

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
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IRINEJ
BY THE GRACE OF GOD
BISHOP OF WASHINGTON-NEW YORK AND EASTERN AMERICA

Most beloved clergy and monastics, sons and daughters, faithful children
of the Eastern American Diocese of our Most Holy Serbian Orthodox Church:

GOD'S PEACE — CHRIST IS BORN!

*"All angels in heaven make merry and dance today,
All creation leaps for joy,
The Lord and Savior is born in Bethlehem.
Every deception of idols is swept away,
And Christ reigns unto all ages!"*
(Great Compline Verse of Christmas)

Truly, Beloved, with the birth of Christ, *all angels in heaven make merry and dance today, as all creation leaps for joy.* For creation itself is renewed in Him, who comes to us as a little Babe — Love and Truth Incarnate! Our *Lord and Savior is born in Bethlehem*, as the rising *Sun of Righteousness* that has shown forth at the dawn of renewal, in Him who *makes all things new* (Rev. 21:5). *Christ is Born; Glorify Him! Christ is on earth; be exalted! Christ is Born; Sing to the Lord all the earth!* (cf., Matins Canon Ode 1).

Yet, the earth finds itself engulfed in the tragedies of war and strife, and here at home, personal, familial and societal values have been so radically compromised, impacting the existential and threatening to impede upon the ontological, by attempting to deny the very image and likeness of God in humankind. Gratefully, within our Orthodox Christian tradition, the celebration of Christmas is so deeply intertwined with the light of love, peace and profound joy, which ushers in hope, that comes from the radiance of Christ's Nativity.

Therefore, as we approach this joyous and hope-filled celebration of Christmas, do we not find our hearts filled with gratitude, as we reflect on the profound gift that this sacred season brings to us. It is, as such, an opportune time to reconnect with our families, nurture our relationships, restore fragmented humanity by extending our love and goodwill to the broader community, and to the world. For today, *every deception of idols is swept away, and Christ reigns unto all ages.*

Christmas is the celebration of the Birth of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh. The Word of God enters creation to renew light, life and hope. This salvific event, which changed the very course of history, calls us to embody the values He taught us — love, compassion, and service. In the words of St. John Chrysostom: *"Let us celebrate the birth of Christ, not only with eating and drinking, but also with acts of charity and love. Let us be joyful and give thanks for the gift of salvation."*

As we gather with our families, relatives and friends, sharing meals, exchanging gifts, and participating in our festal Christmas traditions, let us remember that these moments are about more than just festivities. They are opportunities to foster common unity by strengthening the bonds that bring us all together. For, *“as many as received Him, to those who believe in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12-13). This new identity is not one based on personal achievements, possessions, challenges, or even trauma; but rather on God’s love, grace and mercy for all and in all.

Moreover, as we come together in this season of hope and renewal, may our hearts be opened to allow the Christmas spirit to inspire our actions and our interactions within our families, communities, and even globally. May we always carry this spirit within us, not just during this wondrous season, but throughout the entire year, by fostering an enduring legacy of love and compassion. Let us demonstrate our faith by uplifting others in prayer and deed. In doing so, we reinforce the fact that we are all children of God, connected by His bond of love. For *“God is love!”* (1 John 4:8).

Earnestly praying that you, your families and all, will enjoy a blessed Feast of the Nativity of Christ, filled with the presence of Christ the Newborn Babe. May your homes be embraced with the warmth of peace, joy and hope, wherein faith is shared and nurtured, and wherein all family members and guests feel fully valued and appreciated. May the New Year bring you an abundance of grace, and fulfillment in the Divine Child’s love for everyone and everything, jubilantly exclaiming from a joyful heart:

**GOD'S PEACE – CHRIST IS BORN!
INDEED, HE IS BORN!**

Given in New York at Christmas in the Year of our Lord, 2024.

