The Nativity Message of Metropolitan Theodosius

Dear beloved: Christ is born! Glorify Him!

The time in which we live is often referred to as the "information age." With the advent of the World Wide Web, the internet, e-mail, and the like, we have been assaulted with all kinds of information. Some is indeed useful; some is less than edifying or outright useless. Trying to determine which is which can be confusing, especially when one considers that it has become impossible for any one person to manage, much less digest, all the infinite array of information that is no further than a keystroke away.

The dramatic increase in the amount of information placed at our disposal, however, has not necessarily produced an increase in knowledge. A "virtual tour of France," for example, may enable us to know about the life and customs of that country and its people, but until one actually visits France, one can hardly claim to actually know its life and customs. Knowing about something or someone is not the same thing as knowing something or someone. The first requires information: the latter demands experience - experience which ultimately leads to knowledge.

In the fifth Ode of the Nativity Kanon, we sing, "We are guided to the light of the knowledge of God." This simple, seemingly unassuming phrase, reminds us that our goal as the People of God is to know God to experience Him as He reveals Himself to us. Our heavenly Father did not send His only-begotten Son into the world to impart information. Rather, Jesus Christ robed Himself in our human flesh to reveal the image of the Trinity in which we were created, to transform that which had been tarnished through sin, and to form us into "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," that we might "declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." [1 Peter 2:5]

As we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord, let us dedicate ourselves to the ongoing search to know Him and to share the glorious message He proclaims with all whom we encounter - not as another bit of information, but in testimony to all that He has done - and continues to do - for us.

May the blessings so richly poured out upon us during this most holy season be with you now and in the new year to come!

With love in the newborn Christ,

- Theodosius
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada
Primate of the Orthodox Church in America

Continued from Issue #24, 11/24/00

Translated from another Calendar in the following story about another important village in Lemkovina.

Ustye Russke
(A historical outline)

Although Tsisliak did not win a seat in Parliament, the election taught the nobility and the administration a lesson, showing the unity of our people and Tsitsiak's popularity. After that, every request he presented to the government was given serious attention. And so, it was not only individuals from all over the region that came to Tsitsiak with their petitions to the government, but so did entire villages. He not only gave them good advice, he also fought for just disposition of their problems. Older people remember to this day the good services of Andrei Tsitsiak. The Polish aristocracy also remembered this lesson well, so well that when World War I broke out, Tsitsiak was one of the first in Ustye Russke to be arrested. He was sent to the concentration camp at Telskohof and was kept there, among other leading Lemkos, from 1914 until 1917.

In the new Poland following World War I, the Ustynas again ran a candidate, this time for the Lemkovina representative to the Warsaw Sejm. But now the election districts were even more gerrymandered than they had been before, and the entire electoral system of Poland had become a semi-fascist affair; only government candidates were allowed on the ballot, and the voters could choose one of two. Under this system, there was no hope of the people electing their own representative.

The people of Ustye still tried to keep up their cultural activity and restore the village's prewar renown, but conditions were now so difficult that Ustye never regained its prewar glory. Through the efforts of the socially conscious priest Mikhail Sobolewski, the teacher Nikołaj Yurkowski, and a few others, the reading room was reopened, the choir and drama group were reorganized, a course on the cooperative movement was given, and the "People's Power" cooperative was established. However, all this was muted by the iron fist of the fascim now growing in Poland.

In 1928, Ustynas completed a consolidation of their land holdings, one of the first such actions in Lemkovina. They improved these consolidated holdings to some extent and began systematic farming. But the population kept increasing, and the consolidated holdings were again subdivided.

