

**St. George Orthodox Church**  
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**THE WEEKLY MESSENGER**

Published weekly in the interest of the parishioners and friends of Saint George Orthodox Church, Buffalo, NY a parish of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey and The Orthodox Church in America

**ST. GEORGE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

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**29th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST — Tone 4. Eve of the Nativity of Christ . Sunday before the Nativity.** Nun-martyr Eugenia of Rome, and with her Martyrs Philip, her father, Protus, Hyacinth, Basilla, and Claudia (ca. 262). Ven. Nicholas the Monk, of Bulgaria

**EPISTLE:** Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom **GOSPEL:**  
 Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40 **Matthew 1:1-25**

**GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST! GLORY FOREVER!**

**\*\*FLOWERS FOR THIS WEEK\*\***

In front of the Icon of Our Lord, In front of the Icon of The Theotokos, and on the Center Icon Table are donated by St. George Orthodox Church!

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**Altar Vigil Candles** are offered by Anthony DelNuovo in Loving Memory of Thy Dep

arted Servants of his family. May their memory be eternal.

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**TODAY'S WEEKLY MESSENGER IS SPONSORED BY:**  
 St. George Orthodox Church

**WELCOME TO ST. GEORGE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

We welcome all of you to the Divine Liturgy this morning, especially those who are visiting with us here at St. George Orthodox Church. Everyone is invited to the Parish Fellowship Hall following the Divine Liturgy for Christian Fellowship. It is our prayer that your experience this morning was spiritually uplifting and you will return very soon to pray with our parish family. In the Orthodox Church, we do not practice open Communion. However we do invite everyone to come and participate in the Divine Liturgy. Hence only those Orthodox Christians who have properly prepared themselves through prayer and fasting may receive Holy Communion. May the Lord bless you with many years of good health and happiness.

## **HYMNS FOR THE DIVINE LITURGY**

### **Troparion for The Resurrection – Tone 4**

When the women disciples of the Lord learned from the angel the joyous message of Thy Resurrection, they cast away the ancestral curse and elatedly told the apostles: “Death is overthrown! Christ God is risen,// granting the world great mercy!”

### **Troparion for The Holy Forefeast – Tone 4**

Mary was of David’s seed, so she went with Joseph to register in Bethlehem. She bore in her womb the Fruit not sown by man. The time for the birth was at hand. Since there was no room at the inn, the cave became a beautiful palace for the Queen.// Christ is born, raising up the image that fell of old.

### **Troparion for The Holy Fathers – Tone 2**

Great are the accomplishments of faith, for the three Holy Youths rejoice in the fountain of flames as though in the waters of rest; and the Prophet Daniel appeared a shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep.// So by their prayers, O Christ God, save our souls!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

### **Kontakion for The Fathers – Tone 1**

Rejoice, O Bethlehem! Prepare thyself, O Ephratha! The Lamb is on her way to give birth to the Chief Shepherd she carries in her womb. The God-bearing Forefathers will rejoice, beholding Him,// and with the shepherds, they will glorify the Virgin nursing Him.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

### **Kontakion for The Forefeast– Tone 3**

Today the Virgin comes to the cave to give birth to the Eternal Word. Hear the glad tidings and rejoice, O universe! Glorify with the angels and the shepherds the Eternal God, Who is willing to appear as a little child!

### **THE PROKEMEINON – TONE 4**

Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers, / and praised and glorified is Thy Name forever!

V. For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us!

### **ALLELUIA VERSES**

*We have heard with our ears, O God, for our fathers have told us.*

*For Thou hast saved us from them that oppose us, and hast put to shame them that hate us.*

### **THE HYMN TO THE THEOTOKOS**

It is truly meet to bless You, O Theotokos, ever blessed and most pure and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim. Without defilement, You gave birth to God the Word, true Theotokos, we magnify You!

### **COMMUNION HYMN**

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the highest! Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous; praise befits the just! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

## EPISTLE LESSON FOR TODAY

### **BRETHREN:**

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of

David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,

God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

## GOSPEL LESSON FOR TODAY

### **LET US ATTEND:**

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot

Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah.

Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah.

Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away

secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us.'"

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

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=== Scriptural Readings for the Week ===

PLEASE REFER TO THE OCA WEBSITE...[www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org)

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**THE SCHEDULE OF WEEKLY SERVICES and ACTIVITIES**

**SUNDAY DECEMBER 24, 2023 [STRICT FAST DAY]  
THE EVE OF THE GREAT FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD  
GOD and SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO THE FLESH**

The Hours – **9:10 AM**

Divine Liturgy followed by Brief Vespers Service – **9:30 AM**

BRIEF COFFEE HOUR in Parish Fellowship Hall following The Divine Liturgy!

