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EDITOR'S LETTER

MAKE A WISH FOR NEW HAPPINESS!



Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin: the great satirist was born exactly 200 years ago. Besides, we will speak about Nikolai Leskov and Ernest Beaux, Nikolai Rubtsov and Osip Mandelstam...

We will not forget about St Isaac's Cathedral in St Petersburg: in early January the 240th anniversary of the birth of its architect Auguste de Montferrand was celebrated. This cathedral is the fourth largest in the world: only the Cathedrals of St Peter in Rome, St Paul in London and St Mary in Florence

"Please accept my heartfelt congratulations to you all on the radiant feast day of the Nativity of Our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ," His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia addressed Christians in his Christmas Message. Readers of the Russian Mind magazine live in various countries – both where snowdrifts are now outside the window and where palm trees grow... But, as we know, all of us are dependent on time, which gives us wonderful festive occasions: New Year's Eve and Orthodox Christmas. It is not in vain that they say these days: "Make a wish for new happiness, but don't lose the old one!"

As always, there will be many stories on historical subjects in this issue. They include the foundation of the Russian Academy of Sciences by Peter the Great (exactly three centuries ago the first Russian Emperor signed a decree on its establishment), and a tribute to

are larger. Its building project that covered forty years was an epic! The heavy building needed wooden piles, 10,762 of which were driven into the swampy ground! A process that lasted five years. Residents of St Petersburg even began to joke: "We hammered a pile – it went into the swampy ground; we hammered a second one – and it disappeared... A dozen more logs were hammered in, and then a letter arrived from New York: 'You've spoiled an American pavement! There is the stamp of the Gromov and Co. St Petersburg's timber exchange at the end of a log sticking out of the ground.'"

Enough of historical anecdotes though! Especially as winter is not to be trifled with. As a Russian saying goes: "January is strong with frosty weather, and February with blizzards."

Happy New Year, dear readers! Merry Christmas!

By Kirill Privalov

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THE MAIN TOPIC

A HOLIDAY OF INTIMACY

Russian classics on the Nativity of Christ and the celebration of New Year's Eve

By KIRILL PRIVALOV



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“Every year ends happily – it ends with a New Year.” I don’t remember where or when I heard this, but there is some truth in this expression. That’s right: isn’t every New Year, combined with Christmas, the best present from God for us? Even if it is not filled with childishly anticipated naive joy, even if it is painted in alarmingly sad colours, and even if it is associated with a foreboding of gloomy anxiety?... As in the works of Mikhail Yevgrafovich Saltykov-Shchedrin.

My mention of this wonderful Russian satirical writer in the New

Year’s context is no coincidence. This year marks the 200th anniversary of his birth. In my judgement, Saltykov-Shchedrin is a true literary phenomenon: the more you read his works, the more keenly you feel that he has not yet been fully understood by posterity and that his prophecies have not yet fully come true.

Saltykov-Shchedrin’s mention of the New Year is not a mere artistic sketch, but an occasion for truly philosophical reflection: “In effect, what is the ‘old year’ and what is the ‘new year’? Has humanity not yet learned enough

from experience to make sure that these are nothing but terms with an exclusively astronomical meaning? And why should we, simple and poor people, care about what happens in the sphere of astronomy! Does the ‘new year’ bring us pies and roast pork? Does the ‘old year’ take away into eternity all the staleness this vale of tears is dotted with? What do we rejoice in? What do we regret? Oh, let’s leave astronomers alone to prove everything they are supposed to prove, and let’s live as we live, hiding nothing from ourselves, but not exaggerating anything either.

“Life was good in the old year, and it will be good in the new one. It’s just the way it was originally designed: always to live exactly the way you live...”

You cannot disagree with such a confession. It is from his notes, *Our Social Life*, from January 1864. And in *The Provincial Sketches* of 1857, in a sketch under the characteristic title *The Christmas Tree*, Saltykov-Shchedrin gives a whole panorama of Russian provincial life just before the Nativity: “It’s very cold outside; the frost has firmly frozen over and smoothed the road, and now it’s knocking on the doors and windows of ordinary inhabitants of Krutogorsk with all its might. Evening has set in, and the streets are deserted and quiet. The moon is looking down from its great heights genially and cheerfully and is shining out so clearly that it’s like a day in the streets. A small horse is running in the distance, briskly carrying a sledge with a provincial aristocrat sitting in it, hurrying to a party, with the rumble of its hooves heard far away. Lights are lit in the windows of most of the houses, which at first are dim, and then gradually turn into magnificent illuminations. Walking down the street and peering through the windows, I see whole beams of light, around which lovely children’s heads are hurrying and scurrying back and forth... ‘Oh, it’s Christmas Eve today!’ I exclaim in my mind.

“Enlightenment is steadily penetrating eastwards, thanks to the zeal of our dear government officials who have girded themselves to fight against barbarism and benightedness. I don’t know if there is a Christmas tree in Turukhansk, but in Krutogorsk it is generally respected – this is an undoubted fact. At least, officials who breed like rabbits in Krutogorsk consider it their indispensable duty to buy Christmas trees at the market and, decorating



Portrait of A. P. Chekhov by O. E. Braz. 1898

them with simple homemade ornaments, present them to numerous young Ivans and Marias...”

It seems very interesting to me to recall what Russian classics of different times and places of residence wrote about the Nativity of Christ and the celebration of New Year’s Eve. And not only directly in their works, but also in letters to people close to them.

“In my view, to rejoice in such nonsense as the New Year is ridiculous and unworthy of human reason,” Anton Chekhov

argued in the short story, *A Night at the Cemetery*, published in 1886. “The new year is just as bad as the old one, with the only difference that the old year was bad, and the new one is always worse... To my mind, when celebrating New Year’s Eve, one should not rejoice, but suffer, weep, and attempt to commit suicide. We must not forget that the newer the year, the closer to our death, the larger our bald spot, the deeper our wrinkles, the older our wives, the more the children, and the less the money.”



Portrait of P. I. Tchaikovsky by N. D. Kuznetsov. 1893

Caustic and merciless in his words, Anton Pavlovich remained true to himself even during the “magical” – just not for him! – New Year’s Eve. Chekhov did not change in his postal holiday greetings either. Here is what he wrote on 27 December 1897 to Lika (Lydia Mizinova), a person

close to him: “Now it’s New Year’s Eve in Moscow and new happiness. Greetings! I wish you all the best, good health, money, a husband with a moustache and a great mood. With your bad temper, keeping high spirits is as necessary as the breath of life, otherwise your workshop will get

the stuffing knocked out of it.”

Anton Pavlovich also wittily greeted his older brother Alexander in a letter dated 2 January 1889. His common-law wife, Anna Khrushcheva-Sokolnikova, had died the previous year. Alexander, also a man of letters, was not a widower for long and married his sons’ governess Natalia Golden (the future mother of Mikhail Chekhov, a brilliant actor and theatre director). Here is the New Year message:

“Wise gentleman!

I wish your radiant lady and children a Happy New Year and new happiness. I wish you to win 200,000 and become an active state councillor, and most of all, to be in good health and have daily bread in sufficient quantity for such a greedy-guts like you...

“The whole family says hello to you.”

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s New Year greetings are in the epistolary genre as well. On 2 January 1880 he wrote to the philanthropist and patroness of arts

Nadezhda von Meck, who for many years supported him with a sizeable sum of 6,000 roubles a year. The “beautiful stranger” (Tchaikovsky and von Meck never met in person) to whom the grateful composer repeatedly confessed: “Your friendship will always be the great

joy of my life.” Celebrating Catholic Christmas in Rome with his younger brother Modest, Tchaikovsky sent his New Year greetings to the von Mecks’ estate in Brailov in what is now Ukraine:

“We celebrated New Year’s Eve with books in our hands. In my mind, my dear friend, I wished you all the best on earth: firstly, of course, good health; secondly, success in your work, and especially your estate in Brailov finally to get onto a solid footing; thirdly, to avoid any troubles and adversities this time if you travel abroad; fourthly, wished everyone close to your heart to be happy and satisfied. Looking back on the past year, I must sing a hymn of gratitude to fate for the many good days I have lived both in Russia and abroad. I can say that over the whole year I enjoyed undisturbed well-being and was as happy as happiness can be. Of course, there were bitter moments, but these were only minutes, and even then, I was just affected by the hardships of those close to me, and I myself was certainly happy and content. It was the first year of my life when I was free all the time. And I am indebted for all this to none but you, Nadezhda Philaretovna! I invoke all the fullness of blessings on earth upon you.”

The Russian New Year was also described from Paris by the wonderful emigrant writer Nadezhda Lokhvitskaya (penname: Teffi). In her short story, *The Neighbour*, she compares the French Peer Noel and the Russian Father Frost, and far from favouring the Frenchman: “In front of the pastry shop, a costumed Peer Noel walked along the pavement with a Christmas tree in his hands. The children shouted their wishes to him. Their mothers nodded their heads as they listened, but they had nothing to do with it. Peer Noel remembers everything himself: who wants what. The neighbour dared not shout

out his wishes. Besides, there were so many of them that he wouldn’t have made it anyway. He wanted everything that other children asked for, and besides, all those peculiar things that the Russians had. But, of course, he was suffering because he hadn’t had the courage to ask. And he was very unhappy. It was good that Katya kindly wrote to the Russian Father Frost that evening. He will bring everything he can take along. He is unlikely to take a model railway the neighbour requested for, but it’s not hard to bring a drum. And he’ll probably take a wonderful brilliantine-bottle, too. In short, life will be even more fantastic.”

And here is how Lydia Alexeyevna Charskaya, rightly nicknamed by her contemporaries “the dominant influence of Russian high school girls”, describes the festive evening at the Pavlovsky Institute for Noble Maidens in one of the bestsellers of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *Notes of an Institute Girl*: “In the middle of the hall, all shining with countless candle lights and expensive, shiny ornaments, there was a large Christmas tree up to the ceiling. The gilded flowers and stars at its very top burned and shimmered just like candles. Hanging bonbonnières, tangerines, apples and flowers made by the grown-ups stood out by their beauty against the dark velvet background of greenery. There were piles of cotton wool under the tree, representing snowdrifts.”

