



The Nativity of St. John the Baptist

Orthodox Church O.C.A.

420 Laura Street
 Philipsburg, PA 16866
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<http://nativityofstjohn-oca.org>

Very Rev. John Horosky - Priest
 John Conkey - Council President

August 2013

Glory Be to Jesus Christ!

Service Schedule

August 3

Orthodoxy Discussion @ 4:00 PM
 Vespers @ 5:00 PM

August 4

General Confession @ 9:30 AM
 Hours @ 9:50 AM
 Liturgy @ 10:00 AM
 Special collection for Seminarian
 Coffee Hour following Liturgy
 Council Meeting

August 11

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

August 15 Dormition of the Theotokos

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

August 18

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

August 25

Hours @ 9:30 AM
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 AM
 Pot Luck Luncheon

August 31

Orthodoxy Discussion @ 4:00 PM
 Vespers @ 5:00 PM

Reader's Schedule

Hours

8/4 John Conkey
 8/11 Mark Ammerman
 8/15 Jan Brennish
 8/18 Tom Demchak
 8/25 Dorian Batchko

Epistle

John Conkey
 Mark Ammerman
 Jan Brennish
 Tom Demchak
 Dorian Batchko

Feasts & Saints

8/6 Holy Transfiguration
 8/15 Dormition of the Theotokos
 8/29 Beheading of St. John the Baptist



Vespers

With encouragement from Father John, Father Deacon Edward will be serving Vespers the Saturday evening before General Confessions. The first Vespers will be August 3 at 5:00 PM.

Orthodoxy Discussion

Prior to Vespers on August 3, Father Deacon Edward will hold a discussion at 4:00 PM about "Our purpose on earth as Christians."

On August 31 at 4:00 PM, the topic will be "Vespers" We hope that you will join us.

Birthdays

Karen Stine August 15
 Julia Blazosky August 27

Anniversaries

Father Deacon Edward August 13, 1999
 & Matushka Ksenia Batchko

Semi-Annual Parish Meeting will be held Sunday, September 8, 2013 at the Church Hall.

Congratulations to Alexandra Stine who will graduate August 2013 from Penn State University.



God grant you many years!

Remember in your prayers: Bishop MELCHISEDEK, Father John, Father Adam, Father Ted, Father Paul, Father Michael, Matushka Judy Horosky, Matushka Ksenia Batchko, Larry Ammerman, Mary Ann Ammerman, Vincent Ammerman, Karen Blackburn, Matthew Boroughf, Chris Conkey, Drew Conkey, James Crites, Helen Czar, Joe Demchak, Mike Demchak, Steve Demchak, Kari Donovan, Matthew Donovan, Michael Evans, Bonnie Fetcenko, Randy Fetcenko, Rose Marie Fetcenko, Yvonne Fetcenko, Olga Finlayson, Kenneth Finlayson, Jack Foster, Mary Foster, Harry Horosky, Alexandra Mamrak, Evan Morgan, Richard Nakles, Harry Socie, Eleanor Sura, Andrew Tocimak, Irene Tocimak, Louise Tocimak, Walter Varagea, Delores Varagea.

“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.”

From the Desk of Father John Horosky

From the Prayer Of Jesus to the Prayer of the Heart

The expressions "Prayer of the Heart" and "Prayer of Jesus" or "Jesus Prayer" are often used as equivalent. They should, however, be clearly distinguished one from the other. According to a person's degree of spiritual maturity, the "Jesus Prayer" can be either active or contemplative. In the latter case, it becomes a true "prayer of the heart".

The Jesus Prayer is composed chiefly of the name of Jesus. Athonite monks pray continuously: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!" It can begin with a confession of faith: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God." The cry for "mercy" is then uttered as a call for God to pour out His grace upon us ("mercy, is closely related to the Greek term for "oil" which in Hebrew usage was a symbol of blessing). The Jesus Prayer is thus a "verbal icon" of Christ, which communicates to us the deifying grace or energy of the Risen Lord.