Your prayerful intercessor before the crib of the Newborn Savior,

+Irinej

BISHOP OF WASHINGTON-NEW YORK AND EASTERN AMERICA
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Sunday before the Nativity The Sunday of the Holy Fathers

(01.05.2025)

Matthew 1:1-25

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Tamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon: And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus. (KJV)

The Sunday before the Nativity

The Sunday of the Holy Fathers

St. Matthew's Gospel describes the miraculous Virgin Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is certainly needed in the present world. Jesus Christ is needed in the world in every century until His glorious Second Coming.

The Virgin Birth is proof of Christ's Divinity and witnesses to the action of the Holy Spirit. The uniting of Divine and human occurs in the Virgin Birth. Jesus Christ is Perfect God and Perfect Man.

The Lord Jesus Christ is associated with and is the personification of peace. Today's world is filled with violence and has much to learn from Jesus Christ. Too often aggression, anger and violence manifest themselves.

The New Born Christ Child grew to become a victim of violence. Violence is not new to society. Each person determines whether to participate in violence. Each person determines how to respond to violence.

Individuals by the way they live can add to the climate of violence or to a climate of peace. The Lord Jesus Christ teaches the path to peace and the Heavenly Kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ offers eternal life.

Each person chooses what to think about. Careers and goals in life are personal choices. Whether to live in Christ and follow Christ are personal choices. God's Holy Church welcomes each person freely choosing to enter and follow Christ.

The Birth of Jesus Christ changed the world. Jesus Christ's birth was long expected. Evidence exists in the Holy Prophets about Christ's birth. The liturgical services of the Church draw from the Prophets in preparing for the Feast.

The liturgical celebrations of the Feast are rooted in history. The present Gospel identifies specific names associated with the birth of Jesus Christ. The present Gospel contains the known words of the Prophet Isaiah, (Is.7:14)

Believers are given one life to live. The time of life comes only once. Each person chooses whether to live in ways pleasing to the Lord. Each person decides whether to promote peace and pursue it.

Violence begets violence. Expressed anger often leads to bad results. Choices made in life have results and consequences. Jesus Christ's birth offers the way to peace. Jesus Christ offers the path to lasting peace.

God's Church is where to find and promote peace. Jesus Christ exists in the Church and in the Holy Mysteries of the Church. Jesus Christ is alive and emanates from the Holy Gospel. Now is the time to seek and promote the peace of Christ.

The Forefeast of the Nativity. The Sunday of the Holy Fathers. Holy Ten Martyrs of Grete. Venerable Naum of Ochrid. Serbian Fathers' Day. December 23, 2024/January 5, 2025. Father Rodney Torbic

Beloved brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of our Holy Church,

With joy in our hearts and the blessing of God, we greet you in this sacred season of Christmas and the New Year. May this holy time bring peace and joy to your homes, health to your bodies and souls, and countless blessings in all your endeavors.

Our church, built with the love and sacrifice of our ancestors, stands as a testament to their deep faith and hope for future generations. In this new land that has provided us refuge, we honor their legacy, preserving the traditions that bind us not only to our Serbian homeland but also to the eternal Heavenly Kingdom. This connection transcends time and space, uniting us in faith, hope, and love for the Lord. Here, within these sacred walls, we encounter the grace of God, who strengthens and comforts us, guiding us on the path of salvation.

As we celebrate the Nativity of Christ, let us remember the profound meaning of His coming into the world: God became man to reconcile us with Himself and bring peace to all. Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, came to transform the darkness of the world with His divine light. Let us follow this light and embrace His call to forgiveness, reconciliation, and unity. As the Apostle Paul reminds us: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

Many have strayed from the Church, pursuing worldly paths that lead to forgetfulness of their spiritual roots. Yet, the Church remains a beacon of hope and a refuge for the faithful. As Christ promised: “On this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18) The Church is not merely a place; it is the Body of Christ, where we find solace, unity, and the strength to navigate life’s challenges. Let us remember the words of St. Basil the Great: “Let the Church be your foundation and comfort in all troubles, for it is the pillar of life, just as Christ is the true light.”

