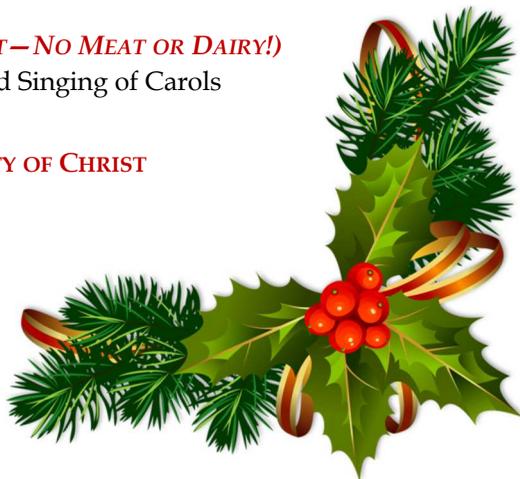


Bulletin for December 12-24, 2021

Schedule of Services & Events

*SUN	12/12/2021	2ND SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY—OF THE HOLY FOREFATHERS
	9:00 AM	Divine Liturgy (<i>Live-Stream</i>) Election of Officers Meeting & December Board Meeting
TUES	12/14/2021	
	8:00 AM	Confession Available
	8:30 AM	Divine Liturgy <i>Special Intention: All Homebound Parishioners</i>
WED	12/15/2021	
	5:30 PM	Confession Available
	6:00 PM	Prayer Service (Moleben) for the Nativity Fast
*SUN	12/19/2021	SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY—OF THE HOLY FATHERS
	8:00-8:50 AM	Confession Available (<i>Special Extended Time Today!</i>)
	9:00 AM	Divine Liturgy (<i>Live-Stream</i>) <i>Panachida: ++Polansky Family (Perpetual)</i> <i>++Tripp Family</i>
WED	12/22/2021	
	5:30 PM	Confession Available
	6:00 PM	Prayer Service (Moleben) for the Nativity Fast
FRI	12/24/2021	CHRISTMAS EVE (STRICT FAST—NO MEAT OR DAIRY!)
	8:00 PM	Vigil Service for the Nativity and Singing of Carols
SAT	12/25/2021	CHRISTMAS DAY—THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST
	10:00 AM	Divine Liturgy (<i>Live-Stream</i>)
*SUN	12/26/2021	SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY
	9:00 AM	Divine Liturgy (<i>Live-Stream</i>) Singing of Carols



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our thanks is extended to those who helped with yesterday's 2021 Christmas Market!
A report will follow in a subsequent bulletin.

Fasting and Feasting

Please remember that the Nativity Fast (Advent) continues through Christmas Eve. **Christmas Eve is a strict fast day** – no meat or dairy are to be consumed. **Christmas Day is always fast-free** and there is **no fasting** from Christmas Day through January 4th. January 5th – the eve of Theophany – is a strict fast day.

Blessed Honey and Christmas Straw on December 19th

There are many pious, home-based customs associated with Christmas throughout the world. In this bulletin, you can read about the "Holy Supper" tradition. Often, honey is eaten during this meal. It is also customary to place some straw on/under the tablecloth, to recall that the Infant Jesus was born in a manger. Additionally, many people place some straw in their Nativity Scene at home for the same reason.

This year, on Sunday, December 19th, we will bless and distribute **honey**, kindly provided for us by Kathy Piston from her hives. We thank her for this donation! We will also distribute small packets of **straw** for you to use on your Christmas table and/or in your Nativity Scene!

Confessions will be heard during this pre-Nativity season prior to all Sunday and Weekday Liturgies, 30 minutes before the Wednesday evening services, and by appointment. *Confessions will not be heard on Christmas Eve, December 24th, so please plan ahead!*

Diocesan Yearbook/ACRY Annual Sponsors and Memorial Listings: If you would like to include your name and/or the names of your loved ones in the 2022 Diocesan Yearbook/ACRY Annual, please visit the church office.

National ACRY "Lots o' Luck" calendar raffle tickets are available in the church office for a donation of \$25.

Our Next Bulletin will be distributed ON Christmas Day – Saturday, December 25th. Any submissions for the bulletin MUST be received by Monday, December 20th.

– Upcoming Divine Services for the Nativity –

- **Wednesdays, December 15 & 22: Moleben for the Nativity Fast at 6:00 PM**

This short (*roughly 30 minute*) service includes hymns and a Scripture reading to help us prepare to celebrate Our Lord's Nativity.

- **Friday, December 24: 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.

- **Saturday, December 25: Divine Liturgy at 10:00 AM**

Did you know that Bethlehem is Hebrew for "House of Bread"? We celebrate the Birth 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!"*

Christmas doesn't end on December 25th – it is just beginning! Don't forget that there is Divine Liturgy on Sunday, December 26th, Monday, December 27th, and January 1st at 9:00 AM!

– 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 over the next couple weeks. If you have children at home, say these together before bed. If you have a Nativity Scene or icon of the Nativity at home, you may gather 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!

In Memoriam

We take this opportunity since our last full bulletin to extend our condolences to many in our parish community...

To Fr. Michael and all the family and friends of **+Pani Eleanor Polanichka**, who passed away on November 21st.

To Helen and all the family and friends of **+Professor Joseph Jaeger**, who passed away on November 29th.

To Diane and all the family and friends of **+Kyle Kupensky**, who passed away on November 12th.

To all the family and friends of **+Matthew Kulusich**, who passed away on Thursday, December 9th.

Please continue to keep all of these departed in your prayers!

Eternal Memory!
Vičnaja Pamjat!

Read the Scriptures at Christmastime

Fill your heart and home with God's Word as we 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

New Testament

Matthew 1:18-25

Matthew 2:1-12

Luke 2:1-20



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. Fa-

miliar 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!***

Thoughts on Stewardship

By Dan Hromyak

"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? Or, 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.

*"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."
- 1 John 3:1*

During this season of giving, let us remember a beautiful gift that we have received - being children of God! As God's children, it's in our DNA that we share and express our love for others as well. Tell your spouse, children, other family members and friends that you love them, every day! Also, pray for those people that are different than you, those that you may not like or those that go out of their way to annoy you. Your prayers may be the start of a new friendship.

SAINT JOHN'S ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Very Rev. Protopresbyter Michael Polanichka

Rev. Deacon John Anderson

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. 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.

Website: stjohnacroc.org

YouTube: youtube.com/user/saintjohnsharon

Facebook: facebook.com/SaintJohnHermitagePA

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