

Dormition of the Mother of God

Sunday, January 4, 2026

"Sunday before Theophany"

Reflections for this Weekend

The Gospel is not merely an introduction to John the Baptist; it is a revelation of how God approaches the human heart.

The voice crying out in the wilderness does not shout from the centers of power or comfort, but from a place of barrenness and silence. Spiritually, the wilderness is where God speaks most clearly, because there the soul is no longer distracted by illusions of self-sufficiency.

The Gospel calls us to live repentance not as a moment, but as a way of life.

The wilderness where John proclaims the message is not only a physical place; it is the interior space we must intentionally enter today. Practically, this means creating silence in our lives, stepping back from constant noise, media, and busyness, so that we can hear God's truth about who we are and who we are called to become.

Repentance begins when we honestly examine our hearts and allow God to reveal what needs to change.

John's simplicity challenges us to live with greater interior freedom. In daily life, this may mean letting go of habits, attachments, or attitudes that distract us from God: resentment that hardens the heart, pride that refuses correction, or comforts that dull our spiritual hunger.

Repentance becomes real when it leads to concrete actions, seeking forgiveness, repairing relationships, practicing generosity, and choosing humility over self-justification.

John's warning to the religious leaders reminds us that faith cannot be reduced to outward practices alone. Bearing fruit worthy of repentance means allowing the Gospel to shape how we speak, work, and treat others.

We live this passage today when prayer leads to patience, when worship leads to mercy, and when belief leads to love expressed in action, especially toward those who are weak or overlooked.

Finally, John points us to Christ, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. Practically, this calls us to openness, to daily prayer asking the Spirit to purify our intentions, strengthen us against sin, and ignite love within us. When we welcome this transforming fire, repentance becomes not a burden but a path to freedom.

The Gospel is lived today when our lives show that God's kingdom is near, through hearts continually turning toward Him and lives bearing fruit for others.

The Divine Liturgy: Where Eternity Touches Time

In the Eastern Christian consciousness, the Divine Liturgy is not an event that *happens* during the week; it is a **revelation of reality as it truly is**. It is the moment when the veil between the visible and invisible is drawn back, and the Church on earth stands within the worship of heaven. The faithful do not gather merely to remember Christ, nor simply to receive instruction or moral encouragement. They gather to **enter the Kingdom**, already present but not yet fully revealed.

This is why Eastern liturgical texts speak without hesitation of angels surrounding the altar, of heaven opened, of the Holy Spirit descending *“upon us and upon these gifts here offered.”*

The Divine Liturgy is not symbolic theater. It is sacramental participation in the eternal offering of Christ to the Father. What occurs is not confined to human comprehension or linguistic clarity; it transcends them.

In this vision, the stability of the Divine Liturgy does not lie in external forms alone, but in its **unchanging inner orientation**: Christ offering Himself, the Father receiving the offering, and the Holy Spirit transforming both the gifts and the people. This inner reality remains the same whether the prayers are spoken in Greek, Slavonic, Ukrainian, Arabic, English, or any other tongue. Language, therefore, is not the essence of the Liturgy, it is the **clothing** of the mystery.

Language, Survival, and the Church in Exile:

For many generations in Ukraine, the liturgical language of the Church was **Church Slavonic**. This was not merely a preference, nor a refusal of change, but a historical and spiritual inheritance shared by the Kyivan Church with the broader Slavic Christian world. Church Slavonic functioned as a sacred, trans-ethnic language, one that bound Ukrainians, Belarusians, Bulgarians, Serbs, and others into a common spiritual civilization shaped by Byzantium and sanctified by martyrdom.

Over time, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the **Ukrainian language** itself began to be used more widely in preaching, catechesis, paraliturgical services, and eventually in parts of the liturgy. This movement was not driven by modern ideology but by a pastoral desire: that the faithful might pray with greater understanding and that the Church might support the dignity of a people whose language was often suppressed politically and culturally.

In Ukraine, language change was therefore **organic and communal**, unfolding slowly within the life of the people themselves. Ukrainian replaced Church Slavonic not as a rejection of tradition, but as an expression of survival, resistance, and spiritual self-awareness, especially under imperial and later Soviet oppression. The Church became one of the last places where Ukrainian identity could breathe.

The American Context: A Church in Survival Mode

When Ukrainian Catholics arrived in the United States in large numbers, especially between

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the late nineteenth century and the post–World War II period, they did not come as confident cultural ambassadors. They came as **wounded survivors**: peasants, laborers, refugees, displaced persons, and later political exiles.

