



THE FORERUNNER

The Nativity of St. John the Baptist

Orthodox Church O.C.A.

420 Laura Street

Philipsburg, PA 16866

(814) 342-2011

<http://nativityofstjohn-oca.org>

Very Rev. John Horosky - Priest

John Conkey - Council President

January 2015

Glory Be to Jesus Christ!

Service Schedule

January 4

General Confession @ 9:30 AM
Hours @ 9:45 AM
Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 AM
Coffee Hour following Liturgy

January 11

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

January 18

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

January 25

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

Reader's Schedule

Hours

1/4 Doug Donovan
1/11 John Conkey
1/18 Jan Brennish
1/25 Tom Demchak

Epistle

Doug Donovan
John Conkey
Mark Ammerman
Tom Demchak

Feast & Saints

1/1 Feast of Circumcision
1/6 Holy Theophany
1/7 Synaxis of St. John the Baptist
1/17 St. Anthony the Great
1/30 Three Hierarchs



Birthdays

Mitch Tocimak 1/13
Steve Demchak 1/20
Sonia Bragonier 1/30

Anniversaries

Rhonda & Tom Demchak 1/19/2002
Mike & Louise Demchak 1/20/1957

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.

Remember in your prayers: Archbishop MELCHISEDEK, Father John, Father Adam, Father Ted, Father Paul, Father Michael, Matushka Judy Horosky, Matushka Ksenia Batchko, Larry Ammerman, Mary Ann Ammerman, Jen Ammerman and Victor, Karen Blackburn, Matthew Boroughf, Chris Conkey, John Conkey, James Crites, Helen Czar, Eugene Demchak, Joe Demchak, Mike Demchak, Steve Demchak, Kari Donovan, Matthew Donovan, Michael Evans, Bonnie Fetcenko, Randy Fetcenko, Rose Marie Fetcenko, Olga Finlayson, Kenneth Finlayson, Jack Foster, Mary Foster, Harry Horosky, Alexandra Mamrak, Eugene Minarich, Evan Morgan, Richard Nakles, Gloria Rice, Mary Sura Saupp, Harry Socie, Alexandra Stine, Karen Stine, Eleanor Sura, Andrew Tocimak, Irene Tocimak, Louise Tocimak, Walter Varagea, Delores Varagea, Patricia Wood

“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:

Soon we will celebrate the civil New Year with many unknown things coming into our lives. However, we must look back to 2014 in which many things have happened. Many people gave their time and talents to chair and work on the events and projects at St. John’s. This is the time to thank all of the people that help to keep the church clean and inviting. We don’t know what labors they encountered. Thank you, thank you, for all of your labors and may God grant you "Many Years".

Starting the new year we are asking these people to continue in their endeavors for the church and for others to join in to use their talents for God’s Glory.

Theophany is January 6th with The Great Blessing of Water. If anyone wants their homes blessed, please call Fr. John or leave your name at the candle counter.

As a matter of interest Great Lent starts on February 22nd and Pascha will be April 12th.

God Bless all of us and keep us in good health.

From the Desk of Your Council President:

Reflecting back on 2014, I find that I have received a lot of blessings to give thanks to God. I personally would not have made it through the year without my faith in God, my family, and my extended family at St. John’s. Thoughtful greetings and cards, prayers, and the joy felt at our services are all contributors to my speedy recovery. That leads me to a question for not only myself, but for each one of my friends at St. John’s to ask themselves: How can I become more faithful?

Do I partake of the Sacraments? Do I cheerfully greet everyone I meet? Do I make people comfortable in my presence? Do I pray for all those in need? Do I support my church family, both financially and with deeds?

This year as a parish we have donated food to the needy, helped several parishioners in need, received new members into our parish family, and baptized a new child into the Orthodox faith. It is time now to look forward to 2015.

Personally as your council president I would like to set some goals:

- Run a budget for the year that does not end in the red
- Provide fundraisers for the parish to cover our shortfall
- Recruit new members into our parish family
- Grow in faith and love personally, and extend that to my parish family

I cannot accomplish these things alone. I need the help of all parishioners. We each need to examine ourselves, looking deep into our hearts to determine what we can do spiritually, financially, and through our own actions to help the parish to meet these goals.

