



BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PHOENIX

Christmas 2025 eNews

Message from the Bishop

Dearly beloved in Christ,

Christ is among us – He is and always shall be!

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas in this Jubilee of HOPE, my heart returns again and again to the words that became my episcopal motto from Psalm 17: *“I will love You, O Lord, my strength; the Lord is my rock and my refuge.”* Over this first year serving you as a bishop, I have experienced those words not as a motto on a coat of arms, but as a living reality: in every parish visit, every pilgrimage, every Divine Liturgy, every encounter with you, the faithful, the Lord has shown Himself to be our rock and refuge.

This year, the Lord allowed me to stand at many holy altars across our vast eparchy, to listen to your stories, to rejoice in your hopes and to share your tears. We walked together as pilgrims of HOPE both on actual pilgrimages and on the quieter pilgrim roads of illness, family struggle, and hidden fidelity. I was given the humbling joy of ordaining new servants for our Church: the gift I received at my own episcopal ordination becoming a gift I must share and hand on. All of this has convinced me that the heart of our eparchy is very simple and very beautiful: **ABOVE ALL LOVE.**

At Christmas we celebrate the mystery that St Paul calls *“the fullness of time”*: heaven bending low to touch the earth; eternity entering our fragile history. The One whom the heavens cannot contain allows Himself to be held in the arms of a Virgin and laid in a manger. The uncircumscribable God accepts to be “wrapped” in swaddling clothes. In the Ninth Ode of the Canon at Christmas Matins, we sing of this wonder: the cave becomes like heaven, the Virgin like a living throne, and the manger a place where God Himself rests among us. In this tiny Child, our rock and refuge has a human face.

The Philip’s Fast is our school of the heart that prepares us for this encounter. Through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, it slowly forms us not just to *do* works of mercy, but to *become* mercy. Each of the six Sundays of the fast has been like a lesson in this **school of becoming mercy**, each Sunday asking us a fundamental question:

- *What must I do to inherit eternal life?*
- *What shall I do with all my goods?*
- *What is bending me down so that I cannot stand upright before God in true worship?*
- *Who is my neighbor on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho today?*
- *How is Christ asking to be welcomed and forgiven in my own family and parish community?*
- *What kind of Church are we called to become together in the year ahead, so that ABOVE ALL LOVE shines through everything we are and do?*

If we let these questions remain alive in us, they will continue to shape our mission long after the leave-taking of Christmas. In the coming year, the Lord invites our Eparchial Family to be ever more:

- **A Church of mercy** – where the wounded, the poor, the lonely, the migrant, the forgotten, and the spiritually lost can find a home;
- **A Church of hope** – where the Jubilee of Hope is not just a past event, but a way of looking at every person and situation with the eyes of Christ;
- **A Church of generous service** – where our time, talents, and treasures are placed at the feet of the newborn King, especially through our care for those in need and our support for the mission of the eparchy;
- **A Church anchored on the Rock** – where, in every storm, we rediscover that “the Lord is my rock and my refuge,” and we stand firm in the faith of our martyrs and confessors, Bishops Theodore Romzha, Paul Gojdich, Peter Hopko, Petro Oros, Methodius Trchka.

We walk this path under the mantle of the Holy Protection of the Mother of God. She is the first to live ABOVE ALL LOVE: listening to the Word, treasuring it in her heart, and then going in haste to serve. From her, we learn how to hold Christ close and carry Him out into the world—into our homes, our workplaces, our parishes, and every corner of the territory entrusted to our eparchy.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for welcoming me this year into your parishes, your homes, and your hearts. Thank you for your prayers, your sacrifices, and your love for our Church. Together, let us continue to build a community where anyone who walks through our doors can say: *“Here, Christ is truly present. Here, ABOVE ALL LOVE.”*

And so, I conclude with heartfelt wishes for you and your loved ones: Christ is Born whenever we are caring for the least of His sisters and brothers. Christ is Born whenever our giving is not repaid in mutual gifts. This should cause us to look for that great last day in which Christ will bless us with all we have given to those in need.

May our newborn Savior bring His forgiveness and grace, His light, His peace, His hope to our present moment in life. Christ is Born – Glorify Him / Христос Раждається – Славіте Єго!

