

THE FORERUNNER
The Nativity of St. John the Baptist
 Orthodox Church O.C.A.
 420 Laura Street
 Philipsburg, PA 16866
 (814) 342-2011

Very Rev. John Horosky - Priest
 Mark Ammerman - Council President

December 2011
Glory Be to Jesus Christ!

Service Schedule

December 4

General Confession & Hours @ 9:30 AM
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 AM
 Coffee Hour following Liturgy
 Council Meeting

December 11

Hours @ 9:30 AM
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 AM
 Coffee Hour following Liturgy

December 18

Hours @ 9:30 AM
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 AM
 Coffee Hour following Liturgy

December 24

Compline @ 7:30 PM

December 25 - Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Hours @ 9:30 AM
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 AM

Reader's Schedule

Hours

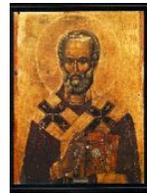
12/4 Larry Ammerman
 12/11 Jan Brennish
 12/18 Mark Ammerman
 12/25 Andrew Tocimak

Epistle

Doug Donovan
 Jan Brennish
 Mark Ammerman
 Andrew Tocimak

Feast Days

12/6 St. Nicholas
 12/25 Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ
 12/26 Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God
 12/27 First Martyr Stephen



For private confession, call Father to make arrangements.

Remember in your prayers: Bishop MELCHESEDEK, Father Adam, Father Ted, Father Paul, Father Michael, Larry Ammerman, Mary Ann Ammerman, Karen Blackburn, Chris Conkey, James Crites, Helen Czar, Christine Demchak, Joe Demchak, Mike Demchak, Eileen Donovan, Elizabeth Edwards, Joe Edwards, Olga Finlayson, Kenneth Finlayson, Jeffrey Fetcenko, Randy Fetcenko, Rose Marie Fetcenko, Yvonne Fetcenko, Jack Foster, Mary Foster, Helen Mae Harvey, Harry Horosky, Carl Mandel, Richard Nakles, Anna Pennington, Karen Saupp, Harry Socie, Alexandria Stine, Karen Stine, Eleanor Sura, Holly Thompson, Andrew Tocimak, Irene Tocimak, Louise Tocimak, Michael Tocimak, Walter Varagea, Delores Varagea, Margaret Stefanko.

“O Master, the all-sustainer, and Holy King, Who punishes, but reduces not to death, Who strengthens the failing, and raises the outcast, Who remedies the bodily sorrows of men, we pray unto Thee, O Our Lord, visit Thine infirm servants with Thy mercy; forgive them every transgression, voluntary and involuntary. Verily O Lord, send down from Heaven Thy healing power, touch the body, extinguish the fever, lessen the suffering and every infirmity of Thy servants, raise them decumbent, from sickness, and from the bed of evilness, make them whole and all-restored, return them to Thy Church well-pleasing and fulfilling Thy will. For it is of Thine own, to be merciful and to save us, O Lord, and unto Thee we send glory, to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Birthdays

Larry Ammerman 12/11
 John Conkey 12/17
 Mike Demchak 12/31

Anniversaries

Matushka Judy and V. Rev. John Horosky 12/17/1970

Congratulations to Christopher Conkey. Chris graduated from the Coast Guard Training Center on November 18th being honored with a Seamanship Award. Chris has faithfully served us at St. John's as an altar server and as a reader, and now will serve our country in the Coast Guard assigned to CGC Bear in Portsmouth, VA. We will miss you, Chris, and will we will keep you in our prayers. God grant you many years.

Thank you. Many thanks to the ladies and gents who helped to make the nut and poppy seed rolls and who will be making pirohi this month. On their feet for hours, these faithful parishioners work with love to produce quality baked goods and ethnic foods that are highly praised and in great demand! God grant you many years! *Matthew 11:28* "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

From the Desk of Father John Horosky

Question: I was wondering why we fast before Nativity. The Lenten fast seems more obvious. Also, from what foods do we normally fast during the Nativity fast?

