

THE FORERUNNER
The Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church
 420 Laura Street
 Philipsburg, PA 16866
 (814) 342-2011
 V. Rev. Fr. C. Michael Simerick, Acting Rector
<http://nativityofstjohn-oca.org>



John Conkey-Council President; Tom Demchak-Vice-President; Judy Everly-Secretary
Members: Mark Ammerman, John Blake, Sonya Brennish, Mike Conkey, George Sura, Ivan Switala

DECEMBER 2018

Service & Activity Schedule

Sat., December 1
 Vespers @ 5:00 p.m.

Sun. December 2
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.
 Fellowship Hour – (FAST) Simerick & Stine

Wed., December 5, 6:00 p.m.
 Vesperal Liturgy Feast of St. Nicholas

Sat., December 8
 Vespers @ 5:00 p.m.

Sun., December 9
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.
 Fellowship Hour - (FAST) St. Ann's Guild
 Parish Council Meeting

Sat., December 15
 Vespers @ 5:00 p.m.

Sun., December 16 - Holy Forefathers
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.
 Fellowship Hour - FAST – Everly & Donovan

Sat., December 22
 Vespers @ 5:00 p.m.

Sun. December 23 – Sun. before Nativity
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.
 Fellowship Hour – FAST – Foster & Conkey

Mon., December 24 - Christmas Eve
 Royal Hours @ 9:00 a.m. followed by
 Vesperal Liturgy of St. Basil
 Compline with litya @ 6:00 p.m.

Tue., December 25 – Feast of the Nativity
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.

Sat., December 29 Vespers @ 5:00 p.m.

Sun., December 30
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.
 Fellowship Hour – Fetcenko & Demchak

Mon., December 31
 Vesperal liturgy Feast of Circumcision – 6 pm

Readers:

Mark Ammerman, John Conkey,
 Mike Conkey, Tom Demchak,
 Doug Donovan, George Sura,
 Andrew Tocimak

Altar Servers:

John Blake
 Ivan Switala

Reader's Schedule

	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Epistle</i>
12/2	John Conkey	John Conkey
12/9	Doug Donovan	Doug Donovan
12/16	Mark Ammerman	Mark Ammerman
12/23	John Conkey	John Conkey
12/30	Tom Demchak	Tom Demchak

Notable Feasts in December

12/5	Ven. Sabbas the Sanctified
12/6	St. Nicholas the Wonderworker
12/13	Ven. Herman of Alaska

Birthdays

Larry Ammerman	December 11
John Conkey	December 27

Please contact Shirley Donovan (814-360-3615) or Mary Ann Conkey (814-867-2926) if there are changes with the Fellowship Hour. Cash donations go towards the purchase of coffee, cream, sugar, and donuts.

From the Desk of Father Michael

ST. NICHOLAS, A SAINT FOR ALL TIMES



On Thursday, December 6, we will celebrate the glorious feast of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker and Archbishop of Myra and Lycia. St. Nicholas Velimirovic writes the following regarding this holy bishop:

“St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia. This saint, famed throughout the entire world today, was the only son of his eminent and wealthy parents, Theophanes and Nona, citizens of Patara in Lycia. They dedicated to God the only son He gave them. St. Nicholas was instructed in the spiritual life by his Uncle Nicholas, Bishop of Patara, and became a monk at New

Sion, a monastery founded by his uncle. On the death of his parents, Nicholas distributed all the property he inherited to the poor and kept nothing back for himself.

As a priest in Patara, he was known for his charitable works, fulfilling the Lord’s words: ‘Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth’ (Matt. 6:3). When he embraced a life of solitude and silence, thinking to live in that way until his death, a voice from on high came to him: ‘Nicholas, set about your work among the people if you desire to receive a crown from Me.’ Immediately after that, by God’s wondrous providence, he was chosen as archbishop of the city of Myra in Lycia. Merciful, wise and fearless, Nicholas was a true shepherd to his flock. He was cast into prison during the persecutions of Diocletian and Maximian, but even there continued to instruct the people in the Law of God. He was present at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325, and, in his zeal, struck Arius with his hand. For this act, he was removed from the Council and from his episcopal duties, until some of the chief hierarchs had a vision of our Lord Christ and His most holy Mother showing their sympathy with Nicholas.