✙ Artur
Bishop of Phoenix

News From the Vatican



Pope Leo Celebrates 11 Years as a Consecrated Bishop



Leo P.P. XIV

Congratulations to Pope Leo on the 11th anniversary of his consecration as a Bishop on December 12, 2014. **May God Grant Him May Blessed Years!**

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

On the 11th anniversary of his consecration as a bishop, Pope Leo celebrated his first mass as pope on the solemnity of Our Lady of Guadalupe. [Catholic News Agency](#) shared that, "On Dec. 12, Pope Leo XIV presided over his first Mass on the solemnity of Our Lady of Guadalupe, whom he asked to come to his aid "so that she may confirm in the one true path that leads to the blessed Fruit of your womb all those who have been entrusted to me."



Pope Leo XIV honors Our Lady of Guadalupe during the Mass on her feast day, Dec. 12, 2025, in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. | Credit: Vatican Media

The Pope prayed that families find strength, young people find meaning and people of faith seek greater communion because "within the church, Mother, your children cannot be divided."

The USCCB also reported on the Pope's pleas to Mary for her intercession on behalf of people suffering from undignified treatment. [Pope Leo XIV prayed for Mary's maternal intercession so that she would help nations avoid lies and hatred and instruct leaders to protect the dignity of all human life.](#)

"Show them that your Son walks beside them. May nothing afflict their hearts so that they may fearlessly welcome God's plans," he said, praying that she also help keep young people safe "from the threats of crime, addiction and the danger of a meaningless life."

"Seek out, Mother, those who have strayed from the holy church," he said. "May your gaze reach them where ours cannot, break down the walls that separate us, and bring them back home with the power of your love."

The Team Grows

Director of Communications

Josh Paige Joins the Team!



Josh Paige has joined the eparchial chancery staff as Director of Communications, having spent the past 15 years in digital marketing and consumer research. For the last six years he was the Director of Consumer Insights, Marketing & Strategy at Warner Bros Discovery where he led consumer strategy and insights for the MotorTrend division. Josh lives in Gilbert, AZ and attends St. Thomas the Apostle Byzantine Catholic Church with his wife Natalie and children Lukas (13), Evan (10) and Arielle (7). He has been a Byzantine Catholic for 14 years and outside of church, enjoys spending time with his family doing martial arts, going to Phoenix Rising soccer games, and playing with the family German Shepherd, Kahless. He is overjoyed at the opportunity to apply his professional experience helping Bishop Artur, our Eparchy, and our priests & parishes proclaim the message of Christ within our amazing Byzantine tradition.

We Prepare for Christmas

Reflection by Father David Petras

The Liturgy of the Church helps us to prepare for a spiritual celebration of "God with us" in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We hear the word of God in the Epistles and Gospels on the two Sundays preceding the feast. On the second Sunday before Christmas, this year on December 14, we celebrate the Sunday of the Forefathers. The Epistle is Colossians 3:4-11, which begins, "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

This tells us what Christmas is really all about. It is the announcement of the feast. The Word of God, appearing in our world, is the glory of the believer. He appears in humble surroundings, but invites all to the feast! The gospel (Luke 14:16-24) tells us that those who are well off refuse the invitation, but it is "the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind," who come, it is those in "the highways and hedges" who are "compelled to come." Christmas is about the poor beloved by God. We might also read Pope Leo XIV's Apostolic Exhortation, "Dilexi Te," which teaches us about Christian love for the poor and vulnerable. Mary probably realized this when she prophesied, "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly." (Luke 1:52) The angels appear to the shepherds in the fields, and they are invited to the house of the Lord. The glory of the Lord is his humility, and our glory is our humility. For all that, everyone is invited to the banquet, and the wise and the rich from Persia come with expensive gifts, though they too are outsiders, and the epistle tells us "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." (Colossians 3:11) Those who welcome Christ will put aside "anger, wrath, malice" (Colossians 3:8) The first sticheron at

Christmas chants, "let us proclaim the present mystery by which the partition has been broken and the flaming sword withheld. Now the Cherubim shall let us all come to the Tree of Life." This is putting Christ back into Christmas!

