

SUNDAY BEFORE THEOPHANY

January 2, 2022

8:40 AM Rosary

9:00 AM H/B for All Parishioners

DIVINE SERVICES/EVENTS FOR THE WEEK

Monday, January 3rd

NO SERVICES

Tuesday, January 4th

9:30AM + Martha Durbak – by Mary & Steve Covert

Wednesday, January 5th

9:30AM H/B for Marie Kosht – by Annette Dressler

6:30PM BIBLE STUDY

Thursday, January 6th THE HOLY THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD, GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

9:30AM + Michael Mosyjowski – by Michael T. Mosyjowski

Friday, January 7th

9:30AM + Dmytro, Maria and Myron Dulyn – by Lydia Strileckyj

Saturday, January 8th

5:00PM + Vasyl Sodik – by Sandy & Theodore Trebonik

Sunday, January 9th Sunday after Theophany

8:40 AM Rosary

9:00 AM H/B for All Parishioners

*The Church was a mother to you in life, providing for your spiritual needs; please remember the Eparchy of Saint Josaphat in Parma in your last will and testament. The wording to do this is as follows: "I give and bequeath to the Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of St. Josaphat in Parma, located in Parma, Ohio, _____% of the residue of my estate [or: the sum of \$_____]."*Thank you!

CONGRATULATIONS:

This week Tekla Dumanski (1/02) celebrates her birthday. We wish you a wonderful celebration, and **many blessed years... mnohaya i blahaya lita!**

SAVE THE DATE January – April 2022:

Our parishioners are invited to participate in upcoming series for parents & adults Fridays 6:30-8:00pm in Memorare Center at St. Francis Parish.

A generation ago, parents didn't have to worry about how to explain transgenderism to their 9 year-old. We want to protect innocence while forming a correct understanding of who we are as God's children.

Silence is not an option. If we are not teaching our children how to understand tough moral issues, then the world will!

This is an 11-week course beginning Jan 14 running through April 1. Come to as many sessions as you are able. Each week covers a different topic. This books equips parents of young children, as well as older children into adulthood with separate age-appropriate dialogue.

To register, contact Mike & Michelle Powers at mpower36@yahoo.com.

The only cost is for the book, which is \$5.

All are welcome.

Babysitting will be provided!

Today's Readings:

Tone 7

Vespers Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11,

Malachi 3:1-5

Matins Gospel X

Epistle: §298; 2 Timothy 4:5-8

Gospel: §1, Mark 1:1-8

The Jordan Water –The Very Sacred

Object:

From very ancient times the Eastern Church has regarded the sanctified water as a great sacramental, possessing miraculous powers for healing both soul and body. It is a custom in our Church *to gladly receive the priest who blesses and sanctifies their home with Jordan Water.* The prayers of the Great Water Blessing call upon the Holy Spirit to come down upon the water to purify and sanctify it, and impart to it a healing power for the benefit of soul and body. *Please call or e-mail Fr. Vsevolod (Sal) to schedule a time for him to bless your home.*

Church Envelopes:

Unfortunately, due to some printing delays we have not yet received our new 2022 church envelopes. We should get them soon. Thank you for patience!

MOLEBEN FOR PEACE IN UKRAINE:

On January 21, 2022, at 6:30 PM, we will have a special Moleben for Peace in Ukraine, with clergy from our local parishes, at St. Josaphat Cathedral. All are invited to attend.

2022 Church Calendars

are available for you in the vestibule.

We also pray that the Holy Spirit may open the hearts and minds of all to wisdom and grace so that those in Ukraine and throughout the world will cease the acts of aggression and respect the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine, let us pray to the Lord.