The Festal Vigil Prayer Service – **4:00 PM**

**MONDAY DECEMBER 25, 2023**

**THE GREAT FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD GOD and  
SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO THE FLESH**

The Hours – **9:10 AM**      Festal Divine Liturgy – **9:30 AM**

Annual Parish Christmas Brunch in Parish Fellowship Hall  
following The Divine Liturgy with singing of Christmas Carols

**TUESDAY DECEMBER 26, 2023**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Day of The Feast: The Synaxis of The Theotokos**

Festal Divine Liturgy – **8:30 AM** [PLEASE NOTE TIME CHANGE]

**SATURDAY DECEMBER 30, 2023**

Great Vespers – **4:00 PM**

**SUNDAY DECEMBER 31, 2023**

**THE EVE OF THE GREAT FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR  
LORD GOD and SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST/ST. BASIL THE GREAT**

Matins – **8:45 AM**

Divine Liturgy – **9:30 AM**

Potluck Coffee Hour Fellowship in Parish Fellowship Hall following  
The Divine Liturgy!

Great Vespers with Litiya – **12:30 PM**

**ST. GEORGE ORTHODOX CHURCH EDUCATION CENTER**

**THE SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD**



## THE SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

On this day, the Sunday before the Nativity of Christ, our holy and God-bearing Fathers have enjoined us to make commemoration of all them that from the beginning of time have been well-pleasing unto God, from Adam even unto Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos, according to genealogy, as Luke the Evangelist hath recounted historically; and likewise for the Prophets and Prophetesses, especially of Daniel the Prophet and the three holy youths. It is also known as the Sunday of the Holy Genealogy. We remember the aforementioned names, those in the Old Testament who were related to Christ by blood, and those who spoke of His Birth as a man. In the Divine Liturgy, we shall read of Jesus Christ's lineage from the Gospel of Saint Matthew. In this way, the Church shows us that Christ truly became a man, taking on human nature. He was not a ghost, an apparition, a myth, a distant imagined god, or the abstract god of philosophers; such a god does not have a family tree. Our God is the God of Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob. He has flesh and blood, human ancestors—many of whom sinned greatly, but like David, also repented greatly. Yet, all of these righteous ones in every age had been well-pleasing to God because they loved Him. By taking on human nature, the Son of God became like us in all ways, in flesh and blood, in mind and soul, and in heart and will. He differed from us in only one way: He could not sin. Since we know that Christ's human nature remained sinless, He is also fully divine, and He shows us the way in which we can avoid sin, and so improve and transform our human nature.

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### **The Genealogy of Jesus Christ**

On this, the Sunday before the Nativity, the Church prescribes the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. The second half of the reading is the nativity story. Joseph is betrothed to Mary, but she is found to be with child, and so his marriage to her remains a secret until after the birth. It is the story we all know; the story we have heard every year, all of our lives.

As familiar as the story is, we seem to skip over the first half of the reading, the genealogy of Jesus Christ. This account of His genealogy differs from the one in Luke. This one begins with Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish people, and moves through and emphasizes King David, who ruled over the golden age of the Israelites.

Matthew wrote his Gospel with the Jewish people as his primary audience, thus he highlights the important figures in the Hebrew narrative. Abraham, the first man blessed of God, the man chosen to father the nation from which the Messiah would be born, and David, the greatest king of Israel. It would be proper and expected that the Messiah would have such a lineage.

In contrast, Luke starts his genealogy with Adam, and ties the humanity of Christ to the humanity of Adam and all people. Luke was writing for a wider audience which included Gentiles as well as Jews.

It is interesting that Matthew includes three women in his account. Normally, Jewish lineages were patriarchal, only figured through the fathers. Even more interesting is the fact that none of these three women are associated with ideal situations. Boaz was the son of Salmon and Rahab. Obed was the son of Boaz and Ruth. Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba.

Rahab was a Canaanite, a Gentile, and a prostitute in the city Jericho. With her help, two Hebrew spies were able to escape with news of Jericho's military capabilities. She recognized and revered the true God, the God of the Israelites, and helped them in an act of faith and penitence.

Ruth was a Moabite, a race shunned by the Hebrews. The entire race was thought to be unclean because it was fathered by Lot, Abraham's nephew, through incestuous relations. Whether this sordid story found in Genesis is fact or legend, the Hebrews had a very low view of the Moabites. Ruth, on the other hand, was a convert to Judaism, and one of the most caring and loving characters in the entirety of Scripture and a great hero of the Jewish people. The story of David and Bathsheba is the most well-known of the three stories mentioned in this genealogy. David, although he had many wives, saw Bathsheba, a married woman, bathing on a rooftop, and took a liking to her. In the course of his conquest of Bathsheba, he had her husband murdered and fathered an illegitimate child. The Scriptures are not as squeaky clean as one might imagine. Solomon the Wise, the builder of the temple, came from the marriage of King David and Bathsheba. Why would these sordid stories be included in the genealogy of the Messiah? Why not just say, "Salmon begat Boaz; Boaz begat Obed"? Why not hide the imperfections in the tapestry? We know that Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus Christ, but he and the Theotokos shared this lineage.