In 1932, three quarters of Ustynas converted to Orthodoxy. The other quarter

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One of the most shady aspects of the controversial meeting of the heads of three Slavic republics was the secrecy of the meeting, of near conspiracy, hanging over it. Yeltsin did not conceal from Gorbachev that he had been in Viskuli and that he would be seeing Kravchuk there, but he was careful to draw a red herring across his trial, saying that he would go there to try to speak Kravchuk into joining them, the nothing could be farther from his mind. Yeltsin himself later wrote that the meeting was taking place in a state of "supersensitivity," and that the residence in Viskuli was therefore guarded by a special detachment, although he doesn't say what was the purpose of all that secrecy or again when to the door were protecting them. Could it be that he feared lest Gorbachev should get wind of the conspirators' real intentions and order their arrest? But that was not Yeltsin's style at all. One must conjecture that the leaders who had gone into a huddle at Viskuli simply had a guilty conscience and would not dare to red-handedly express any curmudgeon in which to decide the fate of nations.

No wonder plenty of people later made fun of the similarity of the words "putsch" and "puschuh (the latter means nothing more sinister in Russian than "dense forest").

Yeltsin arrived late on December 8, to meet with Gorbachev, who was represented by Vice President Kravchuk, by Stanislav Shushkevich, so that, by all accounts, a heavy alcoholic pall hung over all subsequent proceedings. Kravchuk, who had arrived earlier, returned from a day of hunting, boasting that he had knocked over a wild boar, "Krasny Voin," but then he was unable to do what we've come here for," Yeltsin remarked. And no, he had not still been inventing even a shadow of a conspiracy Gorbachev was still in his hands. But even in this little visit, the momentous event. But the Belovezhye trio were aware it was important to have Nazarbayev at the signing for two reasons: (1) Nazarbayev had a lot of personal clout as a politician and had even been slated to become the new Union's prime minister, (2) despite their alcohol intake, the Viskuli conspirators must have realized that they represented republics with, predominantly "Turkic" population, whose cabal might be met with suspicion and animosity by Turkic-speaking republics, of which Kazakhstans was the largest.

Franetic efforts were made to contact Nazarbayev. They got in touch with Alma Ata, the Kazakh capital, only to learn that at precisely that moment the Kazakh president was abroad and knew nothing to a meeting of the heads of the four republics (Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belorusus), scheduled for December 9, to be chaired by Gorbachev. As Nazarbayev was taking an ordinary scheduled flight, it proved impossible to get in touch with him. He was later met by Boris Yeltsin's representative on arrival at Moscow's Vnukovo airport and telephoned Minsk.

By that the celebrations at Viskuli were at an advanced stage, so it's no wonder that the accounts of what happened next differ considerably. According to Yeltsin, he read out to Nazarbayev the documents prepared for signing, and Nazarbayev replied that he was all for setting up a Commonwealth of Independent States, adding: "Wait for me, I'll be flying in directly." But then Gorbachev got his clutches into Nazarbayev and used all his eloquence to dissuade the latter from joining the trio in Belorusussia according to Yeltsin, that is.

Russian Nazarbayev's description is quite different. I translated for Mr Nazarbayev a whole book of his articles and speeches from Russian into English (Moscow, Russkii RYI, Publishers, 1988), so I know how the Kazakhstan leader readies to join the signatories of the Belovezhye agreements on the spur of the moment. "The leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belorusus stated [said Mr Nazarbayev in a Pravda interview] that they had signed important documents the day before and invited me to join them. They were absolutely in a hurry. It was a question of the fate of the state, I could not improvise or act on the spur of the moment, so I hastily refused.

The folks at Viskuli must have really been in high spirits, for even this wet surrender with just a token fight. As Yeltsin

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justified the move must have been their fear that the "divorce" process might become uncontrolled, chaotic and bloody - and that bogey worked. It was, in fact, more than a bogey. It's been already mentioned that only Slavic republics signed and then ratified the Belovezhye agreements - and that immediately triggered off a suspicious reaction among the Central Asian republics. Their leaders gathered in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, on December 12, the very same day on which the Soviet parliament ratified the agreements, and the mood at that gathering, according to Kazakh president Nazarbayev, was ominous: "On arrival all of us received a resolution, drafted by the meeting's hosts proposing the setting up of a confederation of Central Asian states. This opened up a clear sharp split within the former Soviet republics" (op. cit., p.229). I can tell you that that prospect sent a chill down many a spine at the time-bloodily, for which any number of pretexts could be found, loomed on the horizon.