Yours in Christ, John

Assessments for 2015

The Archdiocese increased our assessments in 2013 to \$161, approved at the 11/10/12 Archdiocesan Assembly at McKees Rocks, and stated that they would go up again for 2014. From the Proposed 2014 Budget in the Archdiocese Treasurer's report at the 2013 Archdiocesan Assembly at New Kensington 11/2/13, the Central Church assessment went down by \$3, and the Archdiocese assessment went up \$5. To keep the total amount to \$170, we reduced the amount to St. John's by \$2. A comment in the Archdiocese Treasurer's report states that to fully fund the Archdiocese, they would have to add another \$65 per person to the Assessment. We have been told, there are no changes for 2015 in the Central Church and Archdiocese assessments. So Assessments remain at \$170 for calendar 2015.

Year	Total	Central Church	Archdiocese	St. John's
2013	\$170	\$95	\$66	\$9
2014	\$170	\$92	\$71	\$7
2015	\$170	\$92	\$71	\$7

Please note that of your annual dues of \$170 only \$7.00 remains at St. John's. If we would have to raise the amount of Assessments to cover our costs (over and above current weekly offerings, donations and fund raisers), we would have to add another \$365 or more per person (~\$7+ per week per person).

At our December Council meeting, we discussed ways to make 2015 a year that we end in the BLACK and not in debt. To do so we need your help. Please give what you are able to support our church. We are also planning a few fundraisers so we ask that you help in any way that you can.

In order to be a parish member in good standing, according to St. John's By-Laws one must:

- achieved the age of 18 years,
- received the Sacraments of Penance and Communion at least once a year,
- and meets the parish financial obligation

According to the Bylaws, the financial obligations are as follows:

- Contributions to the Parish of \$2.00 per month (*This is quite outdated as \$2.00/month per parishioner obviously cannot keep the church running and expenses paid. Times have changed in costs, and attendance.*)
- Have paid all Central and Diocesan Assessments. (*Remember only \$7.00 of the \$170 comes to St. John's.*)

Thank You, O Lord! *Thanksgiving Day Message by Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann. These were his words, which proved to be the last ever spoken by him from the ambo in Church. oca.org*

Everyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation and eternal joy.

Thank You, O Lord, for having accepted this Eucharist, which we offered to the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and which filled our hearts with the joy, peace and righteousness of the Holy Spirit.

Thank You, O Lord, for having revealed Yourself unto us and given us the foretaste of Your Kingdom.

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Thank You, O Lord, for having united us to one another in serving You and Your Holy Church.

Thank You, O Lord, for having helped us to overcome all difficulties, tensions, passions, temptations and restored peace, mutual love and joy in sharing the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Thank You, O Lord, for the sufferings You bestowed upon us, for they are purifying us from selfishness and reminding us of the "one thing needed;" Your eternal Kingdom.

Thank You, O Lord, for having given us this country where we are free to Worship You.

Thank You, O Lord, for this school, where the name of God is proclaimed.

Thank You, O Lord, for our families: husbands, wives and, especially, children who teach us how to celebrate Your holy Name in joy, movement and holy noise.

Thank You, O Lord, for everyone and everything.

Great are You, O Lord, and marvelous are Your deeds, and no word is sufficient to celebrate Your miracles.

Lord, it is good to be here! Amen.

Several years ago, a preacher from out-of-state accepted a call to a church in Houston, Texas. Some weeks after he arrived, he had an occasion to ride the bus from his home to the downtown area. When he sat down, he discovered that the driver had accidentally given him a quarter too much change. As he considered what to do, he thought to himself, ‘You’d better give the quarter back. It would be wrong to keep it.’ Then he thought, ‘Oh, forget it, it’s only a quarter. Who would worry about this little amount? Anyway, the subs company gets too much fare; they will never miss it. Accept it as a ‘gift from God’ and keep quiet.

When his stop came, he paused momentarily at the door, and then he handed the quarter to the driver and said, “here you gave me too much change.”

The driver, with a smile, replied, ‘Aren’t you the new preacher in town.’

‘Yes,’ he replied.

“Well, I have been thinking a lot lately about going somewhere to worship. I just wanted to see what you would do if I gave you too much change. I’ll see you at church on Sunday.’

When the preacher stepped off of the bus, he literally grabbed the nearest light pole, held on, and said, ‘Oh God, I almost sold your Son for a quarter.’

Our lives are the only Bible some people will ever read. This is a really scary example of how much people watch us as Christians, and will put us to the test! Always be on guard – and remember YOU carry the name of Christ on your shoulders when you call yourself ‘Christian’.

Watch your thoughts; they become words.
Watch your words; they become actions.
Watch your actions; they become habits.
Watch your habits; they become character.

