



ST. MARK'S ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Orthodox Church in America (www.oca.org)

Diocese of Philadelphia and Eastern PA (www.doeпа.org)

452 Durham Road

Wrightstown, PA 18940

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Clergy

V. Rev. Raymond M. Browne,

Rector

Cell: 570-906-1388

Email: fraymondmartin@hotmail.com

Protodeacon Gregory Moser, *Attached*

V. Rev. Michael Sekela, *Retired. Attached*

Readers:

- ❖ G. Peter Bohlender
- ❖ Dustin Joseph Crosby

Choir Directors:

- ❖ Sergei Arhipov
- ❖ Mat. Martha Moser
- ❖ Daria Cortese

Church School Director

- ❖ Jennifer Sremanak

December 23, 2018

Service Schedule

Great Vespers/Vigil

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Eve of Feast 7pm

(6pm on Sundays).

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Days 9:10am

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Confessions:

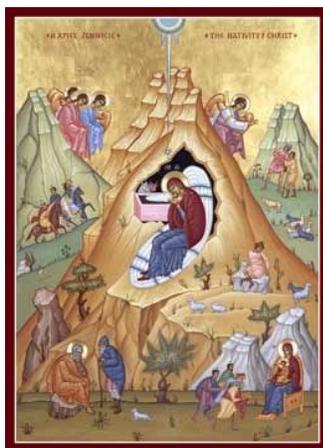
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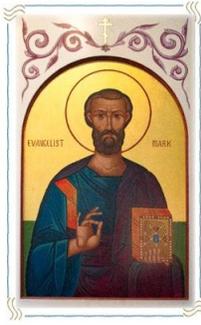
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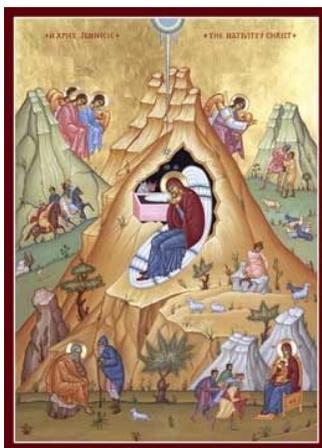
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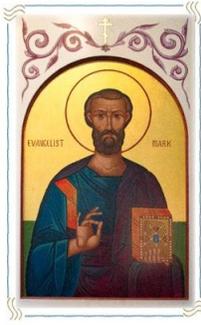
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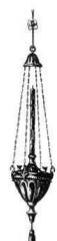
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EXPLANATION OF THE NATIVITY ICON

ICONOGRAPHY IS A "THEOLOGICAL LANGUAGE"

Icons are — as Orthodox Christians faithfully understand — very sophisticated theological expressions about the individuals and events portrayed.

Icons are not — as some people mistakenly believe — illustrations of biblical or other religious stories for the illiterate.

Iconography is, in fact, a theological "language."

Many spiritual and theological ideas exceed the ability of mere words, either spoken or written, to describe.

The aesthetic, visual, colorful, and rich symbolism of a painted icon, however, can provide an additional way to express these ideas.

Iconography is, therefore, a theological language.

Yet, despite their spiritual sophistication, icons are accessible and understood by all: by the simple and the wise, by the young and the old, by the educated and the unlettered.

THE ICON OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

The icon of the Nativity is very rich in meaning. Its central depiction is of Christ lying in a feeding trough (the "manger") of animals. It is located in a cave, which has a black background.

The background represents an inhospitable world, the earth since man's expulsion from Paradise. But into this darkened world a great Light has shone: Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the Savior of the world.

THE CAVE

The earth provides its gift to God: the cave in which animals were being sheltered during the cold winter months.

In the cave-stable are two animals: a cow and a donkey. These represent the prophetic words of Isaiah: "*The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider*" (Isaiah 1:3).