God knows what would have happened if the confederation had indeed been formed and the Slav vs. Muslim split materialized. Wily Nazarbayev exercised all his diplomatic skills, what he calls his "flexibility," to bring together the members of the two nascent blocs in Alma-Ata on December 21. By his efforts, the Commonwealth of Independent States was extended to include the five Central Asian republics plus Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Moldavia (in 1994, Georgia also joined). It was decided to maintain a common "economic space," coordinate economic policies and reforms, especially price liberalization, and do a lot of other useful and pleasant things which mostly remained on the paper, but for the moment served their purpose, relieving the rather tense post-Belovezhye atmosphere.

In those days, people like Kozyrz, Burbulis, Shakhrizai, and many others made a lot of noises, in line with the prevailing "democratic" doctrine, to the effect that now was the time when a Central Asian confederation of the republics would begin, with much better results than in the USSR. Again that talk proved a lot of balderdash. I wish I had the wisdom to tell you how that balderdash were the worst of all the blunders made in that period. Sadly, it wasn't, not by a long chalk.

Now that the last of the republics of the Soviet Union had withdrawn from the USSR and joined the Commonwealth of Independent States, all Gorbachev could do was strike the colors, both figuratively and literally - admit that he could no longer be the president of a country that was no more. He did that on December 25 in his usual style, making a long-winded speech that did not say anything, but which apparently adequately clear to every single listener. Not a line to remember him by. There were just shabby little details that made one's ears burn with shame-the speaker's cup of coffee that no one had bothered to fill, the young media cad who threw his arm patronizingly round Gorbachev's shoulders after the speech, the overall shoutiness of the scene. Inevitably, the lines of that malicious prophet drifted through my mind:

This is the way the world ends.
Not with a bang but a whimper.

Segei Roy-Moscow News

CARPATHO-RUS

CARPATHO-RUSIAN newspaper, published bi-weekly by the Lemko Assoc. of the United States and Canada.

Subscription Rate: One Year...$20.
Edited By: Editor, A. Herenchak
USPS No. 291 460

Postmaster: Send address changes to:
CARPATHO RUS
P.O. BOX 156
ALLENTOWN, NEW JERSEY 08501

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The End

In Appreciation

We extend our thanks for help in producing this week's issue of Carpatho-Rus to Ludmila Marershka.
"Wait a minute," I said. "You have plenty of time. Did he tell you why he's leaving you?"

"Oh, he got mad, yelled at me, said I wasn't worth anything, that I don't have any ambition. I started crying. He swore at me, slammed the door, and went out. I haven't seen him since."

"Put down your suitcase," I said. "You can't go around this late at night looking for a place to stay. You probably don't even know New York very well. I should be the one to go. I have a friend on Long Island, so I have a place to sleep. You stay here until you can find some lodging."}

"I have some milk, tea, and cookies. I can run over to the store and get some beer and other stuff."}

She rose quickly from her chair, and was about to go out.

"No, no," I spoke quickly. "You make some tea. I'll go get the rest."}

I headed for the door. It seemed that she wanted to protest, because she raised her hand, but she dropped it immediately and went over to the gas stove.

I bought some coffee, sugar, bread, canned soup, ham, and two bottles of beer, and brought all this back to the apartment. Water was boiling in the kitchen, and the girl was setting cups and saucers on the table.

While she heated the soup, I sat down on a chair in the kitchen and began talking about her husband. I thought maybe if she talked out her sorrow she would feel better. And I wanted very much to dispel her sadness and cheer her up.

"Does this husband of yours have any relatives in New York? Have you tried asking them what happened to him?"

"I don't know if he has anybody in New York."

"Didn't he tell you anything about his parents, where they live?"

"He said that they are somewhere up around Boston, but I didn't ask many questions. He didn't ask about my family, so I didn't ask about his."

