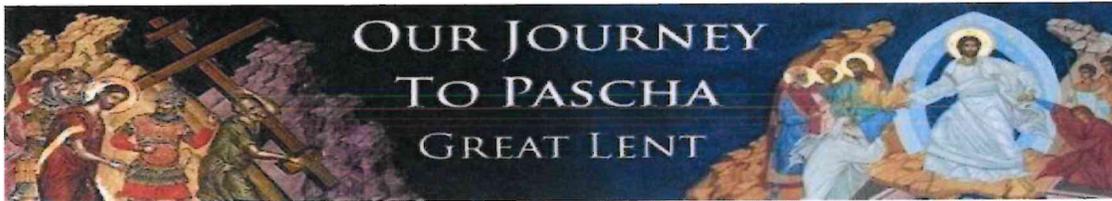


**THE GREAT FAST - Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver**

As we enter into the holiest period of the year in preparation for the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we ask ourselves, "Why should we follow the discipline of fasting, which in essence is abstinence?" What is the purpose of it? Obviously the purpose is that we may be ready to meet our Lord and to receive His promise of eternal life in His Kingdom.

We realize, according to Holy Scripture, that we were created to live forever and that we will live eternally after the return of Christ to the earth with our resurrected bodies reunited with our souls. The Lord therefore asks us to make our decision as to where we wish to live eternally. We have only two directions of which to choose. There is no other.

Mankind could not save itself on its own. Since man fell from his original pristine state to the imperfect state; and consequently, all of his descendants after him, he has tried time and again to reach his original condition. Every pagan religion in the world taught of man's eternal existence and ways in which one could live eternally. We can mention only the Egyptian culture which established the most elaborate way one could reach to the stars and to eternal life. All failed because the imperfect can never by its own efforts attain perfection.

We know the story. God in the Person of Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, out of His great love for us, came into the world in order to guide us toward Him. He tells us that His Kingdom has been prepared for us even before the world began. He entered into our human nature as one of us for the sole purpose of teaching us how we can reach perfection. He did this without interfering with our free will. For had He tampered with our free will, we would no longer be in His image. This is what distinguishes us from all other creatures of this world. We have been created in His image so that we may attain to His likeness, using our hearts and our minds to guide us. He created us to live with Him and to enjoy the works which He has created for us.

Great Lent is the most appropriate time on the church calendar to begin the process of meeting the Lord, especially during the holy and inspirational services of Holy Week and more so at His glorious Resurrection. Everything in life has a time of preparation, especially man. Since we are in the process of becoming — no one is, only God Is — the Church affords us the time-tested discipline of preparation for the most glorious and spectacular occurrence to have taken place in the cosmos: our Lord's defeat of the power of death and His Resurrection.

This preparation is the message of renewal. In His public ministry our Lord's message was "Repent!" In the original language of the Gospels the exhortation of the Lord was and is: "Change your mind; change your ways; change your direction in life." This concept of change simply said is to renew, to start over again through the right preparation.

The Church teaches us that even though we are born with an imperfect nature, we are intrinsically good. Even though through our fallen nature we have the inclination to sin, meaning to go contrary to the divine will, we can still reach sainthood, which is the calling of all who accept Christ as Lord, God, and Savior. In other words, even though Christ came into the world to lead us back to Him, we have the freedom to choose whether we wish to follow Him or not. We know that He humbled Himself out of His great love for us and our eternal condition because we were led astray by the evil one who deceived our progenitors in the beginning. It was Satan who has been responsible for the horrors and catastrophes in the world and who wants us to break

away from God, as he did in the angelic period of God's creation. The saying is true, "Misery loves company."

We, who have chosen God, prefer to live with Him. God adopts us as His children, while Satan keeps us in slavery at all times. The decision is easy. The effort takes work. The beautiful thing about this, though, is that the Lord, His holy Mother, the Theotokos, and the saints who have gone before us help us to succeed.