From the Homily for the New Year By Saint John Chrysostom

A Christian should not merely celebrate appointed feasts, or new moons, or even merely the Lord's Day [Sunday], but, rather, a Christian should continually hold a feast throughout the whole of life. How should it be? Let us listen to the Holy Apostle Paul, who says: "Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:8)." Therefore, if you have a clean conscience, you are already holding a continual feast, because you are nourishing yourself with good hope and reveling in the delight of good things to come. Whenever you are restless in spirit and guilty of many sins, even if there be a thousand feasts and holy days, you would be no better off than those who are grieving. What is the benefit to me of bright days, if my soul is darkened in conscience? For what is the benefit to me of bright days, if my soul is darkened by reproaches of conscience? If, then, you wish to gain some benefit from the New Year, do the following: thank the Lord at the end of the year, because He has led you up to this point. Have compunction in your heart for every bad thing that you do. Reckon up the time of your life and say to yourself, "The days are fleeting, the years are passing, I have already lived through the greater part of my journey, and what good have I done? Will I be able to depart from this life without any virtue? Judgment is at the doors, and the remainder of life leads towards old age. "Let your light shine before others, so that, seeing your good works, they may give glory to your Father who is in Heaven (Matthew 5:16)." This light brings you much recompense. Do not crown the door of your house, but rather conduct your life in such a way, that you will receive a crown of righteousness upon your head from the Savior.

Christmas Pastoral Letter

"Rejoice, O heavens, and be glad, O earth, and shout for joy, ye mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and hath had mercy on them that are oppressed"
(Isaiah 49:13).

This prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled at Christmas – on the day the Messiah, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, was born. More than 2,000 years have passed since God came to be among

us, and although the chronological distance increases with each passing year, the significance, triumph, and experience of this most joyous moment in the history of salvation remains the same as it was on Christmas Eve. It is today that "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). In the incarnation of the Son of God, people received the image of the invisible God the Father and His Word, who was always God before the creation of the world and became man (John 1: 1-2) to make us good, pure, and beloved children of Heavenly Father once again.

The coming of Christ into the world is such a great testimony and proof of God's love for us because no creature has received such an honor and care for its salvation as did the human race. God extended his mercy not because of our merits, but out of God's great mercy. Jesus did not come to give us a new or improved law of morality, because it had already been given to us through Moses and our conscience serves as a guardian to monitor how well we fulfill it. Jesus did not come to work miracles, heal the sick, or raise the dead, because the Old Testament prophets did. Jesus became man not to bring us any temporary prosperity and satisfaction of all our earthly desires and needs, because he himself did not have it - he was born in a poor nativity scene, lacked many of our daily comforts, experienced cold, hunger, abuse, and humiliation.

The reason for the coming of the Son of God is the complete renewal of the human race through the grace of God. He wanted to uncover the original beauty and value of man, which we had at the creation of the world, and, unfortunately, lost through sin. As He Himself said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Luke 5:31). He is the wonderful Doctor of the human nature Who heals and helps us to leave behind our attachment to sin and dependency on everything that is material, and make us think about Gospel message, values and principles that truly matter. He came to establish here the Kingdom of Heaven, where peace, not strife, reigns; love is present, not hatred; truth prevails, not lies; mercy and compassion are common, not selfishness and indifference. The practical implementation of these values and virtues radically changes the state and quality of human existence for better – spiritually enriched. God's presence, His peace and grace are really felt. A person becomes the Human Being that the Lord has called and wants him or her to be.

God is with us and He is among us! Among the many difficult circumstances of today - the coronavirus epidemic, political and economic crises, instability, declining material quality of life, tension and the constant threat of large-scale war in our beloved Ukraine by Russia, force us to rethink the guiding principles and values of our lives. At this point we begin to understand infinite wisdom of God's law and love for us. His love is already manifested in Jesus' invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia (author)

December 2021

So, let's come to Christ - let's go with our hearts, thoughts, and prayers to the poor stable of Bethlehem. Let us imagine the Baby Jesus lying in the hay, laughing, and holding out his arms, ready to hug us, calm us down, comfort us, encourage us and give us joy. And we will find true happiness there. As St. Augustine said, "our hearts are restless until they rest in You, Lord". We will experience the fullness of feelings and the high point of human experience while in the presence of the Lord God Himself.

The beauty of Christ's Nativity stems from the simplicity of Christmas Eve, - deprived of all human splendor, but rich in special awareness and conviction that God is truly with us.

In these bright and joyful days of Christmas, we wish you all to feel the peace and tranquility of the night of Bethlehem and the joy of the coming of the Messiah, the Savior of the world, praised by many angelic choirs, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2: 14). Being filled with this joy and grace in our hearts, let us share it with our neighbors, especially with the sick, those who are neglected, in need of attention and support. Let us be kind and generous, wishing everyone to have enough of earthly good things and God's grace. Let us sing carols loudly and everywhere, thus, announcing the coming of Christ the Savior to us!

