah: *A shoot shall sprout from the stump (tree) of Jesse and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him"* (Isaiah 11:1-2). In the flesh, Jesus can trace his ancestry through both His mother and adoptive father Joseph, all the way back to Jesse. This lineage is also sometimes shown in [Icons of the Jesse Tree](#).

Other Ancient Texts in the Nativity Icon

Another important source for the story of Jesus' birth is the [Protoevangelium of James](#), a 2nd century text which describes the life of the Virgin Mary. This naturally includes a description of Christ's Nativity, and the account is more detailed than those found in the Gospels. According to the *Evangelium*, Joseph brought along two women – a midwife and a woman called Salome – to help with the birth of Jesus. Salome is identified with a woman who later became a disciple of Christ, was the mother of the Apostles James and John, and was one of the women who discovered the empty tomb after Christ's resurrection.

But where is Joseph? Unlike the well-known Nativity scenes in the West, in Orthodox Icons Joseph is usually found in the bottom of the icon, away from his betrothed and her Son. Sometimes seen listening to an old man, Joseph looks troubled. He is beset with new doubts regarding this birth, and these doubts are delivered to him by Satan in the form of an old man, as recorded in the *Protoevangelium*. The devil suggests that if the infant were truly divine He would not have been born in the human way. These arguments, which ultimately did not cause Joseph to stumble, have constantly returned to trouble the Church, and are the basis of many heresies regarding Who Christ was and is. In the person of Joseph, the icon discloses not only his personal drama, but the drama of all mankind, the difficulty of accepting that which is beyond reason, the Incarnation of God.

As well as declaring the glorious and joyous news of the Birth of Christ, the icon also acknowledges, as do the hymns of the Church, the great mystery of this event.

How is He contained in a womb, whom nothing can contain? And how can He who is in the bosom of the Father be held in the arms of His Mother? This is according to His good pleasure, as He knows and wishes. For being without flesh, of His own will has He been made flesh; and He Who Is, for our sakes has become that which He was not. Without departing from His own nature He has shared in our substance. Desiring to fill the world on high with citizens, Christ has undergone a twofold birth.

Source: <https://iconreader.wordpress.com/2010/12/24/the-nativity-icon/>

Inreach/Outreach Ministry: 2022 Report

You, as Holy Cross parishioners, have generously donated to our Yellow Envelope Fund each month, enabling us to reach many needy people.

What would we do without your faithful gifts?!? Without the generous help of this parish, the Inreach/Outreach Ministry would not be able to help these organizations with assisting the neediest in our community and beyond. Thank you all for entrusting your donations to us.



Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. Philippians 2:3-4

On behalf of the Inreach/Outreach Ministry, Diana Bisinger

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Listed below are the charitable organizations you have helped this year, along with a short explanation of what each charity does.

OCHC Parishioner Emergencies

Holy Cross parishioners are the priority of this ministry. Assistance is offered either directly by Ministry members or by identifying other means/individuals who can help. Helping hands take many forms.

Community Hope

Provides transitional and permanent housing and supportive service for veteran families in Burlington County.

Crossroads

Provides care for homeless youth with shelter care, outreach services, group homes, residential treatment, community-based treatment homes, life skills training, and family therapy in Burlington County.

Christian Caring Center

Provides inside shelter for the newly homeless during Code Blue, groceries delivered to those in area motels or living outdoors, food baskets at Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, rent or mortgage assistance, and Village Thrift Shop clothing in Burlington County.

Community Luncheon

Provides hot meals for those in need in Burlington County and in our parish. Foods are prepared at Holy Cross each month.

Good Counsel Shelter

Creates supportive residential care and community-based services for homeless, expectant, and new mothers and their children.

Medford EMTs

Supporting our community's local emergency services who always stand ready to assist us.

Orthodox Christians for Life

Cultivates an Orthodox Christian pro-life ethic that incorporates prayer, education, and service into the existing ministries of our church communities.

IOCC

Offers emergency relief and development programs to those in need worldwide, without discrimination, and strengthens the capacity of the Orthodox Church to so respond.

Diocese of Alaska Endowment Fund

Establishing a means to provide Alaskan priests and families with basic necessities every month for their entire active ministry. The median stipend for native priests is \$7,200 per year.

DDB:

Launched January 1, 2011 Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors program financially supports Diocesan Youth Programs, Seminarians and Missions.

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St. Tikhon's Monastery Building Fund

Nineteen monastics live at the oldest Orthodox Monastery in America serving the Church through the daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy, constant prayer, charitable outreach, and a variety of publications and monastic crafts

84th Novogodny (New Year's) Ball

St. Stephen's O.C.F., Chapter 82 of the Fellowship of Orthodox Christian's in America, cordially invites our friends at Holy Cross, to attend the 84th celebration of this festive event.

When

The evening of Sunday, January 15, 2023

Where

*The Radisson Hotel - Philadelphia
Northeast, on Rte. 1 in Trevose, PA*

Music will be provided by the Kuriga Orchestra.

For more information please see the bulletin board in the church hall or see Larry Skvir, President of St. Stephen's OCF.

Note: tickets are only available by registration. No tickets are sold at the door.

A dinner option at the hotel, prior to the Ball, is also available. Profits from the Ball support Orthodox and other worthy charities.

PROVIDENCE HOUSE REPORT

Thank you, thank you, thank you! This past Monday we delivered two large boxes and a lawn bag filled to the brim with everything from curling irons to socks to drones, and over \$1200 in gift cards. The PH staff were extremely appreciative, and they expressed their thanks for giving attention to the teens, which was very much needed for their store. May God bless you all for your generosity!

Your Inreach/Outreach Ministry

Nativity Troparian

Your Nativity, O Christ our God,
has shone to the world the light of wis-
dom!

For by it, those who worshipped the
stars, were taught by a star to adore
You, the Sun of Righteousness,
and to know You, the Orient from on
high. O Lord, glory to You!

Merry
CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY
New Year

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You shop. Amazon gives.