That’s not all. There is a whole Christmas story by Lydia Charskaya (there was such a literary genre) entitled, *A Christmas Tree 100 Years Later*, published by the *Zadushevnoye Slovo* (“Heartfelt Word”) children’s magazine in 1915: “... At the same moment, the doors of the living-room opened, and Marsik screamed with delight and surprise. There was a fabulous Christmas tree in the middle of the room. Toys and

sweets were hung on it, and on each twig a tiny flashlight a little bigger than pea sparkled brightly.

“The tree shone all over like the sun in southern countries. At this time a large box in the corner started playing. It wasn’t a gramophone, but some other musical instrument. It seemed as if a wondrous chorus of angelic voices was singing the song of the night in Bethlehem when the Saviour was born.

“Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, good will toward men,” sang beautiful angelic voices, filling the room with their wondrous sounds.”

The remarkable Soviet author Lev Kassil recalls New Year’s Eve in an absolutely different way, much more restrained and modest, in his book, *Conduit and Schwambrania*, which brought up several generations of “builders of Communism” in the USSR. Kassil’s New Year’s Eve is, alas, a special occasion for adults only: “31 December came. By nightfall, our parents had gone to celebrate New Year’s Eve with their friends. Mum explained to us for a long time before leaving that ‘New Year’s Eve is not a children’s holiday at all and you must go to bed at ten, as always.’”

How deplorable! It’s tempting to recall an old saying: “It’s good to make money in an unfamiliar place, but it’s good to celebrate New Year’s Eve in a familiar one.” With meaningful toasts, inspiring copious drinks with sumptuous (preferably “hot, Moscow” ones, as Mikhail Bulgakov advised) snacks.

By the way, toasts could well be borrowed from Russian classics – for instance, Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin: “Love is the only game in which an amateur has a better chance of perfection than a professional.”

All that remains is to add: “Let’s drink to love and to perfect lovers!” Or from Fyodor Dostoevsky: “You must love life more than the meaning



Portrait of L. N. Andreyev by I. E. Repin. 1904

of life.” We have only to reply in kind: “Let’s drink to real life!” – and a resounding toast is ready for everyone at the hospitable table!...

A list of tips from the grandees of Russian literature for masters of toasts (what a wonderful Russo-Caucasian profession!) can go on and on... However, you and I now have a goal other than encouraging

new gluttonous exploits in the lovers of New Year’s Eve. And the author’s task is to continue the narrative of the New Year celebrations in olden days with the help of classics of Russian literature. For example, Alexander Ivanovich Kuprin.

“I remember a Christmas tree well from my childhood: its dark greenery through the dazzling mottled light,

the sparkle and glitter of decorations, the warm glow of paraffin candles, and especially the smells,” Kuprin writes in his short story, *The Little Christmas Tree*. “How pungent, cheerful and resinous the suddenly illuminated needles smelled! And when the tree was being brought in from outside, with difficulty pushed through the open doors and curtains, it smelled of watermelon, forest and mice. Our cat with a pipe-like tail was very fond of this mousy smell. In the morning, it could always be found deep in the lower branches: for a long time, it sniffed the trunk suspiciously and carefully, poking its nose into the sharp needles: ‘Where is a mouse hiding here?’ As a candle burns down, it sends out a long, swaying flame and its sooty smoke is fragrant with memory, too.

“Our toys were marvellous, but

someone else’s always seemed better. Clutching the present you’ve received to your chest with both hands, at first you don’t look at it at all: instead, you seriously, silently, and frowningly look at the toy of your closest neighbour. <...>

“What can I say? The Christmas tree is enchanting and intoxicating. It is intoxicating, because from

the multitude of lights, from strong impressions, from the lateness of the hour, from the long bustle, from the hubbub, laughter and heat, the children are drunk without wine, and their cheeks are of a red calico colour.

“Oh, how much grown-ups get in our way! They don’t know how to play themselves, but they still fuss around with some round dances, songs, caps, and games. We’ll do just fine without them! And then there’s Uncle Pyotr with a goatee and a reedy voice. He seated himself on the floor under the Christmas tree, sat the children around and started telling them a fairy tale. Not real, but one that he had thought up. Oh, what a bore, even to the point of disgust! The nanny knows a true fairy-tale.”

If we take into account that the New Year is inseparable from Christmas, we can also recall angels. It’s little wonder that one of Leonid Andreyev’s short stories is entitled *The Little Angel*:

“...With their little eyes wide open in advance and holding their breath, the children decorously, in pairs, entered the brightly lit hall and walked quietly round the sparkling Christmas tree. It cast a strong light, without shadows, on their faces with little staring eyes and lips. For a minute there was the silence of deep charm, followed by a chorus of enthusiastic exclamations. One of the girls was unable to control her delight and jumped on the spot stubbornly and silently; a small pigtail with a plaited blue ribbon bounced on her shoulders. Sashka [a diminutive of the name Alexander] was sullen and sad – something bad was going on in his small, wounded heart. The Christmas tree dazzled him with its beauty and the flashy, cheeky glare of countless candles, but it was alien and hostile to him, like the neat, beautiful children crowding around it, and he wanted to push it so that it would fall onto those fair

heads. It was as if someone’s iron hands had taken his heart and were squeezing the last drop of blood out of it. Hiding behind the piano, Sashka sat there in the corner, unconsciously finishing breaking the last cigarettes in his pocket and thinking that he had a father, a mother, and his own house, but it appeared as if none of this existed, and he had nowhere to go. He tried to imagine a penknife that he had recently traded for and loved very much, but it had become very bad, with a thin, sharpened blade and only half a yellow handle. Tomorrow he will break the knife, and then he will have nothing left.

“But suddenly Sashka’s narrow eyes flashed with amazement, and his face instantly assumed its usual expression of cheek and self-confidence. On the side of the tree facing him, which was dimmer than the others, he saw what was missing in the picture of his life and without which everything was so empty, as if the people around him were artificial. It was a small wax angel, carelessly hung in the midst of dark branches and seemed to float through the air. Its transparent dragonfly-like wings fluttered from the light falling on them, and it seemed very alive and ready to fly away. Its pink hands with delicately made fingers stretched upward, and behind them a head with hair like Kolya’s. But there was something else in it that Kolya’s face and all other faces and things lacked. The angel’s face did not shine with joy, was not gloomy with sadness, but it bore the stamp of a different feeling, which cannot be conveyed by words or defined by thought but is accessible only to the same feeling. Sashka could not grasp what secret power drew him to the angel, but he felt as if he had always known it and always loved it, loved it more than his penknife, more than his father, and more than everything else. Full of bewilderment, anxiety, and incomprehensible delight, Sashka

folded his arms by his chest and kept whispering:

“Dear... dear little angel!”

“What shall we offer Thee, O Christ, Who for our sakes hast appeared on earth as man?...” reads one of the first stichera, sung at the beginning of Vespers of Christmas Eve.

How can we not turn to Vasily Rozanov’s essay entitled, *Merry Christmas!* after that? There is no sin in concluding in his pure, high-pitched tone:

“Once again, the Eternal Infant is being born in the consciousness and feelings of people; He is being born in a manger – that is, in a cave where Syrian shepherds would drive their flocks at night, protecting them from predators. Again, first the shepherds of the surrounding flocks are coming to bow down before the Infant and God; and then the /Magi from the East/ will bring Him gifts – gold and incense – that signify both the priestly and royal ministry of the Newborn Infant. Thus, in these features, both simple and folk, saying something /native/ and /dear/ to every poor hut – and together in the Heavenly and religious features, foretelling the future ringing of bells of Christian churches – our Christ was born, Who taught people and the nations a new truth – the One Who would proclaim to everyone that a new law of grace-filled existence was born.

“The Nativity of Christ conveys what is /native/ and /dear/ to every hut. No kingdoms and no authorities, no extensive and new laws that require man to obey and speak to him in the language of command, would ever have brought that inner content and heartfelt speech, which the Newborn Infant gave to people. <...>

“May God be with you! Greetings to everyone, remember the poor and give them something for the feast! And don’t forget God and ingenuous Russian gaiety.”

NATIVITY MESSAGE BY HIS HOLINESS KIRILL, PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUS'

To the Archpastors, Pastors, Deacons, Monks and Nuns and All the Faithful Children of the Russian Orthodox Church

Beloved in the Lord Archpastors, all-honourable presbyters and deacons, God-loving monks and nuns, dear brothers, and sisters!

Please, accept my heartfelt congratulations to you all on the radiant feast day of the Nativity of Our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ as I address you with the words of the ancient Christian hymn: *"Christ is born, glorify him! Christ is come from heaven, receive him! Christ is on earth, be ye lifted up to him!"* (Heirmos of the first Ode of the Nativity Canon).

The Apostle Paul called the event of the Divine Incarnation that had come about *"the great mystery of godliness"* (1 Tim. 3.16). All earthly wisdom falls silent in awe before this mystery; before it vain human knowledge fades away.

This mystery is able to disarm and mollify even the coarsest and stoniest of hearts. Amidst the cruelty and bitterness of this world there is born the One Who can heal all



division and grant to us true peace and genuine contentment.

Ever since sin entered the life of people, tragic division has reigned on earth, and the world, torn away

from its Maker who is the true Fount of light, inexorably plunged into darkness and chaos. Yet God did not abandon His creation and did not cease to care for it. In patiently preparing our salvation, the Lord became incarnate, entered human history and became one of us. The Son of God became the Son of man, in all things like us, except sin. That sorrowful question which once was heard in the Garden of Eden: *"Where art thou, Adam?"* finally found its answer in the lowly cave near Bethlehem. *"The first man was from the earth, full of dust; the second man is from heaven"* (1 Cor. 15.47), as the Apostle Paul wrote. In Christ, as in the new Adam, *"God reconciled the world to himself"* (2 Cor. 5.19); He renewed human nature by healing it from the wound of sin.

