

# THE NEW WITNESS TO THE ANCIENT FAITH

A Newsletter of St. Elizabeth Orthodox Church



JANUARY 2024



## *Glory to Jesus Christ!*

This month, we celebrate the Circumcision of Christ on January 1<sup>st</sup>, and later we complete our liturgical

celebration of the incarnation of Christ with the blessing of waters and Holy Theophany on January 6<sup>th</sup>.

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*When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest: for the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, and called Thee His Beloved Son; and the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of His Word. O Christ our God, who hast revealed Thyself and hast enlightened the world, glory to Thee!*

*Today Thou has appeared to the universe, and Thy light, O Lord, hast shone on us who with understanding praise thee; Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, O unapproachable Light.\**

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\* Troparion and Kontakion of Holy Theophany

## Parish Life & Announcements

### Camilla Athanasia Dirks

Our beloved sister in Christ Camilla Athanasia Dirks reposed in the Lord on Christmas Day. We served the funeral service for her on Saturday, December 30<sup>th</sup>, and her ninth-day panikhida will be served at 6:00 p.m. prior to Vespers on Wednesday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>. The fortieth-day panikhida will be served on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. May our Lord make her memory eternal!

Among her many beautiful contributions to our parish, Camilla left us with two beautiful embroideries which have adorned our parish and enriched our worship since she made them by hand many years ago. One (from which the Gospel is read every Sunday, and which took Camilla years to make) is pictured above; the other (designed to lie beneath our icon of Saint Elizabeth) is pictured on the following page.

At the end of this newsletter you can find a narrative of the creation, inspiration, and symbolism of Camilla's beautiful embroideries for our parish, written by Jeanie Murphy in 2012.

## Annual Parish Assembly

Our annual parish assembly is scheduled for Sunday, January 28<sup>th</sup> from 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. During the course of the assembly, our usual brunch with coffee will be provided. This is an important annual event in the life of our parish community and all members of the parish should plan to attend.

## Nominations for Parish Council

At our annual parish assembly we will be electing a new member of the parish council, to replace Nancy Conrad, who has reached a term limit according to our parish bylaws. We are very grateful for Nancy's tireless work on many things, especially her work as treasurer (which the council hopes will continue even when she is not a member). To replace her, the council has selected a

nominee. Parishioners are welcome to make nominations from the floor, but it is important to ask Fr. John for a blessing to nominate someone in advance. Please see Fr. John if you would like to do so.

## Annual Diocesan Assembly

We will also nominate a lay delegate to attend the annual diocesan assembly in October. That event will be held at Holy Annunciation Church in Milwaukie, Oregon.

## Parish Financial Plan for 2024 & Ongoing Tithe Commitment Appeal

During the month of January, we will complete our call for pledges for the parish's financial plan for the year ahead. Pledge forms were distributed by email and in print



form, and Nancy Conrad and Fr. John are available if you have questions about how to make a pledge. Tithe forms also may be found on the table in front of the tithe box. You can email Nancy Conrad directly with your tithe commitment at [nancyjuno53@gmail.com](mailto:nancyjuno53@gmail.com).

As a reminder, the Council needs time after receiving everyone's tithe commitments in order to modify the budget accordingly before our annual assembly. Therefore, if you could submit your commitment by Theophany (January 6<sup>th</sup>), we would greatly appreciate it!

We understand that not everyone is comfortable making a tithe commitment and that is ok. As with all contributions, tithe commitments are confidential with the exception of the rector and treasurer.

