



SAINT ANDREW THE APOSTLE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America

Christ is The Word LOGOS

*The mission of Saint Andrew the Apostle Orthodox Church
is to glorify our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ through our words and actions according to the Holy Traditions and Sacred Teachings of our
Holy Orthodox Christian Faith*

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

December 2021

Wisdom

Teacher of children became himself a child among children, that he might instruct the unwise. The Bread of heaven came down to earth to feed the hungry. (Cyril of Jerusalem)

For next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became man for our sakes, that becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing. (Justin Martyr)

Angel Tree

St. Andrew's will sponsor an Angel Tree again this year for needy residents of Harbor Health Nursing Home who have no family to provide them with a gift for Christmas. Please reach into your heart and share your love this year with someone who would otherwise be overlooked. Angels are available on the tree in the foyer, and instructions are posted nearby. Choose one item, or as many as you would like to give. Please package your gifts in a gift bag with tissue, and return to the church by December 19. Thank you all for your continued love, support and enthusiasm for this most worthy project!



Calling kids of all ages!

On **Sunday, December 5**, we will be celebrating the life and works of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, who is the model for modern-day Santa Claus. **We will begin at 6 pm** with Vespers, followed immediately by a story from his life, and a special surprise for the kids. Please join us!

And Hannah prayed and said:

My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. There is none holy like the LORD; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.

...

The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven.

The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed.

1 Samuel 2:1-2, 6-10



The Holy Prophetess Hannah is commemorated on December 9. Read her story in 1 Samuel 1:1 - 2:11.

Time to think Stewardship!

As we think about our stewardship in the Church - how we "give back" to God for all His blessings - we ask that you consider making a commitment of financial support to St. Andrew's. **Your pledge**, communicated to us via the pledge form, **helps us to plan** and budget the church's finances for the coming year. If you give regularly but don't pledge, thank you! But it would be helpful for us if we know in advance what your planned giving will be. A pledge is not binding; no one will send you a bill. If your circumstances change, you are free to change your giving plan.

Stewardship packets have been mailed and extras are available in the foyer and on St. Andrew's website at orthodoxdelmar.org/stewardship.



"AND THE DISCIPLES WERE FIRST CALLED CHRISTIANS IN ANTIOCH" (Acts 11:26)

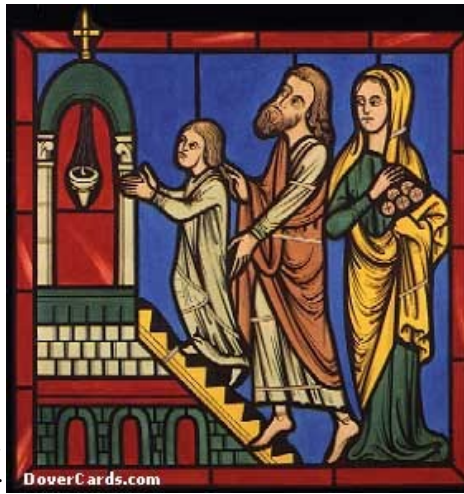
The Presentation of the Theotokos by Dr. Brian Ephrem Fitzgerald

The **Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple**, or, **Presentation of the Theotokos**, is a fixed feast celebrated by the Orthodox Church on 21 November. Its forefeast falls on 20 November and its leavetaking on 25 November. This feast is one of the Five Great Feasts of the Theotokos, namely:

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|--|-------------|
| ✦ Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos | 8 September |
| ✦ Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple | 21 November |
| ✦ Meeting of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple | 2 February |
| ✦ Annunciation to the Most Holy Theotokos | 25 March |
| ✦ Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos | 15 August |

According to Church tradition, through her birth Our Lord and God delivered her aged parents, Saints Joachim and Anna, from barrenness in answer to their prayers. In thankfulness to God, Joachim and Anna dedicate the young child to the service of God by presenting her to the Jerusalem Temple, where she lives as a temple virgin until betrothed to Joseph of Nazareth (Matthew 1:16, Luke 3:23).