This invocation becomes true "prayer of the heart" only under certain conditions. The 19th "Spiritual Homily" of St. Macarius of Egypt says this: "When persons draws near to the Lord, they must first do violence to themselves in a strenuous effort to await His grace with unshakeable faith...They must struggle to pray even when they lack "spiritual prayer." When God sees how just how they persevere in the struggle, even when their heart is not in it, God will grant them the gift of true spiritual prayer, true charity, true tenderness and compassion. In a word, God will fill them with the gifts of the Holy Spirit."

This struggle involves us in the active phase of prayer. It is not, however, a "method" that will lead us deeper into the spiritual life. That can only occur when we respond with *humility* to the grace of God. Repeating the prayer constantly has special value insofar as it leads us beyond discursive reasoning and other forms of mental reflection. It leads us to simplicity and openness of heart that focuses the soul uniquely on Christ. Humility is the key to this inner movement. It enables us to sense God's Presence and help, and to welcome His gift of salvation. It promotes confidence in God, trust that He will see us through times of chaos and tumult. That He will be our Light when we walk through darkness and Light for us in times of illness, spiritual struggle and distress. All of this God offers us through the Prayer of Jesus.

The Hanging Vigil above the Royal Doors of the iconostasis is supported by Irene Pollock in loving memory of her sister and brother-in-law Margaret and Robert Stefanko.

The Vigils on the Tetrapod are supported by Irene Pollock in loving memory of her parents, sisters, brothers, husband, nephew and stepfather.

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

Most Holy Theotokos *save us?* by Fr. Steven C. Salaris, M.Div., Ph.D.



If it is your first time visiting an Orthodox Christian worship service, such as Vespers or Orthros, you might be somewhat perplexed by – or even shocked by – the veneration that we give to the Virgin Mary. This short document hopes to answer some of your questions and to explain, very briefly, why we do what we do. First of all, what does that name *Theotokos* mean? It is a Greek word, referring to the Virgin Mary, which means “birth-giver of God.” That might sound scandalous at first - as if we are saying that Mary gave birth to God the Father. That is not so. We Orthodox Christians believe that the Logos, the Word and Wisdom of God, became incarnate as Jesus Christ and that He took His flesh from His human mother starting at the very moment when Mary said, “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:39). From that point in time, God the Word dwelt in her womb for nine months until His birth. Since the Logos shares the exact same divinity as God the Father, yet is a distinct Divine Person, Mary is correctly called the “birth-giver of God” in that she bore the Word made flesh – Jesus Christ.

What do you mean when you call Mary “immaculate?” When we Orthodox say, “immaculate” we are translating the Greek word *achrantou* which also means “pure.” We Orthodox mean “immaculate” in the sense that Mary committed no serious personal sins and that she, to the best of her fallen human ability, never violated God’s moral law. In addition, we say that Mary was sanctified and purified of any minor personal sins by the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation when Jesus became incarnate in her womb. In the Roman Catholic Church, there is the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception (19th century) which states that Mary was conceived without ancestral (i.e. original) sin so that she could be the Mother of God. This runs contrary to Luke 1:47 where Mary states, “...my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” If Mary had no sin, not even ancestral sin, then why did she need a savior? Mary, like all of us, is ultimately saved from sin and death by her Son, the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you really believe in the virgin birth? Yes, absolutely. We do not accept any other teaching. St. Irenaeus of Lyons, a second century bishop, states that just as Adam was formed from untilled and virgin soil so Christ, the new Adam, must be made from the untilled and virgin flesh of His mother. In this fact, we see Christ foreshadowed in the opening chapters of Genesis and Christ as the fulfillment of that prophecy because of His virgin birth from the Theotokos.

Mary is ever-virgin? Doesn’t Scripture refer to Jesus brothers? First of all, those brothers mentioned in Scripture (Matthew 12:46, Mark 3:31, and Luke 8:19), according to the teachings of the Orthodox Church, are Joseph’s children from a previous marriage (his first wife died). They are Jesus’ half-brothers. Secondly, Uzzah was struck dead when he dared to touch the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6:1-7). Sanctified by God, Mary is the New Ark of the New Covenant that carries not the Word written on tablets, but the Word made flesh. Joseph, a pious God-fearing Israelite, would have recognized this fact and would have never considered violating God’s sacred Ark of the New Covenant. Thus, Mary remained ever-virgin.

