



## February 2nd: The Blessing of Candles on the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord

*“Let us celebrate the feast (of the Presentation) in a solemn way, illuminating the mystery of the day with lights.” -St. Cyril of Alexandria*

Jerusalem, a Holy City! It is holy because it was consecrated by the suffering and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church of Jerusalem is the Mother Church of all Christians, since the liturgical year had its beginning there and the liturgical services of the Christians were formulated there. The Christian Community of Jerusalem commemorated the main events of the life of Christ with liturgical celebrations in their historic settings. These solemn festivities, however, were greatly enhanced by the participation of pilgrims who began to throng the Holy Places after the Constantinian Peace of 313. The festive celebration of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, as described by the Evangelist Luke, had its beginning in Jerusalem in the fourth century.

1. The oldest written account of the solemn celebra-

tion of the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord dates back to the fourth century and is the work of a Spanish Nun, Egeria, who kept a diary of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land toward the end of that century. In it she writes: “The fortieth day after Epiphany (read : Christmas) is indeed celebrated here (in Jerusalem) with the greatest solemnity. On that day there is a procession into the Anastasis (Basilica of the Resurrection), and all assemble there for the liturgy, and everything is performed in the prescribed manner with great solemnity.” (Egeria, Diary of a Pilgrimage, ch. 26).

It seems that at that early date, the Feast did not have a specific name and was simply called The Fortieth Day After the Nativity. Later it was called The Encounter of Our Lord (Gr. Hypapante; O. Sl. Stritenije), referring to the encounter of St. Simeon with Jesus in the Temple which is the theme of the oldest homily on the Feast, ascribed to Hesy chius of Jerusalem (d. after 450). In the West, the Feast was called The Purification from Mary’s compliance

*(Continued on pages 4-5)*



## **BULLETIN FOR JANUARY 31-FEBRUARY 13, 2021**

### **SCHEDULE OF SERVICES & EVENTS**

<b>Sunday, Jan. 31</b>	9:00 AM	Divine Liturgy <i>(Live Streamed)</i> <i>Panachida: ++Guzi Family (Perpetual)</i>
<b>Monday, Feb. 1</b>	6:00 PM	Vespers for the Holyday
<b>Tuesday, Feb. 2</b>		<b>MEETING OF OUR LORD IN THE TEMPLE</b> <b><i>(Holyday; 40th Day After the Nativity)</i></b>
	9:00 AM	Divine Liturgy <i>(Live Streamed)</i> <i>Festal Blessing of Candles</i> <i>Panachida: +Mary Jane Repasky (40th Day)</i> <i>+Margaret Sirb (40th Day)</i>
<b>Sunday, Feb. 7</b>	9:00 AM	Divine Liturgy <i>(Live Streamed)</i> <i>Panachida: +Edward &amp; +Irene Zahuranec (Per.)</i> <i>++Kroko Family (Perpetual)</i>
<b>Tuesday, Feb. 9</b>	8:30 AM	Divine Liturgy <i>+Rebecca Kapusta, by Sisters and Family</i>
<b>Saturday, Feb. 13</b>	6:00 PM	Vespers
<b>Sunday, Feb. 14</b>		<b>Sunday of Zacchaeus</b>
	9:00 AM	Divine Liturgy <i>(Live Streamed)</i> <i>Panachida: +Matthew &amp; +Anna Hudak (Perpetual)</i> <i>++Gula Family (Perpetual)</i>

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Blessing of Candles on February 2:** As is customary, candles will be blessed at the Divine Liturgy on February 2—the holyday of the Meeting of Our Lord, the 40th day after the Nativity that remembers the presentation of the infant Jesus into the Temple. It is recorded in Gospel of Luke (2:22-39) that the elder Simeon recognized the infant Jesus as “**a light for revelation to the Gentiles**” on this day. Thus we highlight the use of candles, as they remind us that Christ is the true Light of the World. We will have candles available for a donation, but you may also bring a candle from home for this blessing. Just place your candle(s) on the prepared table. *(If you have candles you wish to have blessed but cannot attend Liturgy on February 2nd, please bring them to Vespers on February 1st and Fr. David will bless them.)*

**The First Soul Saturday** is one month away—on March 6. Hramoty envelopes will soon be available in the vestibule. Please use them to list the names of your dear departed to be remembered on the five Soul Saturdays this year. Return them to Fr. David as soon as you can!