The Nativity of our Lord draws near, the union of God and man. Jesus Christ is truly God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, existing before all ages, coessential with Father and Holy Spirit. But Jesus Christ is truly man, truly born from the ashes and dust of which humanity is made. There is nothing of created matter which God cannot sanctify through His All-powerful touch. There is nothing so sordid or awful which cannot be made to fulfill His good will. Human nature was assumed into the person of Jesus Christ, and He thus sanctified it. It does not matter what sin we have fallen into; Rahab shows us faithfulness and repentance. It does not matter who we are; Ruth became a paragon of virtue from a despised race. It does not matter what is done to us;

Bathsheba's son's name, Solomon, has become synonymous with wisdom. All of these things work together ineffably to accomplish the will of God. "Every saint has a past; every sinner has a future." It is through Christ who sanctifies all, we can all have a hope of a saintly future.

### The Jesse Tree

On the two Sundays preceding the feast of the Nativity, the Church commemorates the forefathers and the fathers: the prophets and saints of the Old Testament who prepared the coming of Christ. The Sunday before the Nativity of the Lord (December 18-24) is known as the Sunday of the Holy Fathers. On this day the Church commemorates all those who were well-pleasing to God from all ages, from Adam to St. Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos, those who are mentioned in the genealogy of Luke 3:23-38. The holy prophets and prophetesses are also remembered today, especially the Prophet Daniel and the three holy youths.

The Jesse tree represents Jesus' family tree. The name is taken from Isaiah 11:1 – "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." - in which Jesus is referred to as a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse, the father of David. Look up the information in the bible about each of the forefathers of Christ to find out why each symbol is associated with the ancestor.

### **Suggested Symbols**

- |                |                    |                                       |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • Adam and Eve | Apple              | (Genesis 2:4-3:24)                    |
| • Noah         | Ark or rainbow     | (Genesis 6:11-22, 7:17-8:12, 20-9:17) |
| • Abraham      | Knife              | (Genesis 12:1-7, 15:1-6)              |
| • Isaac        | Ram                | (Genesis 22:1-19)                     |
| • Jacob        | Ladder             | (Genesis 27:41-28:22)                 |
| • Joseph       | Colorful coat      | (Genesis 37, 39:1-50:21)              |
| • Moses        | Tablets of the law | (Exodus 2:1-4:20)                     |
| • David        | Harp               | (1 Samuel 16:17-23)                   |

- |             |               |                                    |
|-------------|---------------|------------------------------------|
| • Isaiah    | Lion and lamb | (Isaiah 1:10-20, 6:1-13, 8:11-9:7) |
| • Mary      | Lily          | (Luke 1:26-38)                     |
| • Elizabeth | Small home    | (Luke 1:39-55)                     |
| • Joseph    | Hammer or saw | (Matthew 1:18-25)                  |

## The Winter Pascha, Chapter 16: The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

*The following is an excerpt from **The Winter Pascha**, by Fr.  
Thomas Hopko*

The gospel reading for the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday before Christmas is "the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham," taken from the gospel according to St. Matthew. This genealogy lists the generations of people from Abraham to David, to the Babylonian captivity of the people of Israel, to the birth of Jesus. It is a selected genealogy, ending in the appearance of "Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ" (Mt 1:16). It differs from the genealogy presented in St. Luke's gospel which begins with Jesus "being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph," and goes back all the way not simply to Abraham but to Adam (Lk 3:23-38).

There are many purposes for presenting the genealogy of Jesus in the gospels, chief among which is the affirmation that Jesus, being in truth the Son of God, as all the gospels testify, has come "in the flesh" as a real human being. This affirmation was critically important in the time of the apostles and the first Christian generations because, unlike today, the temptation of the early period of Christianity was not to deny Jesus' divinity, but to deny His real and authentic humanity.

As a matter of historical fact, the first Christian heretics were those who said that Jesus was some sort of divine being (how this was explained had many variations and versions) who only appeared to

be a true man, but was not really one since "flesh and blood" were taken to be intrinsically degrading if not downright evil. Thus the apostle Paul had to insist that in Jesus, who belongs to the Jews "according to the flesh" (Rom 9:5), the "whole fulness of deity dwells *bodily*" (Col 2:9), and that it is the same Jesus who died and was buried and raised in the flesh as a real man, who is Messiah and Lord.

...

The genealogies in the gospels of Saints Matthew and Luke are made to and from Joseph. This is not to give the impression that Jesus came from Joseph's seed. Both gospels are absolutely clear on this point. Jesus is born from the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. The point is rather that Joseph is Jesus' father according to the law, and it is from the father that one's lawful descent is to be traced. Jesus' legal father is "Joseph, son of David," the legal husband of Mary (Mt 1:20).