Is Mary ever referred to as the Queen of Heaven? Yes. Psalm 45 is a Messianic psalm. It tells us of the king’s wedding and in that psalm it mentions two women. Protestants often refer to both the queen (Ps. 45:9) and the royal daughter (Ps. 45:13) as the bride and thus the Church. Unfortunately, that does not make sense since the Queen is at the King’s right hand and the bride-to-be is waiting to enter the palace and be brought to the king (Ps. 45:13-15). The Orthodox Church understands the bride as the Church, but the Queen is the King’s mother. If Jesus is the Messianic King prophesized in the psalm then Mary, His mother, is the Queen who sits at His right side. That also explains Jesus’ curious words in Matthew 20:23 and Mark 10:40. Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father (i.e. God the Father is at Jesus’ left hand) and Mary, the Queen of Heaven, sits at the right hand of her son.

And now for the tough question: What does it mean when you say, “Most Holy Theotokos *save us?* First of all, let it be stated unequivocally that Jesus Christ is truly the only Savior of humankind. By His birth, life, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension, He has destroyed sin and death and opened the gates of paradise for us sinners. The question of “Mary save us” can be answered in several different ways. First, look at an icon of the Theotokos. A proper icon of the Virgin Mary is never shown without her Son in her arms. Obviously we do not teach that Mary died on the cross for us, nor are we denying the fact that Christ is the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5); however, Mary saves us in the sense that through her Jesus Christ became incarnate and thus was able to do all that He did for our salvation. Because of this, we refer to Mary as the mediatrix for our salvation because He suffered the Passion of the Cross in the flesh that He assumed from her. Secondly, at the end of certain divine services such as Vespers, there is what this author likes to refer to as a “liturgical dance.” The priest exits the royal doors, faces the congregation, and states, “Christ our God, the existing one, is blessed always now and ever and unto the ages of ages.” After the people respond, the priest turns to the icon of the Theotokos and says, “Most Holy Theotokos save us.” The people again sing a response, “More honorable than the Cherubim....” Note what happens next. The priest turns to the icon of Christ and says, “Glory to you, O Christ, our God and our hope....” In this “liturgical dance” we turn to Mary and ask her to save us, but we are then immediately directed to Him who is our God and our sure hope – the Lord Jesus Christ. Thirdly, think about this analogy. Bob and Mary go on a cruise ship vacation. While taking in the sights, Bob falls overboard into the ocean. He cries out, “Mary, save me!” Unfortunately, Mary can’t swim. She cannot save Bob directly. However, Mary can summon Captain Joshua, the boat’s commander-in-chief, a former Olympic Gold-Medalist in swimming, who then dives into the waters and saves Bob. Mary saves Bob indirectly by summoning Capt. Joshua just as the Theotokos saves us by forever interceding on

our behalf and by forever directing our lives towards her Son Jesus Christ who, by the Cross, entered into the chaotic waters of Death, loosed the bonds of Hades, and rose from the dead on the third day. Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!
<http://www.allsaints-stl.org/>

Question: Why do you pray to the Mother of God? Answer: Since Jesus Christ died on the Cross and rose from the dead, conquering death for us, there is no reason why we cannot ask those in heaven to pray for us just as we ask those still living on earth for their prayers. After all, in Christ all are alive. Therefore we ask the Ever-Virgin Mary to pray to her Son for us, just as we also ask the angels, the saints, and all the faithful believers here on earth to pray on our behalf, as Scripture commands us to do: *"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, and giving of thanks, be made for all men... I will therefore, that men pray everywhere"* (I Timothy 2:1,8). We turn readily to our friends and neighbors to ask for their prayers in our time of need; are not those in heaven even more our friends than those on earth? Why should they not intercede for us also before the throne of God?