## THOUGHTS ON STEWARDSHIP

By Dan Hromyak

*"Brothers and sisters: I would like you to be free of anxieties." - 1 Corinthians 7:32*

How much anxiety do we bring upon ourselves by constantly worrying about not having enough or attaining more things? God won't necessarily give you everything you want, but He will provide everything you need. Try this - use the word "pray" instead of the word "worry" in the future. Then pray for things instead of worrying about them.

*"Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed...He told them, 'Let us go on to the nearby village that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come.'" - Mark 1:35, 38*

In today's Gospel reading we see a perfect example of stewardship. Jesus gives His time to do all that God wishes - healing the sick and preaching. But before He begins, Jesus makes time to be alone with God in prayer. It is through prayer, spending time with God, that we find the strength to do what He wishes us to do. Be sure to find time every day to be with God.

with the legal purification prescribed by the Law (Lk. 2, 22) . In the English speaking world, however, the term of Presentation was adapted since on that day Jesus was presented (offered) to God in the Temple (Lk. 2, 22). In other places the Feast was called The Candles, since on that day the solemn blessing of candles was prescribed.

In the fifth century, the solemn celebration of the Feast was transferred from Jerusalem to Egypt (cf. St. Cyril's Homily), Syria and Asia Minor (cf. Homily of Theodore of Ancyra). In 542, Emperor Justinian I established the celebration of "Hypapante" (Stritenije) as a Solemn Feast in the entire Byzantine Empire. (cf. Nicephorus Call., History of the Church, XVII, 28). At the turn of the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) introduced the celebration of the Feast in Rome from where it spread throughout the entire West.

2. When St. Simeon took the Child Jesus into his arms, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit and chanted the hymn, "Now You can let Your servant go in peace, O Master . . ." (Lk. 2, 29-32), which was integrated into the service of Vespers. In his inspired hymn, St. Simeon referred to Jesus as the "Light to the Gentiles," it prompted the first Christians to carry a lighted candle or lamp in the procession that day, symbolizing the mystical presence of the "True Light" (In. 1, 9), Jesus. The solemn procession itself symbolized the journey of Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem in fulfillment of the Law.

The Spanish Pilgrim Egeria made no mention of the use of candles in the procession in Jerusalem, since this custom was introduced later, toward the middle of the fifth century, by a Roman matron, Ikelia.

Both St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) and Theodore of Ancyra (d. 446) mention the use of lights in the procession of the Feast in their homilies.

The Chronicle of Theophanes attests to the candle-light processions in Constantinople in the sixth century.

In all the religions of the world, the symbol of the deity is the light and the lighted candle symbolizes the Divine Presence. This is more pronounced in the Christian religion in which God is referred to as the "Light" (In. 1, 5) and that He dwells in the "inaccessible light." (I Tim. 6, 16) In the Old Testament, God Himself ordered the Israelites to burn lamps as a sign of His presence among the people. (Lev. 24, 14)

In the New Testament, the Christians followed the

same prescription as attested to by St. Epiphanius (d. 403) in his letter to the monk John of Jerusalem. As the Saint was passing through the country around Anablatha, he passed by a building in which he noticed a "lamp burning." In answer to his inquiry, he learned that the building was a "Christian Church." In our churches today, the Presence of a burning vigil-light indicates the Real Presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist on the altar.

St. John the Evangelist presents Our Lord Jesus Christ to us in his gospel as the "Light of Life" (In. 8, 12), a spiritual life, a life of grace. In this context, the burning candle presented to us at Baptism is a symbol of the new spiritual life we receive through the sacrament.

St. Matthew refers to light as a symbol of Christ's teaching: "The people that lived in darkness (of ignorance) have seen a great light . . ." (Mt. 4, 16) Hence the custom of having two lighted candles, one on each side of the Gospel, when it is read during a liturgical service, as explained by St. Jerome in 378 A.D. "In all the churches of the East, whenever the Gospel is to be read, candles are lighted although the sun is already shining. Of course, it is not done to dispel the darkness but to express our joy . . . Under the material light that Light is represented of which the Psalmist speaks: 'Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' " (St. Jerome, Against Vigilantius, 7). The burning candles, then, flanking the Gospel during the reading, remind us that the teaching of Christ should enlighten us and guide us on our way to salvation as indicated by the words of Our Lord Himself: "I am the light of the world; anyone who follows Me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life." (In. 8, 12)