May the newborn Baby Jesus bless you, your families, and communities this Christmas and every day!

Christ was born! Praise Him!

+Borys Gudziak

Archbishop of Philadelphia
Metropolitan of Ukrainian Catholics in the United States

+Paul Chomnycky, OSBM

Eparch of Stamford

+Benedict Aleksiychuk

Eparch of St. Nicholas in Chicago

+ Bohdan J. Danylo

Eparch of St. Josaphat in Parma

+Andriy Rabyi

INSTEAD OF THE SYNAXARION READING, we may reflect on this text:

“A Reading from the The Year of Grace of the Lord, by A Monk of the Eastern Church [Hieromonk Lev (Gillet)]”:¹¹

“The time of Bethlehem and Nazareth is drawing to a close. After about thirty years of hidden life, which were made holy by humble work with his hands and by obedience, Jesus is soon to be revealed to the world. In the same way that, in spirit, we went to the manger, at Bethlehem, we shall go, guided by the angels, towards the river where the Father will manifest his Son. 'Go ye, O angelic powers, moving on from Bethlehem to the flow of the Jordan.' This is sung by the Church at matins for the Sunday which precedes Epiphany. Not only does the Church associate herself with the joy of the angels who will be present at the baptism of Christ, as they were present at the Nativity, but she invites men, too, to draw near to the Jordan, and tells them what it is that they will receive there. For, at vespers on the Saturday evening, she sings: 'Let us, the faithful, prepare with just praise for the coming feast of the baptism of our God. Behold he has put on our flesh ... and asks for the baptism of salvation so that he might regenerate all those who, in purity, have been illumined by faith, all those who share in his Spirit'. And again: 'In truth Christ our God comes to be baptised in the Jordan, and through his coming takes upon himself the cleansing of our sins'. These words indicate briefly and precisely the double purpose of the grace which Epiphany brings to men. On the one hand, it is a grace for purification and for the remission of sins; on the other, a grace for illumination and participation in the Holy Spirit. We draw near to the Jordan desiring and humbly asking for

this double grace. We would not, however, be true to the genius of the eastern Church (and of the universal Church) if we reduced the meaning of Epiphany to these gifts of pardon and light which it offers to sinful men. Even before offering us these special graces, it is an objective glorification of Christ. We should be capable of selfless joy in the presence of this mystery of Epiphany. Our hymn of praise must take precedence over our prayer of petition. The gospel and epistle read at the [divine] liturgy for the Sunday before Epiphany are devoted to the memory of John the Baptist and Precursor who, at Epiphany itself, is the one who, in a way, presents Jesus Christ to the world. The gospel (Mark 1, 1-8) brings us the austere figure of John, preparing the way, crying in the wilderness, preaching the baptism of repentance; John, clothed with camel's hair, feeding on locusts⁵¹ and wild honey; John, announcing that another will come after him, the latchet of whose shoes he is not worthy to unloose, who will baptise not with water but with the Holy Ghost. In the epistle (2 Tim. 4. 5-8), the apostle Paul urges his disciple to watch, to endure afflictions, to do the work of an evangelist; he reminds Timothy that he himself is ready to depart, to 'be offered', having fought the good fight and run his course, and that a crown of righteousness awaits him. These words are suited to Paul, but they apply just as well to John the Precursor, whose life will be 'offered', that is to say, ended, in a bloody way, soon after he has baptised Jesus. Paul's exhortation to Timothy: 'make full proof of thy ministry', is also the call that the Church addresses to John: prepare thyself, Precursor, to accomplish the chief act of thy ministry, which is to baptise Jesus and to proclaim to the world: 'Behold the Lamb of God'. We shall come back later — in connection with the feast of January 7th — to the significance of the person, the message, and the baptism by St John the Baptist. Today, it is enough to say this: the best preparation for the baptism that Jesus confers is John's baptism, in the same way that John's preaching is the best preparation for Jesus's preaching. 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ... The baptism of repentance for the remission of sins' Moral uprightness and repentance for our sins, these are the two lessons that we can learn today at

the feet of the Precursor. Austerity and justice in our conduct, inner and outward penitence, and, also, exultation at the coming of the Saviour — 'There cometh one mightier than I after me' — let us listen to these themes which make up John's call; let us listen to the voice which cries in the wilderness.”