"Didn't any of his folks come to your wedding?"

"We didn't have any wedding. We just got married at City Hall."

"I know now that he deceived me," she said. "A week after we were married, I met a girl I knew in the restaurant. She told me in secret that my Joe had been married before, and that his previous wife had come to New York looking for him. She had heard this directly from that woman herself when she came to the restaurant inquiring about where he lived. I didn't believe this, and when Joe came home that evening I asked him about it. He went into a rage and yelled at me, that I was spying on him. He picked up his things right then and left in the night."

"Later I met that other wife, and she told me she wasn't the first either. He had a wife before her, and she left him just like he did me. She said he was a cheat and a thief, who swindled people, and speculated, and gambled. She said she was going to find him and put him in prison."

After sh told me all this, she sat there quietly, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. I realized that she had now told me the truth, which she had earlier tried to hide for some reason. I didn't want to hear anything more about her wedding or her husband. I could see that was just adding to her sorrow. Then too, it occurred to me that I was sitting there with her and I didn't know the first thing about who she was."

"Are your parents here in New York?"

I asked after a short pause.

"No, they live in Pennsylvania, by the coal mines."

I intended to ask if her parents had come to her wedding, but I held up just in time, thinking it would be unpleasant for her to go back to that topic. So I asked, "Do you correspond with them? How are they?"

"I write to them often. When I told them I got married they were very angry that I didn't invite them to the wedding, but they gave me their blessing anyway."

I could see that the girl had overcome her dejection and was now a little more composed.

"But I haven't told them anything about this latest happening. They asked me to send them pictures of our wedding, but we didn't have a formal wedding, and he didn't want any pictures taken."

"What do your parents do?"

"Father works in the mines. They're old-country people."

"I'm old-country too." I said. "Do you know what region they came from?"

"They say they're from Galicia, Sanok County."

"Sanok County!" I shouted. "I'm from Sanok. Your parents and I must have been almost neighbors." I was speaking now in Lemko, "po nashomu."

"Then maybe you know my mother and father?" asked the girl, also "po nashomu."

"What village are they from?"

"From Sanok."

"That's the county seat. They probably didn't live right in the city but in some village."

"I don't know the name of their village."

"What is their name?"

"Zwatik."

"Zwatik!" I repeated, overjoyed. "Your mother's name must be Olena."

"Yes, it is, Olena."

"You know, little girl, they lived in the same village I did. Why, even I counted your mother. I danced with her many times. But I was a little younger than she, so nothing came of it. Your father, Wanyo Zwatik, was born in America, so he had an American passport. He went over to the old country and married your mother. Then he came back here and later brought your mother over. I went to Canada and moved to New York after a few years, so we never met over here. What a surprise!"

I filled our glasses with beer, and said, "Let's drink to the health of your father and mother. And you forget all about this Joe. You'll never see him again.

We clinked glasses and drank.

"I don't ever want to see him again," she said.

"Don't worry, you won't. He's not stupid enough to show up here and risk going to jail. He has probably even left New York by now. If he's heard anything about his former wife looking for him, he should be long gone."

"If I could only forget all this, I would be happy," she said and frownd, as though something else had flushed through her mind.

"I don't even know your first name."

"Olena, just like mother's."

"Well, Olena, let's have a drink to your health, too."

We clinked again and emptied our glasses.

We had finished eating, too. Olena got up, cleared the table, and started washing the dishes.

"What are you going to do now, Olena?" I asked. "Will you stay in New York, or are you going back to Pennsylvania?"

"I really don't have anything to go back there for. There's no work for me around the mines. Then too, it would be hard for me now to live among our people. If I went back there now, they would all talk and look for some scandal. You know how our people treat a girl. While she's still single, they're very interested in her, watch to see which boys she goes with, and check every step she takes. But if that same girl makes a bad marriage and has a hard time with her husband and children, those very same people lose all interest and don't want to know anything about her. The poor woman has to suffer all alone for the rest of her life."

To be continued.