How do we proceed in our preparation? We must prioritize our value system. God must always come first; everything and everyone else follow in their proper place. One of the basic steps in our preparation is to give more attention to our souls. We, unfortunately, do not give to our souls even equal time in our lives with our bodies. During the Lenten period we must converse with God, the ever-blessed Holy Trinity, on a daily basis and several times a day in private prayer. We should attend the special services that take place during the Great Fast along with the usual services and sacraments. Even making the sign of the Cross upon ourselves is a prayer.

Together with prayer, we must become selective in our diet and follow the teachings of the Church becoming vegetarians for several weeks. Physiologically this is good for the body. Theologically we remind ourselves of the Lord's words that man does not live by bread alone. In other words, we give more time to the nourishment of our souls through increased prayer time contemplating the holiness of God. For we, also, are called to become holy. We were created to be heaven bound and not earth bound. Our Lord reminds us that we live in the world, but are not of the world. Our Lord's prayer to the Father is clear when He says that He does not pray for the world, but for those who are being saved for His eternal Kingdom, our real and permanent home.

During this holy period we should increase our good works in helping others and to imitate Christ Who came not to be served, but to serve. If we want to find our true calling in life, it is exactly this: to serve others. The feeling of fulfillment is phenomenal when we serve others. We should also attend retreats that take place, thereby giving ourselves more time for spiritual nourishment.

All this preparation, as mentioned before, has one goal, and that is to meet our Lord, the Bridegroom of the Church, as He calls Himself regarding His Second Coming. The Parable of the Ten Virgins is a most-appropriate icon on which to reflect. Five virgins were wise and five were foolish. All were awaiting the Bridegroom, but only five were ready to receive Him.

Let us therefore enter into this refreshing period of renewal in our spiritual lives, as we prepare ourselves to experience the world-changing events in the life of our Lord which herald the coming of our permanent home in the heavenly realms with our Lord Jesus Christ. May this period of the Great Fast be most edifying and sanctifying for all of God's people.

#### ***LENTEN DABS OF THOUGHTS***

- ◆ The **Holy Fast** enriches our heart, and by the power of God makes an increase in virtue like a full ear of wheat. Let us therefore fast with gladness during these holy days and so receive sanctification.
- ◆ During the **five Sundays of Great Lent**, the Liturgy of St. Basil is served in place of that of St. John Chrysostom on Sundays. The significant difference lies in the silent prayers that the priest reads during the Liturgy. The prayers of St. Basil's Liturgy are longer and sometimes there will be silent moments in the liturgy between the choir responses and the priest's prayers.
- ◆ One reason for the **Memorial Saturdays** is to provide a spiritual unity of all the living and the deceased members of the Church.
- ◆ The priest holds his hand in a prescribed way when he **imparts a blessing**. His index finger remains straight forming the "I," the middle finger is bent slightly to represent "C." His thumb and third finger overlap to make an "X" and his little finger is bent slightly to represent a "C." In this position his fingers form the letters ICXC which are the Greek letters symbolizing Jesus Christ.

*Over these past six years, our parish has had an influx of families and individuals migrating from the Northwest and California. We have also been blessed with many who have come seeking the Historic Christian Church, and thus found themselves here in Southeastern Idaho and the parish of the Assumption. Once a month, The Epistle will feature a family or individual who has embraced the Faith and how they came to Orthodoxy.*

***JOURNEY TO ORTHODOXY: NATE MOUNTAIN  
EMBRACED THE ORTHODOX FAITH OCTOBER 18th, 2025.***

My journey to the Orthodox faith began about three years ago. Like many, I had zero interaction and awareness of Orthodoxy until I found it online. In my case, through a Facebook group which had formal debates with different members defending their denomination of Christianity, I was first introduced to the early church fathers. At the time, I was and had always been active in the LDS faith. Whether politics or religion or any other topic, I have always enjoyed a friendly debate, and had found debating was a practical way to test if my beliefs could hold under some pressure.