For them, the Church was not simply a place of worship. It was:

- * the keeper of memory,
- * the guardian of language,
- * the protector of faith against assimilation,

and often the only institution that did not demand they forget who they were.

In this context, preserving **Church Slavonic first**, and later **Ukrainian**, became an act of spiritual and cultural self-defense. The parish hall, the choir, the Liturgy, and the calendar of feasts formed a sacred ecosystem that resisted the silent pressure to disappear into the American melting pot.

This is why Ukrainian gradually replaced Church Slavonic in many parishes in the U.S. **especially in the mid-20th century**, and more decisively **after the Second Vatican Council (1960s)**, when the Catholic Church explicitly encouraged the use of vernacular languages for deeper participation. Yet even this change was painful and contested. What had taken centuries in the homeland was compressed into decades in exile.

Why English Was (and Often Still Is) Harder to Accept

A question naturally arises:

Why was Ukrainian defended so fiercely in church, even when children and grandchildren already spoke English at home?

The answer is not contradiction, it is **symbolism**.

At home, language serves survival in society. Children must succeed, integrate, and communicate. English becomes unavoidable and necessary. But the Church was expected to be the one place where **loss did not continue**, where something was still intact.

For many Ukrainian Catholics in America, English represented not neutrality, but **finality**, the last step toward disappearance. If English entered the Liturgy fully, what would remain uniquely Ukrainian? What would distinguish the parish from any other Catholic church down the street? More painfully: ***what would justify the sacrifices of parents and grandparents who carried the faith across oceans?***

Thus, Ukrainian in the Church was not merely about comprehension. It was about **continuity**. It assured the faithful that their children might be American citizens, but their souls were still rooted in a history sanctified by suffering, persecution, underground worship, and martyrdom.

The Church as Ark, Not Museum

Here lies a crucial theological insight.

In the diaspora, the Church unconsciously shifts into **survival mode**. Like Noah's Ark, it

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becomes a vessel carrying what might otherwise be lost forever. In such moments, preservation feels like holiness, and change feels like betrayal, even when change is pastorally justified. But an ark is meant to **preserve life**, not freeze it.

When survival mode becomes permanent, the Church risks confusing *means* with *ends*. Language, customs, and structures meant to protect faith can slowly replace the living encounter with Christ. The Church then begins to guard identity more than it proclaims the Gospel.

This tension is especially acute for Ukrainian Catholic parishes in the U.S., which carry the trauma of historical attempts to erase them, politically, ecclesially, and culturally. Their caution is understandable. Their fear is real. Their attachment is born of love, not obstinacy.

The Deeper Theological Challenge

The Gospel, however, places before the Church a difficult but necessary discernment:

What must be preserved so that the faith survives, and what must change so that it can be handed on?

The Divine Liturgy is not Ukrainian because it is said in Ukrainian. It is Ukrainian because it expresses the Kyivan spiritual vision: its theology, chant, structure, gestures, and sense of mystery. These can survive in any language if the Church has the courage to teach, accompany, and trust the Holy Spirit.

English in itself is not the enemy. **Assimilation without memory is**. The true danger is not praying in English, but raising generations who no longer know *why* their Church exists, what she suffered, and what spiritual gift she offers the wider Catholic world.

From Survival to Mission

A Church permanently in survival mode cannot grow. It can only endure. And endurance, while heroic, is not the final calling of the Body of Christ.

The moment comes when preservation must give way to **mission**, not abandoning Ukrainian language or heritage, but integrating them into a living, bilingual or multilingual ecclesial life where memory and future meet.

This transition is painful precisely because it asks the faithful to trust that God can preserve what they love **without freezing it in time**.

When the Church moves, slowly and reverently, from fear to trust, from survival to witness, language becomes once again what it was meant to be:

a servant of the Divine Liturgy, a bearer of memory, and a bridge between generations not a wall.

Only then does the Church remain faithful not merely to her past, but to her calling: to stand, in every land and every tongue, as the living meeting place between heaven and earth.

You are warmly invited to the **Arizona Ukrainian Fest**, a joyful celebration of faith, culture, and community!

Join us on **Saturday, January 10, 2026, from 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM**, as the **Dormition of the Mother of God church** opens its doors and heart to share the beauty of Ukrainian heritage.

Experience the energy and grace of traditional Ukrainian dance, the rich melodies of beloved folk music, and the unforgettable flavors of authentic Ukrainian cuisine. Above all, come and enjoy the warmth of community, hospitality, and shared joy.

This festival is more than an event, it is a living expression of culture, tradition, and togetherness, welcoming families, friends, and guests of all ages.

