

Reflections for this Weekend

Matthew's account of the flight into Egypt and the return to Nazareth draws us into a Gospel shaped by danger, obedience, and hidden faithfulness, realities deeply familiar to the Eastern Christian experience of salvation lived in mystery rather than spectacle. The Child revealed as King is immediately rejected by the powers of this world. From the very beginning, Christ's life unfolds as a confrontation between God's kenotic, self-emptying love and the anxious grasp of human fear. Salvation enters history quietly, almost unnoticed, yet its very presence unsettles every power built on control and violence.

Joseph again receives God's word in a dream, and again he responds without hesitation. In the Eastern tradition, dreams are not escapes from reality but moments where the veil is thinned and God's will is disclosed to the attentive heart. Joseph speaks no words; his faith is embodied in movement and sacrifice. He rises in the night, gathers the Child and His mother, and abandons stability, plans, and reputation. Here we encounter true righteousness, not legal correctness, but synergy with God's will. Joseph teaches us that obedience often means displacement, that faith may require leaving what is familiar in order to guard life when it is most vulnerable. Holiness is revealed not in control, but in trustful readiness to move when God calls.

The massacre of the innocents confronts us with the unbearable weight of human cruelty. Matthew does not explain it away, nor does he offer a neat theological answer. Instead, he allows the lament of Rachel to be heard, the ancient cry of Israel rising once more. In Eastern theology, God does not redeem the world by standing above suffering, but by entering it fully. The presence of Christ does not magically erase violence; rather, God chooses to bear its wounds from within. The innocent children of Bethlehem are not forgotten victims. They are the first martyrs of the New Covenant, their blood mingled with the mystery of Christ's own offering. Their suffering is named before God and gathered into His redemptive compassion. Egypt, once the land of slavery, becomes a place of refuge. This reversal reveals the deep logic of salvation history: God is never bound by a place's past. Christ recapitulates Israel's story, entering exile so that exile itself may be healed. What was once a symbol of oppression becomes a shelter of life. In this, we learn that no land, no memory, no wound is beyond transformation when God is present. Salvation is not an escape from history but its transfiguration.

The return from Egypt is careful and discerning. Herod's death does not usher in immediate

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The Courage to Live the Church's True Mission

The mission of the Church flows from the very heart of God, and to understand it rightly we need not only clarity of mind, but kindness of heart. The Church was never meant to be a place of fear or self-preservation, but a living sign of God's tender love for the world.

She exists to proclaim, embody, and share the Good News of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom not built on power or nostalgia, but on mercy, truth, and self-giving love.

It is easy, especially in uncertain times, to slip into the temptation of survival. When culture shifts and familiar supports seem fragile, the Church can be misunderstood as a refuge meant to protect what is "ours": our customs, our language, our memories, or our sense of belonging.

These things are not unimportant; they carry history, sacrifice, and faith. Yet they are not the reason the Church exists. They are gifts meant to serve the Gospel, not replace it. When preservation becomes our primary goal, the Church risks turning inward, slowly forgetting that her deepest identity is missionary.

Christ did not establish the Church to safeguard a way of life, but to offer new life. He entrusted His disciples with a message meant for the whole world, a message capable of reaching every heart in every culture. The Kingdom of God is not confined to one people, one nation or one expression; it is wide enough to embrace all, and gentle enough to meet each person where they are. This truth calls the Church to courage, but it is a courage shaped by humility and compassion, not by anxiety or defensiveness.

To live the Church's mission is to believe that love is stronger than fear. It means trusting that the Gospel does not need to be protected as though it were fragile but lived as something alive and powerful. The early Christians had no guarantees of survival, no cultural dominance, and often no safety, yet they changed the world through acts of mercy, radical forgiveness, and joyful witness. They did not cling to security; they clung to Christ.

The Church brings the Good News of the Kingdom not only through preaching, but through presence. She does so when she listens patiently, when she welcomes those who feel unworthy or unseen, when she accompanies people in their pain without rushing to judge or control.

In these moments, the Kingdom becomes visible. The Church becomes a place of

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peace, and the Holy Family settles instead in Nazareth, a town of no importance, carrying no prestige. This is the quiet wisdom of God. Divine purposes unfold not in imperial centers, but in obscurity. Nazareth becomes the hidden garden where the Word grows in silence.

The Eastern spiritual tradition recognizes a life formed in stillness, where faithfulness is cultivated through ordinary days rather than public triumphs. Holiness matures in places the world overlooks.

Matthew 2:13–23 reveals a God who guards life through humble obedience and who walks with humanity through fear, loss, and uncertainty. It assures us that God is active even when His presence seems concealed, even when evil appears loud and victorious. The Child preserved through exile will one day face death freely, not as a victim of fear, but as the Way who transforms violence into the path of resurrection.