The *Presentation* itself, along with other reported earlier events in the life of the Theotokos have not been recorded in Holy Scripture. The *Presentation*, however, is narrated in the early Christian text, the *Protoevangelium of James*, a second century expansion of the infancy narratives of Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 2:1-7. Since it follows the biblical infancy narratives and is cited by Origen (184-253), its date is most likely around 150 AD. It is perhaps also the earliest source relating Mary as ever-virgin. Furthermore, its rather physical depiction of Mary's pregnancy and the examination of her hymen by the midwife, Salome, indicates this text to have opposed both docetists and Marcionites, who denied the humanity of Christ. Although never accepted in the New Testament canon, the *Protoevangelium of James* is a source for many of the Church traditions concerning the early life of the Theotokos.



While this narrative is absent from scripture and its historical attestation is quite slim, its theological and spiritual significance is great. As with all aspects of the life of the Theotokos, her obedience at the *Annunciation* (Luke 1:27-56) and the resultant saving Incarnation of Christ our God are central to her key role in God's plan of salvation for humanity. Here the focus is the transition from old to new covenants, specifically from the Jerusalem Temple as the tabernacle of God to the Theotokos herself becoming the living tabernacle of God on earth. Psalm 45:10-17 provides inspiration for the Church's celebration of the *Presentation*:

Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.

And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favour. The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold.

She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace.

Reverence in God's House

O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.
- Psalm 26:8

Leaving Before Dismissal

Leaving church before the Dismissal - besides being rude - deprives us of a blessing. Worship has a beginning ("Blessed is the Kingdom...") and an end ("Through the prayers of our holy Fathers ... Amen"). To leave immediately after Communion is to treat church like a fast food restaurant where we come and go as we please. We live in a fast-paced world where we seem to be hurrying from place to place. But in God's presence, we need to make every attempt to fight this pressure to move on to the next thing on the day's agenda. We deprive ourselves of blessings by not being still and participating in God's holiness. Eat and run at the fast-food place - but stay in church and thank God for his precious gifts.

Final Thoughts

There are surely many other areas that could be covered when discussing Reverence in God's House. North American society in our time is rather casual in its approach to life; don't allow this prevailing attitude to enter into your Orthodox Christian piety. Remember, we are all growing in godliness, and many have physical needs that force them to "break" some of the rules of etiquette; therefore we must bear with one another. Much of church etiquette is based on common sense and showing respect for God and others. Always remember that you are in church to worship God, the Holy Trinity. The priest says, "With the fear of God and faith and love, draw near." Let this be the way you approach all of worship. If you do, you will probably have good church etiquette.

The original version of our Reverence series was written by Fr. David Barr and first appeared in The Word, January 1997. Over the years, others have republished it with additions and modifications to suit their own context, as we have here.

MISSION MOMENT - A CHILD'S MISSION

by Mary Ann Bulko

“And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7)

Over forty years ago, the children of our church school at St. Gregory's in upstate New York were rather excited about their upcoming 'mission' in the parish. They were preparing for their annual Christmas Pageant as well as a simultaneous spaghetti dinner! This year, things were going to be slightly different for the parents/audience and the performers. I had prepared a storyline for the event entitled “Jesus Christ – The Man Born to Die So that We Might Live.”

In those days of slides, projectors, and tape recorders, one could almost 'have your cake and eat it too!' With hours spent setting up numerous 'scenes' and capturing images both indoors and out, the children donned their costumes, re-creating some of the people and events in the life of Jesus. A manger scene was created on the parish lawn with bales of hay and stuffed animals along with crowned wise men in colorful 'bath-robos'. Another scene had one little boy sitting on a tree branch looking over the heads of a curious crowd trying to 'see' Jesus. Of course, that was Zacchaeus. A few children clutched their fishing poles and nets while standing by a nearby stream – obviously, the Apostles, who one by one would be called into service. One of the final scenes showed all twelve of them with Jesus in the center, seated around a long (child-size) table which was set up in front of the iconostasis in the church – this, of course, represented the Last Supper.