We fast before the Great Feast of the Nativity in order to prepare ourselves for the Celebration of Our Lord's birth. As in the case of Great Lent, the Nativity Fast is one of Preparation, during which we focus on the coming of the Savior by fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

By fasting, we "shift our focus" from ourselves to others, spending less time worrying about what to eat, when to eat, how much to eat, and so on in order to use our time in increased prayer and caring for the poor. We learn through fasting that we can gain control over things, which sometimes we allow to control us—and for many people, food is a controlling factor. We live in the only society in which an entire TV network is devoted to food! While fasting from food, however, we are also challenged to fast from sin, from gossip, from jealousy, from anger, and from those other things which, while well within our control, we all too often allow to control us.

Just as we would refrain from eating a lot before going to an expensive restaurant for dinner—if we "ruin our appetite" we will enjoy the restaurant less—so too we fast before the Nativity in order to more fully feast and celebrate on the Nativity itself. During the Nativity Fast, we are called upon to refrain from meat, dairy, fish, wine, and olive oil. At the same time, we are challenged, within this framework, to fast to the best of our ability, and to do so consistently. If we must modify the extent to which we fast within this framework, it is of course possible, but in every instance our fasting should be consistent and regular, for Christ does not see fasting as an option, but as a "must". In Matthew, Christ says, "WHEN you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, not IF you or "IF YOU CHOOSE to fast".

Finally, it seems quite odd that in our society—a society in which people gladly and freely spend huge sums of money for diets, most of which recommend that one refrain from red meats and dairy products—fasting is not more widely embraced. How odd that a Jenny Craig consultant or diet guru or physician will tell us to refrain from eating meat or cheese or butter and we will gladly embrace—and pay large sums of money for—his or her advice, while when the Church offers the same advice (at "no cost") we tend to balk, as if we were being asked to do the impossible.

How We Celebrate the Nativity

As with Pascha, the Feast of the Nativity begins with a period of preparation. It is preceded by a fast corresponding to Lent and lasting for forty days. The fast begins on November 15. On the Sundays immediately before December 25, special commemorations emphasize the link between the Old Covenant and the New. On December 20, the Forefeast of the Nativity is commemorated, and the daily liturgical texts are directed toward the Feast itself. On Christmas Eve, services include the Great or Royal Hours, the Great Vespers, and the Liturgy of Saint Basil.

On Christmas Day the service commemorates the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, the adoration of the Shepherds, and the arrival of the Wise Men with their gifts. The service held on this day is the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom. The days following Christmas are associated with the Theotokos and Joseph. December 26 is the Synaxis of the Mother of God, and the first Sunday after the Feast commemorates "Joseph the Betrothed." December 29 commemorates the Massacre of the Innocents, and January 1 the Circumcision of our Lord. The Nativity season concludes on December 31, but the spirit of the festival extends to the celebration of Theophany (Epiphany), the feast commemorating the Baptism of our Lord in the Jordan River.

Icon of the Nativity - What Does it Tell Us?

The icon of the Nativity tells the story of Christ's birth from the Scriptures. It also shows that all creation is taking part in Christ's birth. The angels give thanks with their song; the heavens give the star; the Wise Men give their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The poor, humble shepherds give their praise and amazement; the earth gives the cave, and humanity gives the Virgin.