A Reading from “www.OCA.org”: _____ (adapted here)

“Saint Sylvester, Bishop of Rome (314-335) was born at Rome of Christian parents named Rufinus and Justa. His father soon died, and the saint remained in the care of his mother. Sylvester's teacher, the presbyter Quirinus, gave him a fine education and raised him as a true Christian. When he was an adult, Sylvester fulfilled the Lord's command to love one's neighbor. He often received strangers and travelers, serving them like a slave in his own home. During a persecution against Christians, Sylvester did not hesitate to take in the holy confessor Bishop Timothy of Antioch, who dwelt with him for more than a year, and who converted many to Christ by his preaching. Bishop Timothy was arrested and executed on orders of the Prefect Tarquinius. Sylvester secretly took the body of the saint and buried it. This came to the attention of Tarquinius, and the saint was arrested and brought to trial. Tarquinius demanded that he renounce Christ, threatening him with torture and death. Saint Sylvester was however not intimidated, and he remained steadfast in his confession of faith, and was then thrown into prison. When Tarquinius suddenly died after the trial, the saint was set free and fearlessly he evangelized the pagans, converting many to Christianity. At thirty years of age Saint Sylvester was ordained as a deacon, and then presbyter, by Bishop Marcellinus (296-304). After the death of Bishop Miltiades (or Melchiades, 311-314), Saint Sylvester was chosen Bishop of Rome. He encouraged his flock to live in a righteous manner, and he insisted that priests strictly fulfill their duty, and not be involved with secular businesses. Saint Sylvester became renowned as an expert on Holy Scripture and as a staunch defender of the Christian Faith. During the reign of the emperor Saint Constantine the Great, when the period of persecution had ended for the Church, some anti-Christian Jews

arranged a public debate to determine which faith was true. Saint Constantine and his mother, the holy Empress Helen, were present together with a large crowd. Saint Sylvester spoke for the Christians, and the Jews had one hundred and twenty learned rabbis led by Zambres, a magician and sorcerer. Quoting the sacred books of the Old Testament, Saint Sylvester convincingly demonstrated that all the prophets foretold the birth of Jesus Christ from the all-pure Virgin, and also His voluntary suffering and death for the redemption of the fallen race of mankind, and His glorious Resurrection. The saint was declared the victor in the debate. Then Zambres tried to resort to sorcery, but the saint obstructed the evil by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Zambres with a large number of those who organized the debate came to believe in Jesus Christ, and they asked to be baptized. Saint Sylvester guided the Roman Church for more than twenty years, earning the esteem of his flock. He died peacefully in old age in the year 335.”

“Saint Seraphim of Sarov, a great ascetic of the Russian Church, was born on July 19, 1754. His parents, Isidore and Agathia Moshnin, were inhabitants of Kursk. Isidore was a merchant. Toward the end of his life, he began construction of a cathedral in Kursk, but he died before the completion of the work. His little son, Prochorus, the future Seraphim, remained in the care of his widowed mother, who raised her son in piety. After the death of her husband, Agathia Moshnina continued with the construction of the cathedral. Once she took the seven-year-old Prochorus there with her, and he fell from the scaffolding around the seven-story bell tower. He should have been killed, but the Lord preserved the life of the future luminary of the Church. The terrified mother ran to him and found her son unharmed. Young Prochorus, endowed with an excellent memory, soon mastered reading and writing. From his childhood he loved to attend church services, and to read both the Holy Scripture and the Lives of the Saints with his fellow students. Most of all, he loved to pray or to read the Holy Gospel in private. At one point, Prochorus fell grievously ill, and his life was in danger. In a dream the boy saw the Mother of God, promising to visit and heal him. Soon past the

