

# Quo Vadis

The monthly newsletter of Saints Peter & Paul Orthodox Catholic Church of Bayonne, N.J.  
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“**Quo Vadis?**” is a Latin phrase meaning “Where are you going?” It refers to a Christian tradition regarding St. Peter. According to the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, Peter is fleeing from likely crucifixion in Rome, and along the road outside the city, he encounters the risen Jesus. Peter asks Jesus “Quo vadis?” Jesus replies “Romam vado iterum crucifigi” (“I am going to Rome to be crucified again”). St. Peter thereby gains the fortitude to return to the city, to eventually be martyred by being crucified upside-down. The phrase also occurs a few times in the Latin *Vulgate* translation of the *Holy Bible*, notably in John 13:36 when Peter asks Jesus the same question, to which He responds, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me.” The Church of Domine Quo Vadis in Rome is built where, according to tradition, the meeting between St. Peter and the risen Jesus Christ took place.

This parish newsletter is called **Quo Vadis** for a reason: to ask the question of where *you* are going in life. Is your life’s journey leading you towards Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? St. Peter, at a pivotal moment in his life, when he understandably felt like running away, found the courage to go where Jesus Christ would have him go. Where are *you* going? Will *you* follow Jesus Christ?

## Rector’s Message

*“Christ lowered Himself not for His own personal advantage but for our good; in order to justify us and give us peace and happiness.”*

— St. Augustine, [Sermon 185](#)

In the above quote, St. Augustine calls our attention to an important theological consideration about the incarnation of the Son of God—that of Christ’s condescension in becoming human. How could the eternal God take upon Himself human limitations while retaining His eternal deity? Orthodox theologians have answered the question by declaring that God in becoming man did not diminish His deity, but added a human nature to the divine nature. How this actually affected the divine nature is treated in the classic passage of Philippians 2:5-11:

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This passage concerning the *kenosis* (self-emptying) of the Son of God in support of a practical exhortation to have the mind or attitude of Christ; i.e., the action of Christ in proceeding from glory to become human and suffer on the cross was cited as an illustration. In his accompanying explanation, St. Paul gave one of the most concise theological statements of the incarnation to be found anywhere in the Bible. Christ is first described as “existing in the form of God.” The word for existing is not the usual Greek

verb ὢν (to be), but rather ὑπάρχων, which is found in a form used for both the present and the imperfect participle and carries the meaning of continued existence, meaning that Christ always has been in the form of God with the specific implication that He still is. If the Greek form is taken as the present tense instead of the imperfect, the word would mean that Christ existed as God in the past, that is, before the incarnation, and is still existing in the form of God. This would be asserting that the deity of Christ continues unchanged by the act of the incarnation. If taken as a simple imperfect, it would refer to His state before the incarnation, without explicitly affirming continuity of the form of God, though the implication of continuity would remain.

The act of the incarnation is described in the passage's use of the strong word ἐκένωσεν (English, *kenosis*) meaning "to empty," used also in Romans 4:14, 1 Corinthians 1:17 and 9:15, and 2 Corinthians 9:3. The crux of this important passage hangs on the definition of the act of *kenosis*. Orthodox theologians have pointed out that the meaning of this word must be interpreted by the context itself. The passage does not state that Christ ceased to exist in the form of God, but rather that He added the form of a servant. The word μορφῆ, translated "form," speaks of the outer appearance or manifestation. As it relates to the eternal deity of Christ, it refers to the fact that Christ in eternity past in outer appearance manifested His divine attributes. It was not mere form or appearance, but that which corresponded to what He was eternally. In becoming human He took upon Himself the form of a servant, that is, the outward appearance of a servant and the human nature which corresponds to it. This is further defined as manifesting the "likeness" (ὁμοιώματι) of man in that He looked and acted like a man. The passage further declares that He was "found in fashion as a man," the word "fashion" (σχῆματι) indicating the more transient manifestations of humanity such as weariness, thirst, and other human limitations. Therefore, taking the whole passage together, there is no declaration here that there was any loss of deity, but rather a limitation of its manifestation. It is certainly clear from other declarations of Paul that he recognized that Jesus Christ in the flesh was all that God is even though He appeared to be a man.