On Sunday, December 21, we read the genealogy of Jesus. The Gospel this Sunday presents us with an abundance of names, all those who were the ancestors of Christ. By this we see that on this feast, the Son and Word of God becomes a part of the human family and a part of human history. In this Gospel Jesus is also given a name, the final verse tells us that the child will be known as Jesus - Savior. In verse 22, though, he is given the name "Immanuel," "God with us." This gives us the theological meaning of the feast, the incarnation signifies our deification. We all have names, but for the ancients, names had meanings, they did not simply give us an identification tag, but told us something of who we were. In that sense, we do not name ourselves, but we are given a name, we are all "called by name" by God, and so we enter into the ancestry of Jesus. The names are the forefathers of Jesus, but also the foremothers are mentioned: Tamar, who bore a son by trickery of Judah; Ruth, the grandmother of David, who left her people to follow Naomi; the unnamed wife of David, Bathsheba, who David married by arranging for the death of Uriah. We see, then, that even through questionable and evil actions, as well as by faithfulness, Jesus becomes "the son given to us." The greatest of the woman in his genealogy is, of course, Mary, his mother, who by her obedience cancelled the curse of Eve, and united God with humanity in her womb. Today, we celebrate the Son of Abraham, according to the Law, and the Son of David, the everlasting King, to whom even David bowed, and even the Son of exile, for we are all citizens of the spiritual, not the earthly, Jerusalem. Today we must be named as a follower of Christ.

In this Sunday, then, we see that Jesus has come to call us all into human solidarity, calling each of us by name. He calls us all as one, as children of Abraham, for through him all nations will be blessed., and "And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. (Luke 18:28)" The Gospel today teaches us that we must set aside our pride, our supposed "privileges," our partisan hatreds, to see the image of God in Emmanuel, who has become one of us and in all of us. The shepherds in their poverty, and the Magi in the riches come to worship God in Christ, and to give themselves to him.

We can understand better the structure of the feast by looking at the Gospels which are read:

1. On the Sunday before Christmas, we read the genealogy of Jesus. Moreover, on this Sunday, we do read the birth of Christ according to St. Matthew. This is the beginning of the feast.
2. On Christmas eve, at Vespers and the Liturgy of St. Basil, we read the gospel of Jesus' birth according to St. Luke. The greatest feasts (Christmas, Theophany and Pascha) all have this two-liturgy structure in the Byzantine Liturgy. The vigil Liturgy is a true Christmas Liturgy, and the fast is broken after Vespers. However, the abstinence continues until midnight, but Holy Suppers are quite festive for all that and very full.
3. The Gospel of the birth of Jesus is again read at Orthros (Matins, the morning service) of December 25.
4. On Christmas Day, at the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the first event after Jesus' birth, the gospel of the Magi is read. In the Roman tradition, this is the gospel of Epiphany on January 6. Of course, we know that the Magi visited long after Jesus' birth, Herod killed the infants two years old and younger.
5. On the day after Christmas, and on the Sunday after Christmas, the Gospel of the massacre of the Holy Infants is read. I think this reminds us that Christmas is a very serious feast that challenges us to choose our Lord as the true king of God's Kingdom. We often make it into a sentimental, "feel-good" feast in which we are nice to each other, but it is truly a theological feast, of God becoming incarnate and of all that this means for our human lives. He became poor for our sakes that in his poverty we might become rich (1 Corinthians 8:9).

Other News

Bishop Artur Attends USCCB Plenary Assembly

[The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops \(USCCB\) gathered for their Fall Plenary Assembly in Baltimore, November 11-13. Throughout the meeting, the bishops had opportunities to spend time in prayer and fraternal dialogue together.](#)



Eastern Catholics in the US - The Numbers

[The Catholic World Report](#) publishes an article on the number of Eastern Catholics in the United States. The article summarizes the number of Eastern Catholics across all 18 eparchies:

“Ten of the Eastern Catholic Churches have a combined 18 eparchies that are headquartered in the United States; these 18 jurisdictions have a combined 575,218 Catholics, 793 priests (both diocesan and religious), and 641 parishes.”

The article highlights the Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Church for attracting priestly vocations, high baptismal rates, higher rate of conversions, and high rate of weddings.

How do the Eastern Catholic eparchies compare, according to statistics published in the Directory?

