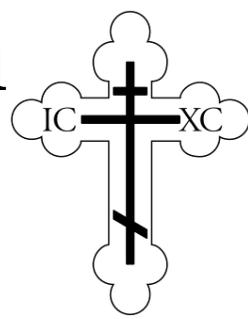
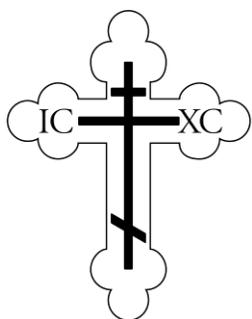


Protection of the Virgin Mary

Orthodox Church



A Parish of the
Diocese of Chicago
and the Midwest
Orthodox Church
in America



8600 Grand Blvd.
Merrillville, IN 46410
(219)947-4748
Hall: (219)730-4698
www.ptvm.com

Rev. Dr. Jacob Van Sickle
(219)384-6826 • frjacobvansickle@gmail.com

Great Vespers: 6pm Saturdays

Divine Liturgy: 10am Sundays

Confession is available before or
after Vespers or by
appointment.

January 3, 2021

Forefeast of Theophany

Holy Prophet Malachi

The Holy Prophet Malachi lived 400 years before the Birth of Christ, at the time of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Captivity. Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets, therefore the holy Fathers call him “the seal of the prophets.”

Manifesting himself an image of spiritual goodness and piety, he astounded the nation and was called Malachi, i.e., an angel. His prophetic book is included in the Canon of the Old Testament. In it he upbraids the Jews, foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ and His Forerunner, and also the Last Judgment (Mal 3:1-5; 4:1-6).

HYMNS OF THE DAY

Tone 5 – Resurrectional Troparion

Let us, the faithful, praise and worship the Word,
co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit,
born for our salvation from the Virgin;
for He willed to be lifted up on the Cross in the flesh,
to endure death,
and to raise the dead//
by His glorious Resurrection.

Tone 4 – Troparion of the Forefeast

Prepare, O Zebulon,
and adorn yourself, O Naphtali!
River Jordan, cease flowing,
and receive with joy the Master coming to be baptized!
Adam, rejoice with our first Mother,
and do not hide yourselves as you did of old in Paradise;
for having seen you naked,
He has appeared to clothe you with the first garment//
Christ has appeared to renew all creation.

Tone 5 – Resurrectional Kontakion

You descended into hell, O my Savior,
shattering its gates as Almighty,
resurrecting the dead as Creator,
and destroying the sting of death.
You have delivered Adam from the curse, O Lover of man,//
and we cry to You: “O Lord, save us!”

Tone 4 – Kontakion for the Prophet Malachi

Endowed with the gift of prophecy, O Malachi,
you clearly proclaimed the saving coming of Christ to the world//
His brightness has brought light to the whole universe.

Tone 4 – Kontakion of the Forefeast

Today the Lord enters the Jordan and cries out to John:
“Do not be afraid to baptize Me//
For I have come to save Adam, the first-formed man.”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Tone 6 – Prokeimenon for the Forefeast (Psalm 27)

O Lord, save Your people, / and bless Your inheritance!

Epistle: 2 Timothy 4.5-8 (Sunday before Theophany)

My son Timothy: Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Gospel: Mark 1.1-8 (Sunday before Theophany)

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.'"

John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

WE REMEMBER IN PRAYER

N.Dep. Mary Ann Caravana
Ernst Pedersen
Barbara Kurth
Mary Ann Behnke
Mitchell Bright

Ev.Mem. Peter Holik ('83)
Thomas Kane ('75)
Isidor Bartko ('59)
Kalilanius Parfeevets ('26)
John Tihonchuk ('17)

Health & Salv.
Archpr. Peter
Mat. Margaret
Mat. Anne
Mat. Nancy
Pr. Christopher
Mat. Jennifer
Andrew