And so, the attitude of Christ which believers are exhorted to emulate is that He did not grasp at being on an equality with God as if it had to be retained by effort. Though having existed in the form of God from all eternity, He was willing to empty Himself, taking the form of a servant, and ultimately He became obedient unto death. The union of the Son of God to an unglorified humanity unquestionably involved divine condescension and was a necessary factor in His ultimate humiliation on the cross. The humiliation was not the initial step of incarnation, but was involved in the whole program of God leading to His death on the Cross. The humanity to which Christ was united was not a glorified humanity, but one subject to temptation, distress, weakness, pain, sorrow, and limitation. After His return to glory His humanity was glorified, but the original union with unglorified humanity is included in the *kenosis*. But Christ surrendered no attribute of deity; rather, He voluntarily restricted their independent use in keeping with His purpose of living among men and their limitations. This He did in order to reverse humanity's loss of the image of God, as St. Athanasius points out at the beginning of his book *On the Incarnation*.

By sending to his creation the actual Image in which humans were created, God renewed the part of humans by which we can know God. Seeing that humans lowered their eyes from the divine and wallowed in their senses, the divine took on flesh, according to Athanasius, in order to "return their sense perception to himself." By this the Word brings the knowledge of God, making it accessible through the renewed image, which perceives the invisible God by means of the visible works of the incarnate God. The gravity of the situation called for the Creator, the Word of God, to be the "re-Creator," who is sufficient to suffer on behalf of all since he made all. The incorruptible Word came down and entered the corruptibility of creation in order to turn humanity from its corruption back up to God. Through taking on a body with the incorruptible Word, corruption can be reversed in humanity. But a debt must also be repaid, and this involves more than condescension, but the ultimate humiliation; that is, it can be done only by the death of Jesus Christ and the "grace of the resurrection." The death of Jesus Christ paid the debt for the ultimate end of corruptibility — death — and finally released humanity from its curse. The resurrection of Jesus Christ shows victory over

death and is a witness to the incorruptibility available to all. St. Athanasius put this directionality memorably in a famous line: “He was incarnate that we might become god.” If we have faith in the one who conquered death, and emulate His self-emptying by our repentance, we gain his incorruptibility, delivered in eternal life. We gain by grace what the Son has by nature, and so, by the mystery of the incarnation, of the Child born in the humble manger of Bethlehem, our lives are forever changed, reconciled to the goodness of God.

Let us emulate Christ’s *kenosis* by sincerely, and faithfully, keeping the Nativity Fast with the “attitude of Christ,” and on Christmas Day let us joyfully celebrate all that Jesus Christ has done for us by His voluntary condescension in becoming incarnate for the sake of our salvation. To all of you, peace and joy, and a Merry Christmas!

## **Excerpt from the Church Fathers**

*“For next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became man for our sakes, that becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing.”*  
— Martyr Justin the Philosopher (c. 100-c. 165).

## **Lives of the Saints**

*St. Joasaph of Belgorod, Bishop – commemorated on December 10th*

St. Joasaph was born as Joachim Gorlenko in Pryluky, Cossack Hetmanate (present-day Ukraine) on September 8, 1705. He was the son of Colonel Andrei D. Gorlenko of the Hetmanate’s Pryluky Regiment, and Maria Danylova, a daughter of Danylo Apostol (1654-1734), Hetman of the Cossacks from 1727 until his death in 1734. After attending the Kyiv Theological Academy, in 1725 Joachim was tonsured a monk of the Mezhyhirya Monastery (located immediately north of Kyiv) and given the name of Hilarion. In 1727 Hilarion (as he then was) took monastic vows and received the name of Joasaph, and in 1728 he was ordained a deacon. By the end of that academic year he was teaching at the academy. In 1737 he was appointed abbot of the Mhar Monastery near Lubny. In 1744, by command of the Empress Elizabeth, St. Joasaph was elevated to the rank of archimandrite and translated to become head of the Trinity-Sergiev Lavra, Russia’s most important monastery and spiritual center. On June 2, 1748 he was consecrated as bishop of Belgorod and Oboyan.

After his arrival in Belgorod, St. Joasaph was noted for his untiring efforts for his diocese and especially for his work to help those in need, often visiting the poor and the sick. He died on December 10, 1754, at 49, in a village in the Graivoron district. His body was taken from there to Belgorod and was placed in the city’s Holy Trinity Cathedral. Not until February 28, 1755 was the coffin transferred to a crypt in the cathedral which had been made on St. Joasaph’s orders. Some years later the body was found to be incorrupt, and news of this spread. The sick began to visit the coffin of St. Joasaph, many reporting cures. The miraculous power of St. Joasaph’s relics became known throughout the Russian Empire, and every year more people came to Belgorod to seek help. St. Joasaph thus gained the aura of a saint, and portraits of him became popular. In 1883, the Holy Trinity Cathedral became a monastery cathedral, and a series of requests for St. Joasaph’s glorification began to be made. Finally, in 1910, Tsar Nicholas II asked the Holy Synod to glorify Joasaph as a saint, and so on September 4, 1911 the glorification was celebrated in the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Belgorod, attended by more than 200,000 people, many of whom had come from all over the Empire and beyond.