One other important point is made in listing the human generations which led to the birth of Jesus. This is the fact that God is faithful to His promises even though His chosen people are often not faithful. Among the people from whom Jesus came are both sinners and heathens. In a word, Jesus comes not only from the righteous and holy, but from the wicked and sinful. And He comes not only from Jews, but from Gentiles. The names of the four women specifically mentioned in St. Matthew's list-- Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba)-- were noted, not to say notorious, Gentiles, including one of David's own wives, the mother of Solomon. The point to be seen here is one beautifully made in an early Christian hymn quoted in the Bible in the second letter to Timothy:

If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him;  
If we endure, we shall also reign with Him;  
If we deny Him, He also will deny us;



If we are faithless, He remains faithful-- for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Tim 2:11-13)

This is the wonderful witness of the genealogies of Jesus: If we are faithless, the Lord God remains faithful-- for he cannot deny Himself!

Behold, the time of our salvation is at hand. Prepare yourself, O cavern, For the Virgin approaches to give birth to her Son. Be glad and rejoice, O Bethlehem, land of Judah, For from you our Lord shines forth as the dawn. Give ear, you mountains and hills And all lands surrounding Judea, For Christ is coming to save the people Whom He has created and whom He loves.

### **The Sunday before The Nativity of Our Lord**

The Sunday before the Nativity of the Lord (December 18-24) is known as the Sunday of the Holy Fathers. On this day the Church commemorates all those who were well-pleasing to God from all ages, from Adam to Saint Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos, those who are mentioned in the genealogy of Luke 3:23-38. The holy prophets and prophetesses are also remembered today, especially the Prophet Daniel and the three holy youths (December 17).

The Troparion to the Prophet Daniel and the three holy youths ("Great are the accomplishments of faith...") is quite similar to the Troparion for Saint Theodore the Recruit (February 17, and the first Saturday of Great Lent). The Kontakion to Saint Theodore, who suffered martyrdom by fire, reminds us that he also had faith as his breastplate (see I Thessalonians 5:8).

### **The Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ Commemorated on December 24**

In Slavic practice, on the eve of the Nativity of the Lord, the liturgical services consist of the Royal Hours with the Typika, Vespers, and the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great. At Vigil in the evening, Great Compline is followed by Matins.

If the Nativity falls on Sunday, however, the Royal Hours with the Typika are read on the preceding Friday. On Friday evening, the office of the Forefeast, December 24. The Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom is served on Saturday morning. At Vigil in the evening, Great Compline is followed by Matins. On Sunday morning, the Liturgy of Saint Basil is celebrated.

If the Nativity falls on a Monday, Royal Hours with the Typika are read on Friday December 22. On Saturday evening and Sunday morning we follow the order for the Sunday before the Nativity with the office of the Forefeast for December 24. On Sunday morning the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom is served. Vigil on Sunday evening consists of Great Compline is followed by Matins. On Monday morning the Liturgy of Saint Basil is celebrated.

On the eve of the Nativity, instead of three readings from the Old Testament at Vespers, there are eight readings (from Genesis, Numbers, Micah, Isaiah, Baruch, Daniel, and two more readings from Isaiah). The entrance is made with the Gospel.

At the end of Liturgy the priest places a lighted candle in a candlestick in the center of the church. Then the troparion and kontakion of the Feast are sung. At Vigil on the evening of the twenty-fourth, Great Compline is followed by Matins.

## THE CELEBRATION OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD GOD and SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

The celebration of the feast of the **Nativity of Christ** in the Orthodox Church is patterned after the celebration of the feast of the Lord's Resurrection. A fast of forty days precedes the feast, with special preparatory days announcing the approaching birth of the Saviour. Thus, on St Andrew's Day (November 30) and St Nicholas Day (December 6) songs are sung to announce the coming birthday of the Lord:

*Adorn yourself, O Cavern. Make ready, O Manger. O Shepherds and wisemen, bring your gifts and bear witness. For the Virgin is coming bearing Christ in her womb (Vesperal Hymn of St Nicholas Day)*

On the eve of Christmas, the **Royal Hours** are read and the **Divine Liturgy of St. Basil** is served with **Vespers**. At these services the Old Testament prophecies of Christ's birth are chanted, emphasizing the prophecy of **Micah** which foretells Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Saviour, and the prophecies of **Isaiah** about the appearance and character of the Messiah:

*The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, which translated is, God with us (Is 7:14-15).*

*God is with us, understand all ye nations, and submit yourselves, for God is with us (Is 8:9).*

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end (Is 9:6-7).*

The **Vigil of Christmas** begins with **Great Compline**, highlighted once again by the solemn chanting of **God is with us** and the words of the prophecy of Isaiah. At Compline there is also the singing of the Troparion and Kontakion of the feast along with the special hymns glorifying the Saviour's birth. There are also the special long litanies of intercession and the solemn blessing of the **five loaves** of bread together with the **wheat** and the **wine** of which the faithful partake and the **oil** with which they are anointed. This part of the festal vigil, which is done on all great feasts, is called the **litya** (in Greek, the *artoklasia* or the **breaking of the bread**).

