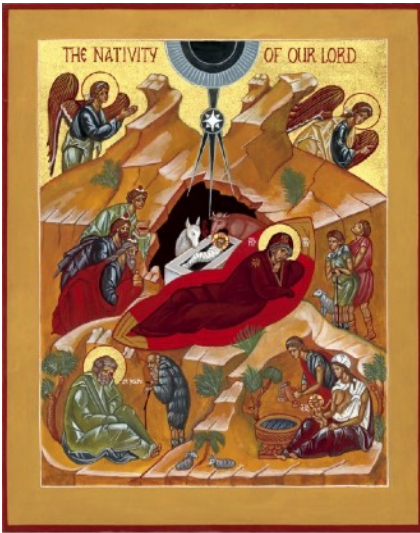


# NATIVITY NEWSLETTER

## The Nativity Epistle of the Episcopate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada in the 2023-2024 year of our Lord

To the All-Venerable Clergy, to the Diaconate in Christ, and to all the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

### CHRIST IS BORN!



By the grace of God, once again this year, we have the joy of celebrating the great feast of our faith - the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In this winter time of year the days are short, and the nights are long and there is so much darkness in our lives. Feelings of sadness, depression, and despair over evil and injustice fills and dominates the world. It is especially difficult to witness the ungodly and diabolical war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine that continues. The star that shone over the city of Bethlehem gives us hope and shows us the way to the light in our lives. We are created by God to live and be in the light, are called to be His children, children of light, and we should not be in darkness.

Today, the Star of Bethlehem illuminates the whole earth with the light of God's great grace and shows all of us the road to the Savior and to salvation. The world, which has been in the darkness of sin and death for thousands of years, is returning to the light, because God sends His Only- Begotten Son, to live and be among us and to bring us back to the light of life. The Lord said: "I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

So humanity, which was in darkness, in the kingdom of sin and death and despair, is filled with a new joy "that never happened". Let us rejoice and be glad now, because God is with us! The Son of God is born of the Virgin Mary, becomes in likeness to us in everything except for sin. God lowers himself in the person of the New-born Christ the Savior. As St. Apostle Paul declares, "made Himself of no reputation,

taking the form of a bond-servant, coming in the likeness of men. " (Philippians 2:7). The world and the powers of this world did not love Him. The Savior did not even find a place to be born among people. He was born in a cave among animals. King Herod saw even the small and innocent baby Jesus as a threat to himself, and the little Savior was forced to flee to Egypt with the Virgin Mary and the righteous Joseph.

It seems that evil and sin rule in this world, goodness and holiness are weak. St. Apostle Paul says: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:7).

Everything earthly is temporary. Where are the great and famous, the rich and powerful of this world? They have come and gone from this world; only God's love for us is eternal. Our Lord, out of great love "for us people and for the sake of our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became a man" (Symbol of Faith); to suffer, to be crucified and resurrected, to defeat evil, sin and death, to grant eternal life and peace to all who believe in Him and obey His commandments. God humbles Himself, but this does not mean that He is weak and defeated. No one can ever defeat our God. Evil will never defeat good. Sin will never defeat holiness. Hell will never defeat the Kingdom of Heaven because the Savior is born. He is the fountain of life and immortality. He conquered hell and its powers through His crucifixion and resurrection.

Today the angels sing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Lk 2:14). Today Heaven is reconciled with the earth, the temporary with the eternal, man with God. In the darkness of the kingdom of sin and death, the star of Bethlehem shines, filling everyone with the light of joy, peace and God's mercy.

On these holy days, we especially pray for our long-suffering motherland, Ukraine. May the Lord hear our prayers and grant Ukraine victory over the enemies. May He strengthen, help, and save all who are in danger with His grace.

We especially welcome and pray for all our brothers and sisters and their children from Ukraine, who have found refuge in the hospitable land of Canada. May Christ the Savior, who was a baby refugee in Egypt, fleeing from the threat to His life by King Herod, bless you and help you carry a difficult cross. May the temples and parishes of our Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada become a spiritual home for you and your family, where you will always receive God's blessing and support in moments of joy and sorrow.

Dear fathers, brothers and sisters,

Just as the Star of Bethlehem helped the shepherds and wise men find the New-born Baby Jesus, may the star guide and lead each of us through the narrow and thorny path in 2024 so that we can also meet the New-born Savior and find a place for Him in our soul and heart.