- *In terms of attracting priestly vocations, it's feast or famine for the 18 Eastern Catholic eparchies. Thirteen attract priestly vocations at a higher rate than that of the typical Latin-rite diocese, with the Eparchy of Phoenix (Ruthenian), Archeparchy of Philadelphia (Ukrainian), and Archeparchy of Pittsburgh (Ruthenian) leading the way. The other five eparchies reported no seminarians.*
- *Ten of the 18 eparchies have infant baptism rates higher than that of the typical Latin-rite diocese. The Eparchy of Phoenix (Ruthenian), Archeparchy of Philadelphia (Ukrainian), and Eparchy of Stamford (Ukrainian) lead the way.*
- *Nine of the 18 eparchies attract conversions (and other non-infant receptions) at a rate higher than that of the typical Latin-rite diocese. The Eparchy of Phoenix (Ruthenian), Eparchy of Parma (Ruthenian), and Eparchy of St. George in Canton (Romanian) lead the way. Three eparchies, on the other hand, reported no conversions.*
- *Fourteen of the 18 eparchies reported wedding rates higher than that of the typical Latin-rite diocese. The Eparchy of Phoenix (Ruthenian), Eparchy of Our Lady of Deliverance (Syriac), and Archeparchy of Philadelphia (Ukrainian) lead the way.*

Bishop Artur Visits Parishes in California & Colorado

Bishop Artur had a busy month in November as he visited numerous parishes and outreaches throughout California and Colorado. Along with celebrating the Heirarchal Divine Liturgy. He enjoyed a warm reception from parishioners and especially enjoyed sharing the word of God with the children.

Santa Paula Outreach

At the Santa Paula Outreach, the Bishop performed a baptism, a chrismation, and celebrated the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple. Bishop also had the opportunity to hike with students from St. Thomas Aquinas after touring the school campus.





Bishop Visits St. Mary's Proto-Cathedral

At St. Mary's Proto-Cathedral, Bishop celebrated the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple.



Bishop Artur Visits Holy Protection of the Mother of God

& Fort Collins Outreach

Holy Protection of the Mother of God Byzantine Catholic Church in Denver and the Byzantine Catholic Outreach of Fort Collins were blessed to have Bishop Artur visit for the Feast of Blessed Theodore Romzha and the weekend of November 1st and 2nd. He celebrated four Divine Liturgies while he was here, including two Hierarchical Divine Liturgies on Sunday! At those two liturgies, he ordained Subdeacon Damion Giunta in Denver and Subdeacon David Bratnick in Fort Collins. Thank you, Bishop! And many years to our new Subdeacons! Minor orders of candlebearer, reader, cantor and subdeacon.



Reflection by Subdeacon Damion Giunta

Upon ordination to subdeacon, what struck me the most is the act of humility and service that was exhibited throughout the ritual act. Jesus tells us in Luke 17:10, "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"" To truly take on the mind of Christ, we have to learn to do what is very foreign to us, lay down our pride and learn to serve each other by way of Christ. In a profound way we are doing this with the first steppingstones of a calling to a duty to minor orders. There is no glory in this service and the act of submission to the Bishop was a visible example of this. John Chrysostom, commenting on this passage by way of his homily on Genesis states, "Dearly beloved, see how the person with his mouth open for human glory and performing the works of virtue on that account has no benefit from it. Despite practicing every example of virtue, if he seems to give himself credit for it, he ends up empty-handed and bereaved of everything." Let us all fill our hands with every act of virtue through participation in good works of service with the Holy Spirit.



Reflection by Subdeacon David Bratnick

At the end of October and the beginning of November, our Byzantine Catholic communities in Colorado were blessed to receive a visit from our shepherd, Bishop Artur Bubnevych. His days with us were filled with joyous liturgical celebrations, beginning with the feast of our beloved Ruthenian martyr, Blessed Theodore Romzha, and concluding with two ordinations to the subdiaconate - Damian Giunta for the parish of Holy Protection in Denver, and myself for the outreach in Fort Collins.

A particular moment of grace from my own ordination occurred when the bishop laid his hands upon my head to ordain me to the minor order of subdiaconate. From the moment of my birth, I have been spiritually connected with Blessed Romzha, as my parents and family prayed to him when I was born premature. Ever since then, I have no doubt that he has helped guide my life and my vocation to serve Christ and His Church. I've been fortunate enough to visit his tomb on multiple occasions in Uzhhorod; however, during that moment of ordination, I felt closer to him than ever before. It truly felt as though I was flanked; on my left by the Mother of God, and on my right by Blessed Theodore.

