

## **Bishop Paul awards Order of St. John of Chicago to Frs. John Mason and Vladimir Lecko**

Two retired priests of the Diocese of the Midwest were awarded the Order of Saint John of Chicago in early December 2018.

On December 6, the Feast of Saint Nicholas of Myra, His Grace, Bishop Paul awarded the Order to Archpriest John Mason at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy at Saint Nicholas Church, Mogadore, OH, where he served as rector for 27 years. Father John was the first priest to receive the diocesan award since its inception in the fall of 2018.

Sixteen priests, including Father John's brother, Archpriest James Mason, concelebrated with Bishop Paul and Archpriest Nicholas Wyslutsky, rector.

Bishop Paul presented the Order's pectoral cross to Father John, in addition to a gramota recognizing "his 67 years of priestly service to the Orthodox Church in America, the Diocese of the Midwest, and Saint Nicholas Parish." Father John had also served parishes in Pennsylvania, Connecticut and New York. For many years, he was National Spiritual Adviser to the Federated Russian Orthodox clubs/ Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America and an original member of the Orthodox Church in America's Pension Board.

On the following Sunday, December 9, Bishop Paul celebrated Matins and the Divine Liturgy at Saint Mary's Cathedral, Minneapolis, MN, after which he awarded the Order of Saint John of Chicago to Archpriest Vladimir Lecko, the parish's retired long-time dean and associate pastor.

Concelebrating with Bishop Paul were Archpriest Andrew Morbey, cathedral dean; Archpriests Myron Manzuk, Gregory Krutchek and John Schroedel; Priests William Neumann, Richard Flom, and Benjamin Tucci; and Deacons Gregory Krutchek, Jr. and Michael Tarris.

In addition to the Order's pectoral cross, Father Vladimir was presented with a gramota "in recognition of his decades of faithful service to the Orthodox Church as a Choir Director, Priest, Father Confessor, Dean and Educator – a ministry distinguished above all by a pastoral wisdom and compassion recognized by all as carrying the fragrance of the Holy Spirit." Prior to his assignment to Saint Mary's Cathedral in the late 1970s, Father Vladimir served the Nativity of the Virgin Mary Church, Madison, IL for two decades. A gallery of photos is [available online](#).

The previous evening, Saint Mary's Choir presented its annual Advent Concert, which was a huge success with standing room only. Choir Director Gregory Ealy led a large ensemble in a chronological selection of the Church's Advent hymns from the beginning of the Fast through to the Eve of the Feast. A gallery of concert photos is [available online](#).

## **20,000 Martyrs of Nicomedia Commemorated on [December 28](#)**

The Holy 20,000 Martyrs of Nicomedia: At the beginning of the fourth century the emperor Maximian (284-305) gave orders to destroy Christian churches, to burn service books, and to deprive all Christians of rights and privileges of citizenship. At this time the bishop of the city of Nicomedia was Saint Cyril, who by his preaching and life contributed to the spread of Christianity, so that many members of the emperor's court were also secret Christians.

The pagan priestess Domna was living in the palace at that time. Providentially, she obtained a copy of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Saint Paul. Her heart burned with the desire to learn more about the Christian teaching. With the help of a young Christian girl, Domna went secretly to Bishop Anthimus (Cyril's successor) with her faithful servant, the eunuch Indes. Saint Anthimus catechized them, and both received holy Baptism.

Domna began to help the poor: she gave away her valuables with the assistance of Indes, and she also distributed food from the imperial kitchen. The chief eunuch, who was in charge of provisions for the imperial household, found out that Domna and Indes were not eating the food sent them from the emperor's table. He had them beaten in order to find out why they did not partake of the food, but they remained silent. Another eunuch informed him that the saints were distributing all the emperor's gifts to the poor. He locked them up in prison to exhaust them with hunger, but they received support from an angel and did not suffer. Saint Domna feigned insanity so she wouldn't have to live among the pagans. Then she and Indes managed to leave the court, and she went to a women's monastery. Abbess Agatha quickly dressed her in men's clothing, cut her hair and sent her off from the monastery.

