

**Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church**  
*971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905*  
**Rev. Presbyterian Dragan Vukovic**  
**(814) 244-4063**

**The Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost**  
**(12.01.2024.)**

**Luke 8:26-39**

And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when He went forth to land, there met Him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech Thee, torment me not. (For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.) And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go our into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that He would suffer them to enter into them. And He suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought Him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and He went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought Him that he might be with Him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. **(KJV)**

God's Holy Church is now in the period of the Nativity Fast. God's mercy is present to begin anew in Christ. The Church provides this time to earnestly prepare for celebrating Jesus Christ taking on human flesh.

The Nativity Fast inspires serious believers to focus on the purity of the Mother of God. The Mother of God was chosen among all women of all centuries to give birth to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believers are challenged to live in purity in Jesus Christ from the time of Holy Baptism until departure from this life. Believers are expected to reject the temptations and the corruption in the world that are perilous to the soul.

The current Gospel proves the power of the Lord Jesus Christ over the devil. The devil seeks to corrupt the human soul. Believers taking the present Gospel seriously will turn to Christ to seek purity in their personal lives.

Repentance has a place throughout life. Believers often unwittingly and unintentionally corrupt their lives during daily living. The Church provides the Nativity Fast and other days of fasting for repentance and purification.

Jesus Christ is ever-present and within reach for believers seeking to live healthily. During the Nativity Fast serious believers consciously act on the desire to begin anew in Christ.

The Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ is worthy of great preparation. The Son of God taking on human flesh radically changed the world forever. The Church celebrates Jesus Christ taking on human flesh in the present each year.

The Church offers guidance and nourishment for humans from conception until departure from this life. The Church provides understanding of human life and the way to life eternal.

Nourishment and guidance exist in the Church for believers throughout life. The Lord Jesus Christ is alive and present in the Holy Mysteries of the Church. Unsurpassed and unending joy in Christ are always available.

The Nativity Fast is a time of discovery. Believers seeking to learn more about Jesus Christ and to grow in Christ consciously approach the Nativity Fast with seriousness and deliberate effort.

The Nativity Fast is an investment in the Kingdom of God. The effort invested in adhering to the Nativity Fast will be fully realized in the experience of the Feast of Christ's Nativity.

The Christ Child born to the Virgin Mary links heaven and earth. Jesus Christ's birth links the human with the eternal. The Christ Child is Perfect God and Perfect Human. Believers come to the Church to learn about and appreciate Jesus' birth.

From Baptism until departure from this life, believers are to grow in understanding and appreciation of Jesus taking on human flesh. The Nativity Fast is a time for believers to reject and crucify desires that are perilous to the soul.

Worldly undertakings seek to overshadow and draw believers away from the way of Jesus Christ. Commercialism and materialism entice humans to pursue a way of life having nothing to do with Jesus Christ.

Discipline, vigilance and repentance are necessary throughout life to remain faithful and united with Jesus Christ. Joy in Jesus Christ is possible when resolute faith exists and continues.

The Gospel strengthens and educates attentive believers. Today's Gospel assures believers of Jesus Christ's power over devils that impair human life.

Believers need never fear in life and always have reason to hope in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is always present to allay anxieties arising in life over the threat of devils. Now is the time during the Nativity Fast to choose the life of purity and faithfulness in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ' Nativity is associated with unsurpassable joy in the world. Now is the time to commit to fully honoring the Nativity Fast. Today turn to Jesus Christ fully and reject any devils impairing personally living in Christ.

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**The Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost. Holy Martyr Plato, Holy Martyr Romanus and Child Barulas. November 18/December 1, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic**

## **HOW A GIRL WHO DIED OF CANCER STRENGTHENED MY FAITH**

In 2015 I was diagnosed with cancer. Two months later I underwent an operation: with God's help everything went well. My family prayed for me while a doctor removed my thyroid gland for four hours.