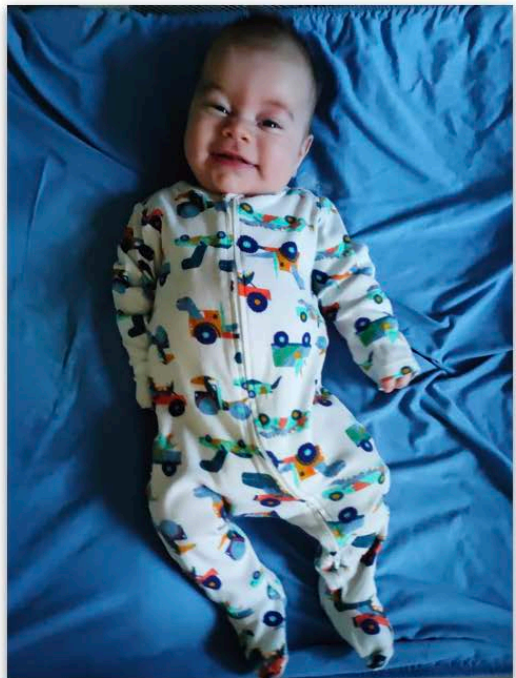
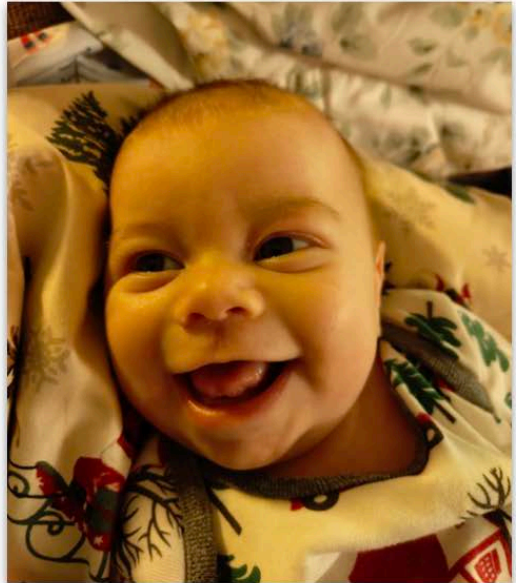
## Charity Totals for 2023

Thanks to your generous donations, we were able to raise a grand total of \$14,220.45 during our Charity Sundays in 2023—nearly triple our charity totals for 2022. A breakdown of the individual charity totals is provided below:

- St. Elizabeth Internal Charity: \$2,747.00
- St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund: \$2,490.00
- Alaska Clergy Stipend Fund: \$5,027.00
- Kitsap Homes of Compassion: \$2,604.40
- International Orthodox Christian Charities: \$1,352.05

## Baptism of Arthur Lee

Arthur Lee, son of Alexander and Jordyn, is now scheduled to be baptized on Sunday, January 14<sup>th</sup> immediately before the Divine Liturgy. Archie was born November 3<sup>rd</sup> in Tacoma. Everyone should plan to attend this important parish event.



## Angel Tree Christmas

Thank you to all who participated in the Angel Tree program administered through Prison Fellowship. Together we provided presents to 16 children in seven different families in our community. This seemed to be a program that many parish members enjoyed and hopefully next year we can provide for more children in our area.

## Underwear & Sock Drive

Another thank you to those who participated in our underwear and sock drive. We were able to fill up our bin and the donated items will be delivered early next week to those in need.

## Homeless Care Kits

We have enough donated items to begin our bag assembly. A table will be set up during the month of January to assemble the kits. Stay tuned for more information.

## Barrel Vault Iconography

We hope to have a sketch depicting the planned iconographical program for our barrel vault by the middle of the month of January. Pledges are still being invited for its completion.

So far, we have received donations for about a half of the cost of this project—\$17,371 out of \$35,100. We hope to raise the remainder (\$17,729) between now and Pascha. Take a look at our vault iconography fundraising poster in the parish hall to see progress toward our goal.

## Men's Fellowship

The men's fellowship group is in the process of picking a new book to read. If you have suggestions, please contact Fr. John. And please join us for our next meetings on Saturday, January 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 a.m.

## Women's Fellowship

The women's fellowship will be meeting on Tuesday, January 9<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. (the second Tuesday of the month, instead of the regular first Tuesday). We will continue with *The Scent of Holiness* by Constantina Palmer. We will read and discuss at the meeting, and will pick up where we left off in Chapter 4.

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## Bookstore News

Thank you everyone for your continued support of the bookstore this December and throughout the year.

In January we will do inventory and restock our shelves. If you have a favorite book that you think would make a great addition to our bookstore, please contact Sheryl Becker at [shabo5@hotmail.com](mailto:shabo5@hotmail.com).

Speaking of books of great impact, how would you like a \$10 bookstore credit? A simple book report for the newsletter would go a long ways in "getting the word out." Have your book review ready? Contact Nancy Conrad at [nancyjuno53@gmail.com](mailto:nancyjuno53@gmail.com).

## Charity Sunday

January 7<sup>th</sup>— After Liturgy we will be collecting for the Alaska Clergy Stipend Endowment of the Diocese of Sitka & Alaska. Donations to the Alaska Clergy Stipend Endowment are seriously needed to remedy impoverished living conditions of clergy in the Diocese of Sitka and Alaska—the root of Orthodoxy in America.