During this time the emperor returned from battle and ordered that a search be made for the former pagan priestess Domna. The soldiers sent for this purpose found the monastery and destroyed it. The sisters were thrown into prison, subjected to torture and abuse, but not one of them suffered defilement. Sent to a house of iniquity, Saint Theophila was able to preserve her virginity with the help of an angel of the Lord. The angel led her from the brothel and brought her to the cathedral.

At this time the emperor cleared the city square to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. When they began sprinkling the crowd with the blood of the sacrificial animals, Christians started to leave the square. Seeing this, the emperor became enraged, but in the middle of his rantings a great thunderstorm **Con't Page 14**

## **20,000 Martyrs Con't**

sprang up. People fled in panic, and the emperor had to retreat to the palace for his own safety.

Later Maximian went to the church with soldiers and told them they could escape punishment if they renounced Christ. Otherwise, he promised to burn the church and those in it. The Christian presbyter Glycerius told him that Christians would never renounce their faith, even under the threat of torture. Hiding his anger, the emperor exited the church, and a short time later commanded the presbyter Glycerius be arrested for trial. The executioners tortured the martyr, who did not cease to pray and to call on the Name of the Lord. Unable to force Saint Glycerius stop confessing Christ, Maximian ordered him to be burned to death.

On the Feast of the Nativity of Christ in the year 302, when about 20,000 Christians had assembled at the cathedral in Nicomedia, the emperor sent a herald into the church. He told the Christians that soldiers were surrounding the building, and that anyone who wished to leave had to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods.

Anyone who defied the emperor would perish when the soldiers set fire to the church. All those present refused to worship the idols.

As the pagans prepared to set fire to the church, Bishop Anthimus, baptized all the catechumens and communed everyone with the Holy Mysteries. All 20,000 of those praying died in the fire. Among them were the abbess Agatha and Saint Theophila who had been saved from the den of iniquity by a miracle. Bishop Anthimus, however, managed to escape the fire.

Maximian thought that he had exterminated all the Christians of Nicomedia. He soon learned that there were many more, and that they would confess their faith and were prepared to die for Christ. The emperor wondered how to deal with them. At his command they arrested the regimental commander Zeno, who was openly criticizing the emperor for his impiety and cruelty. Zeno was fiercely beaten and finally beheaded. They jailed the eunuch Indes, formerly a priest of the idols, for refusing to participate in a pagan festival. The persecution against Christians continued.

Dorotheus, Mardonius, Migdonius the deacon and others were thrown into prison. Bishop Anthimus encouraged them by sending letters to them. One of the messengers, the Deacon Theophilus, was captured. They subjected him to torture, trying to learn where the bishop was hiding. The holy martyr endured everything, while revealing nothing. Then they executed him and also those whom the bishop had addressed in his letter. Though they were executed in different ways, they all showed the same courage and received their crowns from God.

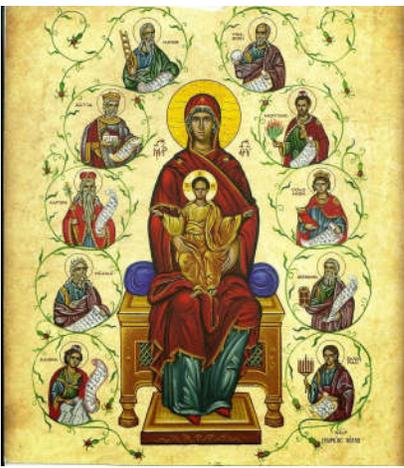
For weeks, Saint Domna concealed herself within a cave and sustained herself by eating plants. When she returned to the city, she wept for a long time at the ruins of the church, regretting that she was not found worthy to die with the others. That night she went to the sea shore. At that moment fishermen pulled the bodies of the martyrs Indes, Gorgonius and Peter from the water in their nets.

Saint Domna was still dressed in men's clothing, and she helped the fishermen to draw in their nets. They left her the bodies of the martyrs. With reverence she looked after the holy relics and wept over them, especially over the body of her spiritual friend, the Martyr Indes.

After giving them an honorable burial, she did not depart from these graves so dear to her heart. Each day she burned incense before them, sprinkling them with fragrant oils. When the emperor was told of an unknown youth who offered incense at the graves of executed Christians, he gave orders to behead the youth. The Martyr Euthymius was also executed along with Domna.

### **Matthew 2:1-12 (*Gospel, Nativity*)**

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'" Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.



### Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40

#### *(Epistle, Sunday Before)*

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

### Matthew 1:1-25 (*Gospel, Sunday Before*)

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob.

And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us.’” Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

## 2018 NATIVITY MESSAGE OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP PAUL

*“For today I see equality of honor between heaven and earth, and a way for all those below to things above, matching the condescension of those on high. However great the heaven of heavens may be, or the upper waters which form a roof over the celestial regions, or any heavenly place, state, or order, they are by no more marvelous or honorable than the cave, the manger, the water sprinkled on the Infant and His swaddling clothes. For nothing done by God from the beginning of time was more beneficial to all or more divine than Christ’s nativity, which we celebrate today. . . . He Who is by nature Lord of all is now ranked with the servants and enrolled with them (Luke 2:1-6), clearly making humble service to others no less honorable than the exercise of lordship, or rather, showing the servants as having greater honor than the earthly ruler at that time.”*

—St. Gregory Palamas, *Sermon on the Nativity*

TO ALL CLERGY, MONASTICS, AND LAITY OF  
THE DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST  
**Christ is Born! Glorify Him!**

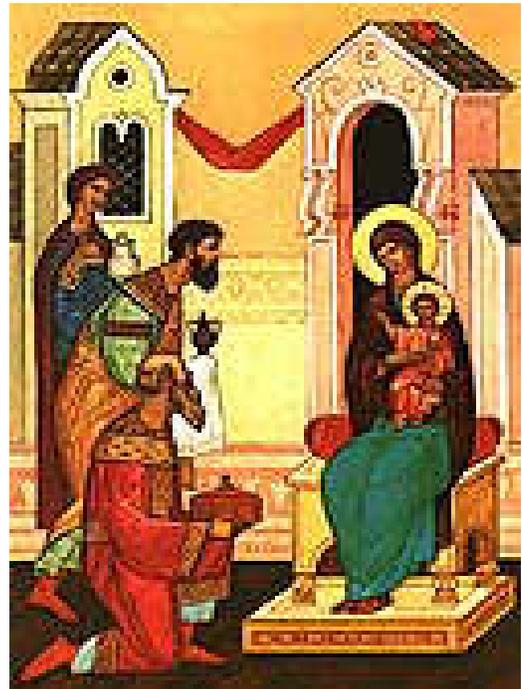
These words of St. Gregory Palamas portray a wonderful icon of earth and heaven. It also points to the supreme act of condescension where the Uncontainable God, contained in the Virgin’s womb is now born into the world “for us men and for our salvation.” For “nothing was more beneficial to all or more divine than Christ’s nativity.”

This is why we fast, say our prayers, go to Confession, attend services, and give alms during the fasting season; it is to do away with the false dichotomy between the earthly and the spiritual. One is not lesser than the other; the created things of this world are not sinful. We don’t embrace spiritual things as good while hating what is of the earth.

By gazing into the Cave and beholding the Incarnate God, a transformation occurs in uniting ourselves to Him. All we have becomes an offering to Him in gratitude. In Christ we now become Kings of Creation and no longer slaves of Creation.

In Christ we become Prophets of Creation and no longer fools of Creation. In Christ, we as Priests become intercessors of Creation and no longer desecrators of Creation. It is only through Christ we can ever realize this reality because He is the King, the Prophet, and the Priest of Creation. He once again reveals the “very good” of Creation in His Nativity.

**CHRISTOS  
RAZDAJETSJA  
SLAVITE  
JEHO**



Passions that are self-oriented now can become offerings to God the Father, through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. They are offerings in gratitude for the many gifts He has given, whether they are gifts of food, safety, security, or knowledge. Finally, a man and woman offers their desire to be united to each other, and to have that union blessed by the Church, and thus become an icon of a common witness between a husband and wife towards the Kingdom and of Christ’s love for the Church.

Our participation in the Cave is realized and renewed through our Baptism and Chrismation. It is fulfilled in the Cave of the Eucharistic Assembly where we touch earth and encounter heaven. Let us rejoice this day and be glad; for the glory of our earthly life, what we sense, feel, and touch, now points to the glory of that which is beyond what we see, feel and touch, a glory that has no ending!

**Christ is Born! Glorify Him!**

With love in Christ, the unworthy

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