When I was young, I would get to watch some great TV cartoons during the Christmas season. Waiting to devour a bowl of popcorn, I would anxiously anticipate the appearance of the “special presentation” logo and with abandon throw myself into the stories of Frosty, Kris Kringle, and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. Nowadays, kids can watch these cartoons any time, through iTunes, Hulu, and Netflix, but in my day kids could only watch them around Christmas time, which added to the excitement of the season. These shows reminded me that soon we would be celebrating the birth of Jesus—and that soon I would be opening my presents.

However, at my young age I usually “reversed” that order. If my parents or my priest were to have asked me what Christmas meant, I would have had quite a bit to say about what Santa might bring me for Christmas. If I had remembered—and that is a big “if”—I might have mentioned that Christmas is also about the birth of Jesus and the salvation of the world. In my youth, I had offered Jesus a backseat to *Star Wars*, and I had displaced the truly wonderful gift that I had received from God with opening my own Christmas gifts.

I could easily excuse my behavior as youthful exuberance, blame my immaturity, or point to the commercialization of the season. What I could not get around (even now) is that Linus—the character from Charles Schulz’s “Charlie Brown” comic strip—taught me better; he taught me what Christmas is really about.

Most of us probably recall “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” a TV cartoon special that debuted in 1965 and has been aired every year since. In the cartoon Charlie Brown—the main character in Schulz’s strip—laments the commercialization of Christmas and falls into an emotional depression. Acting as the resident psychiatrist, Lucy (Charlie’s ever-present antagonist) suggests that Charlie Brown direct the school Christmas play, and in so doing find some peace within the Christmas season. However, rather than finding peace, Charlie Brown instead finds greater frustration: the Peanuts gang wants to modernize the Nativity story rather than highlight Jesus’ birth.

Seeking to create a more appropriate mood, Charlie Brown and Linus (Lucy’s gentler and kinder younger brother) set off to find a Christmas tree for the play. As they leave, Lucy requests that they get a “big, shiny aluminum tree.” However, in the midst of the many extravagant and fake trees in the lot, Charlie Brown finds and chooses a humble, unassuming evergreen—the only real tree available.

Despite Linus's misgivings, Charlie Brown returns with this tree to rehearsal, where the Peanuts gang promptly laughs at him for his seemingly poor decision. Shaken by their response, Charlie Brown cries out, "Will somebody tell me what Christmas is all about?" Responding to his question, Linus takes center stage and recites six verses from the Gospel of Luke: "And the angel said unto them: 'Fear not, for behold, I bring unto you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you this day is born in the City of Bethlehem a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, good will toward men'" [Luke 2:10-15].

After recounting the Gospel's "infancy narrative," Linus states, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

Inspired, Charlie Brown decides to take his tree home to decorate it, to show the rest of the gang its true beauty. Charlie Brown borrows an ornament from the prize-winning Christmas display created by his own dog, Snoopy, only to watch the little tree droop from its weight. After crying out "I've killed it!", he flees in despair.

Now sorry for their rough treatment of Charlie Brown, the Peanuts gang (inspired by Linus), follow after him, only to discover the humble tree bowed down by the weight of the ornament. Linus lovingly props up the tree to give it strength, and wraps his security blanket around its base. The gang decorates the tree with the rest of Snoopy's ornaments as they sing "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." Upon returning, Charlie Brown is stunned as his friends shout, "Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown!"

Charlie Brown learned something valuable that day: the joyful gift of our salvation comes wrapped not in worldly glory but in humility. The Messiah comes not in earthly splendor but in heavenly glory, wrapped in swaddling clothes rather than royal garments. The small tree chosen by Charlie Brown symbolizes the truth of the Incarnation of the Word of God: our salvation resides in an outpouring of love, not in self-glorification.

We can perhaps find even deeper symbolism in Linus's security blanket (usually an ever-present fixture; he does not leave home without it!). As Linus recites the gospel verse, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy," he lets go of his security blanket. Linus has always depended on his blanket to have peace of mind, to feel protected, to feel safe. Yet, in this dramatic moment, he lets his blanket drop, symbolically reaching for the Savior to find true peace, protection, and safety.

Linus also wraps his security blanket around the tree after Charlie Brown flees in despair. This hopeful act suggests that Linus wrapped his fears around the Christmas tree, because perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). In the light of Jesus' birth, anxiety loses its grasp upon humanity; our security is no longer in earthly vessels but in the Lord Himself. Like Linus, we might consider letting go of our own security blankets in order to offer the same gratitude.