courtyard of the Moshnin home came a church procession with the Kursk Root Icon of the Sign (November 27). His mother carried Prochorus in her arms, and he kissed the holy icon, after which he speedily recovered. While still in his youth Prochorus made his plans to devote his life entirely to God and to go to a monastery. His devout mother did not object to this, and she blessed him on his monastic path with a copper cross, which he wore on his chest for the rest of his life. Prochorus set off on foot with pilgrims going from Kursk to Kyiv to venerate the Saints of the Caves. The Elder Dositheus (actually a woman, Daria Tyapkina), whom Prochorus visited, blessed him to go to the Sarov wilderness monastery, and there seek his salvation. Returning briefly to his parental home, Prochorus bid a final farewell to his mother and family. On November 20, 1778 he arrived at Sarov, where the monastery then was headed by a wise Elder, Father Pachomius. He accepted him and put him under the spiritual guidance of the Elder Joseph. Under his direction Prochorus passed through many obediences at the monastery: he was the Elder’s cell-attendant, he toiled at making bread and prosphora, and at carpentry. He fulfilled all his obediences with zeal and fervor, as though serving the Lord Himself. By constant work he guarded himself against despondency (accidie), this being, as he later said, “the most dangerous temptation for new monks. It is treated by prayer, by abstaining from idle chatter, by strenuous work, by reading the Word of God and by patience, since it is engendered by pettiness of soul, negligence, and idle talk.” With the blessing of Hegumen Pachomius, Prochorus abstained from all food on Wednesdays and Fridays, and went into the forest, where in complete isolation he practiced the Jesus Prayer. After two years as a novice, Prochorus fell ill with dropsy, his body became swollen, and he was beset with suffering. His instructor Father Joseph and the other Elders were fond of Prochorus, and they provided him care. The illness dragged on for about three years, and not once did anyone hear from him a word of complaint. The Elders, fearing for his very life, wanted to call a doctor for him, but Prochorus asked that this not be done, saying to Father Pachomius: “I have entrusted myself, holy Father, to the True Physician of soul and body, our Lord Jesus

Christ and His All-Pure Mother.” He asked that a Moleben be offered for his health. While the others were praying in church, Prochorus had a vision. The Mother of God appeared to him accompanied by the holy Apostles Peter and John the Theologian. Pointing with Her hand towards the sick monk, the Most Holy Virgin said to Saint John, “He is one of our kind.” Then She touched the side of the sick man with Her staff, and immediately the fluid that had swelled up his body began to flow through the incision that She made. After the Moleben, the brethren found that Prochorus had been healed, and only a scar remained as evidence of the miracle. Soon, at the place of the appearance of the Mother of God, an infirmary church was built for the sick. One of the side chapels was dedicated to Saints Zosimas and Sabbatius of Solovki (April 17). With his own hands, Saint Seraphim made an altar table for the chapel out of cypress wood, and he always received the Holy Mysteries in this church. After eight years as a novice at the Sarov monastery, Prochorus was tonsured with the name Seraphim, a name reflecting his fiery love for the Lord and his zealous desire to serve Him. After a year, Seraphim was ordained as hierodeacon. Earnest in spirit, he served in the temple each day, incessantly praying even after the service. The Lord granted him visions during the church services: he often saw holy angels serving with the priests. During the Divine Liturgy on Great and Holy Thursday, which was celebrated by the hegumen Father Pachomius and by Father Joseph, Saint Seraphim had another vision. After the Little Entrance with the Gospel, the hierodeacon Seraphim pronounced the words “O Lord, save the God-fearing, and hear us.” Then, he lifted his orarion saying, “And unto ages of ages.” Suddenly, he was blinded by a bright ray of light. Looking up, Saint Seraphim beheld the Lord Jesus Christ, coming through the western doors of the temple, surrounded by the Bodiless Powers of Heaven. Reaching the ambo, the Lord blessed all those praying and entered into His Icon to the right of the royal doors. Saint Seraphim, in spiritual rapture after this miraculous vision, was unable to utter a word, nor to move from the spot. They led him by the hand into the altar, where he just stood for another three hours, his face having changed color from the great grace that shone upon