I should have been happy that the cancer had been detected accidentally at a very early stage, that an examination had been made quickly and an operation had been successful. As the hospital doctor joked just before the operation: "In a few hours your thyroid gland will become history." But sometimes it happens that after cancer is overcome, a person plunges if not into depression, then into sadness and melancholy. He begins to pity himself, and indeed it's not easy to live without your organ. For the rest of your life, you are dependent on hormone pills (this is called replacement therapy). Once a year you take blood tests for the thyroid hormone, periodically the dose of the drug is increased or decreased, your weight is unstable, and you put on weight very easily. I pitied myself terribly. I can't say that I didn't want to live, but I couldn't feel joy at all. It was painful for my loved ones to look at me; they had no idea to make me laugh. I even started [murmuring against God](#) and the whole world. "Why should I bear such a heavy [cross](#)? What did I do to deserve this?"

I worked at the Russian Embassy in the United States at the time. I attended St. John the Baptist's Orthodox Church where I met an amazing girl. This story—sad yet edifying—made me stop feeling depressed, look at my life from a different perspective and try to be grateful to God. It taught me to rejoice in life and strengthened my faith. Knowing the story of that young parishioner, I realize how lukewarm I was, and that I did not know how to thank the Lord, value my relatives, and greet every day with prayer. I would like to share this story with readers.

The girl Julia courageously and bravely struggled with cancer. She believed in her strength and a miracle to the last, took Communion until her death, always smiled and was always in a good

mood. She was only thirteen years old. But over such a short time she managed to live a fulfilling, interesting life and cheer people up with her versatile talents. From the age of three Julia studied singing; she sang the Liturgy by heart from an early age, won competitions, and performed solo with a symphony orchestra. This is not to mention folk dances and ballet. And everything was at a very high level...

One day all the parishioners were given color printouts to read: “Julia needs treatment and an operation. She has a rare type of oncology—bone cancer.” There was a photo of a girl with big, beautiful eyes, so radiant and deep that the lack of hair (due to chemotherapy) did not even spoil the impression. Below was a photo from Julia’s “past” life: now at a concert, now while dancing... Bright and cheerful, buoyant and open.

Everyone who saw Julia marveled at how she coped with illness, never complained about anything, and enjoyed life. She answered all questions that everything was fine and all right. She also shared her plans with others. After her leg amputation everything would heal, she would have a prosthesis and would learn how to live anew and walk again.

Perhaps Yulenska<sup>1</sup> had such a gift from God—fearlessness and willpower, which helped her pass into eternity with dignity.

Until her last day she accepted all circumstances with gratitude to the Lord and would even say that with God nothing happens without a reason: “So my illness is needed for something, too.”

When Julia was terminally ill, her brother did not know whether he should go to France alone or not. He was both her brother and friend, so he hesitated, but Julia told him, “You must definitely go! I’ll give you my money.” (Julia always had money; she won contests, performed songs, music or dances, and as a token of gratitude people would give her some money). Another girl could have said out of envy, “No way! Don’t go without me!” and it would probably have been difficult to judge her for this.

With such a terrible diagnosis Julia radiated only positive energy, and never during her illness did anyone hear complaints from her or see resentment or [depression](#). Once she even reproached her mother: “Stop worrying and grieving! Do you think it’s easy for me to restrain tears and not let them out? But I’m coping!”

Julia spent five months at a cancer hospital in Mexico where she underwent alternative treatment and chemotherapy. Should I tell you what a cancer hospital is like? Today you have lunch at the same table with your wardmate, and tomorrow that person is gone... Death, pain and suffering are always present there. But Julia’s ward by no means resembled a “funeral home”: She listened to music there—mostly Russian folk songs; she read books in French, spoke Russian with her mother, English with her father (her father is American), and before going to the Mexican hospital... she learned Spanish! No wonder the local doctors admired such a patient! They asked her parents why the girl was so radiant and what her father and mother were did to make her that way. Her mother explains that wherever Julia appeared, order and beauty reigned. When the girl entered her hospital ward for the first time, she looked at paintings hanging on the walls and said,

“Beautiful.” It was important for her (regardless of whether she was ill or not) when everything around was harmonious and cozy.

Yulenska was born and grew up in love. She was an adorable daughter, and probably this is why she shared her love with others.