Gideon
Kevin
Jon
Tanya
Jovan
Julia
Warren
Tom

Tina
Brittany
Jennifer
Gail
Stacy
Jeramie
Olivia
Parker

Christine	Janet	TaQuana
Linda	Daryl	Ayden
Larry	Diane	Hyland
Rollie	Carla	Jason
Joseph	Susan	Ted
Nadia	Timothy	James
Daniel	William	Pamela
Brendan	Paul	Erin
David	Joseph	Alexander
Sharon	Linda	Ronald
Michael	Claudia	Theodore
Janie	Tom	Robert
Tanya	Beth	Mary Ann
Christopher	Elizabeth	Lara
Nina	Snezana	Craig
Renee	Nathan	Chuck
Carissa	Kara	Scott
Cynthia	Ryan	Mark
John	Thomas	Julie
Vern	Carol	Christine
Olga	Christine	Dale
Mark	Jon	Ashley
Jerry	Zoey	Abbey
Michael	Dominic	Hillary
Janice	Declan	
Anthony	Hudson	

*If you know someone who needs prayer, please give their name to Fr Jacob

ANNOUNCEMENTS

2021 Calendars and Stewardship Envelopes are available for pick-up in the Narthex.

Please **let our hall manager know ASAP** if you need to reserve any dates in 2021.

Mark your calendars:

Jan 5: Vespers and Litia with the Great Blessing of Water for Theophany @ 6pm

Jan 6: Divine Liturgy for the Feast of Theophany @ 10am

Last Week's Gifts to the Lord: \$8,090

“We Rejoice even in Tribulation”

An Encyclical of Hope from the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America

Our dear brothers and sisters in Christ, *we give thanks to God for you!* In a year of tribulations — a testing of our faith, perseverance, and character — you have shown great love to Christ in your willing obedience and unwavering service to the Church. How can we convey to you the concern each bishop has felt for his flock during these weeks and months? God knows our prayers for you, and He has sent us the consolation of your faithfulness and love.

Not only to us, however, have you shown this love, but also within your communities, in caring for one another: within families, between households, among brother clergy and circles of friends. Even beyond those closest to you, you have responded to those in need: to those who are homebound, or who have lost their homes, their livelihoods, and even their family members. Beloved, your love and service are the light of Christ and the seeds of the Kingdom. What hope we have obtained from these manifestations of the Holy Spirit in your hearts! Having received this consolation from you, we write now to strengthen you, in case anyone is becoming weary. We do not know what the coming year will bring, but we know that Christ is in our midst — He is, and ever shall be! It is precisely in these times of tribulation that we exclaim this with greater conviction than ever. As St. Paul writes to the Romans, “we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:3-5). Let us not be downcast by our tribulations but take courage and find in them our hope of the Resurrection.

Part One

OUR TROUBLED WORLD

Let us not be surprised, however, if hope is not what the world feels when it looks back upon the year 2020 and into the New Year of 2021. By many people, the year 2020 will be remembered as one of calamity: the year of the covid-19 pandemic; of violence perpetrated upon the weak by the strong; of civil unrest and

rioting; of political polarization and turmoil; of fires, storms, and floods. In addition to all of this, many of us grappled with personal tragedy throughout the year, with the loss of loved ones, chronic and acute illnesses, financial ruin, accidents, abuse, addiction, and every other temptation and challenge. In the New Year, these troubles may well continue, or new ones may come.

Beloved in Christ, we see all of this as well. The Church does not look away from pain, suffering, and death — not our own, not that of our neighbor. But while those around us may see suffering and death as evidence of meaninglessness and chaos, we acknowledge this pain as an inescapable element of our broken world. The brokenness of the natural world, of our minds and hearts, of our relationships, and of our societies — all of this stems from the rebellion of human beings against God. Our attempts to live without Him have separated us and our world from the loving wholeness of life in the Holy Trinity.

THE TEMPTATION OF FEAR

It is precisely when we attempt to live without God, when we either forget Him or deliberately reject Him, that the world and its brokenness overwhelm us. Without God, we have everything to fear. We fear every possible loss, because we have no power to restore that which we lose. We fear pain, because we have no power to escape it, and we know it leads to our death. We fear not only imminent threats, but also those that we imagine, because we become unable to distinguish the difference between the two. God warns Israel of the consequences of rebellion, that for them, “the sound of a shaking leaf shall chase them. Then they shall flee as though fleeing from a battle, and shall fall when no one pursues” (Lev 26:36). Fear confuses and bewilders us, and it also further divides and isolates us: “Brother shall disregard brother as in warfare, though no one is in pursuit” (Lev 26:37). We turn on each other, in fact, as the Midianite army destroyed itself at the shouting of the men with Gideon (Judg 7:22).