The life of a human being and the life of the whole world is healed only in God. This is the simple yet profound truth to which today's feast day testifies. How can we not recall here the inspired

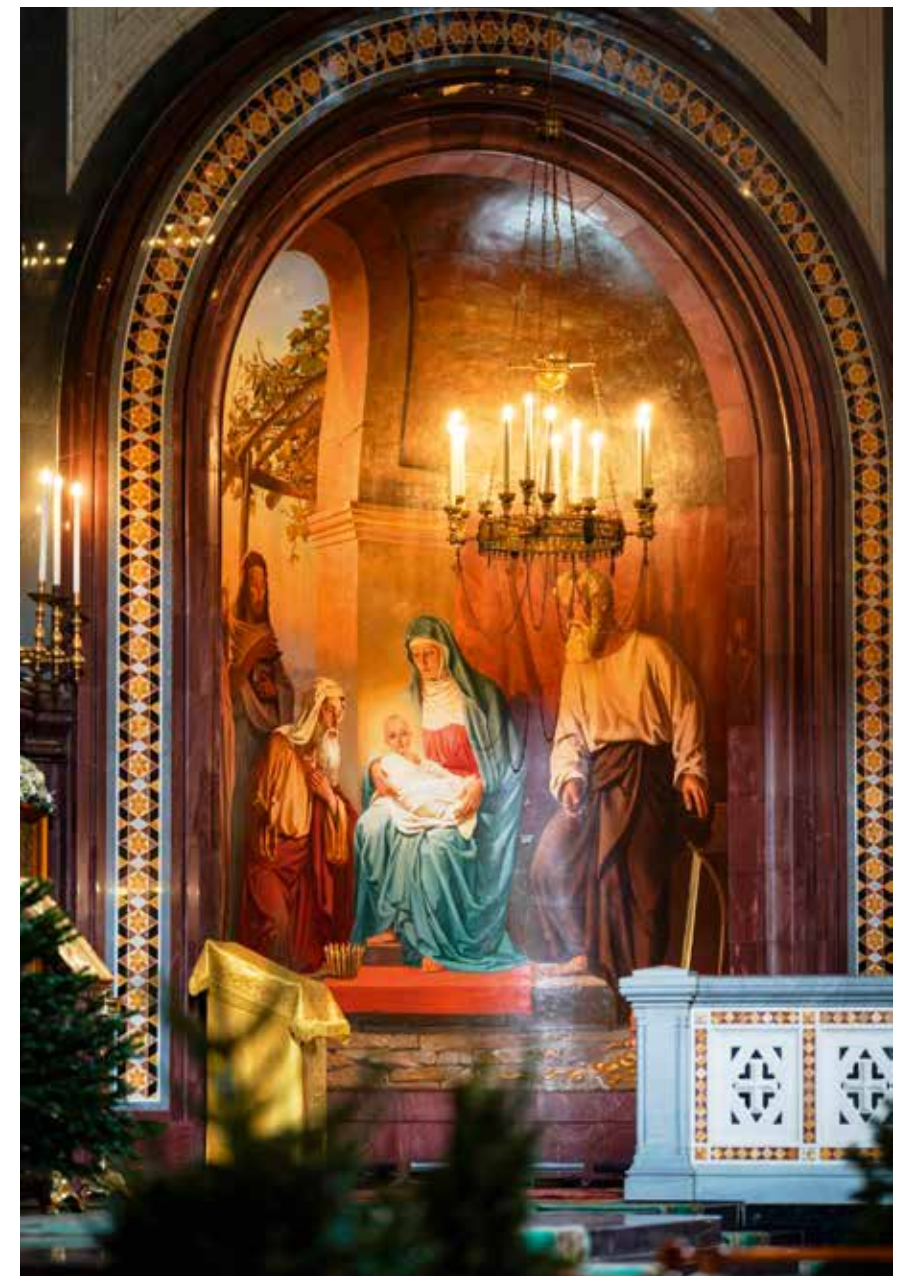
words of Saint Augustine, who with sacred awe glorified the wise Providence of the Almighty: *"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you"* (Confession)! It is only in Christ Jesus that oneness with God and the true meaning of the life of the human person, who from the creation of the world was called to life eternal, are to be found.

The coming into the world of the Saviour is above all the revelation of Divine love for people. A love, which on the one hand is unbounded and all-conquering, and on the other, is meek, *"bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things"* (1 Cor. 13.7).

How, then, are we to reply worthily to the great love of our Maker and draw near to Him? We attain and affirm this closeness by following the Gospel commandments, through patience and unfeigned love for one another, but above all through the constant renewal of our oneness with Christ by participating in the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

Today is a feast of hope; a feast of peace; a feast of quiet joy. In glorifying the Born Saviour and greeting him with the beautiful church hymns and songs, let us recall the lofty Christian calling to be the *"light to the world and the salt of the earth"* (Matt. 5.13-14) and *"whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith"* (Gal. 6.10). Let us give hope to the afflicted, let us comfort the disheartened, let us share our joy with those near and those afar and help those in need. In acting in this way, we truly become *"the aroma of Christ to God"* (2 Cor. 2.15) and thereby bring fruits pleasing to the Lord Who has been born.

And to those who by force of various circumstances find



themselves beyond the salvific enclosure of the Church and who are not part of the life of Christ's community, I would like to say: open up your hearts to the One *"who so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life"* (Jn. 3.16). Let us, then, glorify the Lord and Saviour for His ineffable mercy and love for the human race.

In congratulating all of you on the feast of Christ's Nativity, I wish you, my beloved, bodily strength and unfading joy in the Saviour Who has been born. *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Eph. 1.2). Amen.

+KIRILL PATRIARCH
OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUS'
The Nativity of Christ
2025/2026
Moscow

CHRISTMAS AND ITS LITURGICAL COMPANIONS

True holidays are not alone

By AUGUSTINE SOKOLOVSKI,
Doctor of Theology, Priest

The date of the celebration of Christmas is linked to a belief that was widespread among the biblical people during the earthly life of Jesus Christ. It was a time of universal expectation of the Messiah. The Bible consists of many books. They reflect vast periods of time. The history of the Bible is the history of the Covenant between God and man. God has always been faithful to this Covenant, but man, represented by God's people, has constantly been unfaithful and broken the Covenant. God sent leaders and helpers to ancient Israel who delivered them from the disasters, captivity, and catastrophes into which the people had plunged themselves through their own fault.

As the birth of Jesus drew near, there was a growing conviction that such a helper and deliverer was soon to come, who would once and for all, in the most decisive manner, rescue the people from all their misfortunes. It was He who was destined to become the true Anointed One of God, the one and only Messiah in Heaven and on Earth. The circumstances of His earthly life were to be not only unusual but also surrounded by supernatural events. The life of the Messiah simply had to be woven from a multitude of unique and unrepeatable coincidences. One such great coincidence was the predestination that the Messiah would die on the day of His conception.

There are corresponding prophecies about this in the biblical text. "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk," – it is said in the Book of Exodus (Chapter 23, verse 19). This prohibition proved to be so important that it is repeated in the Book of Deuteronomy, which, according to scholars, formed the basis of the Israeli Constitution during the religious revival on the eve of the Babylonian Captivity. Here is what is said in verse 21 of chapter 14 of this book: "You are a people holy to the Lord your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk." These words are so mysterious, so closely tied to the context of the time in which they were formulated, that it took the experience of the Church and the wisdom of the Holy Fathers to give even an approximate interpretation.

"Since Christ did not suffer in childhood when Herod sought to kill him and it seemed that such danger hung over him, a prediction was made with the following words: "Do not boil a kid in its mother's milk." Christ suffered like a lamb boiled in its mother's milk, that is, at the time of his conception, and that Christ was conceived and suffered in that month, as evidenced not only by the celebration of Easter, but also by the day of his birth, well known to the Churches. He who was born nine months later, around December 25, was conceived, apparently, around March 25, which was also the time of his suffering in his mother's

milk," is how St. Augustine (354–430), a great Father of the Church, interprets these words of Scripture in one of his little-known but very important works, whose title literally translates as "Questions on the Seven Books," that is, the first seven Books of Scripture (Quaestionum in Heptateuchum 2; 90). The date of March 25, mentioned by Augustine and celebrated as the Feast of the Annunciation, was calculated astronomically, as it is linked to the celebration of the Jewish Passover in the year of Jesus' crucifixion. It is this date that determines the date of Christmas.

This testimony of St. Augustine is extremely important. After all, the Church Fathers did not usually engage in historical research in liturgical matters. They celebrated events that were customary to celebrate in their local churches. During the era of the first Ecumenical Councils, there was great diversity, with churches and even individual dioceses often using their own Eucharistic prayers and even Creeds. The unification of these matters came later and is associated with the split of Eastern Christianity into two parts, Orthodox and Monophysite, and, of course, with the emergence and spread of Islam.

To conclude the biblical theme, let us note that the prophecy from Exodus and Deuteronomy was not the only one. In the Book of Job, which presents the image of a suffering righteous man in whom Christians

saw Christ the Messiah, Job himself curses the day he was conceived. The third chapter of this great biblical book, the mystical Old Testament "Gospel of Suffering," begins with the words: "Then Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. And Job began and said: 'Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night when it was said, "A man is conceived!"' (Chapter 3, verses 1–3). According to ancient exegetes, among whom the Church Fathers hold a special place in Orthodoxy, these words are also connected with the biblical predestination of the Annunciation, Nativity, and Crucifixion of Jesus.