Question: Why do Orthodox Christians call the Virgin Mary "Mother of God"? This term seems to imply that God is not the creator and origin of all things. Answer: We call the Holy Virgin Mary the Mother of God (from the Greek, Theotokos: literally, the "Birthgiver of God") because it is Scriptural: the righteous Elizabeth addressed the Virgin with these words: *"And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me"* (St. Luke 1:43). Who is this "Lord" of which Elizabeth speaks? It is Christ, the Lord God. For this reason we say, correctly, that the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God. She is not the Mother of God the Father, but the Mother of God the Son, who was begotten by the Father before all ages, and took flesh from the Virgin Mary.

Question: Why do Orthodox Christians give so much honor to the Mother of God? Answer: We honor her because Jesus Christ Himself honored her on several occasions recorded in Scripture. He fulfilled her requests and also gave her special thought even while He was dying on the cross (St. Luke 2:51; St. John 2:3-9; St. John 19: 26-27). Even before Christ was born, she was honored by heaven when the Archangel Gabriel appeared and said to her: *"Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women"* (St. Luke 1:28). Holy Scripture further proclaims of her that *"henceforth all generations shall call me blessed"* (St. Luke 1:48), because from her womb came forth God in the flesh. This means that all who believe in Christ and in the Bible must give special honor and veneration to the one that is "blessed among women." It is not enough to merely give attention to her at Christmas-time, when she appears in the manger scenes of western Christian churches. No, this "highly favored one" must occupy a very special place in the hearts of those that follow her Son, just as she did among the first Christians.

Question: Didn't our Lord, during His earthly life, sometimes place His mother (and His other kinsmen) in a decidedly secondary position, emphasizing spiritual virtues over kinship according to the flesh? Answer: No one who accepts the Gospel can believe that our Lord was in any way lacking respect for His mother. And seeming disrespect on His part can only be due to a faulty, superficial interpretation of Scripture, due sometimes to understandably imperfect translations into modern languages. When, for example, at the marriage of Cana, His mother tells HIM: *"The have no wine,"* and our Lord replies: *"Women, what have I do with thee?"* (St. John 2:4) -one must understand that although the word "woman" might sound disrespectful in modern English, it was not so in the ancient East; it is the very word our Lord used to address His mother as He was dying on the Cross and entrusted her to His beloved disciple (St. John 19:26). His words to her at the marriage feast in no way indicate disrespect, but only emphasize the importance to the miracle, which was to follow (the changing of water into wine) -a miracle which He indeed performed at her request. When our Lord extends the concept of spiritual kinship to all those who *"do the will of God,"* (St. Mark 3:34) He does not deny such a higher kinship to His own family; we know of several of His kinsmen who were Apostles (James, Jude, Simon), and especially "blessed" in this spiritual kinship, of course, was His own mother, of whom alone does the Scriptures say that *"all generations shall call me blessed"* (St. Luke 1:48). Again, when a certain woman praises His mother for being the one who bore Him, and our Lord says, *"Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it"* (St. Luke 11:28), He is clearly raising the minds of His listeners to a higher degree of veneration for His mother: she is blessed not only for hearing Him in the flesh, but even more for being who *"hears the word of God and keeps it."*

Question: Yet in your church services I have heard Orthodox Christians call on the Mother of God to "save" them. How can she "save" anyone, since Christ is the only Savior? Answer: We believe that there is only one Lord God and Savior of mankind, Jesus Christ, no one is equal to Him, and no one but Him can save mankind. We do not turn to Mary, the Mother of Christ our God and Savior, and we certainly do not put her on the same level as her son, but we turn to her as to one who helps us by her prayers, just as St. Paul himself said that he had become all things to all men, *"that I might by all means and in any way save them"* (I Corinthians 9:22). St. Paul was not claiming to usurp Christ as the Savior; he merely wanted to help and strengthen others on the path to salvation. It is in this sense that we Orthodox Christians say, *"Most Holy Mother of God, save us"* -that is, *"Please help us toward salvation by your prayers."*