After the slides were developed, an accompanying tape was recorded with the children's voices, including both dialogue and music. Finally, the actual day for presentation had arrived! Families gathered in the parish hall for an evening of dinner and Christmas 'pageantry'. A small group of adults prepared the simple meal while the children served both family members and parishioners with a lovely spaghetti dinner. Once all were fed and nourished, after dessert that is, the children were seated, joining their families for the long-awaited Christmas Pageant. Witnessing the response of parents alongside their children as they mutually shared the experience of watching, hearing, and learning about the life of Jesus Christ, was indeed a blessing! The festive visual event brought the parish community together in preparation for Advent and the Nativity of the Christ Child. (An added benefit is that it can be viewed again at another time!)

Many if not all of our Orthodox Churches generally celebrate the Feast of our Lord's Nativity with some sort of Christmas program. The children find their roles as Shepherds, Wisemen, Angels, and the Holy Family. Memories of these portrayals can last a lifetime as each generation shares the wonderful story that is told and repeated again and again. As Jesus Christ came into this world as a child on a mission designed by His Own Father, so perhaps it is a mission that our children also share in the recreating and telling of that story again and again!



“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Information on Orthodox Missions is posted on the bulletin board in St. Andrew's foyer. For additional information, contact the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC.org).



December 2021

Every Saturday: 5 pm Confession
5:30 pm Choir Rehearsal
6 pm Vespers

TROPARION OF ST. ANDREW-Tone 4 - As the first-called Apostle and brother of their leader, O Andrew, intercede with the Master of all to grant peace to the world, and to our souls great mercy.

December 5 St Sabbas of Jerusalem
Nectarios of Betelia (Mt. Athos, 1500)
Gury, Missionary Bishop of Kazan (Russia, 1563)

Tone 7 Epistle: Galatians 5: 22-25, 6:1-2
Eothinon 3 (St. Mark 16:9-20) Liturgy Gospel: St. Luke 13: 10-17

RESURRECTION TROPARION - Tone 7 - Thou didst shatter death by thy Cross, thou didst open Paradise to the thief; thou didst turn the sadness of the ointment bearing women into joy, and didst bid thine Apostles proclaim a warning that thou hast risen, O Christ, granting to the world the great mercy!

December 12 Forefathers (Ancestors) of Christ
Spiridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Trimythos (Cyprus, 343)
Alexander, Bishop of Jerusalem (250)

Tone 8 Epistle: Ephesians 5:8-19
Eothinon 3 (St. Mark 16:9-20) Liturgy Gospel: St. Luke 14: 16-24

RESURRECTION TROPARION - Tone 8 - From the heights Thou didst descend, O Compassionate One, and Thou didst submit to the three-day burial, that Thou might deliver us from passion. Thou art our Life and our Resurrection, O Lord. Glory to Thee!

December 19 Sunday before the Nativity (Genealogy)
Martyr Boniface (Rome, 230)
Boniface the Merciful, Bishop of Florence (Italy, 6th cent.)

Tone 1 Epistle: Hebrews 11: 9-10, 32-40
Eothinon 4 (St. Luke 24:1-12) Liturgy Gospel: St. Matthew 1:1-25

RESURRECTION TROPARION - Tone 1 - While the stone was sealed by the Jews, and the soldiers were guarding thy most pure Body, thou didst arise on the third day, O Saviour, granting life to the world. For which cause the heavenly powers cried aloud unto thee, O Giver of life:Glory to thy resurrection, O Christ! Glory to thy kingdom! Glory to thy providence, O thou who alone art the Lover of mankind!