As I stood for the remainder of the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy in front of the icon of Christ, all I could think (besides the fact that my hands were cramping from holding the pitcher of water) was how deeply in awe I was of the goodness of our Lord and of the ways He is always faithful to His beloved children, often in mysterious ways. I feel so blessed to have this wonderful life and vocational journey, and I am continually grateful to the Lord for His ceaseless love and abundant blessings. I join Blessed Theodore Romzha in proclaiming, "I love you, O Lord, my strength; you are my stronghold and my refuge!"

I humbly ask that you keep myself and our growing community of Fort Collins, Colorado in your prayers!



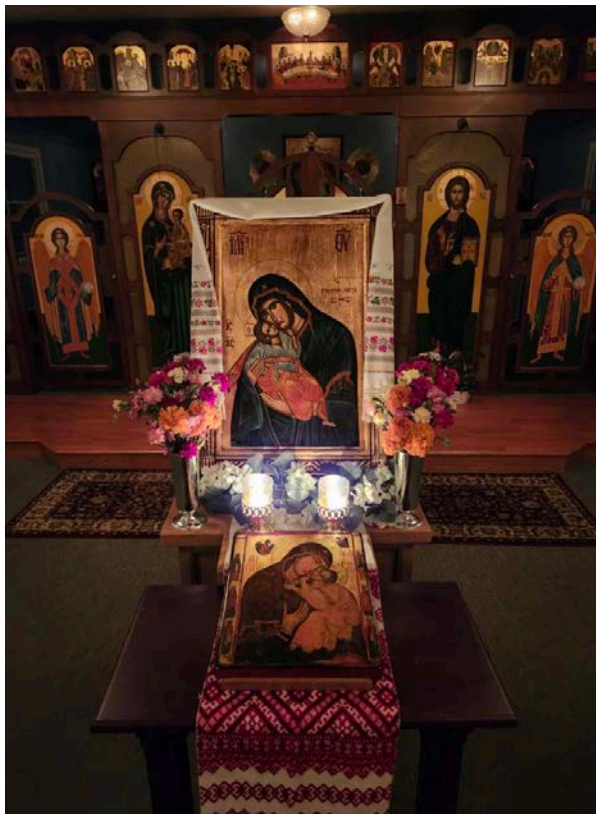
More News from Around the Eparchy

St. Basil in Los Gatos

Atkathist for Young Adults

Akathist for Young Adults: An Akathist to the Theotokos was celebrated at St. Basil's, Los Gatos, CA, with a group of young adults, most visiting from Santa Clara University. A light supper and fellowship took place in the hall after the Akathist. Cal Haynes coordinated this outreach to young adults.





A Day of Recollection and Prayer

Themed: "The Lord is Near!" A Day of recollection and prayer was held at St. Basil's, Los Gatos, , CA, on Saturday, Nov. 22nd. Forty three persons attended the day which began with a Divine Liturgy. There were two talks given: the first talk was by Fr. Michael Pintacura, on the Nearness of God in Prayer; the second talk was by Fr. Anthony Hernandez on preparing for the coming of Christ at the end of our life and on the Last Day. Christina Chan and Noel Jacuban prepared both breakfast and lunch for attendees. Michael Norleen and Art Hernandez helped with event activities. Cal Haynes participated as the reader and Phillip Williams as chanter.





St. Thomas the Apostle in Gilbert, AZ

On November 22, St. Thomas the Apostle in Gilbert made its debut in the annual Gilbert Days Parade. Parishioners worked tirelessly to construct a replica float of St. Thomas, complete with Fr. Adam Lowe alongside and our cantors chanting Nativity blessings through speakers to the onlookers, and St. Nicholas himself (with a helpful loan from the cathedral for his vestments) leading the procession. Parishioners handed out invitations to visit St. Thomas (just down the street from the parade) where hot chocolate and nativity displays greeted visitors in the Hall, and tours of the church were given. Divine Liturgy was celebrated at noon to cap the morning and give glory to God for helping our parish bring joy, light, and the message of Christ to the community.