The early Christians called the dates of the martyrdom of the saints their birthdays. The word "martyr" in Greek literally means "witness." "These are the words of the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Ruler of God's creation," says the Apocalypse (Revelation 3:14). From these words, it is clear that the first martyr, the true witness, was the Lord Jesus. The first three centuries of Christian history, from Easter and the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles to the sole reign of Constantine (324), were a time of persecution by pagans. Martyrs suffered for bearing witness to their faith, believing that their death was not destruction,



Andrei Rublev. Icon "The Nativity of Christ." 1405

but birth in Jesus. In his Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul calls Jesus "the firstborn from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20). From the perspective of the first Christian generations, the day of the Lord's crucifixion was His birthday. It took three centuries before, with the end of persecution

and the beginning of the universal spread of the Church, Christians realized through the Holy Spirit that it was necessary to truly assimilate the Gospel accounts of the Savior's birth into the world and solemnly celebrate the Nativity of Jesus.

Easter has been celebrated by Christians since the very beginning.



Gerhard Locher. "Adoration of the Magi." 1785

Other holidays came later, spreading throughout the Christian world with the end of persecution. Over the centuries, a process that took a very long time, a higher register of holidays was formed in the Orthodox liturgical calendar, twelve in total, which to this day are invariably and solemnly celebrated by the Church. They are called the "twelve great feasts." All of them are dedicated to Christ or the Mother of God, or to Christ and the Mother of God together. Easter, being the basis of all these celebrations and immeasurably higher in significance, is not included in this number. On the twelfth day after the birth of Christ, the Church celebrates the feast of the Epiphany. In Orthodoxy, this feast is also called the Baptism of the Lord.

Initially, Epiphany was the only major Christian holiday after Easter. While Easter celebrated the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, who ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father, Epiphany celebrated the Incarnation of God. Epiphany encompassed the entire spectrum of meanings associated with Jesus' earthly life. Thus, Easter and Epiphany constituted the two poles of the revelation of the New Testament mystery. At a certain point in history, the feast of Epiphany was, in a sense, "divided" into two parts, and Christmas separated from it, just as Eve separated from Adam's rib. This was the case in the East.

In the Roman Catholic Church, Christmas has been celebrated since ancient times. Currently, in the Christian West, Epiphany primarily symbolizes the worship of the Magi, while in Orthodoxy it symbolizes the baptism of the Lord Jesus, the beginning of His preaching, and the beginning of His earthly ministry. The place of the Epiphany is the world. God loved this world; He will never abandon it. By the power of His glorious Epiphany, He is

present in the universe forever. The people of God know that "there is no salvation outside the Church." In turn, the Church, which loves this world with the love of the Holy Spirit, believes that there is no salvation outside this world created by God.

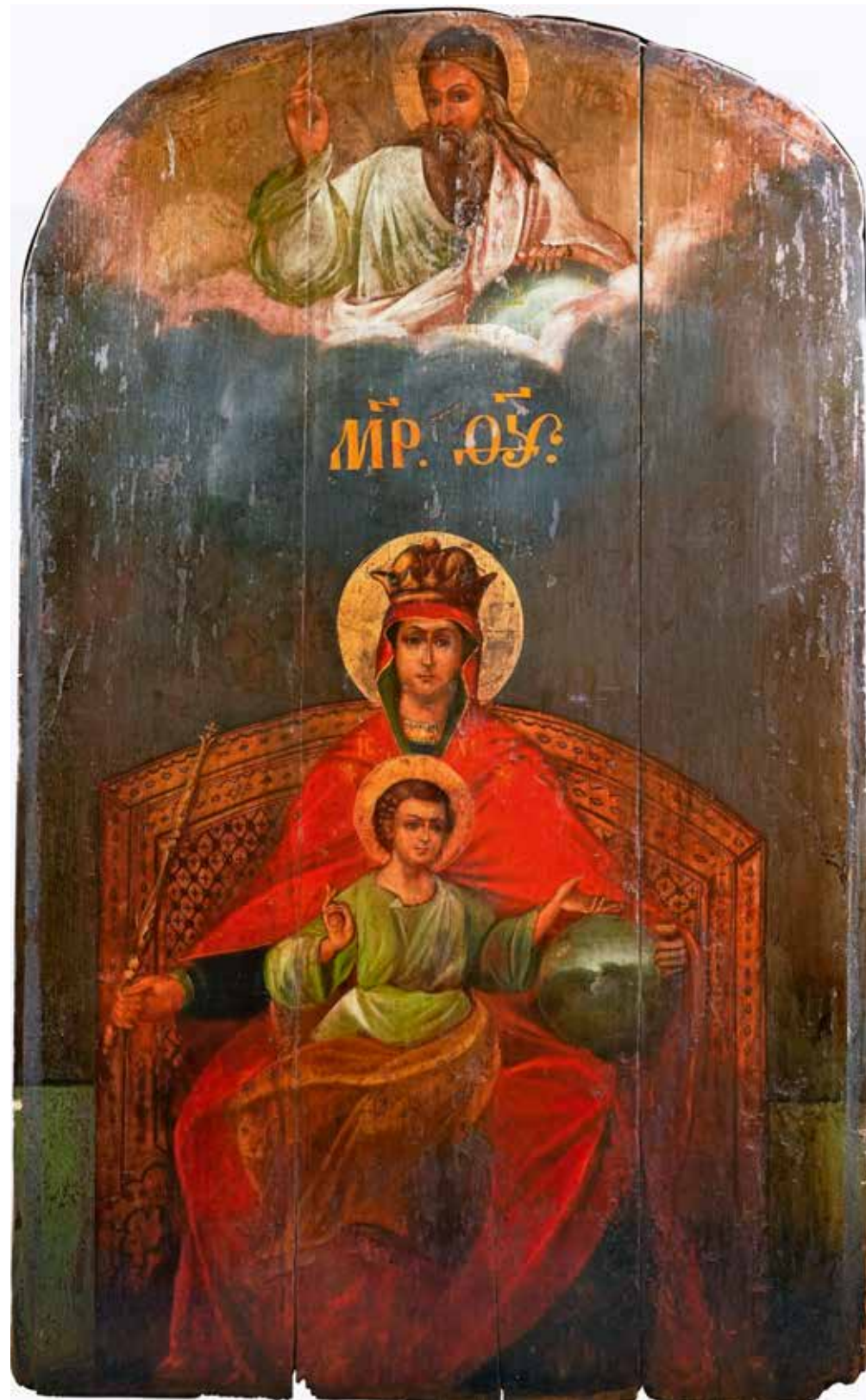
In 1918, World War I ended. Four years later, following the defeat of the Greek armies, which in turn was caused by the cessation of Allied aid to Greece in the war against Turkey, the entire Greek Orthodox population of Asia Minor was forcibly resettled in Europe. The Patriarch of Constantinople lost his flock. It was a great, apocalyptic upheaval.

In 1924, the Church of Constantinople switched to the modern calendar. Several other Orthodox Churches followed suit. Nowadays, Christmas on December 25 is celebrated by Greek Orthodox Christians, the Patriarchate of Antioch, as well as the Romanian, Bulgarian, and Albanian Orthodox Churches. The Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, as well as the Orthodox Church in America, also belong to this group. The Russian Church, the Serbian Church, the Georgian Church, the Polish Orthodox Church, the Church of Jerusalem, and the Holy Mountain of Athos celebrate Christmas on January 7. The difference of thirteen days exists in this century, and in the next century it would have increased by another day, but the "date change" will not take place because it has been suspended by tacit agreement. The Russian Church celebrates its holidays according to the old calendar, which is called the Julian calendar.

The Gospel story of Christ's birth has inspired theologians, saints, poets, artists and musicians to create original works of art dedicated to the most important event in human history. One of the central works in the oeuvre of German-language

writer Edzard Schaper (1908–1984) is *The Legend of the Fourth Magi*, in which the fourth wise king turns out to be a Russian prince. Schaper is the author of numerous works of fiction, novels, novellas, and short stories, in which he boldly expresses his position as a writer and Christian, calling for adherence to the Gospel commandments. The writer is best known for his two-part novel *The Dying Church* (1935) and *The Last Christmas* (1949), about the life and tragic death of the Orthodox priest Father Seraphim and his community, and about the new hope born in the Church through the suffering of the martyrs. *The Legend of the Fourth Magi* (1961), which describes in fairy-tale form the journey of a Russian prince going to worship the newborn Christ Child, represents the author's profound reflection on the fate and destiny of the world, the Church and Russia. The essence of the story is that the "Fourth King", who turned out to be a Russian prince, learned in time about the impending birth of Jesus. But having spent too much time on gifts, including Russian honey, he gradually gave them away to all those in need. Along the way, he encountered various vicissitudes and was so late that he arrived only at the moment of the Crucifixion.

The legend of Edzard Schaper was undoubtedly inspired by Russian religious thought, as well as by the circumstances of the writer's own life, who wandered extensively, lived in Estonia, Finland, and Poland, was twice sentenced to death in absentia by a Nazi court, and witnessed the persecution of the Church in various, often contradictory circumstances. How can we not recall the great painting by Russian artist Mikhail Nesterov (1862-1942) "Holy Week," painted in the tragic 1930s, where the Crucifixion rises against the backdrop of a Russian landscape, before which stand Dostoevsky



The Reigning Icon of the Mother of God, 18th century. Church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Kolomenskoye, Moscow

and Gogol, a priest, and the artist's wife, who holds a small child's coffin with the body of their child. The Russian fourth wise king was late, and, like him, the Julian calendar, which is so important for the Russian Church, is also "late" in relation to the "generally accepted Christmas" on December 25.