Before the First World War, St. Joasaph’s relics were greatly venerated and were brought out for the curing of the sick, when great crowds came hoping for a miraculous cure. A substantial shrine, made of silver, was created in the Holy Trinity Cathedral. In the summer of 1914, when news came of the Austro-

Hungarian bombardment of the Serbian capital city of Belgrade beginning on July 29, 1914, one landowner, Prince Obolensky, spoke stirringly to his peasantry of the need for war with Austria, and they reacted enthusiastically. He later learned that his hearers had understood him to mean the Belgorod which held the relics of the recently glorified St. Joasaph, rather than Belgrade!

After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, St. Joasaph's remains were removed from his shrine in the Belgorod cathedral, and for some seventy years their whereabouts remained unknown, and in 1927 the Holy Trinity Cathedral itself was demolished. In the late 1980s the remains were discovered in the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Leningrad, and on September 16, 1991 they were solemnly returned to the new Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Belgorod, the occasion being marked by a service in which Patriarch Alexis II took part. St. Joasaph's name is still revered by the Orthodox faithful, and above all by those from the Ukraine. The Feast of the Opening of the Relics of St. Joasaph, Bishop of Belgorod, is celebrated on September 4th and his primary feast day is celebrated on December 10th, the date of his repose.

## Frequently Asked Questions

*Does the Christmas Tree have a pagan origin? What is its symbolism?*

Modern Christmas trees originated during the Renaissance (16th century) in Germany.<sup>1</sup> From there it custom of decorating evergreen trees for the celebration of Christmas spread throughout Europe and globally. The tradition was introduced to North America were introduced by Hessian soldiers stationed in Quebec in the winter of 1781. President Benjamin Harrison and his wife, Caroline, put up the first White House Christmas tree in 1889. The first Vatican Christmas Tree is much more recent, in 1982. Dates for taking down Christmas trees vary according to local tradition: in some places, on the night of Epiphany (January 6th), in others, on Candlemas (February 2nd), which ends the Christmas-Epiphany season.

Modern Christmas trees have been related to the "tree of paradise" of medieval mystery plays that were given on December 24th, the commemoration and name day of Adam and Eve in various countries. In such plays, a tree decorated with apples (representing fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and thus to the original sin that Jesus Christ took away) and round white wafers (to represent the Eucharist and redemption) was used as a setting for the play. Like the Christmas crib, the Paradise tree was later placed in homes. The apples were replaced by round objects such as shiny red balls. Another possible predecessor was the tradition of tying oranges and candles to a branch of green laurel in medieval Portugal.

There is, however, a common belief, often spread by mass media today, in even earlier pagan origins of the Christmas tree. But when closely examined, these claims seem to have little basis in fact. Most of the traditions associated with pagan festivals are at most only remotely similar to those of Christmas. It is true that tree worship was common in European paganism; for example, the story of St. Boniface cutting down Donar's Oak<sup>2</sup> illustrates the pagan practices in 8th century among the Germans, but a folk version of the story adds the detail that an evergreen tree grew in place of the felled oak, telling how its triangular shape reminds humanity of the Trinity and how it points to heaven. Thus, the formerly pagan symbol was replaced by a Christian one—e.g., evergreens were specifically used as a sign of eternal life by early Christians in catacombs under Rome.

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest known firmly dated representation of a Christmas tree is on the keystone sculpture of a private home in Turckheim, Alsace (then part of Germany, today France), with the date of 1576.

<sup>2</sup> Donar's Oak (also Thor's Oak or Jove's Oak) was a sacred tree of the Germanic pagans located in an unclear location around what is now the region of Hesse, Germany. According to the 8th century *Vita Bonifatii auctore Willibaldo*, the Anglo-Saxon missionary St. Boniface and his retinue cut down the tree earlier in the same century. Wood from the oak was then used to build a church at the site dedicated to the Apostle Peter. Sacred trees and sacred groves were widely venerated by the Germanic and Norse peoples.