This passage invites us to trust that God's purposes are not undone by displacement, grief, or obscurity. Christ is with those who flee, those who mourn, and those who dwell quietly in forgotten places. In the hidden years of Nazareth and the tears of Bethlehem, we learn that God's saving love is already at work silently preparing resurrection precisely where hope seems most fragile.



As we step into the New Year 2026, I want to extend to each of you my heartfelt prayers and pastoral blessing. With deep affection and gratitude, I thank God for your lives, your faith, and the love you share so generously with one another and with our parish family.

May this New Year be a time when you feel the nearness of God in a very personal way. I pray that the Lord will walk before you to guide your steps, remain beside you to strengthen you, and dwell within you to grant you peace. May He protect you from all harm, guard your homes, and surround you and your loved ones with His holy angels throughout the days ahead. I ask the Lord to bless your families with unity, your hearts with hope, and your labors with meaning. In moments of joy, may you recognize God's gift; in moments of difficulty, may you never doubt His presence. May Christ, our Light and our Peace, heal what is wounded, strengthen what is weary, and renew your spirit with courage and trust.

As your pastor, I carry each of you in my prayers. I entrust you and your loved ones to the loving care of our merciful God, confident that His grace will be sufficient for every need in the year to come. May 2026 be filled with faith that deepens, love that grows, and peace that rests gently in your hearts.

With paternal love and every blessing in Christ,

Fr. Hugo

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healing rather than exclusion, of hope rather than nostalgia, of encounter rather than fear.

This mission also asks something deeply personal of each believer. It invites us to examine our own hearts and ask what we are protecting and why.

Are we guarding the Gospel so it may be shared, or guarding ourselves from being changed by it?

The Kingdom of God always transforms those who truly welcome it. It softens our certainties, widens our compassion, and calls us beyond what is comfortable into what is life-giving.

When the Church understands herself as sent rather than sheltered, she becomes radiant.

Her traditions shine with new meaning, her worship becomes an invitation, and her teachings are received as paths to freedom rather than barriers to belonging.

The Church does not lose her identity by opening her doors; she fulfills it. She becomes what she has always been called to be: a mother who gathers her children, a field hospital for the wounded, a lamp set on a stand for all to see.

To choose mission over survival is not to abandon the past, but to allow it to bear fruit in the present. It is to honor those who came before us by carrying forward the faith they loved not as a relic to be defended, but as a living flame meant to be shared.

With kindness, patience, and courage, the Church continues her true work: announcing to a weary world that the Kingdom of God is near, that love has the final word, and that every person is invited to enter and find life.



Thank You!!!

With sincere love and gratitude, we thank all who sent Christmas cards, warm wishes, and thoughtful gifts. Your kindness and generosity truly touched our hearts and brought great joy during this holy season. Each gesture, whether small or great, was a beautiful expression of love and care, and it is deeply appreciated.

**Thank you for your generous financial donation to help maintain our church.
Your support sustains our parish and allows us to continue serving God and
our community.**

May the Lord bless you abundantly and repay your generosity a hundredfold.



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Inna Kovtun



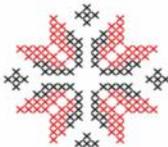
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Ukrainian Catholic Parish**Pastor****Very Rev. Hugo Soutus****Address:****3720 West Maryland Ave.****Phoenix, AZ. 85019****Rectory: (602) 973-3667****Parish: (602) 347-9267****Emergency:****602-329-3281****E-mail:****DMofGod@cox.net****Website:****www.Ukrainianchurch.org****Sunday 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, December 28**“Sunday after Nativity”****Epistle: Galatians 1:11-19. Gospel: Matthew 2:13-23.****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 +Hanna and +Vasyl Bashta from family****Monday, December 29****The Holy Children, Who Were Murdered by Herod in Bethlehem”****Epistle: Hebrews 8:17-13. Gospel: Mark 10:46-52****Tuesday, December 30****“The Holy Martyr Anysia”****Epistle: Hebrews 9:8-10, 15-23. Gospel: Mark 11:11-23****6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom****Wednesday, December 31****“Our Venerable Mother Melania the Roman”****Epistle: Hebrews 10:1-18. Gospel: Mark 11:22-26****Thursday, January 1****“The Circumcision of Our Lord”****“Our Father Among the Saints Basil the Great”****Epistle: Colossians 2:8-12. Gospel: Luke 2:20-21; 40-52.****9:30 am For Edward Walson, that God may grant him His blessings and protection, at the intention of the Soutus family.****6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom****Friday, January 2****“Our Holy Father Sylvester, Pope of Rome”****Epistle: Hebrews 11:8, 11-16. Gospel: Mark 12:1-12****Saturday, January 3****“Saturday before Theophany”****“The Holy Prophet Malachi”****Epistle: 1 Timothy 3:14-4:5. Gospel: Matthew 3:1-11.****6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom****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**