At the beginning of the **Christmas Matins**, which together with Compline form the Christmas Vigil, the six matinal psalms begin as usual with the words; Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will among men (*Lk 2:14*). At the Christmas services these words of the angelic song are normally sung with great solemnity rather than being chanted as at the daily service. The Christmas Matins proceed as usual. The gospel reading from Matthew (*1:18-25*) tells of the birth of Christ, and all of the hymns and verses glorify his appearance on earth:

*Christ is born, glorify him. Christ is from heaven, go to meet him. Christ is an earth, be ye lifted up. Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing out with gladness, all ye people. For he is glorified. (First Ode of the Christmas Canon)*

The **Christmas Liturgy** begins with psalms of glorification and praise. The troparion and kontakion mark the entrance with the Book of the Gospels. The baptismal line from **Galatians 3:27** once again replaces the Thrice-Holy. The Epistle reading is from **Galatians**:

*But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir (Gal 4:4-7).*

The Gospel reading is the familiar Christmas story from **Matthew (2:1-12)**, and the liturgy continues in the normal fashion. A specific two-day celebration follows, dedicated to **Mary the Theotokos** and **St Stephen, the First Martyr**. The period of Christmas rejoicing extends to Epiphany during which time the Christmas songs are sung and fasting and kneeling in prayer are not called for by the Church.

The feast of Christmas is formally entitled the **Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ**. At Christmas we celebrate the birth as a man of the Son of God, the one who together with the Father and the Holy Spirit is truly God from all eternity. Thus, we sing in the Church.

*Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One! Angels, with shepherds, glorify Him! The wise men journey with the star! Since for our sake the Eternal God is born as a little child (Kontakion).*

The feast of Christmas was not a separate Church feast for the first four centuries of Christian history. It was celebrated with **Epiphany** in the one great feast of God's appearance on earth in the form of the human Messiah of Israel. The Nativity began to be celebrated as such on the twenty-fifth of December in order to offset the pagan festival of the Invincible Sun which occurred on that day. It was established by the Church quite consciously as an attempt to defeat the false religion of the

heathens. Thus, we discover the troparion of the feast making a polemic against the worship of the sun and the stars and calling for the adoration of Christ, the **True Sun of Righteousness (Mal 4:2)**, who is himself worshiped by all of the elements of nature.

*Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, has shone to the world the light of wisdom! For by it, those who worshiped the stars were taught by a star to adore Thee, the Sun of Righteousness and to know Thee, the Orient from on high (Lk 1:78, translated as Dawn or Day spring). O Lord, glory to Thee! (Troparion).*

Thus, the feast of Christmas is the celebration of the world's salvation through the Son of God who became man for our sake that, through him, we might ourselves become divine, sons of God the Father by the indwelling of his Holy Spirit in us.

### **A GREAT CHRISTMAS STORY**

The old man sat in his gas station on a cold Christmas Eve. He hadn't been anywhere in years since his wife had passed away. It was just another day to him. He didn't hate Christmas, just couldn't find a reason to celebrate. He was sitting there looking at the snow that had been falling for the last hour and wondering what it was all about when the door opened and a homeless man stepped through.

Instead of throwing the man out, Old George as he was known by his customers, told the man to come and sit by the heater and warm up. "Thank you, but I don't mean to intrude," said the stranger. "I see you're busy, I'll just go." "Not without something hot in your belly." George said.

He turned and opened a wide mouth Thermos and handed it to

the stranger. "It ain't much, but it's hot and tasty. Stew ... Made it myself. When you're done, there's coffee and it's fresh."

Just at that moment he heard the "ding" of the driveway bell. "Excuse me, be right back," George said. There in the driveway was an old '53 Chevy. Steam was rolling out of the front. The driver was panicked. "Mister can you help me!" said the driver, with a deep Spanish accent. "My wife is with child and my car is broken." George opened the hood. It was bad. The block looked cracked from the cold, the car was dead.

"You ain't going in this thing," George said as he turned away.

"But Mister, please help ..." The door of the office closed behind George as he went inside. He went to the office wall and got the keys to his old truck, and went back outside. He walked around the building, opened the garage, started the truck and drove it around to where the couple was waiting. "Here, take my truck," he said. "She ain't the best thing you ever looked at, but she runs real good."

George helped put the woman in the truck and watched as it sped off into the night. He turned and walked back inside the office. "Glad I gave 'em the truck, their tires were shot too. That 'ol truck has brand new ." George thought he was talking to the stranger, but the man had gone. The Thermos was on the desk, empty, with a used coffee cup beside it. "Well, at least he got something in his belly," George thought.