Although we are far from Serbia, we remain deeply connected to our homeland and to the love and sacrifices of our ancestors. Yet, our ultimate home is not of this world but the Kingdom of God. As St. Isaac the Syrian said: “By coming to earth, Christ brought into us peace and joy that surpass this world.” Let us cherish our spiritual heritage and ensure that our Church remains a place of unity, faith, and salvation for generations to come.

As we step into the New Year, let us renew our commitment to living according to the Gospel, striving to embody the love, humility, and peace that Christ brought into the world. Let us forgive one another from the heart, just as the Christ Child came to reconcile us with God and with each other.

I pray that this holy season fills your hearts with peace, joy, and a renewed dedication to our shared faith. May the grace of God be with you and your families now and always.

With love and prayers,
Father Dragan Vukovic

Peace of God! Christ is Born! Indeed, He is Born!

JOHN OF KRONSTADT: SAINT OF COMMUNION, SAINT OF CONFESSION



In the Epistle (1 John 4:7-11) and the Gospel (Luke 6:31-36) that are read in honor of St. John of Kronstadt, we notice the emphasis upon love. Our Holy Father St. John of Kronstadt, Wonderworker of all Russia, is an example to us of loving compassion, of pastoral love. In the Gospel in particular, the Lord emphasizes that our love should not simply be towards the people that we find congenial, not just towards those who show love towards us. It is to be far wider, we are to love our enemies, we are to love all our fellow humans, our love is to be without limits.

It is very clear that when St. John in his Epistle and our Savior in the Gospel speak about love they do not just mean something sentimental, something emotional, they mean something far more profound. The kind of love that they envisage, a universal all-embracing love, a love without limits, can only be a result of prayer, of ascetic effort. Such love is something for which we must struggle and suffer. Such love cannot be based just upon our emotional feelings, it has got to have a deeper basis.

What is this deeper basis? It is precisely the service that we are celebrating together now, the service of the Holy Eucharist, which is indeed a sacrament of mutual love. Our love has its foundation and inspiration in the Divine Liturgy. If we are to show more vividly the kind of love of which the apostle John and our Lord speak, that can only come first and foremost through a deeper experience of Holy Communion, through frequent Communion received after profound and searching preparation.

St. John of Kronstadt was above all a Eucharistic Priest. He put The Holy Liturgy at the center of his life, and this was the source that enabled him to show such a dynamic and universal love. Our receiving of Holy Communion, while it is with the blessing of our spiritual father to be frequent, should never be mechanical or automatic. We are to prepare. And how should we do it? We are to prepare above all through the use of the sacrament of Confession.

Here there are as we know different disciplines. Some have been brought up to go to confession before every Communion, others have a blessing from their spiritual father to go more frequently to Communion without confession every time. But undoubtedly in our Eucharistic experience the sacrament of healing which we call Confession or the sacrament of repentance plays a central part.

Why do we need to go to confession? Is it not enough to confess our sins with sincerity in our private prayers each evening, will not God forgive us from the very moment that we confess our sins? Yes, as soon as we turn to God in true repentance He forgives us. God is always more ready to forgive than we to repent. Even the slightest turning of our heart will be blessed by God. Why then are we taught also to go to the sacrament of confession? I can think of three reasons certainly, perhaps you can think of more.

First of all there are no private sins, all sins affect our brothers and sisters in Christ. All of our sins, however secret, have an effect on the community. If I feel in my heart anger towards someone else, even if I do not show it by word or action, that evil disposition in my heart has a destructive effect on others around. Every sin is a sin against the community, every sin however secret is a stumbling block for others and makes it harder for them to serve Christ.

In the early Church confession was public. After the fourth century, with the growth of the Christian community, that gave scandal and so confession assumed its present form, as an opening of the heart before the priest alone, under conditions of secrecy. But let us remember that during confession the priest is there, among other things, as the representative of the community, of the people. The fact that we confess not just to God, but in the presence of a fellow man, shows that we acknowledge the communal social dimension of all our sins. In confessing in his presence we are also asking forgiveness from the community. I heard a story once told about St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco. I have also heard it told of others, but the same thing can happen more than once.