Often an association is claimed with the Roman holiday of Saturnalia (December 17-24). Saturn was a god of time, generation, dissolution, abundance, wealth, agriculture, periodic renewal and liberation, and his mythological reign was depicted as a paradisiacal Golden Age of abundance and peace (later, after the Roman conquest of Greece, Saturn was conflated with the Greek Cronus). The Temple of Saturn in the Roman Forum housed the state treasury and archives of the Roman Republic and the early Roman Empire. During Saturnalia the Romans would hang evergreen boughs on their houses and give gifts of holly to one another. Other Saturnalia customs included the giving and lighting of candles, and the gift on the last day of the festival was a wax or clay figurine called a *sigillaria*. Hence, the frequent claim that these Roman customs were directly incorporated into Christian celebrations at Christmas. However, the Roman festival of Saturnalia bears, at most, only a superficial similarity to Christmas, and if there is any connection between Saturnalia and Christmas, it is the date of Christmas, not the relatively recent tradition of erecting Christmas trees. Furthermore, the symbolic importance of evergreens has Biblical roots.

Evergreens are mentioned prominently in the Bible and were associated with God's favor towards his people (Numbers 24:6, Psalms 104:16, Isaiah 41:19) or were mentioned in connection with testifying to the goodness of God (Psalms 148:9, Isaiah 55:13). Solomon loved cedars and (c. 1000 BC); he imported them into Jerusalem and made them commonplace within the city (2 Chronicles 9:27). In Isaiah 60:13 (c. 700 BC) we read that the Lord promised that fragrant evergreen trees such as the cedar, cypress, and pine would be brought from Lebanon and be planted around the Temple to beautify it. Indeed, the first Temple, built by Solomon was constructed of cedar and cypress wood (1 Kings 6:15), and when God spoke of revitalizing Israel, he specifically mentioned planting cedar, cypress, and pine trees in the wilderness (Isaiah 41:19). We can glean from the Bible that evergreen trees were used for decorating and building and were well-loved trees. The association of a tree with prosperity and long life for those who loved the Lord is mentioned several times in the Bible (Psalm 1:3, 52:8, 92:12, Proverbs 11:30, Jeremiah 17:7-8, Hoshea 14:6-8), long before both Roman and Germanic-Norse mythologies.

## Recipe of the Month

### Christmas Eggnog Pie

*Don't drink your eggnog this year — eat it! This baked eggnog pie is similar to a traditional custard pie. If you love eggnog and you're a fan of custard pie, this baked eggnog pie recipe is an absolute must-try for the holiday season. Using store-bought eggnog and pie crust, you'll need just five additional ingredients and about 10 minutes of prep to make this a new holiday tradition. You can also add a splash of brandy or brandy extract for a little kick.*

#### **Ingredients:**

- 1¼ cups white sugar
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cups eggnog
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ cup unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
- 1 (9 inch) unbaked deep dish pie crust

#### **Directions:**

- (1) Gather all ingredients and preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.
- (2) Mix the sugar and flour together in a mixing bowl. Beat in the eggnog, eggs, and vanilla to make a smooth mixture. Stir in the butter.
- (3) Pour into the prepared pie crust and dust with cinnamon and nutmeg, if using.

(4) Bake in preheated oven until the custard is set, 45 to 60 minutes. The outer edges of the pie should be fully set and the center should still be a little jiggly.

(5) Remove from oven and let cool to room temperature before slicing and serving.

## Special Donations

*Special Donations may be offered at \$15/week for Altar Vigils, \$10/week for Sanctuary Lamp, and \$5/week for any one of the following: St. John's Cross, St. Nicholas' Cross, and Triple Candelabra, and may be offered in memory of the departed or in honor of the living. Please note that for Special Donations in January to be acknowledged in "Quo Vadis," the donation must be recorded in the Special Donations register in the church vestibule by December 17, 2023.*

December 3, 2023

**Altar Vigils** offered by John and Helen Wanko in memory of Lydia Wanko (anniversary of repose).

December 10, 2023

**Sanctuary Lamp** offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Right Rev. Bishop Anthony (Grabbe).

December 17, 2023

**Altar Vigils, Sanctuary Lamp, and St. John's Cross** offered in memory of Juliana and Andrew Bacsik (anniversary of repose).

December 24, 2023

**Altar Vigils** offered by John and Helen Wanko in memory of June Bianchini (anniversary of birth). **Sanctuary Lamp** and **St. John's Cross** offered by the Zuber Family in memory of Stephan Korbelak.

