

BULLETIN FOR DECEMBER 15-24, 2024



“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.” (Luke 2:4-5)

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES & EVENTS

- *SUN 12/15/2024** **25TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST – TONE 8**
SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FOREFATHERS
8:15-8:50 AM *Confession Available*
9:00 AM *Divine Liturgy*
- Perpetual Commemorations for December 15-21, 2024:*
POLANICHKA, Protopresbyter Michael
ANDRAS, John Jr. & Helen
REPASKY, Mary Jane
- WED 12/18/2024**
5:15-5:50 PM *Confession Available*
6:00 PM *Prayer Service (Moleben) for the Nativity Fast*
- FRI 12/20/2024** **PRE-FEAST OF THE NATIVITY**
ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH
8:15-8:50 AM *Confession Available*
9:00 AM *Divine Liturgy*
With Prayers for Weekly Perpetual Commemorations
- *SUN 12/22/2024** **26TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST – TONE 1**
SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY – THE HOLY FATHERS
8:15-8:50 AM *Confession Available*
9:00 AM *Divine Liturgy*
Blessing of Honey and Christmas Straw
- 11:00 AM *Baptism of Pierce Jules Lukac*
- TUES 12/24/2024** **CHRISTMAS EVE**
STRICT FAST DAY—NO MEAT OR DAIRY
8:00 PM *Vigil Service of the Nativity of Christ*
- WED 12/25/2024** **THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST – CHRISTMAS DAY**
10:00 AM *Divine Liturgy*
Fellowship to Follow

God Bless Baby Pierce!



Our congratulations are extended to Sabrina and Steven Lukac on the occasion of the Baptism of their daughter PIERCE JULES. She will receive the Sacraments of Initiation on Sunday, December 22. May God grant Pierce, her parents, godparents, and entire family many, blessed years!

∞ ANNOUNCEMENTS

The next bulletin will be the Christmas Edition distributed at Christmas services (*December 24 and 25*). Any submissions for the Christmas bulletin need to be sent to Fr. David by noon on Friday, December 20.

Upcoming Confession times are listed on the schedule in this bulletin. All are encouraged to prepare for Christmas by approaching the Sacrament of Confession. *Confessions will not be heard on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, so please plan accordingly.*

House Blessings Begin January 6, 2025

Starting on the holyday of Theophany, Fr. David will be available to bless homes with the newly-sanctified water. As usual, house blessings will be *by request only*. An online form is available on our website stjohnacroc.org, and hard-copy forms are available in the hall for those who don't use computers. Fr. David will communicate with you directly to set up a day and time—he will not simply show up. *This is a wonderful tradition and a great way to begin the year with faith in Christ!*

—Blessed Honey and Christmas Straw on December 22nd—

There are many pious, home-based customs associated with Christmas throughout the world. In this bulletin, you can read about the practice of the “Holy Supper.” One custom is to use honey during the Christmas Eve meal. It is also traditional to place some straw on or under the tablecloth, to recall that the Infant Jesus was born in a manger. Additionally, many people place straw in their Nativity Scene at home for the same reason.



This year, on Sunday, December 22nd, we will bless honey and distribute small packets of hay for you to use on your Christmas table and/or in your Nativity Scene.



Christmas Day Refreshments & Fellowship

As is our parish custom, we will have an opportunity for festive celebration in the hall after our Christmas Divine Liturgy. Please plan to stay for a few moments and share the joy of the Nativity with your brothers and sisters in Christ! (For some of our parishioners, this is the only time they have to celebrate with others on Christmas.)

You are invited to bring a dozen cookies or another small finger-food to share. (Some non-sweets are always appreciated!)



In Memoriam



"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." (John 11:25)

+Larry Long passed away on November 29, 2024. As a parish community, we extend our condolences to wife Nancy and to all family and friends. May Larry's memory be eternal!

+John Safin passed away on December 2, 2024. As a parish community, we extend our condolences to wife Liz and to all family and friends. May John's memory be eternal!

Blessed Repose – Eternal Memory!

Reminder Regarding Winter Weather and Church Services

Under *most* circumstances, Sunday Liturgy will not be cancelled. In the event that weather conditions make it impossible for us to assemble for Sunday Liturgy, Fr. David and our board members will spread this information as soon as possible by various means (e-mail, Facebook posts, phone calls, etc.) Cancellation of weekday services will follow a similar pattern.