3. In the East, this custom is mentioned for the first time in the biography of St. Sabas which was written in 556. It seems that this practice was introduced during the sixth century by the hermits who, in order to create a prayerful atmosphere in their caves, burned oil lamps or candles in front of the icons. (J. Moschus, Spiritual Meadow, 155) St. Germanus, the Patriarch of Constantinople (715-733) and a great defender of the veneration of icons, explained to one of his bishops: "Let it not scandalize some that lights and incense are burnt before the holy images, for these rites were devised in their honor, . . . since visible lights are a symbol

of their gift of divine grace and the burning incense is a symbol of pure inspiration and the fulness of the Holy Spirit.” (Epistle to Bp. Thomas)

In 787, the Council of Nicaea II approved the custom of offering lights (candles or oil lamps) in honor of the icons of Our Lord, the Blessed Mother of God, the Angels and all the Saints, as well as in honor of the Holy Cross and the Book of Gospels, for ” this was a pious custom since ancient times.” (cf. The Decree of the I Nicaean Council) The burning candles and lights placed in front of the holy icons should remind us of the light of the exemplary lives they lived and inspire us to model our lives after their’s in imitation of their “good works.” (compo Mt. 5, 16)

4. The custom of blessing candles on the Feast of the Presentation was introduced to fill the “needs of the people.” (I Prayer of the Blessing) Its introduction into our Rite was relatively recent, during the seventeenth century, but its roots reach venerable antiquity. As recorded in The Chronicle of St. Theophanes, Emperor Justinian I had issued an order in 541 A.D. that on the Feast of the Presentation, a candle-light procession be held throughout the city to implore Divine Protection against pestilence and the numerous earthquakes that plagued the city. And in answer to this holy gesture, God caused the pestilence and the earthquakes to subside. This gave rise to having similar processions on other occasions when the common welfare of the people was in danger.

These solemn processions, which eventually developed into Litia services in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, were later discontinued and limited only to the churches. The faithful, however, continued to use the candles as the means of Divine protection. This prompted the blessing of candles on the Feast of the Presentation which then were distributed to the faithful.

In homes, the blessed candles are lighted and placed before a holy icon in time of serious sickness or the threat of a storm to implore Divine protection, as the family is gathered in prayer. The blessed candle is popularly called the hromnicja” or “hromnichka” from our Rusyn word “hrom” (thunder), because it is used at the time of a thunder storm. It is also used by the parents to dispel the fear in children caused by darkness or thunder.

The candle blessed on the Feast of the Presentation

is also used when the Last Rites of the Church are administered to a member of the family. It should also be placed into the hand of the dying as the priest recites The Prayers for the Departure of the Soul, sending him to God as the ” champion of Faith” (St. John Chrysostom, Hom. on Hebr., IV, 7).

## CONCLUSION

The blessing of candles on the Feast of the Presentation is closely related to the Gospel narrative, introducing Jesus as the “Light of the people” (Lk. 2, 32) The burning candle symbolizes the abiding presence of Jesus Christ in the midst of the Christian community as He, Himself, had promised : “Where two or three are gathered in My Name, there I am in their midst.” (Mt. 18, 20) For this reason, the ritual of the Church prescribes that at least two candles be lit on the altar at all liturgical services, and the greater the solemnity, the greater the number of candles used.

The burning candles also create a more prayerful atmosphere in the churches. They remind us that our prayers should come from a heart burning with love of God and they should be directed toward heaven, where God abides in the “inaccessible light.” In this manner, candles make a positive contribution to the fervor of our prayers. The burning of a votive candle in church, besides its sacrificial value (donation), has also a symbolic meaning, namely, the continuation of our prayers after we leave the church.

Lighted candles are also carried in procession for the ” Glory of God” (cf. /I Prayer of Blessing) as well as for the support of our prayers, imploring Almighty God to show us His “mercy” (cf. I Prayer of Blessing).

From this “intercessory” character of processions, the protective power was ascribed to the candles blessed on the Feast of the Presentation.

Therefore, at the present time, the faithful use them to implore God’s help in their every sickness and distress.

(*archpitt.org*)

**From the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops  
Statement Regarding Developments in Medicine:  
COVID-19 Vaccines & Immunizations  
Friday, January 22, 2021**

*Christ “came not to heal the healthy, but the sick; not to save the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17)*

As the world continues to battle COVID-19, we are ever grateful to the frontline workers – including medical professionals, emergency responders, and scientists – for their unwavering dedication to making the world a better place.

