



THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

Bulletin for December 10-23, 2023

☞ **CONFESSION is available:**

- ✓ before all upcoming Sunday and Weekday Divine Liturgies from 8:20-8:50 AM
- ✓ before Wednesday evening services from 5:20-5:50 PM
- ✓ before Vespers on Saturdays, December 16th & 23rd from 3:00-3:50 PM

Confessions will NOT be heard on:

- ✕ *Christmas Eve – Sunday, December 24th*
- ✕ *Christmas Day – Monday, December 25th*

SCHEDULE FOR DECEMBER 10-24, 2023

*SUN	12/10/2023 9:00 AM	27TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST – TONE 2 Divine Liturgy <i>St. Nicholas Celebration with Visit from “St. Nicholas”</i>
MON	12/11/2023 6:00 PM	December Board Meeting
TUES	12/12/2023 9:00 AM	<i>Saint of the Day: St. Spyridon the Wonder-Worker</i> Divine Liturgy (CHAPEL) <i>Special Intention: All Homebound Parishioners</i>
WED	12/13/2023 6:00 PM	<i>Saint of the Day: St. Herman of Alaska</i> Prayer Service (Moleben) for the Nativity Fast
SAT	12/16/2023 4:00 PM	Vespers
*SUN	12/17/2023 9:00 AM	SUNDAY OF THE FOREFATHERS (2ND SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY) Divine Liturgy <i>Panachida: +Dorothy & +Thomas Patrick (1 Year Memorial) by the Family</i> <i>Perpetual Commemorations for December 17-23, 2023</i> <i>POLANICHKA, Protopresbyter Michael</i> <i>TRIPP, Karl, Love & Ann</i> <i>ANDRAS, John Jr. & Helen</i>
WED	12/20/2023 6:00 PM	<i>Pre-Feast of the Nativity; Saint of the Day: St. Ignatius of Antioch</i> Prayer Service (Moleben) for the Nativity Fast

THURS	12/21/2023 9:00 AM	<i>Prefeast of the Nativity; Saint of the Day: St. Juliana</i> Divine Liturgy (CHAPEL) <i>Weekly Perpetual Commemorations</i>
SAT	12/23/2023 4:00 PM	<i>Saturday Before the Nativity</i> Vespers
*SUN	12/24/2023 9:00 AM	CHRISTMAS EVE (STRICT FAST DAY—NO MEAT OR DAIRY) SUNDAY OF THE FATHERS—SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY Divine Liturgy
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Perpetual Commemorations for December 17-23, 2023</i> <i>REPASKY, Mary Jane</i> <i>LATCHERAN, Michael, Julia, Charles, Anna, John</i></p>		
	8:00 PM	Christmas Eve Vigil Service and Singing of Carols
MON	12/25/2023 10:00 AM	CHRISTMAS DAY—THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD Divine Liturgy <i>Refreshments and Fellowship to Follow</i>

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.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

■ CHRISTMAS MARKET: THANK YOU!

We thank Mary Ann Lavin and Renee Maceyko for coordinating the 2023 Christmas Market on December 9th; all those who baked or prepared other food-stuffs; all those who worked before, during and after the event; and all who contributed in any way. *A report will be printed in a forthcoming bulletin!*

■ Our Next Bulletin will be the “Christmas and New Year” edition and will be distributed on Christmas Eve—Sunday, December 24th. **Any submissions for the bulletin must be received by Monday, December 18th to ensure inclusion.**

■ Theophany Eve (January 5) “Holy Supper” – Any Interest?

It has been several years since we had a pot-luck “Holy Supper” for the eve of Theophany. The last time we had it—maybe 2018?—we did not have a lot of participation. **Is there any interest in having one on the evening of January 5, 2024?** While we are not limited to only bringing the “traditional” foods, all foods must be “strict fast” — no meat or dairy products. Please talk to Fr. David or Pani Vikkie if you are interested, so we can determine if we will schedule this or not.

(If you aren't sure what a “Holy Supper” is, you can read about the Christmas Eve Holy Supper in this bulletin. The tradition is to have two such suppers: one on Christmas Eve and one on Theophany Eve.)

■ **House Blessing** information will be available soon!