However, even if a service is not canceled, **please use "common sense" and your best judgment regarding winter travel.** This is something you have to determine for yourself. Whether it is snow, ice, extremely low temperatures, or driving at night—if you feel unsafe, uncomfortable, or just unsure about driving, please *don't* risk it. **It is not sinful to miss Divine Liturgy if you are unable to drive!**

— *Upcoming Divine Services for the Nativity* —

- **Wednesday, December 18, 2024: Moleben for the Nativity Fast at 6:00 PM**
This service (*roughly 30 minutes in length*) includes hymns and a Gospel reading to help us prepare to celebrate Our Lord's Nativity.
- **Friday, December 20, 2024: Divine Liturgy at 9:00 AM**
The period from December 20 to December 24 is called the "Prefeast" of the Nativity, as these are the final days before the celebration of the Birth of Christ on December 25. On the first day of the Prefeast, which is also the commemoration of St. Ignatius of Antioch, we will have a Divine Liturgy.
- **Sunday, December 22, 2024: Divine Liturgy at 9:00 AM**
As we gather for our regular weekly Sunday Liturgy on this Sunday before the Nativity, we hear the Gospel of the Genealogy from Matthew.
- **Tuesday, December 24, 2024: Christmas Eve Vigil Service at 8:00 PM**
"Vigil" means to keep watch, and we keep watch like the shepherds and begin the celebration of Christmas. This service includes many hymns and prayers celebrating the birth of Our Savior. We hear the Gospel of the Nativity announced. We will also sing a selection of familiar carols after the service.
- **Wednesday, December 25, 2024: Christmas Divine Liturgy at 10:00 AM**
Did you know that Bethlehem is Hebrew for "House of Bread"? We celebrate the Nativity of Christ "the Bread of Life" by offering the Holy Eucharist. As they say, *"If you want to keep 'Christ' in CHRISTmas, then keep the 'Mass' in ChristMAS!"* Can you imagine someone celebrating YOUR birthday without you? Presents and cookies can wait—don't ignore the invitation to the house of the King of Kings on His birthday!
- ***Christmas doesn't end on December 25th—that is just beginning!***
There is Liturgy on Thursday, December 26, 2024 at 9:00 AM. We also continue the celebration through January 1st (the Circumcision of Christ) and January 6th (the Baptism of Christ).

Prepare for the Nativity at Home with Prayer...

Prayer accompanies everything in our life as Christians. Below are hymns taken from the services of our church which you can include in your daily prayers in these days leading up to Christmas. If you have children at home, say these together before bed. If you have a Nativity Scene or icon of the Nativity at home, say them there!

Today, the virgin comes to the cave * to give birth in an ineffable manner to the Eternal Word. * O universe, having heard this news, rejoice; * and together with the angels and shepherds glorify Him, * Who though He be the Eternal God,* has willed to appear as a newborn Babe.

What shall we give to You, O Christ, * Who for our sake did appear on earth as a man? * Every creature You created offers You thanksgiving: * the angels sing praises; * the heavens—the star; the Magi—gifts; * the wilderness—a manger; * and we—a virgin mother. * Therefore, O Eternal God, have mercy on us!

Read the Scriptures Related to the Nativity

Fill your heart and home with God's Word as we prepare to celebrate the Nativity. These are some suggested passages to inspire us during this holy season.

Old Testament

Micah 5:2-5

Isaiah 9:2-7

Isaiah 11:1-10

New Testament

Matthew 1:18-25

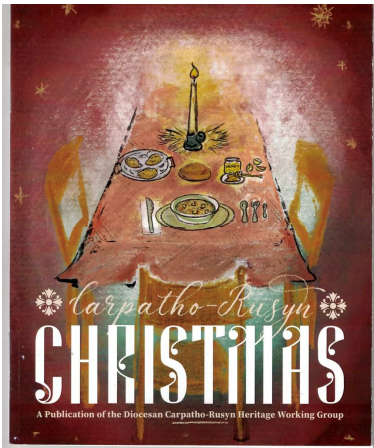
Matthew 2:1-12

Luke 2:1-20

Hebrews 1:1-12

Hebrews 2:11-18





CHRISTMAS EVE & CAROL BOOKS FOR SALE

This **NEW** beautifully-designed Diocesan book, published with the blessing of Metropolitan Gregory, includes information about the traditional Christmas Eve Holy Supper along with a large selection of carols. (Fr. David was involved in this project, especially in writing the introductory material.) These books retail for \$15 but we have **copies available at the Showcase for a special sale price of \$12 each**. Buy one for your home, your family members, your grandkids, etc. It is a great holiday resource!