In light of the same, given our clergy and lay faithful are seeking archpastoral guidance regarding developments in medicine, such as COVID-19 vaccines and immunizations, we offer the following guidance:

Scripture encourages us to respect and protect the body as the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19). At the same time, it discourages us from either tempting or testing the Lord (Matt. 4:7). And as your spiritual shepherds, we affirm and assure you that it is neither wrong nor sinful to seek medical attention and advice. In fact, we welcome interventions that provide us more time for spiritual renewal and repentance.

We therefore encourage all of you – the clergy and lay faithful of our Church – to consult your physicians in order to determine the appropriate course of action for you, just as you do for surgeries, medications, and vaccinations, in cancer treatments and other ailments. Indeed, while your own bishop, priest, or spiritual father remains prepared to assist you with spiritual matters, your personal doctor will guide your individual medical decisions.

We trust that whatever course of action you and your doctor decide upon will also benefit the rest of the community. If we work together – in a spirit of sincere compassion and care for one another – we will soon be able to gather together as a full community in our churches once again. We miss you very much and eagerly await the day when we can all exchange the kiss of peace in the Divine Liturgy!

Conveying our paternal blessings with love in the Lord,

**Archbishop Elpidophoros, Chairman**

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

**Metropolitan Joseph, Vice-Chairman**

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

**Archbishop Michael, Treasurer**

Orthodox Church in America

**Metropolitan Gregory, Secretary**

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of the USA

**Bishop Irinej**

Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South America

**Metropolitan Nicolae**

Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas

**Metropolitan Joseph**

Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese of the USA, Canada, and Australia

**Bishop Saba**

Georgian Apostolic Orthodox Church in North America

**Metropolitan Tikhon**

Orthodox Church in America

# SAINT JOHN'S ORTHODOX CHURCH

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## *Clergy:*

*Rev. Father David Mastroberte*

*Very Rev. Protopresbyter Michael Polanichka*

*Rev. Deacon John Anderson*

*A Parish of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese—Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople*

## Sacramental and Membership Information

**Sick Calls** can be made at any time. Please phone the rectory (724-346-4457) when a family member is admitted to the hospital, or to request a home visit. Hospitals do *not* call to alert the parish when someone is admitted.

**Marriages** are solemnized on Saturdays or Sundays. Circumstances may require a dispensation from the diocesan bishop. Consult the pastor at least six months in advance and before any plans have been made for the wedding reception. Marriages cannot be celebrated during the fasting seasons of the church, or on Fridays.

**Baptisms** are usually scheduled on Saturdays or Sundays. Consult the pastor. Two godparents (godfather and godmother) are required, at least one of whom must be a practicing Orthodox Christian in good standing at an Orthodox parish, and the other (at least) a practicing, baptized Christian.

**Church Funerals** are, under ordinary circumstances, provided for practicing Orthodox Christians who are current in their spiritual and material obligations to the parish; otherwise, the funeral service is conducted at the funeral home. The Church does *not* permit cremation.

**Parishioners in "good standing"** are those Orthodox Christians who, as members of Saint John's Orthodox Church, strive to live according to the teachings of the Orthodox Church; participate in the life of the parish through regular church attendance, regular reception of Holy Communion and periodic Holy Confession (and receive these sacraments no less than once a year); if married, having been married in the Orthodox Church; and financially support the parish (especially through an annual "pledge").

**Prospective members and returning members** are asked to fill out an application form, copies of which are available in the church office.

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**Website:** [stjohnacroc.org](http://stjohnacroc.org)

**YouTube:** [youtube.com/user/saintjohnsharon](https://youtube.com/user/saintjohnsharon)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/SaintJohnHermitagePA](https://facebook.com/SaintJohnHermitagePA)

**Instagram:** [instagram.com/saintjohnhermitagepa](https://instagram.com/saintjohnhermitagepa)

**Diocese:** [acrod.org](http://acrod.org)



# Happy February Birthday!

February 2 Denise Janosky  
February 3 Steve Banas  
February 7 Daniel Hromyak  
February 7 Paul McMahon  
February 8 Chuck Kretchek  
February 9 Julianne Lukac  
February 10 John Safin  
February 11 Remington Dinsmore



## ETERNAL AMP SPONSOR

January 31

In loving memory of

**Stephen Yonchak**

By: Katherine & Gary Yonchak

February 7

In loving memory of

**Bob Maykowski**

By: Wife Carol Maykowski



## MEN TO HOLD CANDLES

### Sunday, February 7

John Moon  
John Parimuha  
Tom Patrick  
Dan Ristvey  
Joel Ristvey

### Sunday, February 14

Matt Ristvey  
Tom Ristvey  
Pete Roman  
Steve Saluga  
Milan Shumkaroff