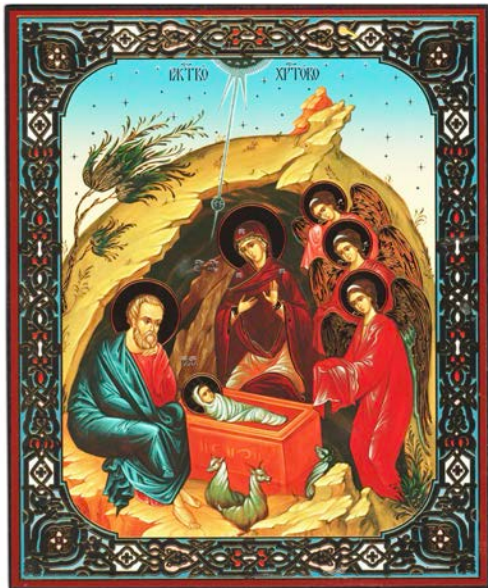
About the Christmas Icon

By Father Christopher Zugger

All icons are filled with rich symbolism from the colors to the position of the people, to the backgrounds. The Nativity icons are no exception. Our Lady rests on the large traveling blanket in which she rode, slung along the side of the donkey while traveling to Bethlehem. She is in robes of **blue** (for her humanity) and **red** (for the divinity of Jesus). The Infant Jesus is wrapped in **swaddling clothes** which also **prefigure the wrapping of the linens around His dead body** after the crucifixion, set against the darkness of the cave, which also represents the tomb He will be laid in.

The **ox and donkey** fulfill the **prophecy of Isaiah 1:3**: the animals recognize their true Master, and they also represent **the union of Israel (donkey) and the Gentiles (ox)** in Christ. The **Magi** are shown **traveling toward Bethlehem**, while the **shepherds come to worship** the newborn King of the Jews.

The **angels** who appeared to the shepherds are shown above them. Sometimes Saint **Joseph is off to the side**, pondering the great mystery, while a figure who is really Satan tries – unsuccessfully - to tempt him. In other icons, Joseph is next to Mary, both adoring Jesus while protecting Him. The **cave is the gift of the earth** to its redeemer. **Midwives** are sometimes shown, washing the Infant, to show His humanity, but Jesus' halo with the **Divine Name** remains intact to show His divinity.





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Upcoming Events



ByzanTeen Youth Rally Registration Opens in January

Early registration for the ByzanTEEN Youth Rally 2026, happening July 9-12, 2026, in Cleveland, Ohio, **opens in January 2026**, with an "Early Bird" discount for registrations completed before April 1st. You can find details and the registration link in the January newsletter and online at ephx.org when registration opens.

Key Details:

- **When:** July 9–12, 2026.
 - **Where:** John Carroll University, Cleveland, Ohio.
 - **Who:** Eastern Catholic teens, ages 13-18.
 - **Early Bird Deadline:** Before April 1, 2026.
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Bishop Artur to concelebrate Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at St. Joseph Maronite Church

On **Saturday, January 17th 2026**, [St. Joseph Maronite Church](#) in Phoenix (just west of Scottsdale) has invited our Ruthenian Church to celebrate a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy commemorating St. Sharbel and the 10th Anniversary of the miraculous healing of a woman healed of blindness. A large relic of St. Sharbel is being brought from Lebanon for veneration. **The Hierarchical Divine Liturgy will be at 11:00 a.m.** All are welcome to come and participate in the Divine Liturgy, commemorate St. Sharbel and venerate his relic. St. Sharbel pray for us!

About Saint Sharbel

Saint Sharbel (sometimes called Charbel) was born in Lebanon on May 8, 1828 and died on December 24, 1898. He became a Maronite hermit monk and gained a reputation for holiness due to his devotion to the Holy Eucharist & the Blessed Mother.

He is known as a miracle worker for the many healings attributed to his intercession. One of those miracles occurred right here at the Shrine of Saint Charbel in Phoenix: [here is the story](#).

He is the patron saint of Lebanon: his feast day is celebrated on the third Sunday in July (Maronite Calendar); or July 24 (Roman Calendar).

About the Shrine of Saint Charbel at St. Joseph Maronite Church in Phoenix:

St Joseph's erected a large Shrine to St Sharbel that was dedicated by His Excellency A Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon Los Angeles on March 26, 2017.

NOTE: This is obviously most relevant to those local to the area with parishioners who would be most likely to attend, [please let them know about this](#). To those in areas further away, it may still be of interest depending on any potential travel plans that might bring them close, devotion to St. Sharbel, the activity of our bishop. We will share information, when available, regarding the travel of the large relic of St. Sharbel in the western states.



The Byzantine Catholic
Eparchy of Phoenix
Bishop Artur Bubnevych

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