The Holy Supper on Christmas Eve

By Fr. David

The day before Christmas has been observed as a day of fasting among both Eastern and Western Christians since the earliest centuries. While the Roman Catholics broke with this ancient tradition by eliminating the Christmas Eve fast after their Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, Orthodox Christians (*as well as most Eastern Catholics*) continue to keep Christmas Eve as a strict-fast day: no meat or dairy are eaten on this day, as it is the final day of the Nativity Fast. That being said, Christmas Eve is *not* somber!

In the church's cycle of services, the new day begins at sunset—just as was the custom in the Old Testament. Fasting, however, doesn't end until midnight and, on days when there is a Divine Liturgy, after Liturgy and the reception of Holy Communion. To balance the fact that Christmas has begun but the fast has

not ended, many Christian peoples of Central and Eastern Europe such as Carpatho-Rusyns, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Slovaks and Poles, developed a festive-yet-fasting meal known as the "Holy Supper" (*Svyaty Vecher*) or "Veliya" (from "vigil").

One possible origin of this dinner is the common monastic practice of eating sweetened boiled wheat kernels known as *koliva*—in Slavonic, *kutya*—on days of fasting. This food is still made for Christmas Eve in some locales.

Customs for this meal vary from region to region, village to village, and family to family. Here is a rough outline of some common traditions among Carpatho-Rusyns:

- The table is covered with a white cloth, to remember the swaddling clothes of the Infant Jesus. Straw is placed either under or on the tablecloth, as a reminder of the manger.
- The meal begins after the first star appears, as a reminder of the star of

Bethlehem. The head of the household signals the start of the meal by saying "Christ is born!" with all replying "Glorify Him!"

- Before food is served, any number of customs might take place. Participants may wash their hands, as a sign of purity. Some tie a rope around the table legs to symbolize unity. Rural families even bless the animals in the barn to recall the animals present at the birth of Christ. *(These days, some people bless their pets!)*
- A candle is lit, to remember that Christ is the Light of the World. Everyone then joins in a prayer like the Lord's Prayer or the Tropar of Christmas "Your nativity, O Christ our God..."
- A loaf of bread is cut and shared, since Jesus is the "Bread of Life." This simple leavened bread *(made from flour, water, yeast, and perhaps a little salt, sugar, or oil)* is similar to the "prosfora" used for Holy Communion. *(Wafers – oplatky – are used by Roman Catholic Slovaks and Poles, since they use unleavened bread for Communion.)*
- Everyone gets a glass of wine and a toast is given, wishing good health for the new year.
- Some families share pieces of garlic dipped in honey—a symbol of accepting both the sweet and the bitter in life. Others dip the bread in honey.
- After these preliminary actions, the meal itself begins. As noted before, it

is a strict-fast meal, so the foods are prepared without meat or dairy products. However, this doesn't mean the foods aren't plentiful and delicious! Some families serve 12 dishes, in honor of the 12 apostles. Familiar dishes utilize the kinds of foods that could be preserved for the winter, and include: a **soup**, of beans, mushrooms, cabbage, or other similar ingredients; **bobalky** *(bread dough made into small balls, baked, and seasoned with cabbage/sauerkraut, or sweetened with honey, poppy seeds, or ground nuts)*; **pirohy** *(filled with potato, cabbage, prunes, or apricots)*; beans, mushrooms, or cabbage made with *zaprashka* or roux; potatoes of some sort; rice-stuffed cabbage; seafood or fish. *(This is not an exhaustive list!)*

- Dessert of fruit, nuts, and/or sweets concludes the meal. The family then goes to church for the evening service.

