

## THE BREAD OF LIFE

Bread Stamps, *prosphora* Breads, and Orthodox Rituals across the Centuries  
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Bread has always been at the heart of Christian rituals, from the Old Testament's references – both metaphorical and tangible, quotidian – to unleavened bread and yeast, up to the New Testament's embrace of bread as the ultimate – both metaphorical and tangible, real – embodiment of Christ's body. For the Orthodox Liturgy, a particular type of leavened bread – *prosphora* – is prepared and decorated with a specially-carved stamp – also called *prosphora* – whose symbols and letters are meant to express in images on the bread the core of Orthodox philosophy: the understanding of God's Incarnation and Resurrection, of the love between God and Man, of fall and hope, of death and life. In this presentation, I will take us across the centuries to explore the evolution of bread stamp shapes and designs across geographic regions and cultural differences while at the same time revealing the continuation of the fundamental yet most profound theological truths expressed through the simple yet perhaps most specially cherished of all foods – bread.

In addition to the Orthodox liturgical breads and bread stamps, the presentation will examine other varieties of bread made for special holidays in the Orthodox festive cycle. Finally, I will briefly discuss her community-based work with low-income communities and people with special needs in different countries, where she has been developing and employing collective bread-making as a therapeutic, educational, and community-building tool through socio-cultural centers called Bread Houses, translation of the word "Bethlehem" ([www.breadhousesnetwork.org](http://www.breadhousesnetwork.org)). Proving bread-making as a legitimate new method for creative therapy - bread therapy – the term inspired by Greek that I have crafted for these methods is *Psihatotherapy*, rooted in the word "psiha" which means the inside, soft part of the bread, intriguingly reminding of the word "psyche" which refers to the human soul. In light of Orthodox Christian theology, the proximity between the two words seems to be far from a mere coincidence.