May the New-born Lord bless you, fill you with grace, peace, hope and spiritual joy. May He strengthen all of you spiritually and physically, and give us His gracious help to bear our earthly cross.

We prayerfully wish that the coming year 2024, will be peaceful and blessed by the Lord and that God will favor us. May we all meet the great feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ again in a year's time.

*With fervent prayers for all of you,*

*+Ilarion*

*Archbishop of Winnipeg and the Central Eparchy Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada*

*+Andriy*

*Bishop of Toronto and the Eastern Eparchy*



## Pastoral Reflection on the Adoption of the Revised Julian Calendar



On December 1<sup>st</sup>, His Eminence Metropolitan Ilarion proclaimed the UOCC would be adopting the Revised Julian Calendar on December 20<sup>th</sup> 2023. This is a monumental and historic moment for our Church. It is also a call for change which naturally is making some of our faithful nervous and trepidatious for what this will mean for our local church and family traditions. I wanted to share my reflections not in an effort to belittle anyone's emotions, change is hard and it will take time to adjust to a change of this magnitude, but rather in the hopes that it may provide some assurances.

What we are experiencing right now is something that has likely been felt by every Christian that has faced the changing of the calendars. From the vast majority of the world that adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1542, to the Orthodox Christians that adopted the Revised Julian Calendar in 1923. They have all adapted to a new calendar and generations later have established traditions that will be held for generations yet to come.

Our traditions, both those of the Church and those of our families, have deep roots. They connect us to our ancestors and allow us to lay a foundation for our family to come. I understand the concern that with the changing of our calendar there may be those who feel those traditions are in jeopardy.

It is for this very reason that I recommended to our gathering of the faithful that we delay our local adoption to September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. I wanted to give our faithful time to come to terms with what this change will mean for our churches and our families. I wanted to give our parishes that celebrate fixed date parish feast days (Xrams), one last celebration on those dates that have become so engrained. This will also give me nearly a full year to answer any questions, discuss any concerns, and explain and educate as to why this decision happened now as opposed to sometime in the future.

For anyone that has ever studied or been aware of how the calendars of our Church and society have developed, they would know that a discussion on the change from the Julian Calendar would have happened at some point in the coming decades. The Julian Calendar has been skipping a day every 100 years since the world adopted the Gregorian calendar. We are not aware of a time when the Nativity of Christ was celebrated on January 5<sup>th</sup>, because it took place so long ago. Due to the miscalculations of the Julian Calendar we experience a 13 day discrepancy and as a result, celebrate the Nativity of Christ on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January.



By the year 2101, the Julian calendar will slip yet a further day to a discrepancy of 14 days, meaning that at some point the between now and then, the Church would be forced to change it's dates in any case.

I know there are those who feel that by moving the date of the Nativity, for example, it will have a negative impact on the traditions that we have come to know and love. I feel as though if we were to suggest to our brothers and sisters in the Ukrainian Catholic Church that any celebration of the Nativity on the 24/25<sup>th</sup> of December is a lesser celebration than January 6/7<sup>th</sup>, they would not take to it very kindly. Many of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters have been celebrating in this way for many years and have preserved time honoured traditions.

In regards to your own family traditions, I will reiterate what His Eminence wrote to all of us in his Primatial Encyclical from August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023:

“The ecclesiastical calendar does not regulate how we mark these salvific events with our “small ‘t’ traditions” or folk customs. The ecclesiastical calendar does note, each year, when the feasts and fasts of the Church take place (and their duration), because of canonical decisions establishing the dates on which these commemorations/fasts are to be marked. For example, Nativity Eve will always be a day of strict fasting, whether it falls on January 6<sup>th</sup> – at present – or – potentially – on December 24<sup>th</sup>. If families prefer to gather for a “Holy Supper” on a specific day, the ecclesiastical calendar “offers no comment” regarding such a decision.”

In other words, if your family at this time is not ready for change and wants to continue to celebrate as they always have, you are absolutely welcome to do so.

The truth of the matter is this, if your family traditions are important to you, then they will survive and continue despite a change to our calendar. An adoption of a new calendar does not mean the end of family traditions, but rather a restoration of our Church to being part of the world and following a liturgical calendar upon which the majority of our lives exists within.