This "delay" is unique, because it is largely due to this that the outside world, which knows almost nothing about Christianity, can appreciate the stunning, magnificent uniqueness of the Orthodox Christianity. By analogy with the Second Coming of Jesus, which, according to Scripture and dogma, is about to happen but is still on the threshold so that as many people as possible may be saved (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4), the "old-style" Churches, by God's predestination, "suspend" the beginning of the celebration so that the world may see Orthodoxy in its sovereign beauty. The sovereign is the one who declares a state of emergency and suspends the normal course of events. Like the Fourth Magi, the Russian Church celebrates Christmas with a formal astronomical delay. Thus, believers bow down before the Nativity scene when other Christians, Catholics and Protestants, are already celebrating Epiphany,

as the worship of the Magi. In Orthodoxy, the worship of the Magi coincides with the moment of Christmas. The delay does not turn into tardiness, and the Legend of the Fourth Wise Man comes true, but not according to a pre-written script. After all, all Christians still come to the nativity scene together.

In the Symbol of Faith, the Church is referred to as catholic. This term means unity in the greatest possible diversity. Since Eastern Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries was led by the Church of Alexandria, the custom of celebrating not Christmas but Epiphany has been preserved in the most ancient Orthodox churches, which historically linked their fate precisely to this ancient center of historical Christianity. Therefore, even today, Epiphany is celebrated on January 6 in the Coptic Church of Alexandria and Egypt, the Armenian Apostolic Church, and other ancient Oriental Orthodox Churches. The celebration of the Nativity of Jesus is included here in the single event of the Epiphany; this great tradition does not know a separate holiday of the Nativity of Christ.

In theology, there is a discipline called comparative theology. Its purpose is to identify the differences between Orthodoxy on the one hand, and Catholicism and Protestantism on the other. Another name for this discipline is ecumenical theology. While comparative theology is more polemical in nature, ecumenical theology seeks to find common ground. One of the most common critical arguments in comparative theology is that contrary to the tradition of the Early Church, in Catholicism and Protestantism, the celebration of Christmas has become much more important than Easter. However, if desired, this same argument can be turned around. After all, while formally remaining "only" one of the twelve major holidays,

Christmas in Orthodoxy, as in the West, gradually, over a very long process lasting centuries, acquired the characteristics of the "feast of feasts," as Easter is called in the works of the Church Fathers. This includes the forty-day fast before Christmas, the preparatory weeks, the period of holy days after the holiday during which all fasting is canceled, and finally, the forty-day period leading up to the Feast of the Presentation, which creates an analogy between the period of Easter and Ascension.

However, unlike Holy Week and Easter, Christmas does not cancel the days of commemoration of the saints, which gives the Christmas days special features. On January 5, the eve of Christmas Eve, the Church celebrates the memory of St. Paul of Neocaesarea. He was a bishop, confessor of the faith, and participant in the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325).

The city of Neocaesarea, with which Paul's name is associated, was a fortress on the Euphrates. It should be distinguished from another, much more famous Neocaesarea in Anatolia, where, among other great figures of Christian antiquity, Saint Gregory the Wonderworker (+275) was bishop.

The great ancient historian of the Church, Theodoret of Cyrus (393–457), writes that at the sight of Paul and other confessors of the faith who suffered during the Great Persecution of Diocletian at the Council of Nicaea, Emperor Constantine the Great wept. They bore the marks of deep wounds and terrible mutilations inflicted by pagans. Paul himself had his hands burned. Many pagans, especially representatives of the judicial and administrative elite, were not sadists and did not inflict injuries without reason. They heard Christians, primarily bishops, and Paul was

such a wandering missionary bishop, refer to the Eucharist in their prayers as "Fire" "Light," and "the Body and Blood of God." "Our God is a consuming fire," says the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews (12:29).

Driven by vicious curiosity, the pagans decided to test Paul's words. If he really dared to hold in his hands "the Body of God," which "is Fire," would he withstand the test of physical fire? Paul endured and did not renounce his faith. He teaches a lesson to Christians for all time to come.

The words of prayers, especially those addressed to God in the context of the Eucharist and Communion, contain many statements that are astonishing in their boldness. When uttering them, one must be prepared to undergo a test of faithfulness to the words spoken.

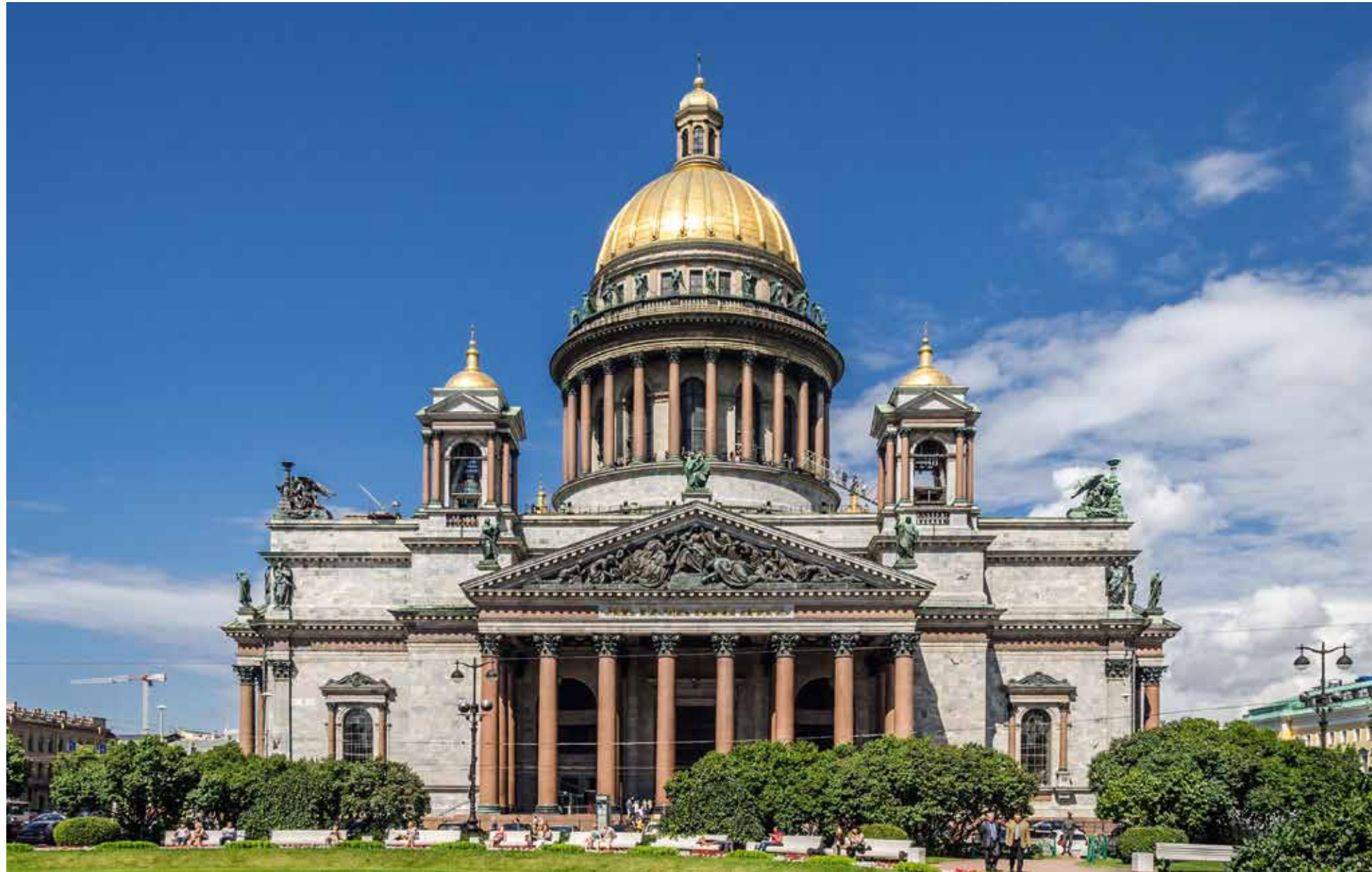
When communicating with our brothers and sisters from other Christian denominations, especially Catholics and Protestants, it is important to emphasize that we, Orthodox Christians, truly celebrate the Nativity of Christ. After all, there is a widespread belief among them that Orthodox Christians celebrate only Epiphany. Since about half of Orthodox Christians follow the Julian calendar and the other half follow the Gregorian calendar, it turns out that Christmas in Orthodoxy is not only celebrated twice, on January 7 and December 25, respectively, but, thanks to the Christmastide, that is, the great festive period from Christmas to Epiphany, it lasts almost four weeks, which is practically equal to the time of preparation for Christmas, the sacred Advent.

"Christ is risen!" By analogy with this apostolic greeting of Easter time, with which Orthodox Christians greet each other from Easter to Ascension, during Christmastide it is customary to exclaim: "Christ is born! Glorify Him!"

AUGUSTE. A GENIUS OF RUSSIA

January 2026 marks the 240th anniversary of the birth of the architect Auguste Montferrand

By TEO GURIELI



St Isaac's Cathedral in St Petersburg. 1818–1858

The French architect Auguste Montferrand did not leave the most important trace in French architectural heritage, but in architectural work on Russian soil, mainly in St Petersburg. Russian architects and architectural historians write about him

with admiration, believing that Montferrand made an invaluable contribution to the architectural appearance of the then capital

of the Russian Empire. One of Montferrand's notable achievements is the brilliant completion of the central architectural complex of St Petersburg, which had begun to take shape under Peter the Great and developed in the eighteenth

the entire esplanade from the Winter Palace (1754–1762) to the Senate and Synod buildings (1829–1834), which is almost a kilometre long, acquired the appearance that makes such a great impression today. Two key elements of this panorama are Montferrand's creations: St Isaac's Cathedral (1818–1858) and the Alexander Column (1834), forty-seven metres high and weighing 600 tons, erected in Palace Square by decree of Nicholas I in memory of Alexander I's victory over Napoleon in the Patriotic War of 1812. The Column is crowned by a sculpture of an angel by Boris Orlovsky.

The obvious merit of Montferrand was that he was well aware of the combination of architectural elements and the real architectural environment, but we can only evaluate his legacy unbiasedly by tracing his creative path, especially on Russian soil.