1. The icon of the Nativity stresses the importance of the Theotokos, the Mother of Jesus (detail).



2. The Christ Child, seen here in swaddling clothes, lies in a manger guarded by the ox and donkey (detail).

This Holy Icon is an icon with many scenes. First, it stresses the importance of the Theotokos, the Mother of Jesus (1). She is placed in the center and is the largest figure in the icon. In this icon, she is kneeling with crossed arms, looking at the Christ child. The three stars, denoting her virginity before, during, and after the Nativity, are on her garments. The Christ Child (2), in the center of the icon, is in swaddling clothes and is lying in the manger. In the background is the dark cave where He was born. In the cave are an ox and a donkey guarding the newborn Babe. Even though the Gospels say nothing of the cave, this information is from Holy Tradition. Neither do the Gospels speak of the ox and the donkey, but all icons of the Nativity include these animals. Including the animals in the icon fulfills the prophecy of *Isaiah 1:3*. "The ox knows his master, and the donkey his master's crib; but Israel does not know me, and the people have not regarded me." The long ray of light from the star points directly to the cave. This ray comes from the star and travels to all parts of the world. It teaches that this bright star is an astronomical happening, and is a messenger from heaven announcing the birth of Jesus.

On the left hand side of the icon is another scene. The Wise Men (3), who were led by the star, are riding horses to bring their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus. The Wise Men are of various ages. One is without a beard. In those days, young men did not wear beards. The other Wise Man has long hair and a long beard, which indicates that he is much older. These details teach that regardless of age and appearance, the Good News was given to each and everyone.

Opposite the Wise Men is the scene with the humble shepherds. An angel proclaims the glad tidings. A young shepherd plays a reed instrument (4). This scene reveals that the music of the humans was added to the hymn of the angels. Across from the shepherd's scene is the heavenly choir of angels (5). They are giving glory to God. The angels serve two purposes in the Nativity of Christ. They give glory to God and announce the good news to all mankind. The background shows a very rugged terrain. This is not a true representation of the land in this area. Joseph could not find room in Bethlehem, so they went outside of Bethlehem to a cave. This rocky mountain formation only serves as a background for the event.



3. The Wise Men are seen in the icon riding towards the light from the star (detail).



4. Opposite from the Wise Men sits a young shepherd boy who plays music for his flock (detail).



5. An angel gives glory to God and announces the good news of His birth (detail).

In the lower part of the icon are two more scenes. In the right hand corner are the two women Joseph brought to take care of the Christ child (7). They are bathing Him just as any baby is bathed. The humanity of Jesus is clearly shown in this setting.

Opposite the bathing of Jesus scene sits a sad and worried Joseph (6). He is not part of the central group the Christ Child and the Theotokos. Joseph is not the natural father. Joseph is troubled and despondent. There is an old man talking to Joseph. The old man is Satan. Satan can appear in many forms. Here he is as an old man who is tempting Joseph and disturbing him. Satan is telling Joseph that virgin birth is impossible. He's telling Joseph that he's a fool if he believes this. This story comes to us from Holy Tradition. The sad Joseph shows us not only his personal predicament, but the dilemma of all mankind in the difficulty of accepting that which is "beyond words or reason."



6. Satan is depicted as an old man who is tempting Joseph not to believe in the virgin birth of Jesus (detail).



7. In the right hand corner are the two women Joseph brought to take care of the Christ child. (detail).



The tree, which is in the middle of the lower part of the icon, is a symbol of the Tree of Jesse.

This tree refers to *Isaiah 11:1-2*, "But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him."

King David was often mentioned as the son of Jesse and Jesus was from the House of David.

The Holy Icon of the Nativity reminds one to praise and glorify the Birth of Christ. The celebration of Christmas each year serves to remind each and everyone of us that Christ came for you and me.

From The Greek Orthodox Website: <http://www.goarch.org>

Christ is Born!

Glorify Him!

The Hanging Vigil above the Royal Doors of the iconostasis is supported by Margaret Stefanko in the memory of her sister Helen Bokach; her husband, her mother, brothers and sister.

The Vigils on the Tetrapod are supported by Irene Pollock in Loving Memory of all departed members of the Bokach family, Bernard Pollock, and Andrew Strizak.

The votives in front of the iconostasis, on the candlestands and in front of the icons in the nave are supported by Andrew & Louise Tocimak in loving memory of George Tocimak.