Long story short, the early church fathers were a source and topic that I had no experience with, they were a whole new library from which I could inform my faith. Somehow I had not heard of these pious men, such as St. Polycarp of Smyrna, St. Justin Martyr, St. Irenaeus, St. Ignatius, St. Clement of Rome, and others. I was particularly interested in the fathers found in the generation after the apostles. Their closeness to the apostles and the early ministry of Christ was fascinating to me. I wanted to believe what they believed, I wanted to understand Biblical passages as they did, I wanted to worship how they worshiped.



It was truly eye opening reading the letters of these fathers for the first time. The devotion they gave to the faith often sealed with their own lives, their steadfastness in preserving and teaching the faith, and the incredible uniformity of their teachings all impacted me greatly. There were particular doctrines such as the Real Presence in the Eucharist, the role and need of the Episcopate, among others that really stuck out to me. Their writings opened up the Bible in an incredible way. Passages that I had understood one way began to have a whole new meaning. These beliefs led me to begin to realize the claims of Holy Orthodoxy, that the church has preserved and guarded the fulness of the faith and kept it pure through the ages since Christ's ministry, might actually be true and legitimate. This was a very captivating time reading these church fathers, but also a perplexing time as I tried to discern what all this new information meant for my own faith.

After some time of continued reading and research, I decided to attend my first Divine Liturgy. From the moment of entering the narthex, something stirred in my soul. To be honest, I walked in the church hoping to see something obviously incorrect, so that I could dismiss this predicament I found myself in. That way I could remain in the faith tradition of my upbringing, find a way to make the church fathers fit that theology, as that would be incredibly more convenient. How foolish I was.

Despite how foreign and different the iconography, incense, and chanting was to me, I felt at home. It felt like my soul could take a deep breath and be at peace in a way that I was not expecting and had never experienced before. Much of the Liturgy was a blur as it was so much to take in. But I can vividly remember hearing the chanters sing "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal have mercy on us" for the first time. Something about that hymn struck deep and was unforgettable. I knew I was witnessing worship of God and my heart longed to participate.

A few months after this visit, it was Holy Week. I knew very little at the time about Lent or how Pascha was celebrated in Orthodoxy, but I had heard about the unique services during Holy Week. Luckily I was able to make it to a few of the services that year which were all memorable, but the Matins of Good Friday was particularly meaningful. At the time, crossing myself and venerating icons were still very new to me. The prospect at the end of the service of venerating the icon of the crucified Lord was a bit daunting. But I decided to give it a go. That was the clincher for me. Everything still felt foreign and new. But I remember realizing that I had encountered the Lord Jesus Christ in a way I never had before. And I wanted more of that.

Another moment that was extremely impactful was discovering the Jesus Prayer. It seems so simple, only a few words. But for me it was an answer to many pleas of my soul in previous experiences of my life. There had been many episodes of my life where my prayer life was not at all what it needed to be, and I always struggled with how to overcome that obstacle. The Jesus Prayer was the answer I had been looking for. If I did not know what to pray for, or my mind wondered as I attempted to pray and became distracted, or if I had a thought that I could not find the words to express, or to combat an intrusive temptation, the Jesus Prayer was incredibly impactful. Upon this discovery I realized not only did Orthodoxy have the historical answers to the questions I had, but it was directly impacting my walk with Christ.

I ended up going through catechism class a couple times as I was discerning when to be baptized. My wife, and both sides of our families are LDS. As I began to share my journey with them, it was quite the surprise and shock to some of them. I am ashamed to say I attempted to engage in theological debates with some of them, attempting to help them see what was clear to me, but as you could imagine, that was not particularly effective. Lesson learned.

I wanted to have my wife's blessing if possible and be able to work out the details of potentially having a home and a marriage that is split in faith traditions. It was a challenging time, as I desperately wanted to participate in the sacraments of the Church but also wanted to be patient and mindful of my spouse. After a period of prayer and many late night discussions, the time came when my wife endorsed my choice to get baptized. I am very grateful for her support. She joins me frequently for Liturgy and is currently discerning where God intends her to be.