Henri Louis Auguste Ricard de Montferrand was born on 23 January 1786 in Chaillot, a suburb of Paris. Benois Ricard, Auguste's father, died prematurely, and the boy was brought up by his stepfather, the artist and engraver Antoine de Commarioux. It was his stepfather who taught the boy how to draw.

At the age of twenty Montferrand was admitted to the Paris Royal School of Architecture, but he was almost immediately called up for military service and enlisted in the 9th Horse Guards Regiment of Napoleon's Guards. In 1806 he was wounded twice and, leaving the army the following year with the rank of sergeant, returned to Paris to continue his studies. Concurrently with his studies Montferrand served in the General Inspectorate of Architecture of Paris under Jacques Molinos. After graduating from school in 1813, he returned to military service. Having distinguished himself in the Battle

of Hanau, he was awarded the Legion of Honour and received the rank of senior quartermaster.

Retiring shortly after the Battle of Leipzig, Montferrand resumed work under Molinos, participated in the building of the Church of St Mary Magdalene and in designing the environment for churches under restoration. From that time on his life was connected with architecture forever. He is considered to have been greatly influenced by his contemporaries: the undoubtedly talented architects Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine.

Post-war French architecture was characterised, on the one hand, by a sharp decrease in the amount of building, especially of civil urban objects, and on the other – by an increase in interest in religious architecture, a trend that lasted till the last decades of the nineteenth century. Many architects, especially young ones, were engaged in restoring Gothic cathedrals and building new structures, relying on the principles of medieval architecture, which became the basis for neo-Gothic, or resorted to the so-called “high Baroque”. Young Montferrand was very impressed by both. But it was extremely hard to find a decent and large-scale job in France at that time. In April 1814, taking advantage of the Russian Emperor Alexander I's stay in Paris, Montferrand presented the monarch with his Album of Various Architectural Designs Dedicated to His Majesty the Emperor.

Montferrand prepared the album carefully: in particular, he included drawings of designs that should seem important and even necessary to the Emperor. These were designs for an imperial country palace, a public library, a Triumphal Arch to the Brave Russian Army, a column in honour of Universal peace and an equestrian statue in honour of the Emperor. The drawings of the album were

century thanks to the work of B. Rastrelli, A. Zakharov and C. Rossi.

But, according to historians, it was thanks to Montferrand that



The First St Isaac's Church. A nineteenth-century lithograph from an 1845 drawing

provided with a short list of building materials and even the approximate cost of their creation.

It should be noted that Alexander I was also presented with albums of designs by Fontaine and Percier, but though they were more venerable architects, their designs did not interest the Emperor, while Montferrand was invited to work in the Russian capital.

The fact that Montferrand was patronised by Agustin de Betancourt and Molina (1758–1824),

an outstanding engineer and architect in the Russian service, must have played a significant role. A lieutenant general, a Spanish and Russian scientist, engineer, and statesman, he arrived in Russia in 1798 and a year later became head of the Russian Corps of Railway Engineers. For the rest of his life he headed the Institute of Engineers where he lectured on theoretical mechanics and machine theory, founding a scientific school of bridge building. In 1816 Betancourt became the head

of the Committee of Buildings and Hydraulic Works in St Petersburg, and three years later became the chairman of the Main Directorate of Railways. From 1816 to 1818 he supervised the construction of the Expedition building (factory) of State paper provision and currency printing facility (now the Goznak currency printshop) in St Petersburg, for which he designed printing presses. Betancourt's contribution to the establishment of the foundry and cannon factory in Kazan and the arms

factory in Tula should be particularly noted. The famous Manege was built in Moscow to Betancourt's design. C. Rossi, V. Stasov, and J. Bove participated in the implementation of his various projects. In 1818–1822 the first roadway in Russia was built under the direction of Betancourt: St Petersburg – Novgorod – Moscow.

Betancourt was clearly one of the most important confidants of Alexander I and his main adviser on a wide range of issues related to architecture and engineering.

Montferrand met him thanks to a letter of recommendation from the renowned watchmaker Abraham Louis Breguet. As it is in Pushkin's immortal *Eugene Onegin*: "Onegin drives down the boulevard // And there he strolls, and takes his pleasure, // Till his Breguet's unsleeping chime // Tells him that it is dinnertime." Distinguished by their high precision and beautiful design, Breguet's watches were very popular in Russia among aristocrats and royalty at that time.

Betancourt liked Montferrand. Their collaboration began as early as 1817. At that time Betancourt was the chief builder of the Nizhny Novgorod Fair, and he decided to involve Montferrand in the design of some buildings. The principal one was the Old Fair Cathedral of the Saviour, the foundation stone of which was solemnly laid on 20 August 1818.

With all due respect to Montferrand's best works, this cathedral can hardly be regarded as a new milestone in his work. The attempt to fuse Classicism and some forms of Byzantine architectural art was not very successful; as for ancient Russian architecture, Montferrand, apparently, was not yet familiar with it. At the same time, perhaps the building of the cathedral in Nizhny Novgorod helped him significantly in the process of designing his famous masterpiece – St Isaac's Cathedral.

The new buildings of the Nizhny Novgorod Fair had been completed by 15 July 1822. Of these, only the Old Fair Cathedral of the Saviour, designed by Montferrand, has survived.

Meanwhile, the Russian aristocracy and the Orthodox Church were eagerly discussing a much larger and more important project for the Russian capital: to rebuild the Cathedral of St Isaac of Dalmatia, an early Christian hermit, monk and confessor (the fourth century) venerated by the Orthodox Church, known for his struggle against Arianism and the gift of prophecy. He founded a monastery near Constantinople and became its abbot. The first church, consecrated in honour of St Isaac of Dalmatia, was built at the behest of Peter the Great back in 1710.

The contest for the design of the new cathedral was announced in 1809. In 1816, after several unsuccessful attempts to hold it, Alexander I commissioned Agustin Betancourt, chairman of the newly formed Committee on Buildings and Hydraulic Works, to work out rebuilding plans for St Isaac's Cathedral. Without much hesitation, Betancourt suggested entrusting the design to Auguste Montferrand.

In 1818 Montferrand presented a number of spectacular drawings of the future St Isaac's Cathedral, and the Emperor liked them. A special commission was set up to rebuild the existing St Isaac's Church. It included officials of the highest rank: the chairman was Count N. P. Golovin, a member of the State Council; Prince Alexander Golitsyn, Minister of Spiritual Affairs and Public Education, and, of course, Betancourt were among its members.

Building soon commenced. It was supervised by the architect himself who, apparently, was not very strict: embezzlements, forgeries and

inflated estimates began. The scandal was hushed up, albeit with difficulty. The building had been going on for two years, but the detailed design had not been completed: in fact, there were only drawings of two facades, a general layout and one section.

And then, like a bolt from the blue, the President of the Academy of Arts A. N. Olenin received a letter from the architect Antoine Mauduit. He had been working in Russia since 1810, presenting several interesting designs, rebuilding the St Petersburg Bolshoi Theatre and building several houses. He had one advantage over Montferrand: he was also a good engineer. In a letter to Olenin he announced that Montferrand's calculations regarding the stability of the building were incorrect, and the technical qualities of the loadbearing structures did not hold water; in other words, the author of the design had shown total incompetence. Moreover, Mauduit supported his conclusions with drawings and calculations.

Initially the Academy took the message with a fair amount of scepticism: The Russian Empire's main cathedral was too tasty a morsel for European architects to keep from brawling. The Academy decided to present the story as a conflict between two architects, and the Commission for the Building of St Isaac's Cathedral did not give it wide publicity. Then Mauduit turned directly to the Emperor.

In February 1822 the Tsar suspended Montferrand from work, halted the building work, and ordered a special committee to be set up at the Academy of Arts, headed by A. N. Olenin, to consider Mauduit's comments on the building of St Isaac's Cathedral. It was only then that it emerged that there was no cross-section in the building plans for the cathedral. It revealed all of Montferrand's errors. Experts recognised that it was impossible



St Isaac's Cathedral to Montferrand's design approved in 1818 in a painting by V. S. Sadovnikov

to build the cathedral to the existing design.

It was an incredibly complicated situation. Lots of money had already been invested in the building. Rumours were spreading in the country about the "wrong choice of the architect", "the authorities' incompetence", and "unreasonable expenses". The monarch decided to stop the rumours about the wasted funds and, since the building had gone too far, resolved to continue it. V. P. Stasov, A. A. Mikhailov 2nd, A. I. Melnikov, P. P. Bazin and V. I. Beretti took part in correcting the design. Mauduit failed to replace Montferrand.

On 9 March 1825 Montferrand's revised design was presented to the Emperor. It was recognised again as the best and approved by Alexander I.

On 13 April 1825 Montferrand continued building the cathedral

under the tutelage of such major experts of architecture as V. P. Stasov, A. A. Mikhailov 2nd, and A. I. Melnikov. However, it should be admitted that without Mauduit's intervention Montferrand would hardly have completed his project.

Anyway, Montferrand won. He eventually built the largest and most important cathedral in St Petersburg.

But there remains one more question that still interests architectural historians, especially in the UK. Studying hundreds of cathedral designs worldwide, they concluded that Montferrand's original design of St Isaac's Cathedral would not have been born but for an earlier design: that of St Paul's Cathedral in London. The difference between them is primarily in the age and style: the London cathedral was completed in 1708 and built by the architect Christopher Wren

in the Baroque style, whereas Montferrand made his design over 100 years later and built it in the style of late Classicism. But architects note the fact that Montferrand successfully used all the elements that are combined in Ren's creation: porticoes commensurate with the structure, belfries, a dome surrounded by a gallery, pediments and sculptural decor. In the nineteenth century thousands of engravings depicting St Paul's Cathedral circulated throughout Europe, and Montferrand probably could not resist the temptation to embody Wren's most interesting ideas in his design of St Isaac's Cathedral.