George went back outside to see if the old Chevy would start. It cranked slowly, but it started. He pulled it into the garage where the truck had been. He thought he would tinker with it for something to do. Christmas Eve meant no customers. He discovered the the block hadn't cracked, it was just the bottom hose on the radiator. "Well, shoot, I can fix this," he said to

himself. So he put a new one on.

"Those tires ain't gonna get 'em through the winter either." He took the snow treads off of his wife's old Lincoln. They were like new and he wasn't going to drive the car anyway.

As he was working, he heard shots being fired. He ran outside and beside a police car an officer lay on the cold ground. Bleeding from the left shoulder, the officer moaned, "Please help me."

George helped the officer inside as he remembered the training he had received in the Army as a medic. He knew the wound needed attention. "Pressure to stop the bleeding," he thought. The uniform company had been there that morning and had left clean shop towels. He used those and duct tape to bind the wound. "Hey, they say duct tape can fix anythin'," he said, trying to make the policeman feel at ease.

"Something for pain," George thought. All he had was the pills he used for his back. "These ought to work." He put some water in a cup and gave the policeman the pills. "You hang in there, I'm going to get you an ambulance."

The phone was dead. "Maybe I can get one of your buddies on that there talk box out in your car." He went out only to find that a bullet had gone into the dashboard destroying the two way radio.

He went back in to find the policeman sitting up. "Thanks," said the officer. "You could have left me there. The guy that shot me is still in the area."

George sat down beside him, "I would never leave an injured man in the Army and I ain't gonna leave you." George pulled

back the bandage to check for bleeding. "Looks worse than what it is. Bullet passed right through 'ya. Good thing it missed the important stuff though. I think with time your gonna be right as rain."

George got up and poured a cup of coffee. "How do you take it?" he asked.

"None for me," said the officer..

"Oh, yer gonna drink this. Best in the city. Too bad I ain't got no donuts." The officer laughed and winced at the same time.

The front door of the office flew open. In burst a young man with a gun. "Give me all your cash! Do it now!" the young man yelled. His hand was shaking and George could tell that he had never done anything like this before.

"That's the guy that shot me!" exclaimed the officer.

"Son, why are you doing this?" asked George, "You need to put the cannon away. Somebody else might get hurt."

The young man was confused. "Shut up old man, or I'll shoot you, too. Now give me the cash!"

The cop was reaching for his gun. "Put that thing away," George said to the cop, "we got one too many in here now."

He turned his attention to the young man. "Son, it's Christmas Eve. If you need money, well then, here. It ain't much but it's all I got. Now put that pea shooter away."

George pulled \$150 out of his pocket and handed it to the young man, reaching for the barrel of the gun at the same time.

The young man released his grip on the gun, fell to his knees and began to cry. "I'm not very good at this am I? All I wanted was to buy something for my wife and son," he went on. "I've lost my job, my rent is due, my car got repossessed last week."

George handed the gun to the cop. "Son, we all get in a bit of squeeze now and then. The road gets hard sometimes, but we make it through the best we can."

He got the young man to his feet, and sat him down on a chair across from the cop. "Sometimes we do stupid things." George handed the young man a cup of coffee. "Bein' stupid is one of the things that makes us human. Comin' in here with a gun ain't the answer. Now sit there and get warm and we'll sort this thing out."

The young man had stopped crying. He looked over to the cop. "Sorry I shot you. It just went off. I'm sorry officer."

"Shut up and drink your coffee " the cop said.

George could hear the sounds of sirens outside. A police car and an ambulance skidded to a halt. Two cops came through the door, guns drawn. "Chuck! You ok?" one of the cops asked the wounded officer.

"Not bad for a guy who took a bullet. How did you find me?"

"GPS locator in the car. Best thing since sliced bread. Who did this?" the other cop asked as he approached the young man.

Chuck answered him, "I don't know. The guy ran off into the dark. Just dropped his gun and ran."

George and the young man both looked puzzled at each other.



"That guy work here?" the wounded cop continued.

"Yep," George said, "just hired him this morning. Boy lost his job."

The paramedics came in and loaded Chuck onto the stretcher. The young man leaned over the wounded cop and whispered, "Why?"

Chuck just said, "Merry Christmas boy ... and you too, George, and thanks for everything."

"Well, looks like you got one doozy of a break there. That ought to solve some of your problems."

George went into the back room and came out with a box. He pulled out a ring box. "Here you go, something for the little woman. I don't think Martha would mind. She said it would come in handy some day."

The young man looked inside to see the biggest diamond ring he ever saw. "I can't take this," said the young man. "It means something to you."

"And now it means something to you," replied George. "I got my memories. That's all I need."