The brilliant Charles Schulz, through his thought-provoking and heart-warming characters, tried to convey to the world the true meaning of Christmas. Although I now enter into the Advent Season through the rich services of the Orthodox Church, I still carry in my heart the simple but profound lessons taught to me by the Peanuts gang.

And, now, when considering my "Christmas presents" I muse: Am I presenting the Lord with gold, frankincense, and myrrh, like the Magi? Or, am I offering him pride, covetousness, envy, and judgment?

What do I really want for Christmas?

Service to God

<http://oca.org>

by Fr. Daniel C. Kovalak

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one” [1 Corinthians 12:4-6].

Whenever we approach the Holy Sacraments of the Church, we are individually addressed and identified as “the servant of God.” Perhaps seldom, however, do we seriously consider and reflect upon the nature and essence of our “service” to God that justifies such an esteemed appellation!

The primary definition of service, from the Latin *servitium*, means the occupation or condition of a servant. And “servant,” from the Latin *servus*, means “slave.” What a blow this is to our proud modern American ego that normally understands service in terms of what people, business, technology and things can do for us. In a society whose economy is largely driven by consumerism, it’s no wonder the “service industry” is prominent. It’s how a majority of Americans earn their living these days, “slaving” for others.

Somehow this idea of service doesn’t seem to translate well into our spiritual lives. Our life “in the world” has so accustomed us to seek, expect and demand service from others that when it comes to our relationship to God and His Church, we often do the same thing. Contrary to the teaching and example of Christ [Matthew 20:28], we frequently find ourselves coming to church to BE served, rather than TO serve.

Should we research the topic of service in the Scriptures, it may be both confusing and overwhelming, depending upon which Bible translation we use (e.g. the above quoted “varieties of service” from the Revised Standard Version is rendered “differences of administrations” in the King James Version!). Yet, just as there are 20-some definitions of “service” in the dictionary, there are, as Saint Paul suggests, “varieties of service” to be found in Scripture.

Indeed, the most often used New Testament word for servant is *doulos*—“slave”—a voluntary or involuntary subjection and subserviency. When Christ said, “you cannot serve God and mammon” [Luke 16:13], He was teaching the impossibility of a “slave” serving more than one master. He exemplified this as He “emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant [*doulos*], being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” [Philippians 2:7-8]. It was thus in imitation of Christ that the apostles introduced and identified themselves as “servants” of Jesus Christ; Paul, James, Peter and Jude begin their respective epistles in precisely these terms.

Do OUR lives truly reflect such dedicated, committed “service” to God?

Another scriptural aspect of service is *diakonia*, translated “minister” as well as “service.” It’s where we get “deacons”—those originally ordained by the apostles to serve tables and, on behalf of the Church, care for widows. This is practical service, certainly not limited to the ordained. It’s attending to things that must be done and running the necessary errands to do them. If you think about the kitchen crew and waiters at a parish dinner, you get the idea.

There are yet other aspects of service implied in various scriptural words. There’s service specific to liturgical ministry, detailing duties connected with worship, priestly and otherwise. (Sometimes we forget that “liturgy” implies work!) There’s the service performed by those hired to do so—“wage-workers.” And there are domestic servants who manage household chores as stewards. All of these are quite appropriate and applicable to Church life today!

But there’s one word, used rarely in the New Testament, that provides a fascinating image of service. Among other places, it’s found in 1 Corinthians 4:1. “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” In this verse, “servants” derives from a verb meaning “to row;” as in “row, row, row your boat.” The image created takes us into the bowels of a great ship before motors and engines, wherein a multitude of hardy men flexed their muscles in synchronized rowing to provide the power and strength to move the floating ship in the direction and at the speed commanded by the captain. These were “servants” performing necessary, hard, menial and generally unappreciated labor in relative obscurity. Maybe they occasionally received a pat on the back or some small commendation from those who actually realized and acknowledged the crucial significance of their work, but they were basically behind-the-scenes workers who made the ship move.

This type of service is as essential to the life and work of the Church, on every level, as it is to the movement of a great ship. Yes, as Saint Paul says, “God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators,” etc. [1 Corinthians 12:28ff.]. But the “varieties of service” excludes no one! Not everyone is called to or capable of standing at the helm of a ship, but *everyone* with the will and strength to do so can work together, behind-the-scenes, to help move the ship in the right direction!