This also presents to us an opportunity as Orthodox Christians in our mission to spread the light of Christ in this world. Our ability now to share the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December with everyone we know allows the opportunity to share the Gospel and preach the good News! What a wonderful challenge it will be for us as a Church to bring a sense faith, sacredness, and tradition to a time that many criticize as being too commercial.

I know many of our faithful who are excited for this change and what it could mean our parish districts and our UOCC. I also know many are worried and uncertain how this change will unfold over the coming years. That is why we are taking a slower approach to this process, allowing time for families to engage in discussions regarding their traditions, allowing time for our faithful to prepare for a change from the dates that have always known, and allowing time to reflect on how this change could be beneficial in our mission work to not just new immigrants from Ukraine (where their families have also adopted a new calendar), but also to our fellow neighbours that have only ever known the world according to the new calendar.

Provided we continue to engage in dialogue and not turn from one another, I also know that by the Grace of God, He will carry us through this!

May God grant us patience in reflection, compassion in our discourse, love in our actions, and endurance in the face of change.

Your humble servant in Christ,  
Rev. Fr. Peter Haugen



The faithful of the Bonnyville and Two Hills Districts greet Olga Orleski on the occasion of her 90<sup>th</sup>, celebrated in November, 2023.

May the blessing of the Lord be with you and may He grant you health, joy, and peace!

May God grant you many years! Happy Birthday!



## Theophany House Blessings

Following the Theophany Feast, Fr. Peter will be offering house blessings to those that wish to have their homes blessed. With two districts under Fr. Peter’s care, it will not be possible to contact all of our members directly, as such, house blessings will be by appointment only. Please sign up at the link below for a home blessing by clicking on the link where you live:

### House Blessing Schedule

If you are reading this in a physical copy and would like to book you and email me at [frphaugen@gmail.com](mailto:frphaugen@gmail.com) or visit <https://calendar.app.google/W4i5QFdiczY4Sfs38>

In the event the date for your area does not work, please let me know and I can schedule a date and time with you.

## Orthodox Youth and Camp Conference

Father Peter has been requested to attend the Orthodox Youth and Camp Conference as the UOCC Representative/Clergy Chaperone. He will be away from January 24<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup>. Should any emergencies arise during that time, please contact Fr. Peter on his cell and he will make arrangements.



## Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meetings for **Bonnyville District of Parishes** will be taking place following the **fellowship in Bonnyville on Sunday, February 25<sup>th</sup>**.



## Activities at St. Elias - Bonnyville

Over the course of the past few months, St. Elias has been host to a number of Sunday School youth events following the Divine Liturgies in Bonnyville. This has included a foam truck, bouncy house, swimming at the local pool, and bowling. Thank you to our Sunday School teachers, Kim and Katya Lester, our lesson coordinator Gwen Taralson, and to Genia Leskiw who has organized all the activities!



There have also been a number of Pyrohy making bees to assist St. Elias in their fundraising efforts. Thank you all those who have come out and helped fill our freezers!





**CHRIST IS BORN!  
GLORIFY HIM!**

*Theophany Eve  
Great Blessing of  
Water*

**Свята Вечера (Holy Supper) to  
follow the service!  
All are welcome!**

**18**  
January

Theophany Service @ 5PM  
St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox  
Church, Bonnyville



**WEEK of PRAYER**  
for CHRISTIAN UNITY  
**2024**

**SEMAINE de PRIERE**  
pour L'UNITÉ DES CHRÉTIENS  
**2024**

"You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27)

« Tu aimeras le Seigneur ton Dieu... et ton prochain comme toi-même » (Luc 10,27)

DATE / DATE : **Tuesday, January 23, 2024**

TIME / HEURE : **7:00 p.m. with fellowship to follow**

PLACE / LIEU : **St. Paul's Cathedral, St. Paul**

Donations to the St. Paul Food Bank would be greatly appreciated. Thank you!

[weekofprayer.ca](http://weekofprayer.ca) | [semainedepriere.ca](http://semainedepriere.ca)

THE CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES  
LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DES ÉGLISES

Prairie Centre for Ecumenism

Centre canadien d'œcuménisme  
Canadian Centre for Ecumenism

INNOVATION - SAISON - RÉCONCILIATION