December 26 Sunday after the Nativity
Synaxis of the Theotokos
Euthimius, bishop of Sardina, (The Balkans, 850)

Tone 2 Epistle: Galatians 1: 11-19
Eothinon 5 (St. Luke 24:12-35) Liturgy Gospel: St. Matthew 2: 13-23

RESURRECTION TROPARION - Tone 2 - When Thou didst submit Thyself unto death, O Thou deathless and immortal One, then Thou didst destroy hell with Thy godly power. And when Thou didst raise the dead from beneath the earth, all the powers of heaven did cry aloud unto Thee:O Thou who art risen from the dead, O Lord, glory to Thee!

Regular Schedule

Saturday 5:15 pm Confession
6 pm Vespers
Sunday 9 am Orthros
10 am Divine Liturgy

Be sure to visit our website at www.orthodoxdelmar.org/calendar for special services and the most up-to-date schedule.

Other December Events:

St. Nicholas (Dec. 6)
Sunday, December 5
Vespers 6 pm
Followed by youth activity

St. Herman of Alaska
Monday, December 13
Divine Liturgy 10 am

Advent Paraklesis
Wednesdays, December 15 & 22
3 pm

St. Ignatius of Antioch
Monday, December 20
Divine Liturgy 3 pm

Christmas Liturgy
Friday, December 24
6 pm

Protomartyr Stephen
St. Fabiola
Monday, December 27
Divine Liturgy 3 pm

Check our online calendar at www.orthodoxdelmar.org/calendar for additional weekday services and the most up-to-date schedule.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. Colossians 3:12-17

Make note of our regular service times:

Saturday Confessions 5:00 pm Sunday Orthros/Matins 9:00 am
Saturday Vespers 6:00 pm Sunday Divine Liturgy 10:00 am

Please contact Father Herman for information about becoming a member of the Saint Andrew Orthodox Church

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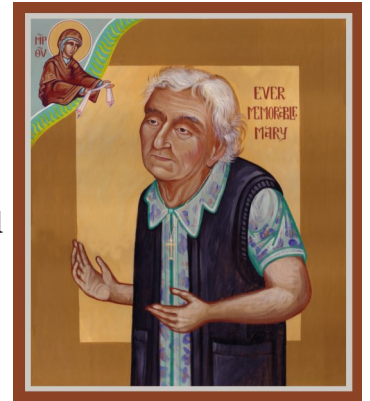
Iconographer's Corner Special Edition - The Nativity Icon

by Nicholas Papas

I will start with a story. It is about a special woman. She is Mary Abraham from Blairsville, Pennsylvania. She was born in Syria about 1900. She came to America as a young girl where a difficult life awaited her. She was married at a very young age and had one daughter. She raised her daughter while caring for an invalid husband. But she carried these daily trials with a Christian faith in her heart in such a way that they bore a fruit of amazing, powerful, and uncontainable love for people.

Jumping ahead many years. When she was seventy and eighty years old, she lived by herself in a humble house. It was in these years that she found a particularly suitable outlet for the uncontainable love that her faith and hard life had taught her. This outlet came through a unique relationship with the college students of I.U.P. (Indiana University of Pennsylvania.)

The University is in close proximity to Mary's home parish of St. John the Baptist Church in Black Lick, PA. The Pastor of St. John's served as advisor to the O.C.F. (Orthodox Christian Fellowship) and as a connection between Mary and the students. Through the O.C.F. she touched the lives of many kids with her grandmotherly love. This is why everyone who knew her referred to her affectionately as "Situ" (Arabic for grandmother.) Her house was always an opened door oasis for everyone, but especially for the students. She loved them and showed it with all the simple gifts God gave to her. She was a gifted cook, gardener, wine maker, and baker. Her heavy-laden table was filled with homemade foods, often made with the produce from her own backyard garden. But her main courses were spiritual food with the best dishes being a ready, patient ear and kind, wise, simple, and encouraging words. The sublime power and impact of her meals and hospitality lingers in the minds and subconscious of those who experienced them even to this day.