St Isaac's Cathedral is reputed to be an exceptionally important urban dominant. It is 101.5 metres tall, and its dimensions in the plan (with porticoes) are 111.5×97.6 metres. The monumental building is

decorated with four eight-column porticoes and crowned with a metal gilded dome on a drum surrounded by monolithic granite columns. It took forty years to build the edifice. The solemn consecration of the new cathedral on 30 May (11 June) 1858 was performed by Metropolitan Gregory of Novgorod, St Petersburg, Estonia and Finland.

Montferrand's last work was the design of the St Petersburg monument to Emperor Nicholas I, which, however, the man of genius did not have time to complete; this work was completed by the architect D. Ye. Efimov.

Montferrand was gifted in various fields of fine art. The artistic part of the original design of the Alexander Column was excellently executed with watercolour technique and testifies to Montferrand's high skill as an artist. This sketch is currently in the library of the St Petersburg State Transport University. He was a good draughtsman and often painted portraits of his contemporaries in Russia.

Montferrand's efforts were generously rewarded. For building St Isaac's Cathedral, he received the rank of active state councillor, 40,000 silver roubles and a gold medal decorated with diamonds on St Andrew's Ribbon; and for building the Alexander Column – the Order of St Vladimir, 3rd Degree, and 100,000 silver roubles. In Russia he received three orders: the Order of St Vladimir, 4th Degree (1826); the Order of St Anna, 2nd Degree with diamonds (1828); and the Order of St Vladimir, 3rd Degree (1834).

Montferrand passed away in 1858 in St Petersburg. A curious detail: the protracted building caused rumours about a prophecy allegedly received by the Frenchman from a passing clairvoyant who predicted that the architect would die once the cathedral was completed. And indeed: a month after the solemn



Bust of Auguste Montferrand at St Isaac's Cathedral

ceremony of the consecration of St Isaac's Cathedral Montferrand passed away.

The architect wished to be interred in one of the underground vaults of St Isaac's Cathedral, the building of which he completed just a month before his demise. However, Emperor Alexander II did not give permission for this, since Montferrand was a Catholic.

As a result, the funeral ceremony took place at the Catholic Church of St Catherine of Alexandria in Nevsky Avenue, and then the funeral procession circled St Isaac's Cathedral thrice. Subsequently, his remains were taken to France. Montferrand rests in the Montmartre Cemetery next to his mother Louise Fitioni and stepfather Antoine de Commarieux.

THE EMPEROR OF RUSSIAN PERFUMERY

For the 145th anniversary of the birth of the “main alchemist of the twentieth century”, a creator whose fate reflected that of Russia and perhaps the whole of Europe at the time of great change

By KONSTANTIN LEGENDRE

Chanel greedily inhaled the scent offered to her by Ernest Beaux. – Master, what kind of miracle is this?..

– Under number five is the so-called “winter perfume”, a melting northern note... Russian perfume, mademoiselle.

– This is what I’ll call it: Chanel N° 5...

When France celebrated the centenary of Chanel N° 5 a few years ago, Gabrielle Chanel was credited with creating the perfume of the century. Practically none of the leading French media mentioned Ernest Beaux. Nevertheless, perfumers and flavourists (fragrance engineers) from all over the world refer to this native of Russia as to the “Napoleon of perfumery”. A descendant of Moscow Frenchmen, he lived a hectic and long life. No other perfumer has created as many new scents as Beaux. And his chief masterpiece is Chanel N° 5. Beaux was the first to equate perfumery with chemical “creativity”, and he “composed” the “scores” of his perfumes like a composer.

The “French Wave”

A genius sometimes remains anonymous in History. I remembered this maxim when I started collecting materials for my essay. Indeed, Chanel N° 5 has been the most famous perfume brand in the world

for a century and is reckoned by most people as one of the symbols of France, but in reality this gentle elixir, a few drops of which (thanks for Marilyn Monroe’s revelation!) are the only “clothes” the beauties of the universe sleep in, was an image of... frosty Russia! And this unique perfume was created by a deeply Russian man. True, he is French by blood and by the last name, but by his very nature he was sincerely Russian.

“There are many various stories and legends about Ernest Beaux, but his real life is much more interesting,” says Natalia Timoshenkova, Executive Director of the International Confederation of Perfumers and Flavourists. “His grandmother came to Russia with a young illegitimate son. Though this woman was a modest milliner, she managed to give her son a decent education in Russia. Ernest Beaux’s father became a top-level entrepreneur who headed the Margarine Russian-French Society with factories in Moscow, St Petersburg, Odessa, Warsaw...”

The first immigrants from France settled in Russia back under Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible. These were military men, doctors, and artisans, primarily tapestry makers. A particularly strong “French wave” invaded Russia at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These were merchants and nobles who fled to the banks of the Neva and Moskva Rivers to fight the Jacobins and then Napoleon. Not to mention many tens of thousands of prisoners left

after the collapse of Bonaparte’s Grand Army.

In the mid-nineteenth century the industrial revolution commenced in the country. Along with metallurgical works and railways, perfume factories also developed in Russia: the well-being of those who had moved to live in the cities grew, and they wanted a more beautiful life, accompanied by pleasing aromas and exquisite make-up.

“In the register of births we see that Ernest Beaux was born on 25 November 1881, and on 5 December 1882 he was baptised,” Natalia Timoshenkova points at the lines in yellowed archive folios. “It says that on 5 December 1882, at the Moscow Roman Catholic Church of St Louis, Vicar Mederic De Cosnac recorded the baptism of the son of the merchant Edouard Hyppolite Beaux, and Maria Wilgemina, nee Misfeld, legal spouses. The infant named Ernest Henry was baptised...”

Russia was his homeland, and Moscow was his beloved city, where his large family lived: three generations who had achieved very significant success. Like many other French people who settled in Russia and became Russians.

“I will return to France to die, but I can only live and work in Russia,” Henri Brocard, who became Genrikh Afanasyevich in Russia (the rival of Alphonse Rallet & Co where Beaux worked), once said. Nicknamed “Fragrant Henri”, he was among the brilliant

galaxy of virtuosos of the sense of smell who laid the foundations of Russian perfumery, which at the turn of the century was rightly considered – without exaggeration, believe me! – one of the best in the world.

Alphonse Rallet, Adolphe Sioux, Alexander Ostroumov, Samuel Chepelevetsky... their names are unknown to the general public today, but their “fragrant feat” is truly immortal. At the 1900 World Fair in Paris, Russian perfumers did not bring the spirit of kvass and cabbage soup to the banks of the Seine, but exquisite perfumes that won the most prestigious awards and Grand Prix of the first Expo of the millennium. It was the World Fair where the Russian exposition blew up stereotypes and was called by the then French Minister of commerce, Industry, Posts and Telegraphs Alexandre Millerand “the most interesting seduction at Paris Labor Day.” And our hero, the grandson of an emigrant who had found a new homeland in Russia, had a hand (or, rather, his “nose”) in this miracle.

“Nose” is the nickname for a master perfumer in the professional community. From childhood Ernest had an excellent sense of smell and the ability to analyse scents. He was not yet seventeen when he joined the *Alphonse Rallet & Co* perfume factory, founded by Alphonse Rallet, a Frenchman who came to Russia in 1843. At the end of that century, it was situated in Teply Lane, in the Khamovniki district and the former estate of Prince Nikolai Stepanovich Vsevolozhsky. I walked along Moscow’s Timur Frunze Street many times without suspecting that one of the largest Russian perfume and cosmetics manufacturers, a supplier to the Imperial Court, as well as the King of Montenegro and the Shah of Iran, used to be where the offices of internet giants dominate today.



Ernest Henry Beaux. Between 1917 and 1921

Ernest’s older brother Edouard Beaux had already been working at Alphonse Rallet & Co (in the early twentieth century this outstanding businessman initiated the establishment of the Russo-French Chamber of Commerce), and no wonder that Ernest joined it.

“*Alphonse Rallet & Co* was regarded as the foremost perfume company in Russia. Its scale of production was huge, with half of it (over 600 names!) being not about soap, powder or make-up, but perfumes.

A stunning amount! Thus, in 1913, they produced for the sum of 2.9 million roubles. If I’m not mistaken, it’s equal to about 6 billion roubles in our days... Everything was under the direction of Edouard Edouardovich Beaux. Ernest Beaux joined the company in August 1898, and its cash register contains the first records of his salaries,” Natalia Timoshenkova holds miraculously surviving documents in her hands. “On 31 August 1898 he received 7.5 roubles. The next month we see



a full salary – fifteen roubles... Ernest Beaux was barely sixteen years old.”

The Great Brand of Alphonse Rallet & Co

“I started working in Moscow in 1898. My older brother was the administrator of Alphonse Rallet & Co at that time,” Ernest Beaux wrote in his *Memoirs of a Perfumer*. “This large company had 1,500 workers. Factory equipment and social organisation were perfect

for that era. We had to adapt to an extremely broad market (180 million people in Russia, plus China, Persia, the Balkans, etc) and take into account the tastes of Russian women in the use of perfumes and luxury items. Full trains would take toilet soap, rice powder, cologne and perfumes to all directions...”

It remains to add that by the early twentieth century the company's products had accounted for thirty-seven percent of the total cosmetic production in Russia. So as not to depend on supplies from abroad,

through the efforts of Alphonse Rallet & Co plantations for the cultivation of essential oil crops appeared in the south of Russia to produce substances for perfumery. The company was awarded the seal of the Russian Empire four times – the highest quality mark in the country. No other Russian company received this award so many times.