George reached into the box again. An airplane, a car and a truck appeared next. They were toys that the oil company had left for him to sell. "Here's something for that little man of yours."

The young man began to cry again as he handed back the \$150 that the old man had handed him earlier.

"And what are you supposed to buy Christmas dinner with?"

You keep that too," George said. "Now git home to your family."

The young man turned with tears streaming down his face. "I'll be here in the morning for work, if that job offer is still good."

"Nope. I'm closed Christmas day," George said. "See ya the day after."

George turned around to find that the stranger had returned. "Where'd you come from? I thought you left?"

"I have been here. I have always been here," said the stranger. "You say you don't celebrate Christmas. Why?"

"Well, after my wife passed away, I just couldn't see what all the bother was. Puttin' up a tree and all seemed a waste of a good pine tree. Bakin' cookies like I used to with Martha just wasn't the same by myself and besides I was gettin' a little chubby."

The stranger put his hand on George's shoulder. "But you do celebrate the holiday, George. You gave me food and drink and warmed me when I was cold and hungry. The woman with child will bear a son and he will become a great doctor.

The policeman you helped will go on to save 19 people from being killed by terrorists. The young man who tried to rob you will make you a rich man and not take any for himself. "That is the spirit of the season and you keep it as good as any man."

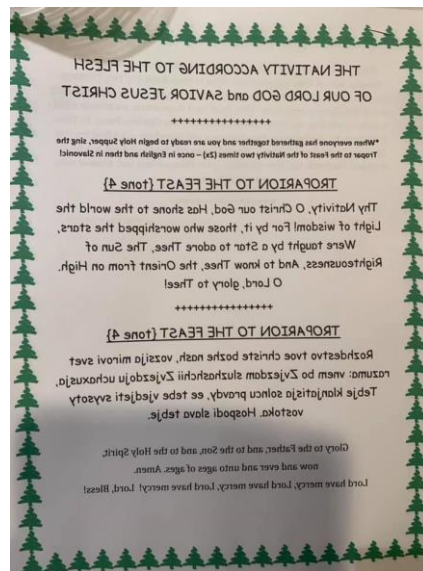
George was taken aback by all this stranger had said. "And how do you know all this?" asked the old man.

"Trust me, George. I have the inside track on this sort of thing. And when your days are done you will be with Martha again."

The stranger moved toward the door. "If you will excuse me, George, I have to go now. I have to go home where there is a big celebration planned." George watched as the old leather jacket and the torn pants that the stranger was wearing turned into a white robe. A golden light began to fill the room. "You see, George ... it's My birthday. Merry Christmas."

George fell to his knees and replied, "Happy Birthday, Lord Jesus"

**MERRY CHRISTMAS AND GOD BLESS!**



A Note on Christian Stewardship .....

Life is given to us through Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our commitment to expressing gratitude for this great blessing is seen through our participation in Christian Stewardship by being faithful stewards of The Gospel. Our commitment reveals how we live our faith in the Resurrected Lord. It is in The Resurrection of Our Lord that we receive eternal life and we express our hope in the life to come by our response as Orthodox Christian stewards.

Come and See how we are all called to be Stewards of The Church!

Please take a moment to reflect upon what God has given us, and to discern how we might be able to return to God a portion of the blessings we have received.

Thank you for your continued support and generosity.

May God continue to bless and guide you and keep you always in His Loving Care!

**What is Stewardship?**

Stewardship means making a regular commitment of one's time, talent, and treasure to Christ and His Church

Stewardship is a way of life, which acknowledges accountability, reverence, and responsibility before God.

Stewardship recognizes that we believe that "every good and perfect gift we receive in our lives comes from above."

Stewardship is a spiritual practice, much like prayer and fasting. And just as prayer and fasting are ways we seek to deepen our relationship with God, so we use Stewardship to turn everything in our lives into an opportunity to grow in our relationship with God.

Stewardship, like prayer and fasting, should be undertaken purposefully and with intention - while giving of time, talent, and treasure when we feel so moved is a good beginning, it can only bear limited fruit. We should set aside portions of our time, talent, and treasure to give to God before we give them to anything else, in the same way that we should plan our prayer and fasting. There will always be times for spontaneous giving, as with spontaneous prayer - but intention is also necessary.

**Why be a Steward?**

To be a Steward of the Church means being an active participant in the life of the Church - growing in Faith and communion with God and proclaiming that same Faith with every word, every action, and every moment of our lives.

## What is Orthodox Christian Stewardship

*"It is by offering our blessings back to God that He will be able to continue His forgiving, healing, liberating, empowering, transfiguring, loving ministry through the Church. For God, Infinite though He be, has chosen to work through us, through our gifts, to continue His saving work in the world today." - Fr. Anthony Coniaris*

Stewardship reminds us that everything we have has been given to us by God - not for us to have, but for us to care for as stewards, or caretakers. This is why we call those who are actively living the Orthodox Christian life "stewards," because to live the Orthodox Christian life fully means to recognize that we have received everything from God, and therefore we offer some of what we have received back in thanksgiving.