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## Recurring Dates

### Resurrectional Vigil

In addition to our regular Saturday evening Great Vespers services, our parish is now serving the Resurrectional Vigil every first Saturday of the month at 6:00 p.m. This is a beautiful service of great importance to our Orthodox worship, culminating in the proclamation of the eleven Matins gospels from the altar. We would love to increase parish-wide attendance at this important service. This month, the Resurrectional Vigil will be served on Saturday, January 6<sup>th</sup>.

### Vespers & Orthodox Studies

Come pray with your fellow parishioners at vespers, Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m.—and then stay after for a half-hour or so discussing interesting and important topics of our Orthodox faith. This is a particularly good time for introducing family members and acquaintances to the Church. Come with questions for Father John!

## Sunday & Monday Catechesis

Father John continues to teach catechesis every Monday from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Catechesis is also held each Sunday during the second half of the Divine Liturgy—except for the fourth Sunday of each month, when there will be no Sunday catechesis.

### Game Night

Our parish game night is normally held the first Friday of every at 6:30 p.m. However, this month there will be no game night due to scheduling conflicts with the festal vigil for Holy Theophany.

### Choir Practice

The choir meets 30 minutes before each service to warm up and a couple times a month for practice. This month, practices are scheduled for Saturday, January 13<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m.

### Moleben of Healing

Our parish serves a moleben of healing on the first Wednesday of every month at 6:00 p.m. before vespers. However, in January this time will be devoted to the ninth-day panikhida for Camilla Dirks.



*Cross from Camilla's St. Elizabeth embroidery*

## Prayer List

### Departed

ND Camilla Athanasia  
ND Stephen  
ND Daniel

### Living

Pr. Symeon  
Michael  
Allison  
Walter  
Douglas  
Douglas  
Jeff Seraphim  
Rd. Cornelius

*ND: Newly Departed*  
*CSB: Child She Bears*

## Miscellaneous

### Newsletter Submissions

If you would like to submit any materials, announcements, classifieds, or requests for this monthly newsletter, please contact Bryan Telegin at [bulletin@stelizabethorthodox.org](mailto:bulletin@stelizabethorthodox.org).

### Contact Us

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*Christ's baptism is the beginning of our passing over from the desert into the Promised Land. In the illustrated icon of Christ's baptism we see parched red earth to the left, and verdant green to the right.*

—Aidan Hart, *The Theology of the Icon*, in *Beauty · Spirit · Matter—Icons in the Modern World* (2014)

# January 2024 Daily Readings

1/1	2 Tim 4:5-8	Mk 1:1-8
1/2	Heb 12:25-26, 13:22-25	Lk 14:25-35
1/3	James 1:1-18	Lk 15:1-10
1/4	James 1:19-27	Lk 16:1-9
1/5	James 2:1-13	Lk 16:15-18, 17:1-4
1/5	1 Cor 9:19-27	Lk 3:1-18
1/6	Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7	Mt 3:13-17
1/7	<b>Eph 4:7-13</b>	<b>Mt 4:12-17</b>
1/8	James 2:14-26	Lk 17:20-25
1/9	James 3:1-10	Lk 17:26-37
1/10	James 3:11-4:6	Lk 18:15-17, 26-30
1/11	James 4:7-5:9	Lk 18:31-34
1/12	1 Peter 1:1-2, 10-12, 2:6-10	Lk 19:12-28
1/13	1 Thess 5:14-23	Lk 10:19-21
1/14	<b>Eph 6:10-17</b>	<b>Lk 18:35-43</b>
1/15	2 Tim 2:20-26	Lk 19:37-44
1/16	2 Tim 3:16-4:4	Lk 19:45-48
1/17	2 Tim 4:9-22	Lk 20:1-8
1/18	Titus 1:5-2:1	Lk 20:9-18
1/19	Titus 1:15-2:10	Lk 20:19-26
1/20	Eph 1:16-23	Lk 12:32-40
1/21	<b>Col 1:12-18</b>	<b>Mt 22:1-14</b>
1/22	Heb 3:5-11, 17-19	Lk 20:27-44
1/23	Heb 4:1-13	Lk 21:12-19
1/24	Heb 5:11-6:8	Lk 21:5-7, 10-11, 20-24
1/25	Heb 7:1-6	Lk 21:28-33
1/26	Heb 7:18-25	Lk 21:37-22:8
1/27	Eph 2:11-13	Lk 13:18-29
1/28	<b>Col 3:4-11</b>	<b>Mt 22:35-46</b>
1/29	Heb 8:7-13	Mk 8:11-21
1/30	Heb 9:8-10, 15-23	Mk 8:22-26
1/31	Heb 10:1-18	Mk 8:30-34

*Sundays in red.*

<https://www.oca.org/readings/monthly/2024/01>

## **Camilla's Embroidery**

St. Elizabeth's Orthodox Church in Poulsbo is truly fortunate to have an extraordinary craftswoman in its parish, one Camilla Dirks. She has created two cloths—one that lies under the large St. Elizabeth icon and the other that stretches on a frame underneath the Gospels.