Once before the Divine Liturgy he was hearing the confession of a man, and the man said: "Yes I know that what I have done is a sin, I ask God's forgiveness, but my heart is like a stone, I do not feel any sorrow for my sin, it is all just in my brain." So St. John said to him: "Go out into the center of the church in front of the people and make a prostration before them and then come back to me." As the man did this and knelt to ask forgiveness from the people before him, something broke inside his heart and it came alive again. Suddenly he felt real compunction for what he had done. He said "now it is different," and the Archbishop gave him forgiveness.

That was the moment of turning for him because he acknowledged that his sin was a sin against the community and he asked their forgiveness. So in our confession let us first of all recall that dimension. We are also asking for forgiveness of our brothers and sisters for what we have done. That is one reason to go to confession, because sin is social.

There is a second reason. The spoken word, the uttered word has great force. This applies in two ways. First of all we listen to the spoken word of the priest, the counsel that he gives, and it may be that what he says if written down and put in a book would not seem so striking. It may be that it wouldn't seem so remarkable.

But in confession the priest is praying and we are praying for the light of the Holy Spirit, and he is addressing those words under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to each one of us, to each penitent personally. The words which looked at in the abstract might seem obvious, common place, can prove words of fire when we realize that they are being said to me personally here and now under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I can remember at the Russian convent in London many years ago there was a priest, Fr. John, who didn't much like hearing confessions, he didn't much like giving sermons either. He was a person of few words and very humble, and didn't feel he really had the authority to offer counsel in confession, but he was blessed by the bishop to hear confessions so he did so. On one occasion a woman was telling him at immense length of her quarrels with her husband: "I said this and he said this and I told him he was wrong and told him this" and so it went on "and I told him this and this." When she had finally stopped all Fr. John did was to turn to her and say "And did it help?" and then he gave her absolution.

That came as a sudden revelation to her, the futility of the endless arguments she had with her husband, of her endless desire to prove that she was right and that he was wrong. Suddenly she saw that there was no point to all this, it was quite simply unnecessary and she stopped from that moment.

So the uttered word can have great power and that applies also to what you or I utter when we make our confession. Yes we can confess our sins secretly in our evening prayers and we should do so, but when we come before the holy icons in church, when we have listened to the prayers and speak in the presence of the priest, when we have to say these things aloud, often then it becomes powerful, immediate, personally significant in a way it was not before.

The uttered word has great force and we find ourselves in confession, by God's grace, saying things that we never said in our private prayers. Suddenly we are able to understand more deeply and to express it more openly. Therein lies much of the grace of confession. The desert fathers say that a thought which is concealed has great power over us, but if we can find a way to bring it into the open and to speak of it, it loses its power. That is also what the modern psychiatrists tell us, but the desert fathers said it first! So, the uttered word that we bring in confession can have a sacramental force and a healing grace which will surprise us.

But then there is a third thing, not just what the priest does when he offers advice, not just what we do when we try to speak the truth in Christ. There is also what Christ does. Confession is a mystery of the Church that confers sacramental grace, there is power within it, Divine power. When the priest lays his hand upon our head in Confession, it is Christ who lays his hand upon us, Christ who forgives and that is certainly the deepest and most profound reason why we should go to Confession. When such grace and such healing is offered to us, who among us dare refuse to accept such an opportunity.

Bishop Kallistos Ware is Spalding Lecturer of Eastern Orthodox Studies at the University of Oxford. The author of many books and translations, he is perhaps best known for The Orthodox Church, the most recent revision of which was published by Penguin Books in 1993, and The Orthodox Way, recently issued in a revised edition by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. He is a member of the advisory board of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship. His sermon was given at the parish of St. John of Kronstadt in Bath, England, the town in which he grew up.