There are so many stories revolving around Situ. Many of these things may be written down in the years to come. But there are two important anecdotes that provide a moving glimpse into the depth of her faith.

Mary lay on her deathbed with a respirator in place, unable to speak. She, pointing and pantomiming, tried to relate something. A number of people saw her during her frantic attempts to communicate something. Days later she was finally able, with her throat raw from the respirator and her voice squeaky and weak, to relate to her priest, Fr. Samuel Smolic, what she had seen. The Virgin Mary had come to her! In this appearance the Virgin placed Her veil on Situ, gave her solace, and told her that she would live for two more years.

On another occasion, still in the same hospital bed, her voice still not recuperated, she shared the secret that was deep within her unschooled, simple, yet beautiful mind. In a raspy voice she squeaked out a secret that was transcendent theology. Her words were far from fancy. At first blush, because of her thick accent, they might almost be humorous. But as she held onto one of the many get-well cards she had received, she spoke with complete, undeniable, and child-like sincerity.

The card's cover had an icon of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child. As she alternately clutched the card close to her heart or gazed lovingly at the picture she seemed in her own world, unaware of others being in the room. It was then that she uttered in an almost lullaby way, the words that could be described as a prayer, a revelation, and a proclamation...

"You[re] da baby, you[re] da baby."

Just as Mary, the Mother of God, revealed it would be, 2 years later on September 28, 1986, Mary Abraham fell asleep in the Lord. Along with the many people who knew her, I ask her to pray for us. And I along with everyone who knew her, I am confident of her place in heaven.

The point of telling this story is to put our minds in a place where we can see that knowing ABOUT God and knowing God are not the same. When we look at the Nativity icon, or any icon, the theology is pointless unless it is personal and experienced. This is why these classes are titled "Icons made Personal."

True "theology" has to do with experience, not with book knowledge. Mary Abraham said with clarity and awe "You da baby" because this is what she experienced. She didn't say this with awe and clarity because she had read it in the *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*.

With a few words Situ Mary expressed more about the incarnation of God than book after book could even attempt to say.

With the huge preamble about **experience** being a key to faith, I am still going to launch into a rather huge list of specific details in the Nativity icon before we launch into an attempt to "make it personal." (Which, you will see, may have very little to do with **the point** I hope to make with this icon.)

Continued

The Nativity Icon cont'd

- 1) The ancient ORIGINS of the Nativity Icon
 - a) Ancient prototypes = ampullae from 5th & 6th c.
 - b) Hymnography !!!
 - c) Scripture
 - d) Apocryphal Gospels of Pseudo-Matthew & Pseudo-James
 - e) APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS are specific sources for
 - 1) the MIDWIVES
 - 2) JOSEPH'S TEMPTATION
- 2) Specific DETAILS of the Nativity Icon and their significance
 - a) Most CENTRAL is CHRIST (artistic composition reflects belief)
 - b) MARY the THEOTOKOS is also CENTRAL in the composition > her all-important role as connector ("Ladder") between Heaven and Earth (as the hymn... "Heaven and Earth are united today...")
 - 1) Mary is "the new Eve".
 - a) Eve = the mother of people
 - b) Theotokos = mother of renewed/reborn people
 - 2) "PLATYTERA" icon depicts "Heaven and Earth are united," revealing it to be a kind of year-round Nativity icon
 - 3) ALL Madonna & Child images are Christmas icons
 - c) DARK CAVE > fallen Earth to which Christ comes
 - d) SWADDLING CLOTHES > foreshadow the clothes of tomb and fulfill the angelic announcement of Luke 2:12.
 - e) CAVE, MANGER, SWADDLING CLOTHES > Christ's HUMILITY
 - f) The OX & ASS > Christ's humility, but more significantly fulfill prophecy of Isaiah 1:3 "The ox knows its owner and the ass its masters crib but Israel does not know me and the people have not regarded me".
 - g) ANGELS, as always >
 - 1) Messengers to shepherds and Magi
 - 2) Praise givers
 - h) Christ God came to save ALL MEN >