December 31, 2023

**Altar Vigils** offered by Tais Fedetz in memory of Very Rev. Archpriest Nicholas Fedetz (anniversary of repose). **Sanctuary Lamp** offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Angelo Cusano, Jr. (fifth anniversary of repose).

## Parish News

Parish Council Meeting

Parish Council is meeting in the church hall on Sunday, December 10, 2023 after Divine Liturgy.

Confessions

All parishioners ought to go to confession during the Nativity Fast, which may be heard after any Vespers. Those unable to attend Vespers may call the Rectory at 201-436-3244 to make an appointment.

Church Candles

Effective January 1, 2024, the following prices take effect: 3-day vigils - \$4, Sanctuary Lamp - \$10, Altar Vigils - \$15.

Christmas Social

The Carpathian Club invites all our parishioners and visitors to its annual Christmas Social, which shall be held after Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day in the club hall behind the church building.

## Archpastoral Visitation

Archbishop Michael's annual visitation to our church will be on Wednesday, December 27, 2023, the 3rd Day of Christmas and feast of Protomartyr Stephen. There will be a brunch in the church hall after Divine Liturgy—all in attendance are welcome!

## **Schedule of Services**

### December 2-3, 2023

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers  
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

### December 6, 2023 [St. Nicholas]

9:30 AM (Wednesday) – Divine Liturgy

### December 9-10, 2023

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers  
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

### December 16-17, 2023

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers  
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

### December 23-24, 2023

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers  
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

### December 24-25, 2023 [Christmas]

4:30 PM (Sunday) – Vigil w. Lity  
9:30 AM (Monday) – Divine Liturgy

### December 26-27, 2023

9:30 AM (Tuesday) – Divine Liturgy  
9:30 AM (Wednesday) – Divine Liturgy

### December 30-31, 2023

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers  
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

## **Daily Bible Readings**

- 1 Timothy 4:4-8, 16; Luke 20:19-26
- Galatians 3:8-12; Luke 12:32-40
- Ephesians 5:9-19; Luke 18:18-27
- 1 Timothy 5:1-10; Luke 20:27-44
- 1 Timothy 5:11-21; Luke 21:12-19
- Hebrews 13:17-21; Luke 6:17-23
- 1 Timothy 6:17-21; Luke 21:28-33
- 2 Timothy 1:1-2, 8-18; Luke 21:37-22:8
- Galatians 5:22-6:2; Luke 13:18-29
- Ephesians 6:10-17; Luke 17:12-19
- 2 Timothy 2:20-26; Mark 8:11-21
- 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4; Mark 8:22-26
- 2 Timothy 4:9-22; Mark 8:30-34
- Titus 1:5-2:1; Mark 9:10-16
- Titus 1:15-2:10; Mark 9:33-41
- Ephesians 1:16-23; Luke 14:1-11
- Colossians 3:4-11; Luke 14:16-24
- Hebrews 3:5-11, 17-19; Mark 9:42-10:1
- Hebrews 4:1-13; Mark 10:2-12
- Hebrews 5:11-6:8; Mark 10:11-16
- Hebrews 7:1-6; Mark 10:17-27
- Hebrews 7:18-25; Mark 10:23-32
- Ephesians 2:11-13; Luke 16:10-15
- Galatians 3:15-22; Luke 2:1-20
- Galatians 4:4-7; Matthew 2:1-12
- Hebrews 2:11-18; Matthew 2:13-23
- Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60; Matthew 21:33-42
- Hebrews 10:35-11:7; Mark 11:27-33
- Hebrews 11:8, 11-16; Mark 12:1-12
- Ephesians 5:1-8; Luke 17:3-10
- Galatians 1:11-19; Matthew 2:13-23

**CHRIST IS BORN!  
GLORIFY HIM!  
Christos raždajetsja!  
Slavite jeh!**

# *Christ is born! Glorify Him!*



Join us for an evening of song and celebration  
as we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus  
Christ with a "Virtual" Christmas Concert

**Sunday December 25<sup>th</sup> – 7:00pm EST**

*Featuring*

Nativity Greetings, Hymns & Carols sung by choirs from  
across the United States

*And*

A special Nativity greeting from  
His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon

*sponsored by*

The Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America

Join us on YouTube – <https://www.youtube.com/@F.O.C.A.>



**Remember to support the parish every time you shop!**



ShopRite, Stop & Shop, and Acme gifts cards available for purchase in the church vestibule.