From the September 1998 issue of *In Communion*, the quarterly journal of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship

[Orthodox Research Institute](#)
[Metropolitan Kallistos \(Ware\)](#)

Services this Week

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Donations December 29, 2024

Offering – \$1,723.00 Candles – \$85.00 Dues – \$50.00

Donations

From William and Melanie Schall – \$1,000

Building Fund

IMO Michael & Evelyn Raich from Ann (Raich) Luy, Evelyn (Raich) & Steve King, and Michael & Mary Raich – \$500

IMO Dorothy Byers from Dan Lovrich – \$20

IMO Natalie Ofsanko

Daniel Lovrich – \$20, Tom & Carole McAllister – \$20

Christopher McAllister – \$20, and Ashley McAllister – \$20

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

Donations are now being taken for the Gold coin for our Christmas Cesnica.

Please see Richard Gardenhour (The cost of the coin is \$298)

Our New Library!

We will be offering a selection of books for our parishioners to borrow for your enjoyment. All reads will be recommended by Father Dragan. At this time we have two available, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy: Finding the Way to Christ in a Complicated Religious Landscape" and "Memory Eternal: Living with Grief as Orthodox Christians" - These titles are available in the Candle Room. Please feel free to sign one out and return when completed. If you have any suggestions, please speak with Father Dragan.

Small pocket calendars are available in the Candle Room for \$10

Nut, Apricot, and Poppyseed Rolls are still available!

Please join us in celebrating Serbian Father's Day Today!

A special thank you to all who purchased Poinsettias

Tony & Linda Freidhoff & Joanne Uzelac IMO Donald Uzelac & Wayne & Patricia Freidhoff
Carole McAllister IMO Devich and Lovrich Families
Evelyn Walet IMO Father Sam Vuckovich
Eli Cvijanovich IMO Deceased members of the Cvijanovich Family
Ed & Kathy Urban IMO Parents, Pete & Irene Martinovich
Karyn Waligora IMO Lazo & Bosa Vuckovich
Diane Tomak IMO Damjena & Lazo Gjurich and Bosa & Lazo Vuckovich
Danica B. Wess IMO Buncich Family & Wess Family
Mike Stipanovich IMO Alex & Beverly Stipanovich
Joe Bartis IMO Constance Bartis
Richard Kondas IMO Parents, Amelia & Joseph Kondas
John & Patricia Pavich IMO Deceased Family Members
Michael Mastovich IMO Milan & Helen Mastovich
Jencine Campagna
Father Rodney Torbic
Donna Zimmerman IMO Nicholas, Mary, David, & Deborah Miller
Diane Thomas IMO Helen Sabo & Dorothy Lavrnja
Jeanette "Chee Chee" Czubak IMO Vinny Czubak
Olga Bulich IMO Lillian Fleck, Sam Vuckovich & Nicholas Matijevic
Mary Kelly IMO Stephanie Lightbody
Gojko, Rose & Kristina Marinkovich IMO Family
Peter & Joanne Todorich IMO Nikola, Milka & Nick Jr.
Richard & Suzette Gardenhour IMO Grisin, Bozic and Gardenhour Families
Helene Gleason IMO Cookie Saula, Zora Locher & Bosa Vuckovich
Pat Niel IMO Buncich & Niel Families
Jencine Campagna
Lazo Gjurich and Peti Gjurich IMO Betty Gjurich

UPCOMING EVENTS

*** Christmas Eve – Monday, January 6, 2025**

9:30 AM – Vespers and Divine Liturgy (of St. Basil the Great)

7:00 PM - Vigil and Blessing of the Yule Log (Badnjak) followed by blessing of Cesnica with Golden Coin and Holy Fathers' message for everyone

*** The Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ – BOŽIĆ Tuesday, January 7, 2025 10:00 AM – Divine Liturgy**

**Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos – Wednesday (January 8th)
9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy**

**Holy Apostle, Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen – Thur. (January 9th)
9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy**

**Circumcision of Our Lord (St. Basil) – Tuesday (January 14th)
9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy**

Men's Club Pork Chop Dinner – Sunday, January 19, 2025

St. Sava Celebration – Sunday, February 2, 2025

**Fish Fry
Friday, February 7, 2025**

*** Lenten Fish Fries
Friday, March 7th to Friday April 11, 2025**