During this time Father Constatine was patient with me as I frequently bombarded him with various questions about the Orthodox faith. He has always been a very helpful guide and a great source of encouragement. He also can attest to my stubbornness, as he experienced it first hand with my desire to be baptized by immersion. That had never been done in all the years of Father baptizing converts. I do not know how many times I asked him, "Well, can I be there first?" but it was not an insignificant amount. Father could have easily brushed my desire aside as the mode has no impact on the validity of the baptism. However, he agreed to make that happen for me which was an act of kindness I will always be grateful for.

As my baptism approached I was incredibly excited. The parish here from the very beginning was very welcoming to me and my family and I have become great friends with many here. I looked forward to officially joining the family that had welcomed me in. I will never forget the day of my baptism and chrismation. Everything I had experienced and gone through in my life seemed to have led up to this moment. Similar to experiencing a Liturgy for the first time, there was much to take in. But there really are not adequate words to describe the experience besides it was the best decision I have made in my 32 years of life. For those who are looking into Orthodoxy, there will be obstacles in your way of joining the Body of Christ. But whatever they are, participating in the Sacraments are worth whatever the sacrifice may be.

The Archpastoral Visit of His Eminence Metropolitan Constantine.



Releasing white homing pigeons visually expresses the presence of the Holy Spirit, with Peace and Blessing upon the faithful and the Grace received through the Divine Liturgy. It is a sign of Joy, Honor, and Celebration!







Tonsured Acolytes: Paisios Barnhart, Dimitry Laudenklos, & Alexander Harris

Blessed Readers: Jacob Denton, Steven Swanson, and Andrew Hearne





Flower Girls greeting His Eminence, Metropolitan Constantine with rose petals. Gwendolyn Harris, Keeva Schmalz, Adalaide Schmalz, Vivian Merzlock, Charlotte, Pascal Carlson, & Olivia Schoenrock





## FASTING BEYOND FOOD

St. Nikolai Velimirovic's profound poem "On Fasting" from *Prayers by the Lake* reminds us that even this comprehensive physical fast is the beginning of true fasting. "Bodily fasting," he writes, "is more a symbol of true fasting, very beneficial for someone who has only just begun to hope in You, and nevertheless very difficult for someone who merely practices it."

St. Nikolai encourages us to consider how our **physical fast** might be something more. Let's explore his wisdom.

Let's explore into this fast of the soul, the mind, the heart, and the tongue. How can we use this sacred season to fast from "idle chatter," "daydreams about worldly matters," and "worries" that stand "like dense fog" between us and God? **How does it transform our bodies and entire beings as we prepare to receive "our Most Joyful Feast" at the Paschal celebration?**

*With fasting I gladden my hope in You, my Lord, Who are to come again.*

*Fasting hastens my preparations for Your coming, the sole expectation of my days and nights.*

*Fasting makes my body thinner, so that what remains can more easily shine with the spirit.*

*While waiting for You, I wish neither to nourish myself with blood nor to take life—so that the animals may sense the joy of my expectation.*

*But truly, abstaining from food will not save me. Even if I were to eat only the sand from the lake, You would not come to me, unless the fasting penetrated deeper into my soul.*

*I have come to know through my prayer, that bodily fasting is more a symbol of true fasting, very beneficial for someone who has only just begun to hope in You, and nevertheless very difficult for someone who merely practices it.*

*And I have brought fasting into my mind, to expel from it all daydreams about worldly matters and to demolish all the air castles, fabricated from these daydreams.*

*I have brought fasting into my heart, so that by means of it my heart might quell all passions and worldly selfishness.*

*I have brought fasting into my heart, so that heavenly peace might ineffably reign over my heart, when Your stormy Spirit encounters it.*

*I prescribe fasting for my tongue, to break itself of the habit of idle chatter and to speak reservedly only those words that clear the way for You to come.*

*And I have imposed fasting on my worries so that it may blow them all away before itself like the wind that blows away the mist, lest they stand like dense fog between me and You, and lest they turn my gaze back to the world.*