Come celebrate, connect, and be inspired. We look forward to welcoming you!

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Dear Parishioners,

Following our cherished tradition after the Feast of Theophany (January 6), Fr. Hugo will once again bless the homes of our faithful. If you would like to receive a visit for prayer and the blessing of your home, please contact him by email, by phone, or in person to arrange a convenient time.

The Blessing of Homes after Theophany is a very ancient and deeply theological tradition of the Church. Rooted in the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan, it proclaims that all creation is renewed and sanctified by the manifestation of the Holy Trinity. When Christ enters the waters, He restores the world, revealing that nothing in human life is outside God's saving presence, not even our homes, daily routines, and ordinary spaces.

Through the blessing with holy water, the Church prays that God's grace may dwell in the home, driving away every influence of evil, bringing peace, protection, healing, and unity to all who live there. The home becomes a "little church," a place where faith is lived daily, where love is nurtured, and where Christ Himself is welcomed as a guest and Lord.

This blessing is not a mere custom or formality. It is an act of faith, a confession that our lives belong to God, and that we desire His presence in every aspect of our family life.

By inviting the priest, we invite Christ to abide with us, to bless our work, our relationships, our joys, and our struggles throughout the year.

We encourage all parishioners to continue this holy and meaningful tradition. May the light of Theophany shine upon your homes, and may the blessing of God remain with you and your loved ones always.



January 10th 2026

11am to 7pm

Featured Performers



Inna Kovtun



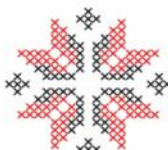
Nicholas Novi with
Roman Flye and Hans-Leo Teuling



Vydelka



Uz Zub



UKRAINIAN THEATER OF ARIZONA

And Many More:

AriZori

Lindsey Bohn

Namytso

Mr. & Mrs. Laschuck

Location: 3720 W Maryland Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85019

www.arizonaukrainianfest.com

Ukrainian Catholic Parish
Pastor
Very Rev. Hugo Soutus
Address:
3720 West Maryland Ave.
Phoenix, AZ. 85019
Rectory: (602) 973-3667
Parish: (602) 347-9267
Emergency:
602-329-3281

E-mail:
DMofGod@cox.net

Website:
www.Ukrainianchurch.org

Sunday Divine Liturgy:
8:50 a.m. The Third Hour
And
Prayer Service for Peace in
Ukraine.
9:30a.m. Divine Liturgy

Religious Education
September - May

Sacraments Penance:
Sunday before Liturgies
or by appointment

Baptism - Matrimony
In most instances
six-month membership
required

Funerals
Membership of an
immediate family member
required

**Communion to the
Homebound**
If you or your family
members are confined to a
health center or are
homebound, please contact
Fr. Hugo directly so that
arrangements can be made
for his visitation.

Sunday, January 4

"Sunday before Theophany"

"The Synaxis of the Seventy Holy Apostles"

Epistle: 2 Timothy 4:5-8. **Gospel:** Mark 1:1-8.

8:50 a.m. The Third Hour and Prayer Service for Peace in Ukraine
9:30 a.m. Gods blessings and good health for all our parishioners and friends
In loving memory of + **Olga Skrypoczka** from family

Monday, January 5

"The Holy Martyr Theopemptus and Theonas"

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27. **Gospel:** Luke 3:1-18.

Tuesday, January 6

"The Holy Theophany of Our Lord"

Epistle: Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7. **Gospel:** Matthew 3:13-17.

9:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy and blessing of the Water

6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom

Wednesday, January 7

"The Synaxis of the Holy Prophet John the Baptist"

Epistle: Acts 19:1-8. **Gospel:** John 1:29-34.

Thursday, January 8

"Our Venerable Father George the Chosebite"

Epistle: James 1:19-27 **Gospel:** Mark 10:17-27

6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom

Friday, January 9

"The Holy Martyr Polyeuctus"

Epistle: James 2:1-13 **Gospel:** Mark 10:23-32

Saturday, January 10

"Saturday after Theophany"

"Our Holy Father Gregory, bishop of Nyssa"

Epistle: Ephesians 6:10-17. **Gospel:** Matthew 4:1-11.

10:00 a. m. Divine Liturgy

3:00 p.m. Prayer Service for Peace in Ukraine

6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom

Sunday, January 11

"Sunday after Theophany"

"Our Venerable Father Theodosius"

Epistle: Ephesians 4:7-13. **Gospel:** Matthew 4:12-17.

8:50 a.m. The Third Hour and Prayer Service for Peace in Ukraine
9:30 a.m. Gods blessings and good health for all our parishioners and friends