Alphonse Rallet & Co was also a pioneer of advertising. Postcards with views of Moscow, calendars, pencils, and even a periodical – *A Complete Encyclopaedia of Ladies' Needlework* – were produced and published. The word “logo” did not exist yet, but the brand name “Rallet” could be seen everywhere in Russia. A bold marketing ploy that was reflected in urban folklore and ditties:

*Spring is bringing gifts again
To the awakened earth.
The skies are clear and bright,
Like the counters of Rallet.*

At the turn of the century, the company's board of directors underwent significant changes. As it says in Rallet's annals, “Edouard Edouardovich Beaux, Ernest's older brother, assumed the post of the company's managing director (the brothers had different mothers and were twenty years apart). On 7 May 1898 at a board meeting chaired by Edouard Beaux it was decided to move the factory to a new location – the Butyrki area. It was a calculated and far-seeing move. There was a crystal factory owned by another Russian Frenchman, Dutfoy, which produced perfume bottles, in Panskaya Street next door. And close to it was the Typolithography (printing house) of E.I. Patriarki, the brother of Edouard Beaux's first wife and a long-term partner of Alphonse Rallet & Co, which produced labels, advertising posters and packages. We

should also mention the proximity of the Savyolovskaya railway station, from which the company built its own separate line. From that time on, according to Moscow guidebooks of the late nineteenth century, “this area, very low, marshy and absolutely uninhabitable, especially with constant rains”, began to turn into a developed industrial area. Soon a city tram line was built there, and in the early 1910s Butyrki became part of Moscow.

...The First World War destroyed everything. Ernest Beaux transferred his savings to the Support Fund for the Wounded and rushed as a volunteer to the French Army, because he was a French citizen. He fought against the Germans conscientiously, was wounded and awarded French and British orders. In the final months of the war he was seconded to the Russian Expeditionary Force sent to help the French near Verdun... And most importantly, he served till the very victory! However, it turned out to be bitter for the Russian Frenchman. Yesterday's employees sent him a wire from Moscow: “Do not return. The company has been nationalised and your property has been confiscated.”

Where are you, O dear epoch?!.. The poet Sergei Solovyov, Alexander Blok's second cousin, wrote about it in 1913:

*I am full of a childhood fairy-tale again,
And, having forsaken the royal Caucasus,
The dream flies to the Kuznetsky Bridge,
Once the fifth hour has struck.
There is the king of maidens' ideals –
The actor Kachalov in high overshoes –
Passes by the doors of Rallet
And is reflected in the window
Of the luxury shop,
From where fragrance drifts out.
Your charming cousin
Checkmated me here,
And even though my mortal dust may rot
in the ground –
My soul will fly to the doors of Rallet.*

Five years passed after the publication of these lines, and the company with 600 names in its catalogue, which had produced, as the advertisement said, “over 200 scents of excellent flower extracts”, was turned by the Bolsheviks into the “State Soap Factory No. 4 of the Zhirkost Trust”. And it produced only one thing: cheap soap that smelled of wet rags.

The Russian Smell of Snow

In Ernest Beaux's judgement, it was a brazen challenge to civilisation. A thirty-seven-year-old officer with combat experience and a man with an ebullient temperament, he could not stay away from struggle. In his eyes, with absolute evil – with Bolshevism. In the summer of 1918 a perfumer in military uniform disembarked at the Soborny Pier in Arkhangelsk as part of a contingent of Franco-British troops. And he immediately rushed into battle, leading a detachment of volunteers that dislodged the Red Army soldiers who had occupied the town of Onega. Beaux received the Order of the holy Grand Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles, 4th Degree, with swords and a bow for bravery from the Provisional Government of the Northern Region. The lieutenant who spoke Russian was involved in the activities of the intelligence department of the headquarters of the General Command of the Allied Armed Forces. That's when strange things began!

«...Lieutenant Beaux, a former major Moscow businessman, is of medium height, fat, with a round, flabby, shaven mug resembling a bulldog. With considerable initiative in committing atrocities, Beaux was a typical gendarme and security guard. It was under his 'paternal care' that the camp of prisoner of war on Mudyug Island was.”

So wrote the revolutionary Pavel Rasskazov in his *Notes of a Prisoner*. Who was it about? Was it really about Ernest Edouardovich, a handsome bon viveur, a keeper of impeccable style, a collector of paintings and a well-groomed theatre-lover? Moreover, no evidence of atrocities on the part of Beaux has survived: the memoirs, apparently, smack of propaganda. However, Rasskazov (he became a prominent figure among the Bolsheviks till his death of Spanish flu) claimed that when the prisoners of the camp demanded respect for their rights, Beaux cut off the dissatisfied: “You are not humans, but Bolsheviks! Bandits and traitors to the motherland.”

“Rasskazov describes him as a ‘bulldog with a round mug’. But there's a different person in these photos,” says Vladislav Goldin, a historian and professor at the Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, showing Beaux's portraits. “In the above-quoted notes about him there is obvious hostility, bias, and, frankly, hatred... For Beaux as a French officer the leitmotif of the Allied landings in Arkhangelsk was to implement the strategic military goals of the Entente, to protect warehouses. And in his eyes the Bolsheviks were Germanophiles. The Allies arrived to defend the North from a possible invasion by the Germans and the White Finns. It meant that those who allied with the Bolsheviks were enemies and supporters of the Germans. It was probably Beaux's simplistic perception.... The Bolsheviks concluded the peace treaty with the Germans in Brest-Litovsk, which meant they were ‘traitors to Russia.’”

Given the specifics of the time, this is understandable. A monarchist for many generations, Beaux was convinced of the criminal nature of the Bolshevik coup. For him the old Russia was beautiful, but

the new one was ignorant, dirty, and smelly... Returning to France, Ernest Edouardovich started his life anew: again at the Rallet factory, but in Grasse – one of the capitals of world perfumery. Nice, full of White emigres, was just a stone's throw away. All the faces were familiar! Grand Duke Dmitry Pavlovich (he had been exiled from Russia for the murder of Rasputin and thus escaped execution by the Bolsheviks) introduces the perfumer to his bohemian passion: "Gabrielle is embarking on a thorny path to haute couture. If she launches her first-rate fragrance, it will help her career..."

Beaux liked the slender Mademoiselle Chanel who wore skillful make-up and had a boyish hairstyle.

Coco had no idea that the aldehyde cocktail N° 5 (perfume compositions based on synthetic organic compounds) was a tribute to Ernest Edouardovich's former life. After all, it was a "winter perfume" that is revealed in the frosty air. It was also called a "fur perfume" at Alphonse Rallet & Co. In the 1900s the fashion to perfume furs spread from Moscow and St Petersburg to Europe... A melting winter note is the revelation of Beaux, who wrote down perfume formulas the way a composer creates the scores of his works. The "perfume composer" answered the question of what inspired him to create Chanel N° 5:

"I created this perfume in 1920, when I returned from the war. Part of my military campaign took place in the North and beyond the Arctic Circle, during the midnight solstice, when lakes and rivers exude a special freshness. I have kept this characteristic smell in my memory..."

"Ernest Beaux is a key figure in perfumery: not just in Russia, but globally," says Matvey Yudov, an expert perfumer. "He is a man who largely predetermined the future

development of perfumery. The scent that Beaux created over 100 years ago can be called innovative, unique and avant-garde. It was a big step forward from perfumery as a craft (when experts of the sense of smell simply took fragrant substances that smelled good and mixed them in various proportions) to perfumery as a refined art and a subtle way of self-expression."

Ernest Beaux was the first to equate perfumery with art: "Since for me perfumery is an art, a genuine perfumer should be an artist... Just as an artist will keep his palette even if he changes his style, a perfumer can recognise his style by the range of substances that he usually uses... If our thoughts are just a fantasy, then thanks to the perfumer's talent this fantasy finds a way to be embodied; by the way, these thoughts are certainly influenced by the environment we live in, the books we have read, and the artists we prefer. For me these were French poets and writers, as well as the poetry of Pushkin, the works by Turgenev and Dostoevsky, the music of Beethoven, Debussy, Borodin and Mussorgsky. The Imperial Theatre with its ballet and the Moscow Art Theatre, artists of the French school and the great Russian artists Serov, Levitan, Repin and many others, and especially the artistic environment that I so loved to be in" (from an article written by Ernest Beaux for the *Industrie de la Parfumerie* French magazine, 1946, No. 7).

Beaux enjoyed reciting in a sing-song voice the poetry of his fellow Russian emigre, Don Aminado, a famous Parisian man of letters:

*There is only one smell in the world,
And there is only one bliss in the world,
It's a Russian winter afternoon,
It's the Russian smell of snow.*

Whatever Ernest Edouardovich did, a particle of Russia was felt everywhere. It was in the "Free Russia"

Russian Masonic lodge, which he set up together with the writer Mark Aldanov, the historian Constantin de Grunwald and the last Ambassador of the Russian Empire to France Vasily Maklakov; in his flat in Boulevard Delessert, which was converted into a museum of Russian antiques; and in the laboratories of cosmetics companies (including Chanel and Bourgeois), where he worked and where dozens of Russian emigres worked with him...

"Sometimes, feeling that he had managed to convey what he had been looking for, and being in a particularly good mood, Ernest would assume a victorious look and, laughing, announce that he felt like the Napoleon of French perfumery," his pupil Konstantin Verigin recalled (he would later be repeatedly elected chairman of the French Perfumers' Society). "Then we would bow to him in a courtly manner, and the whole atmosphere of the laboratory would be charged with creative energy that facilitated new discoveries in the field of fragrances."

One can't even list them all. Having yielded his fame to Chanel, Beaux gave rise to the dictate of couturiers in the world of perfumery, which continues to this day. Not to mention that aldehyde fragrances were a revolutionary invention that determined the development of the industry for centuries to come. Only a year before his demise in 1961 did Ernest Edouardovich reluctantly give up the title of the leader of the art of perfumery to young masters.

He passed away at the age of seventy-nine. The funeral service for him was celebrated at Notre-Dame-de-Grace de Passy Church in Paris. The church floor was entirely covered with rose petals. The emperor of perfumery reposed in the summer. The white flower petals on the tiles were supposed to represent snow – his Russian snow...



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