*And fasting has brought into my soul tranquility in the face of uncreated and created realms, and humility toward men and creatures. And it has instilled in me courage, the likes of which I never knew when I was armed with every sort of worldly weapon.*

*What was my hope before I began to fast except merely another story told by others, which passed from mouth to mouth?*

*The story told by others about salvation through prayer and fasting became my own.*

*False fasting accompanies false hope, just as no fasting accompanies hopelessness.*

*But just as a wheel follows behind a wheel, so true fasting follows true hope.*

*Help me to fast joyfully and to hope joyously, for You, my Most Joyful Feast, are drawing near to me with Your radiant smile.*

The following are some key themes with some added scriptural support for what St. Nikolai presents to us:

- **St. Nikolai reminds us that fasting is spiritual preparation – He begins his poem** by connecting fasting to preparation for the Lord's return. St. Matthew's Gospel 4:1-2 reminds us: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungrey." In Acts 13:2-3, we see: "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."
- **St. Nikolai emphasizes the holistic fasting of the soul, mind, heart, tongue, and worries.** We witness this in St. Matthew's Gospel 6:16-18: "*Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret.*" Isaiah spoke about this in Isaiah 58:6-7: "*Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?"*
- **St. Nikolai further reminds us of the transformation we can achieve through fasting.** Fasting produces tranquility, humility, and spiritual courage. In 1 Cor. 9:27, St. Paul tells us: "*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*" Furthermore, in 2 Cor. 6:4-5, St. Paul explains: "*But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings.*"
- **And finally, let us reflect upon true fasting's genuine hope, which ultimately leads us to joy.** In the scriptures, we see guidance via Luke 2:36-37: "*And there was one Anna, a prophetess... And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day.*" Matthew 9:15 guides us: "*And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.*" In the Old Testament, we uncover Zechariah 8:19: "*Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts.*" Moreover, let us reflect upon Psalm 34:13 for this joy: "*But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.*"

St. Nikolai's poem captures the fast's complex practice. We don't just fast for our body; we fast in our soul, mind, heart, tongue, and worries. This multi-layered discipline aligns us with Isaiah 58, where God rebukes superficial fasting and directs us toward a fast that produces justice and righteousness. His poem also captures the fasting's paradoxical joy. Christ's bridegroom teaching in Matthew 9 reflects this very same joy. True fasting is not morose self-denial; it is our joyful preparation for our union with Christ, "my Most Joyful Feast."

St. Nikolai's instruction to fast as a means to spiritual courage echoed when Daniel received spiritual strength and insight through his fasting. The poem's connection between fasting and hope reflects the early Christian practice documented in Acts, where the Apostles' fasting often preceded significant spiritual development

Journeying together through  
**GREAT LENT**

**ROAD TO PASCHA**

Today is the joyful foretaste of the time of abstinence, the bright threshold of the Fast. Therefore, brethren, together let us run the race with confident hope and with great eagerness.  
— Pope Leo XIII, Canon of the Mass, 1908

**HOLY WEEK**  
Focus on Christ's Passion

**REMAIN SILENT**  
Spend the week in silence, thought and prayer. Attend Holy Week Services Wednesday, Holy Week Services Thursday, Mystical Supper & Washing of Feet (Reading of St. Pauline Epistle) Friday, Crucifixion and Burial of Christ (Optional) Saturday, Resurrection at Noon Sunday, The Resurrection of Christ Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

**THIRD WEEK**  
Focus on Sacrifice and Charity

**DONATE**  
Each day this week purchase a tasty food item to donate to the hungry. Each day take one item from your closet and donate it to those in need. Turn off the television set daily. Put aside a tenth of this week's paycheck, and donate it either to help at church or to help a neighbor. Donate books. Donate a pair of nice shoes. Do one day without coffee, coffee creamer, or sugar. Eat again - to go out without complaining.

**SECOND WEEK**  
Focus on Prayer

Be disciplined with your prayer routine. Memorize the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem.