### ***Cloths and Embroidery in the Church***

The use of cloths and embroidery is old in Orthodoxy and stretches back even further into antiquity, with evidence dating back to the Iron Age. Embroidery has been found everywhere from Ancient Egypt, to China, Persia, and India. (Aside: Interestingly, the best and earliest preserved sample of Anglo-Saxon or early English embroidery happens to be the 906 burial vestments of my patron, Saint Cuthbert.)

Embroidery was seen everywhere in Byzantium, including the church, with many designs coming from Persia. Geometric and floral patterns were common. Russian Orthodoxy, in turn, has a long tradition of “needle painting,” or embroidery, and stitching was considered a pious activity. This was not just decorative or abstract work. Often it would portray the face. Precious jewels, with gold and silver thread were used, and rich houses had special “light rooms” for women, where up to fifty might work.

Convents were also famed for their embroidery, which consisted of vestments, veils, banners, and even an entire iconostasis! There were special religious meanings for embroidered wedding clothes and towels. Towels were traditionally used to decorate the “red corner” in houses—and later icons were placed there. Towels also had traditional roles in weddings (where they decorated wedding carts and horses) and at funerals.

What differentiated these towels, above all, were the symbols embroidered on them. These symbols are thought to be very old, from the time of the Slavic tribal migrations from Tibet to the Alps. Some of the symbols were common in Indo-European culture, even found at Paleolithic sites, such as the circle and rose solar symbols. A special towel for the Russian bread and salt ritual is believed to derive from pre-Christian Slavic worship but has since been “baptized” Orthodox.

In other words, Camilla is part of a very long tradition!

### ***The St. Elizabeth Cloth***

Camilla uses no patterns and credits her work to the inspiration of the Theotokos. Getting her work done takes so long, she notes, because she waits for suggestions before stitching. And she never tears anything out!

Here is a photo of the cloth (thanks to Steve Murphy for the photography):





The St. Elizabeth cloth complements the traditional colors in the icon of St. Elizabeth—the grays and light blue of her robe. In fact, the large blue hexagon with the gold colored crosses in the middle is meant to function as a sort of reflection of the saint, directing our attention back to her icon. Also, the gold crosses remind us of the light of illumination.

The bottom of each side of the cloth mirrors the other, enforcing the idea of *reflection*, both literally and spiritually. (Consider how an icon reflects sanctity and how we should reflect Christ.) While mirrors can have negative connotations, they also need light to function, hinting at the need for illumination. The mirroring of images also adds repetition, as when we repeat a prayer. Finally, it portrays balance and symmetry.

At the bottom of each side is a row of trees, representing life, and on the each side of the three rows are candlesticks, more symbolism of the illumination of Christ.

### ***The Gospels Cloth: The Ladder of Divine Ascent***

The gospel cloth took Camilla a few *years* to make.

It is set on the stand that holds the Gospels that are read at liturgies. The cloth is a light beige muslin bordered with black velvet. Camilla noted that she couldn't find anything for the binding that looked right and then at a store heard a voice that said, "No, take a look." She feels this was the Theotokos speaking to her, saying, "There is something there. You haven't seen it." And there was, standing in a corner, and Camilla knew it was perfect.

Here are two photos of the Gospels cloth:



*One half of the Gospels cloth*



*Other half of the Gospels cloth*

Inspired by the Ladder of Divine Ascent, the cloth presents two images of the ladder, with one side, again, mirroring the other. Camilla notes that the cloth is the story of a journey, one that we take as we come into the Church and live our life in it.

### ***The Portal***

At the base of the ladder is a stone portal. The blue border under the portal seems to reflect the pervasive presence of the Theotokos, the Queen of the Heavens, whose color is so often blue, her cloak our sky.<sup>1</sup> Undergirded by this heavenly presence, the portal shifts in color, into steps, from the dark brown at the base, to lighter and

<sup>1</sup>There is, of course, disagreement about what colors mean, but many weigh in with blue being associated with the Mother of God. For example, vestments are blue for the Dormition feast. Some seem to think that she is often clothed in blue because it is the color of humanity; however, I could not find reliable information confirming this.

lighter colors with a vivid row of purple near the top.