1) Shepherds= Jews	Magi= Heathen/Gentile
Shepherds= simple	Magi= Learned
Shepherds= find XC directly	Magi= find XC via journey

 - 2) Magi represent ALL AGES AND RACES of mankind
 - i) Furthermore the MAGIS' GIFTS are representative >
 - 1) Gold = King
 - 2) Frankincense = Divinity
 - 3) Myrrh = Prophetic of the Passion & Christ's immortality
 - j) Not just compositional centrality but SIZE > ancient tools used by artists to express and prioritizing importance
 - k) The THEOTOKOS' POSTURE reflects divinity (1/2 sitting= as on a Royal Throne and as without suffering at an extraordinary birth) and humanity (1/2 reclined to dissolve any illusions)
 - l) the shepherd-musician represents the artistic OFFERINGS OF MAN in chorus with the praise offerings of the angels
 - m) VARIED "DISTANCES" of Magi > time unclarity of the Gospels
 - n) MIDWIVES > emphasize Christ's humanity... He needs to be washed after childbirth!
 - o) THE STAR > Heaven's announcement of the coming of the Creator of heaven. It is depicted as having Divine origination.
 - p) EARTH & HEAVEN > above and below one another, are joined by the Divine rays of the star of Bethlehem.

The Nativity Icon cont'd

To me there is a quiet little secret in this icon., which is NONE of these major and significant details!

To understand this secret it is important to look closely at something in the icon that could easily be overlooked since the bull's-eye composition draws the viewer away from this detail.

The detail to take a second glance at that will guide us to refocus away from the bull's-eye center is odd. **It is the odd detail of Mary's gaze.**

This is extremely out of character for a mother of a newborn, especially if that Mother is supposed to be THE perfect mother.

I have two brothers-in-law that are chiropractors. They can tell you that they see in their offices many a new mother. Invariably they will all have sore necks from gazing down at their new babies. The new mothers have complete infatuation with the new love in their life. This is not represented in this icon. The knowledge that Mary IS the perfect mother and that a mother will naturally look at her newborn seems to make a strong case that this detail is absolutely intentional.

SO if it is absolutely intentional what is the point that the artist is trying to make?

The answer lies in investigating further the direction of Mary's gaze.

Who or what is she looking at? She is gazing at Joseph.

Who is Joseph that Mary's attention is taken away from the baby Jesus?

This is what the Gospel has to say about Joseph...

Matthew 1: 19 *Then Joseph her husband, **being a just man**, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately.*

Matthew 1: 20 *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.*

Matthew 2:13-14 *And when they were departed, behold, **the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream**, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When **he arose, he took** the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:*

Matthew 2:19-21 *But when Herod was dead, behold, **an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt**, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And **he arose, and took** the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.*

How does the Gospel's image of Joseph contrast with the image of Joseph in the Nativity icon? Angels visit him 3 times! AND, he is called a "just man"!

BUT, in the Nativity icon Joseph's head is down. His hand is on the side of his face or chin. His body language gives a clear message that is quite different than that of the angels, shepherds, and magi. He appears dejected, left out, worried, confused, and maybe most of all, doubtful. And all of the thoughts that Joseph seems to be struggling with are not helped by the instigation of the old strange man who is taunting and goading him. You can almost hear the stranger saying... "Virgin birth? You've got to be kidding?"

If Joseph is such a "just" man, then why does the icon seem to emphasize what was mostly likely a split moment time in which he has very human and understandable doubt? It does not seem fair or accurate or in any way appropriate to blow it out of proportion Joseph's doubt and struggle.

But in fact, an incredible number of hymns for the Orthodox Liturgical celebration of Christmas are spent on this "blown out of proportion" moment of Joseph's doubt.

