

## The Significance of our Blessed Father Herman of Alaska

In 1970, when our Church first received its autocephaly from the Russian Church, it immediately did two things. First, it changed its name from the somewhat unwieldy “the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America” to the more accurate “the Orthodox Church in America”. Secondly, it canonized Herman of Alaska. This latter task was then ours to do; the rule says that whichever Church possesses the relics of a saint is the Church charged with the task and privilege of canonization. Thus, for example, although Saint Tikhon was the ruling bishop of the American diocese, he died on Russian soil and therefore the Russian Church, which retains his relics, was the Church which got to canonize him, regardless of any connection Saint Tikhon might have had with the American Church. Bishop Tikhon may have had a special love for his American children and left his heart in San Francisco, but he left his relics in Moscow, and whoever retains the relics, retains the joyful task of canonization. Thus in like manner, after 1970 the Blessed Father Herman of Alaska was ours to canonize.

It is significant that the first saint of North America was a simple missionary, one who continued to embrace humility all the days of his life, even to the point of shunning ordination. He lived and died as a simple missionary to this land, and it is as a missionary that he points the way forward for us today. For we Orthodox in North America are very different than our Orthodox older brothers in other lands.

Take Russia, for example. Orthodoxy was planted there before Russia was Russia, and before the words “Russia” or “Ukraine” had any national meaning. In 988, it was simply the land of the Rus, and the land’s nationhood post-dated the planting of the Orthodox Church there. Orthodoxy thus grew up with the nation, and became part of the country’s DNA. The Orthodox Church is thus now firmly ensconced in Russia, to the point where it is hard to imagine that country without also seeing it standing under the three-barred cross of Orthodoxy.

Or take Greece, for another example. The Gospel was planted in Hellenistic soil long before those living on the soil became the nation of Greece. When Paul brought the Church there, he found Macedonia in the north and Achaia in the south; the unified country of Greece came much much later. Even in Byzantine times the term “Greek” did not mean “inhabitants of the former Macedonia and Achaia” but rather “pagan”. Once again we see the Church predating the nation so that the nation evolves and grows up with ecclesiastical blood flowing through its veins. The Church is thus ensconced in Greece as it is

in Russia, and it is not surprising if its bishops swagger just a bit. After all this time, they are somewhat entitled.

It is otherwise here in North America. Here the nations of America and Canada have existed before Herman and the other missionaries ever arrived. And, praise-worthy evangelistic enthusiasm notwithstanding, it seems unlikely that Orthodoxy will ever convert North America in the way that it once converted those in the land of the Rus or those in Macedonia and Achaia. Orthodoxy became ensconced there; it will not become similarly ensconced here, so that our bishops should not plan on swaggering culturally here anytime soon. We will never be the ones in charge, as we are in Russia and Greece. We will remain missionaries.

The example of Saint Herman of Alaska reveals that this is perfectly fine. Becoming ensconced or culturally dominant is not our goal; faithful proclamation of the Gospel is. Obviously we have to aim at converting absolutely everyone, since God loves absolutely everyone. But our evangelistic zeal should not blind us to the real situation. The reality is that the cultural tide is now flowing against us, and in a few generations America will not be a Christian country in any sense that Saint Herman (or Saint Paul) would recognize. Indeed, in Canada this has already happened. Radical secularization continues apace throughout the continent, and the Land of the Free seems determined to become the Land of the Secular. And in this land, missionaries will be needed. Perhaps it is providential therefore that the first saint of the land was just such a missionary. We need the example of the simple missionary Herman of Alaska now more than ever.

O Blessed Father Herman of Alaska, pray unto God for us!

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## The Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ

*Commemorated on [December 25](#)*

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, was born of the Most Holy Virgin Mary in the city of Bethlehem during the reign of the emperor Augustus (Octavian). Caesar Augustus decreed that a universal census be made throughout his Empire, which then also included Palestinian Israel. The Jews were accustomed to be counted in the city from where their family came. The Most Holy Virgin and the Righteous Joseph, since they were descended from the house and lineage of King David, had to go to Bethlehem to be counted and taxed.

In Bethlehem they found no room at any of the city’s inns. Thus, the God-Man, the Savior of the world, was born in a cave that was used as a stable. *Con’t Page 8*

**Join us!**

**MARCH FOR LIFE CHICAGO**

**Save the Date!**

LOVIN' LIFE IN CHICAGO

**ANNUAL MARCH FOR LIFE CHICAGO**

**JANUARY 15, 2017, 2-4pm**

Pre-March Students for Life Conference 1.14.17  
 Pre-March Rose Dinner 1.14.17  
 Pre-March Mass & Brunch at Union League Club - Pre-March Youth Rally at St. Ignatius  
 Pilgrim Masses locations: TBD

**Details:** [www.marchforlife-chicago.org](http://www.marchforlife-chicago.org)

**Location:** Federal Plaza - 50 W. Adams - Chicago

Aid for Women ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO Catholic Conference of Illinois CFC FFL SPIRIT JUICE STUDIO  
 ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA PROLIFE ACTION LEAGUE relevant radio CHICAGO radio 950/930AM STUDENTS FOR LIFE OF ILLINOIS THOMAS MORE SOCIETY LAKE COUNTY RIGHT TO LIFE

Join Aid for Women, Archdiocese of Chicago, Catholic Conference of Illinois, Couples for Christ, Lake County Right to Life, Orthodox Church of America, Pro-Life Action League, Relevant Radio®, Spirit Juice Studio, Students for Life of Illinois, Thomas More Society and support the March for Life Chicago! Life Wins!!!

Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). The humble shepherds were the first to offer worship to Him Who condescended to assume the form of a humble servant for the salvation of mankind. Besides the glad tidings to the Bethlehem shepherds, the Nativity of Christ was revealed to the Magi by a wondrous star. Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Theophylactus, commenting on Saint Matthew’s Gospel, say that this was no ordinary star. Rather, it was “a divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star.” Saint Demetrius of Rostov says it was a “manifestation of divine energy” (Narrative of the Adoration of the Magi). Entering the house where the Infant lay, the Magi “fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Mt. 2:11).

The present Feast, commemorating the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, was established by the Church. Its origin goes back to the time of the Apostles. In the Apostolic Constitutions (Section 3, 13) it says, “Brethren, observe the feastdays; and first of all the Birth of Christ, which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month.” In another place it also says, “Celebrate the day of the Nativity of Christ, on which unseen grace is given man by the birth of the Word of God from the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world.”

In the second century Saint Clement of Alexandria also indicates that the day of the Nativity of Christ is December 25. In the third century Saint Hippolytus of Rome mentions the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, and appoints the Gospel readings for this day from the opening chapters of Saint Matthew.

In 302, during the persecution of Christians by Maximian, 20,000 Christians of Nicomedia (December 28) were burned in church on the very Feast of the Nativity of Christ. In that same century, after the persecution when the Church had received freedom of religion and had become the official religion in the Roman Empire, we find the Feast of the Nativity of Christ observed throughout the entire Church. There is evidence of this in the works of Saint Ephraim the Syrian, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Ambrose of Milan, Saint John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church of the fourth century.

Saint John Chrysostom, in a sermon which he gave in the year 385, points out that the Feast of the Nativity of Christ is ancient, and indeed very ancient. In this same century, at the Cave of Bethlehem, **Con’t Page 9**

### **Christmas Con’t**

“I Behold a strange and most glorious mystery,” the Church sings with awe, “Heaven, a Cave; the Virgin the Throne of the Cherubim; the Manger a room, in which Christ, the God Whom nothing can contain is laid.” (Irmos of the 9th Ode of the Nativity Canon).

Having given birth to the divine Infant without travail, the Most Holy Virgin “wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger” (Luke 2:7). In the stillness of midnight (Wisdom of Solomon 18:14-15), the proclamation of the birth of the Savior of the world was heard by three shepherds watching their flocks by night.

An angel of the Lord (Saint Cyprian says this was Gabriel) came before them and said: “Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, Who is Christ the

The Orthodox Christian Clergy Association of Greater Chicago presents  
The 9th Annual Pan-Orthodox

## Sanctity of Life Sunday

### Prayer Service and Presentation



*Come join in prayer that the Lord would  
guide us all to keep life sacred,  
followed by remarks by*

**His Grace Bishop PAUL**  
*of Chicago and the Midwest (OCA)*

**Sunday, January 22, 2017 — 6 pm**

**Sts. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church**

6980 County Line Road Burr Ridge, IL 60527



### **CHRISTMAS Con't**

made famous by the Birth of Jesus Christ, the empress Saint Helen built a church, which her mighty son Constantine adorned after her death. In the Codex of the emperor Theodosius from 438, and of the emperor Justinian in 535, the universal celebration of the day of the Nativity of Christ was decreed by law. Thus, Nicephorus Callistus, a writer of the fourteenth century, says in his History that in the sixth century, the emperor Justinian established the celebration of the Nativity of Christ throughout all the world.

Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople in the fifth century, Sophronius and Andrew of Jerusalem in the seventh, Saints John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maium and Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople in the eighth, the Nun Cassiane in the ninth, and others whose names are unknown, wrote many sacred hymns for the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, which are still sung by the Church on this radiant festival.

During the first three centuries, in the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Cyprus, the Nativity of Christ was combined together with the Feast of His Baptism on January 6, and called "Theophany" ("Manifestation of God"). This was because of a belief that Christ was baptized on anniversary of His birth, which may be inferred from Saint John Chrysostom's sermon on the Nativity of Christ: "it is not the day on which Christ was born which is called Theophany, but rather that day on which He was baptized."