him. After the vision the saint intensified his efforts. He toiled at the monastery by day, and he spent his nights praying in his forest cell. In 1793, Hierodeacon Seraphim was ordained to the priesthood, and he served the Divine Liturgy every day. After the death of the hegumen Father Pachomius, Saint Seraphim received the blessing of the new Superior Father Isaiah, to live alone in a remote part of the forest three and a half miles from the monastery. He named his new home “Mount Athos,” and devoted himself to solitary prayer. He went to the monastery only on Saturday before the all-night Vigil, and returned to his forest cell after Sunday’s Liturgy, at which he partook of the Divine Mysteries. Father Seraphim spent his time in ascetical struggles. His cell rule of prayer was based on the rule of Saint Pachomius for the ancient desert monasteries. He always carried the Holy Gospels with him, reading the entire New Testament in the course of a week. He also read the holy Fathers and the service books. The saint learned many of the Church hymns by heart, and sang them while working in the forest. Around his cell he cultivated a garden and set up a beehive. He kept a very strict fast, eating only once during the entire day, and on Wednesdays and Fridays he completely abstained from food. From the first Sunday of the Great Fast he did not partake of food at all until the following Saturday, when he received the Holy Mysteries. The holy Elder was sometimes so absorbed by the unceasing prayer of the heart that he remained without stirring, neither hearing nor seeing anything around him. The schemamonk Mark the Silent and the hierodeacon Alexander, also wilderness-dwellers, would visit him every now and then. Finding the saint immersed in prayer, they would leave quietly, so they would not disturb his contemplation. In the heat of summer, the righteous one gathered moss from a swamp as fertilizer for his garden. Gnats and mosquitoes bit him relentlessly, but he endured this saying, “The passions are destroyed by suffering and by afflictions.” His solitude was often disturbed by visits from monks and laymen, who sought his advice and blessing. With the blessing of the hegumen, Father Seraphim prohibited women from visiting him, then receiving a sign that the Lord approved of his desire for complete silence, he banned all visitors. Through the

prayers of the saint, the pathway to his wilderness cell was blocked by huge branches blown down from ancient pine trees. Now only the birds and the wild beasts visited him, and he dwelt with them as Adam did in Paradise. They came at midnight and waited for him to complete his Rule of prayer. Then he would feed bears, lynxes, foxes, rabbits, and even wolves with bread from his hand. Saint Seraphim also had a bear which would obey him and run errands for him. In order to repulse the onslaughts of the Enemy, Saint Seraphim intensified his toil and began a new ascetical struggle in imitation of Saint Simeon the Stylite (September 1). Each night he climbed up on an immense rock in the forest, or a smaller one in his cell, resting only for short periods. He stood or knelt, praying with upraised hands, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." He prayed this way for 1,000 days and nights. Three robbers in search of money or valuables once came upon him while he was working in his garden. The robbers demanded money from him. Though he had an axe in his hands, and could have put up a fight, he did not want to do this, recalling the words of the Lord: "Those who take up the sword will perish by the sword" (Mt. 26: 52). Dropping his axe to the ground, he said, "Do what you intend." The robbers beat him severely and left him for dead. They wanted to throw him in the river, but first they searched the cell for money. They tore the place apart, but found nothing but icons and a few potatoes, so they left. The monk, regained consciousness, crawled to his cell, and lay there all night. In the morning he reached the monastery with great difficulty. The brethren were horrified, seeing the ascetic with several wounds to his head, chest, ribs and back. For eight days he lay there suffering from his wounds. Doctors called to treat him were amazed that he was still alive after such a beating. Father Seraphim was not cured by any earthly physician: the Queen of Heaven appeared to him in a vision with the Apostles Peter and John. Touching the saint's head, the Most Holy Virgin healed him. However, he was unable to straighten up, and for the rest of his life he had to walk bent over with the aid of a stick or a small axe. Saint Seraphim had to spend about five months at the monastery, and then he returned to the forest. He forgave his abusers and asked that they not be punished. In 1807 the abbot, Father Isaiah,