Julia sang in the church choirs at the Churches of St. Barbara of the Greek Orthodox Church and St. Andrew of the Russian Orthodox Church in the city of St. Petersburg in Florida. She had a silvery voice and almost perfect pitch. She had a funny and artistic character, and her mother could hardly cope with her energy. And add to this her perfectionism! The girl did not do anything “anyhow” or “a little bit”. If she studied singing, she reached great heights, and everyone praised her and said that she was a born singer. If she played the piano, it was the same story. Also with painting. Julia had this approach towards faith too—she prayed and loved her neighbors sincerely.

Julia was homeschooled. She was the top-of-the-class student. However, mathematics was not her favorite subject—it was not her element. History, foreign languages, painting, music and sports—Julia was the first here!

After her leg amputation, Julia received Communion every Sunday. At first she used a wheelchair, and then she walked on crutches. And one day the doctors said that she had two weeks to live! It was just like a shot. Earlier they had wondered whether Julia, a child, should be told the whole truth. Her mother decided that Julia had the right to know everything as it was. But nevertheless, no one had expected such straightforwardness. Julia did not shed a single tear; she sang, continued to do her homework, and played with her beloved Mickey (dog). It’s touching that the teachers checked her homework after Julia’s death, because she had done all of her homework for two or three weeks in advance!

Julia was given her last Communion about three hours before her death. And just before she died, she had said, “I love you all so much! There is no death—we have eternal life!”

Julia was so endearing to people that parishioners and priests constantly came to her hospital, read prayers and gave her unction. After her death, someone wrote a poem dedicated to Julia and hung it at the entrance to the church. Although it’s blank verse and short, it’s very touching: “The princess of peace and purity is as pure as a white snowflake!”

*Alexandra Gripas*

*Translation by Dmitry Lapa*

## Services this Week

- **Wednesday (12.04.2024.)**
  - **The Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos**
  - *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM.*
- **Saturday (12.07.2024.)**
  - **Holy and Great-Martyr Gatherine of Alexandria; *St Great-martyr Mercurius* (After the Holy Liturgy, all those who wish may go to confession)**
  - *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:00 AM.*
- **24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (12.08.2024.)**
  - **Holy Hieromartyr Glement of Rome (Apod. Of the Entry into Temple)**
  - *Divine Liturgy starts at 10:00 AM.*



**Donations November 24, 2024**

**Offering - \$1,675.00      Candles - \$132.00**

**Dues - \$400.00**

**Donations**

To the Sunday School IMO Connie Bartis from Melissa Komar- \$50  
IMO Milos & Milka Tumbas from Dianna Dunnington - \$100

**Large Candles**

IMO Grandparents Amelia & Pete Matovich from Richard Kondas  
For the Health of Joanne Todorich from Pete Todorich  
IMO Shawn Novatny from Dan & Diane Tomak  
IMO Lazo & Bosa Vuckovich from Helene Gleason  
IMO Parents Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Milica Tumbas  
IMO Bonnie Niemann from the Malich Family

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**❄️ Please see attached form for Poinsette order! ❄️  
Due, to Suzette (or the candle room) Sunday, December 8<sup>th</sup>.**

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**There will be a donation basket in the vestibule today, IOCC (International Orthodox Christian Charities) Sunday to help with IOCC’s hurricane relief effort. The local Committee would like to present IOCC with a single grouping of donations from the faithful in the Greater Pittsburgh region (which we are a part of). (You may also write a check in care of “IOCC”)**

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**FISH FRY**

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2024 - 3:00 TO 6:30 PM**

**ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING - SUNDAY,  
DECEMBER 8, 2024 - LITURGY BEGINS AT 9:30 AM**

**ST. NICHOLAS SLAVA CELEBRATION  
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2024**



# POINSETTIAS

Provided by SEADS Garden Center

No.	Size	Price	Total \$
	5"	\$7	
	6.5"	\$13	
	8.5"	\$21	
	10.5"	\$25	
		Total =	

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

In Memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

Paid \_\_\_\_\_ Check # \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to Suzette Gardenhour no later than Sunday, December 8th.  
If you are out of town – payment and completed form can be mailed to:

St. Nicholas Church  
% Suzette Gardenhour  
1001 St. Clair Road  
Johnstown PA 15905

Or contact Suzette at 814-421-1276 or shliva16@gmail.com