It is important to note that of all the feelings that could be expressed in the hymns of the church, the one that is focused on is doubt. This too is not a mistake. Because, although worries and confusion and the labors and distractions of life are all legitimate expressions of our fallen humanness, doubt is the one hurdle that keeps us from full communion with God. We struggle with being good, with our performance. This is the false struggle of the false model that we learned from our earthly parents. This is what we talked about in our first and second class. The true struggle is to believe, to have faith. To struggle in any other way is putting the cart before the horse.

And at the root of it all is our ability to have and to believe that God loves us. The question that we ponder

So what is the "trick" in the Nativity icon? With all the concentric circles emphasizing Jesus at the center of the icon there is a "still small voice" subtly whispering. "I have not forgotten YOU."

The Nativity Icon cont'd

Because... **Who is Joseph in the Nativity icon?!**

Joseph is us, you and me.

Who is the “REAL” child in this icon?! ... The infant that needs a mother’s care!?

It is Joseph! Which means that we are the child in need in the Nativity icon. And our needs are noticed and met, once again, by a loving Mother. And once again that loving Mother, for us, is the Church.

So then, what is the secret message of the Nativity icon?

That God does love us! That He has not forgotten us in any way. That even when we are troubled and struggle and are worried and scared and **DOUBTFUL** that He remembers us. He remembers us so much that he actually comes to us on earth. He comes to us. He even nurtures us and watches over us and cares for us. He gives us number one priority and does this, not only by Himself, but also by His gentle, kind, loving and patient Mother, the church. And we are shown this in the icon of the Nativity by Mary’s soft gaze. Her attention is on us! Her attention is on me! Her attention is on you!

This sentiment is beautifully echoed in the hymns from the Celebration of the Feast...

JOSEPH’S DOUBT (Your and my doubt. All human doubt.) from the Festal Menaion p.225 *Joseph spoke thus to the Virgin; 'What is this doing, O Mary, that I see in thee? I fail to understand and am amazed, and my mind id struck with dismay. Go from my sight, therefore with all speed. What is this doing, O Mary, that I see in thee? Instead of honour, thou hast brought me shame; instead of gladness, sorrow; instead of praise, reproof. No further shall I bare the reproach of men. I received thee from the priests of the temple, as one blameless before the Lord. And what is this that I see now?*

MARY TO JOSEPH (Jesus through His church to us.) from the Festal Menaion p.245 *O Virgin, when Joseph went up to Bethlehem wounded by sorrow, thou didst cry to him: 'Why art thou downcast and troubled, seeing me great with child? Why art thou wholly ignorant of the fearful mystery that comes to pass in me? Henceforth, cast every fear aside and understand this strange marvel: for in my womb God now descends upon earth for mercy’s sake, and He has taken flesh. Thou shalt see Him according to His good pleasure, when He is born; and filled with joy thou shalt worship Him as thy Creator. Him the angels praise without ceasing in song and glorify with the Father and the Holy Spirit.'*

Thou shalt see Him according to His good pleasure, when He is born; and filled with joy thou shalt worship Him as thy Creator.

This describes Situ!

It is fitting that just last week when we talked about how the Syrian word for Mama and baby are the same. If you think about the reality that Situ expressed looking at an icon of Jesus and Mary and combine Situ’s reality with the secret message of the Nativity icon you may begin to see a line of separation begin to fade. In the same way that the line of separation is blurred in the Syrian language in the words for mother and child. You may begin to see that love blurs the line of separation between child and mother. It is hard to distinguish between one and the other. A bond of love is so strong that all that is left is love.

Situ says to Jesus... “you da baby.”

And in the same way, it is as if through The Virgin Mary in the Nativity icon, Jesus is saying to you and me and to Situ ... “you da baby”... “You are THE CHILD!”

And like St. Paul says (in Galatians 3:26-27) ***For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.***