Camilla sees the brown as an entry way from the street through the gates toward the temple, representing the foundation of the Church. Lines of light embroidery seem to mark bricks as part of the foundation. These may reflect the order that Camilla says we come into when we enter the Church. She also reminds us that we all come in from the outside; everyone has to enter here (I think of John 14:6—“No one comes to the Father except through me.”)

### ***The Vines***

In between the columns, in the middle of the cloth green vines twist up in a beautiful symmetry, showing the ascent of souls, with flowers, diamonds, and crosses. The different colors represent women (yellow) and men (blue). Note the flowers and hexagonal patterns, as well as the crosses, all ancient symbols of life. The multicolor diamonds, Camilla notes, represent souls losing their attachments as they ascend. The green lines curve in graceful loops and then suddenly zoom straight upward as they encounter yellow streams of light, the basic relationship of the plant and the life giving sun.

The vine, of course, speaks to us of Christ as the True Vine through whom we live and have our being. I love the idea of the ladder of ascent being a vine (and it brings back strange images of Jack climbing up to the giant!) I don't think this is a facetious way to look at it—the idea of a vine as a ladder up into the heavens seems to be a very old one.

### ***The Columns***

Passing through the gates on the sides that guard the temple, and the vine, we encounter vibrant columns that rise up, solid, to uphold the church. The ladder/vine is within the church, and the pillars surrounding it, like the foundation, are very solid; nothing can shake them. They are wide and are blue and brown, and purple, the royal color, as is the foundation.

### ***The Evangelists***

On top of the pillars sit the four evangelists. Upholders of the faith themselves, they are in turn upheld by the strong pillars of the faith. Each evangelist is depicted by his traditional symbol: Matthew as a man (or angel); Mark as a lion; Luke, an ox; and John as an eagle. These symbols go back to the four living creatures that worship before the throne of God (the *Merkabah* or “chariot-throne” in Hebrew) in the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel and in the fourth chapter of the Book of Revelation (though nowhere in either section are the creatures explicitly linked to the evangelists.) Typically, the man and the animals all have wings, but Camilla's versions don't.

**Matthew:** Because his gospel starts with Abraham's genealogy, the emphasis is on the incarnation and Christ's human nature.

**Mark:** This gospel begins with the preaching of John the Baptist, like a lion roaring. Because lions were thought to sleep with open eyes, the lion is seen as an image of the Resurrection and Christ as king.

**Luke:** The ox is a sacrificial animal that served the farmer and was extremely strong. Since this gospel begins with the story of Zacharias in the temple, the ox is seen as a picture of Christ's sacrifice in the passion as well as His high priesthood. It also represents the obedience of the Theotokos.

**John:** The eagle dwells in the sky (heavens) and was believed to be able to look at the sun. John's gospel starts with the description of the *Logos* and so represents Christ's ascension and His divine nature.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The Iconostasis***

The light of the Holy Spirit shines through the curved bar and doors of the dark brown and blue iconostasis, surrounded by the evangelists. Just beyond its doors are four tiles representing the tools for those who celebrate the liturgy. These include a bishop's stand, the cup for the priest, a book for the reader, and a torch of illumination.

As the ladder ascends, it grows brighter. Our eye is drawn up and through, following the light until we find ourselves before a fiery red robe of protection of the Theotokos, who has inspired and guided Camilla in the creation of the hanging. And there, in the center, is the complex cross, the Holy of Holies, bordered in blue, with light coming in and going forth in all four directions. The light is the heart of the Holy Spirit, the gold showing the Holy Spirit bringing light to the world. Nothing can obstruct its presence. It is the central mystery, depicted abstractly, in red and green, with crosses and geometric designs.

Camilla can tell you more about the cloths if you ask her. Thank you, Camilla, for these beautiful works, and may they help all of us in our journey to Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> The most thorough explanation of meanings that accrued over the time in the West is that of Rabanus Maurus in the ninth century. He noted that the man and beasts represented not only the evangelists, but also the nature of Christ and the virtues required of a Christian for salvation. There is much more on this symbolism. See "Symbols of the Four Evangelists in Christian Art" at *Sacred Destinations* on the Web.