fell asleep in the Lord. Saint Seraphim was asked to take his place, but he declined. He lived in silence for three years, completely cut off from the world except for the monk who came once a week to bring him food. If the saint encountered a man in the forest, he fell face down and did not get up until the passerby had moved on. Saint Seraphim acquired peace of soul and joy in the Holy Spirit. The great ascetic once said, "Acquire the spirit of peace, and a thousand souls will be saved around you." The new Superior of the monastery, Father Niphon, and the older brethren of the monastery told Father Seraphim either to come to the monastery on Sundays for divine services as before, or to move back into the monastery. He chose the latter course, since it had become too difficult for him to walk from his forest cell to the monastery. In the spring of 1810, he returned to the monastery after fifteen years of living in the wilderness. Continuing his silence, he shut himself up in his cell, occupying himself with prayer and reading. He was also permitted to eat meals and to receive Communion in his cell. There Saint Seraphim attained the height of spiritual purity and was granted special gifts of grace by God: clairvoyance and wonderworking. After five years of solitude, he opened his door and allowed the monks to enter. He continued his silence, however, teaching them only by example. On November 25, 1825, the Mother of God, accompanied by the two holy hierarchs commemorated on that day (Hieromartyr Clement of Rome, and Saint Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria), appeared to the Elder in a vision and told him to end his seclusion and to devote himself to others. He received the hegumen's blessing to divide his time between life in the forest, and at the monastery. He did not return to his Far Hermitage, but went to a cell closer to the monastery. This he called his Near Hermitage. At that time, he opened the doors of his cell to pilgrims as well as his fellow-monks. The Elder saw into the hearts of people, and as a spiritual physician, he healed their infirmities of soul and body through prayer and by his grace-filled words. Those coming to Saint Seraphim felt his great love and tenderness. No matter what time of the year it was, he would greet everyone with the words, "Christ is Risen, my joy!" He especially loved children. Once, a young girl said to her

friends, “Father Seraphim only looks like an old man. He is really a child like us.” The Elder was often seen leaning on his stick and carrying a knapsack filled with stones. When asked why he did this, the saint humbly replied, “I am troubling him who troubles me.” In the final period of his earthly life Saint Seraphim devoted himself to his spiritual children, the Diveyevo women’s monastery. While still a hierodeacon he had accompanied the late Father Pachomius to the Diveyevo community to its monastic leader, Mother Alexandra, a great woman ascetic, and then Father Pachomius blessed Saint Seraphim to care always for the “Diveyevo orphans.” He was a genuine father for the sisters, who turned to him with all their spiritual and material difficulties. Saint Seraphim also devoted much effort to the women’s monastic community at Diveyevo. He himself said that he gave them no instructions of his own, but it was the Queen of Heaven who guided him in matters pertaining to the monastery. His disciples and spiritual friends helped the saint to feed and nourish the Diveyevo community. Michael V. Manturov, healed by the monk from grievous illness, was one of Diveyevo’s benefactors. On the advice of the Elder, he took upon himself the exploit of voluntary poverty. Elena Vasilievna Manturova, one of the Diveyevo sisters, out of obedience to the Elder, voluntarily consented to die in place of her brother, who was still needed in this life. Nicholas Alexandrovich Motovilov was also healed by the monk. In 1903, shortly before the glorification of the saint, the remarkable “Conversation of Saint Seraphim of Sarov with N. A. Motovilov” was found and printed. Written by Motovilov after their conversation at the end of November 1831, the manuscript was hidden in an attic in a heap of rubbish for almost seventy years. It was found by the author S. A. Nilus, who was looking for information about Saint Seraphim’s life. This conversation is a very precious contribution to the spiritual literature of the Orthodox Church. It grew out of Nicholas Motovilov’s desire to know the aim of the Christian life. It was revealed to Saint Seraphim that Motovilov had been seeking an answer to this question since childhood, without receiving a satisfactory answer. The holy Elder told him that the aim of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, and went on to explain the great benefits of