This variety of customs and foods shows that the *exact* details of this "holy supper" are less important than the underlying concept: that meals can be sacred occasions to celebrate our Christian faith in the home. Whether you grew up with this tradition or not, all Orthodox Christians from all backgrounds can make this tradition their own by gathering as a family on Christmas Eve to pray together, break bread, make a toast of wine, and share a fasting meal. This is a worthy way to begin the celebration of Our Lord's Nativity. *This Christmas Eve, make your supper a **Holy Supper!***

STEWARDSHIP

From Dan Hromyak

"Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, but prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God." - Philippians 4:6

St. Paul reminds us that God is an abundant God - He is the ultimate giver of gifts. He promises to give us all that we need. Remember, that we are created in God's image and likeness. We, too, are made to be generous with all of our gifts as well. Placing our trust in God frees us from being a slave to possessions. It allows us to gratefully and generously share ourselves and our goods with others.

"For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy." - Luke 1:44

When you hear the scripture readings and Gospel reading at Liturgy, do you "leap for joy?" If not, don't blame the lecturer or priest, rather look inside yourself. What are you doing to grow in friendship with Jesus? How do you prepare for Liturgy each week? Do you just show up and expect to be entertained? As the Body of Christ, we are called to be active participants, not just passive observers.

Stewardship 2025 Update

*As of the printing of this bulletin, we have received **29 Pledge Cards** for 2025 with a total of **\$48,976 in pledges**. We thank ALL of those who have stepped forward to make a pledge!*

We know there are more pledge cards that will trickle in as the year winds down. If you have not returned your pledge card yet, please do so as soon as possible.

We thank all those who have contributed throughout 2024, and who continue to offer gifts and donations throughout this Christmas season. God bless you!

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Rev. Father David Mastroberte, Pastor

A Parish of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese – Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople

Sacramental and Membership Information

Sick Calls can be made at any time. Please phone the rectory (724-346-4457) when a family member is admitted to the hospital, or to request a home visit to receive the Sacraments. Hospitals do *not* call to alert the parish when someone is admitted.

Marriages are solemnized on Saturdays or Sundays. Circumstances may require a dispensation from the diocesan bishop. Consult the pastor at least six months in advance and before any plans have been made for the wedding reception. Marriages cannot be celebrated during the fasting seasons of the church, or on Fridays.

Baptisms are usually scheduled on Saturdays or Sundays. Consult the pastor. Two godparents (godfather and godmother) are required, at least one of whom must be a practicing Orthodox Christian in good standing at an Orthodox parish, and the other (at least) a practicing, baptized Christian.

Church Funerals are, under ordinary circumstances, provided for practicing Orthodox Christians who are current in their spiritual and material obligations to the parish; otherwise, the funeral service is conducted at the funeral home. **The Church does not permit cremation.**

Parishioners in "good standing" are those Orthodox Christians who, as members of Saint John's Orthodox Church, strive to live according to the teachings of the Orthodox Church; participate in the life of the parish through regular church attendance, regular reception of Holy Communion and periodic Holy Confession (and receive these sacraments no less than once a year); if married, having been married in the Orthodox Church; and financially support the parish (especially through an annual "pledge").

Prospective members and returning members are asked to fill out an application form, copies of which are available in the church office.

Our Church's Website: stjohnacroc.org
Our YouTube Live Stream: youtube.com/user/saintjohnsharon
Our Facebook Page: facebook.com/SaintJohnHermitagePA
Our Diocesan Website: acrod.org

For Online Giving Options, please visit our website: stjohnacroc.org

Happy Birthday!

Sue Bouslough	December 16
Dan Ristvey	December 16
Betty Jo Patterson	December 18
Richard Preston	December 22
Natalie Lukac	December 24

*God Grant You
Many, Blessed
Years!*

■ **Our Sponsors** ■

DECEMBER 15, 2024

Eternal Lamp

*In Memory of Godmother +Helen Benya Hammon
on the 2nd Anniversary of Her Repose, by Debbie and Greg Cross*

DECEMBER 22, 2024

Candelabrum

*In Memory of +Joseph & +Mary Chupak
by Jerry, Patti, & Ryan Chupak*

Eternal Lamp

*In Memory of Husband +John Kolbrich
by Nona Kolbrich*

***Schedule of
Men to Hold
Candles During
the Gospel***

December 15
Gary Yonchak
Bob Amos
Jason Baker
Dave Beight
Dennis Burprich

December 22
Jerry Chupak
Ed Fabian
Matt Fabian
Chad Fette
Jim Hynes