Financial stewardship is an offering, and it is part of how we participate in the saving work of Christ and His Church. By offering back some of what has been given to us, we allow God to work through that offering "for the life of the world." Just as we offer bread and wine for the Liturgy which God transforms into the Body and Blood of Christ to transform us into the living Body of Christ, so do we offer our time, treasure, and talents to Christ and His Church so that God might receive them and transform them into the means not only of our salvation, but for all Creation.

**\*\* WEEKLY DIVINE SERVICES AND EDUCATION CLASSES\*\***

### TUESDAY MORNINGS

Daily Matins - 9:00 AM

### WEDNESDAY EVENINGS

Paraklesis Service to The Theotokos - 6:00 PM

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(via Zoom)

### EVERY OTHER TUESDAY

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### EVERY 3<sup>RD</sup> THURSDAY OF THE MONTH

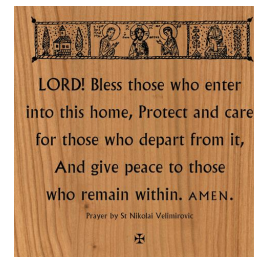
St. George Prayer Group - 6:30-7:30 PM



BE SURE TO CONTACT MAT. FRAN REGARDING THE NEW 2024 COFFEE HOUR SCHEDULE AS WELL AS SEE IT LOCATED IN THE PARISH FELLOWSHIP HALL!!

**\*\*BEGINNING IN 2024 – THE 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH WILL BE POT-LUCK SUNDAY! BRING A FAVORITE DISH OR DESSERT TO SHARE WITH YOUR PARISH FAMILY AS WE COME TOGETHER TO ENJOY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP AS WELL AS HONOR ALL OF THE PARISH BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES FOR THAT MONTH!\*\***

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## HOME BLESSING

BE SURE TO CONTACT FR. JASON TO SCHEDULE A TIME AND DAY FOR HIM TO COME AND BLESS YOUR HOME DURING THE THEOPHANY SEASON!! HOMES WILL BE BLESSED DURING THE THEOPHANY SEASON ALL THE WAY UP TO THE BEGINNING OF GREAT LENT. AS A REMAINDR, WE CAN HAVE OUR HOMES BLESSED ANYTIME

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR 😊

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BE SURE TO SEE THE 2024 READER SCHEDULE (Hours and Epistle) SIGN UP SHEET LOCATED

IN THE PARISH FELLOWSHIP HALL AS WELL AS ON THE PARISH WEBSITE!! Please see Fr. Jason or Sbdn. Shawn if we are interested in Reading during The Divine Service.



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St. George Prayer Group - 6:30-7:30 PM

**THE FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD/  
ST. BASIL THE GREAT/NEW YEAR'S DAY**

**SUNDAY DECEMBER 31, 2023**

**Eve of Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord and  
St. Basil the Great/New Year's Day**

The Hours – 9:10 AM    Divine Liturgy – 9:30 AM

Coffee Hour Fellowship in Parish Fellowship Hall

Great Vespers with Litiya – 12:30 PM

**MONDAY JANUARY 1, 2024**

**The Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord and St. Basil the  
Great/New Year's Day**

Divine Liturgy followed by Brief Moleben for The New Year and  
Blessing of St. Basil Bread- 9:30 AM

**THE GREAT FEAST OF THE HOLY THEOPHANY OF OUR  
LORD GOD and SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST**

**THURSDAY JANUARY 4, 2024**

**Royal Hours for The Feast of Holy Theophany - 9:00 AM**

**FRIDAY JANUARY 5, 2024 [STRICT FAST DAY]  
EVE OF THE GREAT FEAST OF THE  
HOLY THEOPHANY OF OUR  
LORD GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST**

Vespers with Liturgy of St. Basil  
followed by Lesser Blessing of Water - 9:00 AM

Great Compline with Litiya - 6:00 PM

**SATURDAY JANUARY 6, 2024**

**THE GREAT FEAST OF THE HOLY THEOPHANY OF OUR  
LORD GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST**

Festal Divine Liturgy followed by The Great Blessing of Water and The  
Blessing of The Church and Parish Fellowship Hall - 9:00 AM

Great Vespers – 4:00 PM

**SUNDAY JANUARY 7, 2024**

**THE SYNAXIS OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST**

Matins – 9:00 AM

Divine Liturgy - 10:00 AM

Q&A with Fr. Jay and Blessing of Water for Children of our Parish

Coffee Hour Fellowship in Parish Fellowship Hall following The  
Divine Liturgy

**FRIDAY JANUARY 12, 2024**

6:30-9:00 P.M.    Parish Family Paint Night