prayer and the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. Motovilov asked the saint how we can know if the Holy Spirit is with us or not. Saint Seraphim spoke at length about how people come to be in the Spirit of God, and how we can recognize His presence in us, but Motovilov wanted to understand this better. Then Father Seraphim took him by the shoulders and said, “We are both in the Spirit of God now, my son. Why don’t you look at me?” Motovilov replied, “I cannot look, Father, for your eyes are flashing like lightning, and your face is brighter than the sun.” Saint Seraphim told him, “Don’t be alarmed, friend of God. Now you yourself have become as bright as I am. You are in the fulness of the Spirit of God yourself, otherwise you would not be able to see me like this.” Then Saint Seraphim promised Motovilov that God would allow him to retain this experience in his memory all his life. “It is not given for you alone to understand,” he said, “but through you it is for the whole world.” Everyone knew and esteemed Saint Seraphim as a great ascetic and wonderworker. A year and ten months before his end, on the Feast of the Annunciation, Saint Seraphim was granted to behold the Queen of Heaven once more in the company of Saint John the Baptizer, the Apostle John the Theologian and twelve Virgin Martyrs (Saints Barbara, Katherine, Thekla, Marina, Irene, Eupraxia, Pelagia, Dorothea, Makrina, Justina, Juliana, and Anysia). The Most Holy Virgin conversed at length with the monk, entrusting the Diveyevo sisters to him. Concluding the conversation, She said to him: “Soon, My dear one, you shall be with us.” The Diveyevo nun Eupraxia was present during this visit of the Mother of God, because the saint had invited her. In the last year of Saint Seraphim’s life, one of those healed by him saw him standing in the air during prayer. The saint strictly forbade this to be mentioned until after his death. Saint Seraphim became noticeably weaker and he spoke much about his approaching end. During this time, they often saw him sitting by his coffin, which he had placed in the ante-room of his cell, and which he had prepared for himself. The saint himself had marked the place where finally they would bury him, near the altar of the Dormition cathedral. On January 1, 1833, Father Seraphim came to the church of Saints Zosimas and Sabbatius one last time for Liturgy and he received

the Holy Mysteries, after which he blessed the brethren and bid them farewell, saying: "Save your souls. Do not be despondent, but watchful. Today crowns are being prepared for us." On January 2, Father Paul, the saint's cell-attendant, left his own cell at six in the morning to attend the early Liturgy. He noticed the smell of smoke coming from the Elder's cell. Saint Seraphim would often leave candles burning in his cell, and Father Paul was concerned that they could start a fire. "While I am alive," he once said, "there will be no fire, but when I die, my death shall be revealed by a fire." When they opened the door, it appeared that books and other things were smoldering. Saint Seraphim was found kneeling before an icon of the Mother of God with his arms crossed on his chest. His pure soul was taken by the angels at the time of prayer, and had flown off to the Throne of the Almighty God, Whose faithful servant Saint Seraphim had been all his life. Saint Seraphim has promised to intercede for those who remember his parents, Isidore and Agathia."

By the prayers of the Holy Hierarch Sylvester, Pope of Rome, and of the Venerable Father Seraphim of Sarov, O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen.

¹¹ This commentary and its footnote are excerpted from: A Monk of the Eastern Church [Hieromonk Lev (Gillet)], *The Year of Grace of the Lord*, (ISBN 0-913836-68-0), (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980, pp. 77- 78). Fr. Lev (Gillet) explains the meaning of today's Gospel and Epistle for the Sunday before Theophany in light of our Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church's liturgy and calendar. (Fr. Lev, a French convert to Ukrainian Catholicism, was a Studite monk in L'viv, ordained to the priesthood by our Venerable Father Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, in 1924. (For more information about Fr. Gillet, please read: Brian R. Keleher, "Sheptyts'kyi and Three Converts from the West", in Paul Magosci, et. al., ed., *Morality and Reality: The Life and Times of Andrei Sheptyts'kyi*, (Edmonton, Al-berta: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1989), pp. 227-243).

⁵¹ In Palestine one finds certain dry fruits called 'locusts'. It seems that these fruits are what John ate, rather than the creatures we call 'locusts'. [In a YouTube entitled "Carob - Israel Tour what did John the Baptist eat?" by Maranatha Tours, Malcolm Cartier also develops this same explanation which was given by Fr. Hiero-monk Lev [Gillet] in his *The Year of Grace of the Lord*, as follows: "Ceratonia siliqua, commonly known as the carob tree, St John's bread, or locust bean (not to be confused with the African locust bean) is a species of flowering evergreen shrub or tree in the pea family, Fabaceae. The ripe, dried pod is often ground to carob powder which is used as a substitute for cocoa powder."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MmUICnfyVM>