THE STAR

The sky offers to God the star, the light of wisdom. This is a sign that Christ came for all people, because a star is seen by everyone and leads all men to Him.

It is, of course, the star seen by the three Magi who followed it to Bethlehem. These Magi, along with the shepherds bring their gifts, also showing that Christ came for everyone.

Some icons have three rays from the star, representing the Trinity.

A TREE

In some Nativity icons a tree is painted. The tree represents the "root of Jesse (the father of King David)" from which the promised Messiah, or Christ, will come: "*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots*" (Isaiah 11:1).

THE CHILD

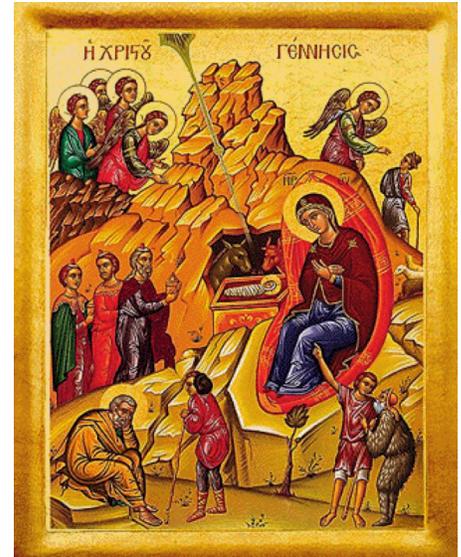
Jesus is shown wrapped in swaddling clothes. These signify His submission to human flesh, and also presage His death and burial for the sins of the world. Jesus will embrace every aspect of the human condition, from conception to death and even resurrection.

The helpless figure in swaddling clothes represents the complete submission of Christ to the conditions governing the human race.

The crib resembles an altar, for He is the Living Sacrifice for the sins of the world. The manger, a feeding trough for dumb animals, represents His crib, His church, and His tomb.

MARY

In the center of the icon is Mary, resting in a cave upon, and surrounded by, a red bedroll. This represents her seedless conception and her painless birthgiving. She looks upon her newborn Child, contemplating the great mystery wrought through her by the Holy Spirit. She prays for Him as His mother, and she prays to Him as the Mother of the human race.



THE RIGHTEOUS JOSEPH

The Righteous Joseph is depicted away from Jesus and the Theotokos, at the bottom of the icon. This is because he was not involved in the miracle of the Incarnation of the Son of God, but he was the protector of Mary and Jesus.

The old man speaking to him represents the devil bringing new doubts to Joseph. The devil suggests that if the infant were truly divine He would not have been born in the human way, and not in such lowly and impoverished conditions.

In the person of Joseph, the icon discloses not only his personal doubt, but the dilemma of all mankind, the difficulty of accepting that which is beyond reason: the Incarnation of God.

THE ANGELS

The angels are glorifying God, tending to the action, and ministering. They announce the Good News to the shepherds, singing “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, to men good will.*”

THE SHEPHERDS

Shepherds are shown, watching over their flocks “by night.” This was the lambing season for the ewes; otherwise the shepherds would have been asleep with their animals at night.

Just as the ewes were giving birth according to nature in the late Autumn and early Winter days, Mary gave birth to her Son Who is the true “Lamb of God.”

In a few months, at Passover (in Hebrew “*Pesach*,” or in Greek “*Pascha*”) some of the lambs would be sacrificed as Paschal lambs. In thirty-three years Jesus, would be crucified on the Cross as the true Paschal Victim.

THE MAGI

The shepherds were summoned by the angels to leave their flocks at a critical time to go to Bethlehem to see a new-born Child. The Magi were drawn by a star to Bethlehem to see a new-born King.

The Magi brought gifts: gold for a King, incense for a Priest, and myrrh for One to be placed in the grave.

THE WOMEN

In some Nativity icons women are shown in the lower portion. These women are midwives, indicating that Jesus was born in the normal way and would have needed washing, as a regular human baby would.