In support of such a view, it is possible to cite the words of the Evangelist Luke who says that "Jesus began to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23) when He was baptized. The joint celebration of the Nativity of Christ and His Theophany continued to the end of the fourth century in certain Eastern Churches, and until the fifth or sixth century in others.

The present order of services preserves the memory of the ancient joint celebration of the Feasts of the Nativity of Christ and Theophany. On the eve of both Feasts, there is a similar tradition that one should fast until the stars appear. The order of divine services on the eve of both feastdays and the feastdays themselves is the same.

The Nativity of Christ has long been counted as one of the Twelve Great Feasts. It is one of the greatest, most joyful and wondrous events in the history of the world. The angel said to the shepherds, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Then suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, glorifying God and saying: Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Those who heard these things were astonished at what the shepherds told them concerning the Child. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen" (Luke 2:10-20).

Thus the Nativity of Christ, a most profound and extraordinary event, was accompanied by the wondrous tidings proclaimed to the shepherds and to the Magi. This is a cause of universal rejoicing for all mankind, "for the Savior is Born!"

Concurring with the witness of the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church, in their God-inspired writings, describe the Feast of the Nativity of Christ as most profound, and joyous, serving as the basis and foundation for all the other Feasts.

*Christ is Born! Glorify Him!*



**Fr. Lawrence Con't**

textbooks will one day refer to them in the same footnote as the Hippies. But while they last, they provide a large and easy target for satire — which is of course the whole point of the Hipster Nativity Set. Nervous Christians should not imagine that the Hipster Nativity Set is targeting them or their faith. The real targets are the hipsters and hipster Christians. If it has any theological point to make (which is doubtful), it is that hipsterism does not easily combine with Christianity and that a “Hipster Christian” might even be a contradiction in terms.

Does the Hipster Nativity Set offer any lessons to the Orthodox and to Christians of a more traditional mindset? I think there is one lesson to be learned from this odd, faddish gift before it passes into history — that holy things should not be co-opted for purposes of satire. I appreciate the desire to satirize the hipsters, and to generally let the air out of anything too over-inflated with a sense of pretentious self-importance. But Christian symbols should not be dragooned for this task, for the symbol is more significant and holier than the task it is called to perform. Using a Nativity Set to satirize a social movement would be like using a Bible as a door-stop, a priestly vestment as an oil-rag, or an icon as a drink coaster. Door-stops, oil-rags and drink coasters are perfectly wonderful and necessary, but holy things should be spared such tasks and not put to uses which violate their holiness. The seasonal Nativity Set, though perhaps humbler and less holy than the pages of Scripture and the colors of an icon, are still nonetheless symbols of the Faith. To an outsider at least, a Nativity Set represents the Christian Christmas; it is a kind of three-dimensional icon. As such, it possesses its own kind of holiness, and ought not to do service for something as ephemeral as social satire.

For that is the problem with the Hipster Nativity Set — what is satirized is ephemeral and passing, as is therefore the purpose of the satire, while Christian symbols refer to things transcendent and everlasting. Those symbols cannot be used for lesser purposes without diminishing them and offending their sanctity. Piety will instinctively recoil from the Hipster Nativity Set, just as it will from the use of icons in political memes, and for the same reason — something holy is being high-jacked in the service of something secular. It is perfectly acceptable to satirize the hipsters, or to poke fun at politicians, or at any group badly needing a healthy dose of reality. But Christian symbols should be above such uses. They refer and transport us to another realm altogether, a place beyond passing fashions and passing politics. They speak to us of a timeless Kingdom, and take us into a land where things requiring satirization cannot enter. A Nativity Set brings us from our world to Bethlehem, and from there gives us a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. And with that vision to nurture and inspire us, who needs satire?

**Annual Yelka  
Christmas Dinner & Celebration  
All Welcome**

hosted by  
St. Pantelimon Orthodox Church  
7549 West 61<sup>st</sup> Place, Summit, IL  
Rectory: 708-552-5276

**When:** Sunday - January 8, 2017  
**Time:** Noon  
**Cost:** Free will offering  
**RSVP:** By January 4, 2017  
Karen M. 708-699-7497  
Fr. Andrew 708-552-5276

**Menu**

Roast Beef	Fried Chicken
Mashed Potatoes	Vegetables
Salad / Bread	Coffee / Tea / Desserts
	Cash Bar

**RAFFLE**

**Financial Snapshot**  
**Fiscal Year: 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter**

**September**

Income:	\$4,606.47
Expenses:	\$5,400.07
<b>DIFFERENCE:</b>	<b>-\$ 793.60</b>

**October:**

Income:	\$2,203.00
Expenses:	\$4,867.86
<b>DIFFERENCE:</b>	<b>-\$2,664.86</b>

**November:**

Income:	\$5,620.25
Expenses:	\$7,001.47
<b>DIFFERENCE:</b>	<b>-\$1,381.22</b>

**FIRST QUARTER TOTAL:**  
Expenses exceeded Income by **-\$4,839.68**

**A LOOK  
at the  
BUDGET**