**FAST**  
O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk. But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to thy servant. Yes, O Lord and King, grant me to love my own transgressions, and not to judge my neighbor, for blessed art Thou, who speakest of ages, amen.

While it is good to avoid places of temptation, it is better to seek places of inspiration. While it is good to avoid individuals who may lead you to sin, it is better to seek out individuals who lead you to virtue. While it is good to shut those things which lead to sin out, it is better to seek self-control over things which have no power over us unless we give them that power.

**FIFTH WEEK**  
Focus on God

**SPEND TIME GETTING TO KNOW GOD**  
Attend Pre-sanctified Liturgy on Wednesday. Read the prescribed readings. Monday: Proverbs 14:27-14:4 Tuesday: Proverbs 18:21-18:6 Wednesday: Proverbs 18:20-18:9 Thursday: Proverbs 16:17-17:17 Friday: Proverbs 17:17-18:3

APRIL 21 Palm Sunday

APRIL 20 - Ignacia Sobrino

**FOURTH WEEK**  
Focus on Family

**SPEND TIME GETTING TO KNOW YOUR FAMILY**  
Pray Evening Prayers with your family. Each evening tell your child a story from your childhood. During dinner share a story about each child. Tell each of your children what makes them special. Tell your parents why you appreciate them. Find a family recipe and prepare it together. Ask: "If you could be anywhere, where would you go?"

APRIL 14 St. Mary of Egypt

MARCH 31 Annunciation of the Holy Child

APRIL 7 St. John of the Ladder

**FIRST WEEK**  
Focus on Self-Improvement

You see a living icon of Christ. Do not gossip. If anyone comes up to gossip, do not participate. This is how you can help.

MARCH 17 Sunday of Chlothilda

MARCH 24 St. Gregory Palamas

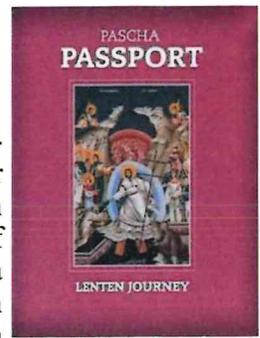
MARCH 31 Annunciation of the Holy Child

APRIL 7 St. John of the Ladder

*Let not one think, my fellow Christian, that only priests and monks need to pray without ceasing...  
— St. Gregory of Palamas*

## Begin Your Child's Lenten Journey with the Pascha Passport

A wonderful way to make Lent exciting and spirit-filled for your children. Have your child/children experience the spiritual journey of Pascha. The Standard Passport is a small booklet, about the size of an actual US passport. Much like a real passport, it has many different spaces for stamps; however, the stamps that go in this passport are beautiful icons that correspond to each destination in the Pascha Passport.



These passport stamps are received at each of the various services of the Great Lent, like Pre-sanctified Liturgies, Salutation Services to the Theotokos, Holy Week, and Special Destinations such as Confession, Lenten Retreat, and additional special Lenten services like Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday. Each time your child attends these services he receives an icon stamp to fill his passport. So help your child/children travel to many destinations on the road to Pascha. Passports will be available at the candle stand.

**Orthodox Blessing Prayers were said for  
two new born as well as the  
Naming Prayers for  
Michael son of Monika & Botros Hanna,  
and  
Rosemary daughter of  
Kayne & Amy Cummins**



### THE AGAPE BOOKSTORE

*The Agape Bookstore, located in the Orthodox Center, wishes you a Blessed and Fruitful Great Lent! We invite all Catechumens and their families, as well as all parishioners to visit the store and see our newest offering of silver Baptismal crosses!*

*We also carry and can custom order a variety of prayer corner icons, censers, incense, and candles to support your prayer life. We now offer Orthodox crafts made by our own parishioners including art, handcrafted wooden crosses, crocheted censers, prayer ropes, and veils.*

*Come and see our expanding selection of Orthodox books and Pascha gifts for the whole family. All proceeds benefit our parish and help the bookstore grow. Glory to God!*