Brothers and sisters, such fear has manifested itself even amongst the faithful. Can any of us claim to have surrendered all our fears to God? In the midst of our fears concerning the pandemic, in particular, we have at times succumbed to divisive criticism and polemic, to doubts and inner panic leading to anxiety, despondency, and despair. The temptation of fear has been all the greater because we have witnessed changes to our

liturgical life that none of us before imagined possible. In our fear, we may have asked ourselves and one another whether the Church itself has succumbed to the pandemic, whether its leaders have capitulated to the demands of the world, whether we have become paralyzed or lost our way.

THE UNSHAKABLE CHURCH

Beloved, all the measures taken by the Church during the pandemic have been undertaken out of love for our brothers and sisters. But the decisions about which measures to take and when to take them have not been easy ones. We your bishops pray earnestly for the guidance of the Holy Spirit at all times, and especially when faced with such a complex, dynamic, and unknown circumstance as the pandemic. All of our priests and deacons share in this challenge, and equally desire to act as the Holy Spirit directs within each parish. We echo the words that Paul wrote to the Colossians:

For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you, ...that [your] hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding.

Our concern has been for both the physical and spiritual well-being of you, our cherished flock, and for our lands as a whole. Our boat is being tossed on the waves of a surging sea, but we know that Christ is in this boat with us; He has not abandoned us, and we have not abandoned one iota of our faith in Him. None of the protocols and precautions — no mask, physical distancing requirement, or call for hygiene — has stopped or can stop the Church from her vocation of making Christ manifest in the world. Even the drastic steps of temporarily suspending or curtailing liturgical services were taken out of love, not fear: love of those in particular peril from the virus, love for healthcare workers overwhelmed with patients, love for those outside the Church for whom our cooperation was and is a witness of Christian charity. These steps have required all of us in the Church — bishops, clergy, monastics, and all the faithful — to work harder than ever, and to sacrifice a great deal. Yet we know that Christ, our Creator and Almighty Lord, is our rock amid this storm (Lk 6:48), and because our rock is unshakable, we have been willing to lay down our normal life out of love, for “greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13).

Along with this cooperation and concern for the weakest among us, however, we must have no doubt that the holy Body and Blood of our Lord is the source of our life. Our liturgical life is indeed essential, and therefore will never be abandoned by the faithful. We must approach the chalice without fear of disease, but with awe and reverence in the presence of Christ's immeasurable condescension. The Church calls to us: "In the fear of God, with faith and love, draw near!" Even if we must maintain physical distance from our brothers and sisters in Christ within the temple, even if some of us cannot commune as frequently as we have in the past, we are united — bishops, clergy, monastics, and the faithful — as members of the Lord's Body as we receive the Holy Gifts. Nothing can diminish or overcome this Mystery.

The chalice which Christ offers us, dear faithful, is truly an ineffable mystery: God transforms that which is perishable into His imperishable self; the humblest elements of the earth become the Holiest of Holies; Christ grants us life by His death. Yet we must remember that only by uniting ourselves to His death do we gain life in Him. In the waters of baptism, and in every Divine Liturgy when we approach the cup of Christ, we unite ourselves to the way of the Cross. The way of the Cross means tribulation, but — here is the great mystery, the great triumph, the great joy! — the tribulation leads to life in God. The Cross and Resurrection at the heart of the Church give us new eyes to see ourselves and the world in which we live. God takes all that is broken and transforms it into the means of uniting us to Himself: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Mt 16:24). Our crosses are precisely the troubles and difficulties resulting from our broken world and broken selves. Each difficulty is a means by which we may enter into the Resurrection. "Behold, through the Cross, joy has come into the world!" Beloved, we are surrounded not by meaninglessness and chaos, but by opportunities to enter ever more deeply into the life, love, and joy of God.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!