! ATTENTION PARENTS OF PARISH YOUTH !

At the *end* of Divine Liturgy on the morning of Christmas Eve (December 24th) **ALL CHILDREN** are invited to be part of a procession as we place the Infant Jesus into our church's Nativity scene. There is nothing to rehearse—we just want your kids to participate!



In Memoriam

Our prayers and our condolences are extended to all the family and friends of +ALEX PARIMUHA who passed away on December 3rd. Eternal Memory!



Stewardship from Dan Hromyak

"Prepare the way of the Lord..." - Mark 1:3

We are called to live a holy life. We are called to invite others to live holy lives. Living a stewardship lifestyle, being grateful and generous with our gifts, puts us on the path to holiness and is an example for others to be holy, too. We are responsible not only for our own lives, but for the lives of others as well. How are you helping others get to Heaven?

"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

This scripture reading sums up Stewardship. "Rejoice always" means place your trust in God; He will provide all that you need. "Pray constantly" means prayer should be a running conversation with God throughout the whole day, every day. "Give thanks in all circumstances" means even in bad situations, thank God. Suffering a little bit helps build empathy for others in similar situations and shows our dependence on God.

Reminder Regarding Winter Weather and Church Services

Under *most* circumstances, Sunday Liturgy will *not* be cancelled. In the rare 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 e-mail, Facebook posts and, if possible, phone calls. 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!**



The Nativity Fast (Advent) Continues

As we draw ever closer to our celebration of the Nativity, let us all focus more deliberately on our spiritual preparation for Christmas:

- **Fast with a joyful heart.** Accept the challenge. Aside from observing the regular weekly fast days of Wednesday and Friday, strive to abstain from meat on additional days, as you are able—especially as we get closer to Christmas. ***Christmas Eve is a strict fast day—no meat or dairy.*** (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.)
- **Pray every day.** There are some prayers and Bible readings included in this bulletin. Make sure you are offering the “**Nativity Fast Prayer Challenge**” from Metropolitan Gregory every evening.
- **Attend additional services.** We have a number of weekday and Saturday afternoon services scheduled. Come and worship!
- **Go to Confession.** Confession is available before all upcoming services as listed on page 2 of the bulletin. Remember: if the door to the “confessional” room is open and the light is on DON’T SIT IN THE FRONT PEW AND WAIT—WALK RIGHT IN. Confessions end 10 minutes before service time. *“Let every heart prepare Him room!”*
 - Confessions will NOT be heard on Christmas Eve—Sunday, December 24 or Christmas Day—Monday, December 25th. Plan accordingly!

Remember: there is no Christmas without 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 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!

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



— Upcoming Divine Services for the Nativity —

- **Wednesdays, December 13 & 20: Moleben for the Nativity Fast at 6:00 PM**

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

- **Saturdays, December 16 & 23: Vespers at 4:00 PM**

This evening prayer service (*roughly 30 minutes*) begins the new liturgical day, and helps prepare us for Divine Liturgy.

- **Sunday, December 24: Divine Liturgy at 9:00 AM**

Don't skip Sunday Liturgy because it's Christmas Eve. Conversely, don't think Liturgy on Sunday, December 24th is a "two-for-one special" and skip Christmas Day Liturgy. You are an Orthodox Christian: attending Divine Liturgy two mornings in a row won't kill you!

- **Sunday, 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.

- **Monday, December 25: 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 cocoa and cookies can wait—don't ignore Our Lord Jesus Christ on His birthday!

Christmas doesn't end on December 25th—it is just beginning! There is Divine Liturgy on Tuesday, December 26th and Wednesday, December 27th at 9:00 AM. We also continue the celebration through January 1st (the Circumcision of Christ) and January 6th (the Baptism of Christ).

Blessed Honey and Christmas Straw on December 17th

There are many pious, home-based customs associated with Christmas throughout the world. In this bulletin, you can read about the “Holy Supper.” One custom is to use honey during the Christmas Eve meal. It is also traditional to place some straw on/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 17th, we will again bless honey and distribute small packets of hay for you to use on your Christmas table and/or in your Nativity Scene.



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” (*Soyaty 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 house-

hold 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!***

SAINT JOHN'S ORTHODOX CHURCH

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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.

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