This wonderful saint was a defender of the truth of God, and was ever a spirited champion of justice among the people. On two occasions, he saved three men from undeserved sentences of death. Merciful, trustworthy, and loving right, he walked among the people like an angel of God. People considered him a saint even during his lifetime, and invoked his aid when in torment or distress. He would appear both in dreams and in reality to those who called upon him for help, responding speedily to them, whether close at hand or far away. His face would shine with light as Moses’ did aforetime, and his mere presence among people would bring solace, peace and goodwill. In old age, he sickened of a slight illness, and went to his rest in the Lord after a life full of labor and fruitful toil. He now enjoys eternal happiness in the Kingdom of heaven, continuing to help the faithful on earth by his miracles, and to spread the glory of God. He entered into rest on December 6, 343.”

In the Judaic-Christian tradition, individuals who achieve holiness, the saints, are praised as heroes. In the past, stories of their lives were excitedly told and it was considered honorable to emulate them. Their holy deeds were often embellished, not to distort but out of a deep love and perhaps an overzealous admiration.

Brothers and Sisters,

Unlike fictional heroes whose claim to fame is their supernatural powers or sports figures and screen celebrities of our day, who have developed what they consider to be their own physical/mental talents and abilities for marketing purposes, the saints acquired and acquire greatness by attempting to accomplish the will of God. Their miraculous deeds are not ends in themselves but by-products of their attempts to draw near to and emulate God. Their mental, physical, and spiritual strength is from God, the source and goal of their existence; and their fame and popularity grows out of their reflecting the image of God and their deep humility.”

Those who truly lived virtuous lives touch deeply the whole of mankind in very profound ways. St. Nicholas, whom we commemorate during this season, is just such an example. His deep love for God and others, as mentioned earlier, was his sole motivation. It is no wonder that countless organizations,

fraternities, vocational groups, and individuals have chosen St. Nicholas to be their patron saint. It is unfortunate that the mythical figure Santa Claus, currently adored, masks the true identity of this glorious servant of the Lord.

St. Nicholas' great popularity among peoples of all nations throughout the centuries to the present day is intrinsically connected to his virtuous life characterized by his love and self-sacrifice for others. That his holy life is celebrated during this season of the year preparing us for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is no coincidence. Our Lord Jesus reveals by His becoming one of us our true humanity. Human beings were made in God's image and ordained to emulate His loving charity. During this season of Christmas, we celebrate the great example of God's love and charity towards us by the gift of His incarnate Son. So deeply are acts of charity felt and appreciated by mankind, that even the godless frequently are moved by such experiences.

Thus in the midst of this selfish and self-centered world an opportunity is given to us to celebrate the life of holy Saint Nicholas, a true emulator of God. His feast points the way to Christmas. All that St. Nicholas accomplished in his life reveals much about the true God he worshipped and emulated. May God always grant us the possibility to celebrate the life of holy St. Nicholas and may his prayers of intercession to God on our behalf save us.

ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA

On Thursday, December 13, we will commemorate the falling asleep of the Venerable Herman of Alaska, the first American saint and an icon of monasticism par excellence. The following information regarding monasticism and the life of St. Herman is taken from Father Thomas Hopko's two books, "The Orthodox Faith, Vol. II Worship" and "The Winter Pascha."

Monasticism

In the Orthodox Tradition the monastic calling is considered to be a personal gift of God to the individual soul for his salvation and service to the Body of Christ. The monastic vocation is the calling to personal repentance in a life dedicated solely to God. The ultimate Christian virtue of love is sought by the monk or nun primarily through prayer and fasting, and through the exercise of the Christian virtues of poverty, chastity, humility and obedience. The monk is normally a layman and not a cleric, with each monastery having only enough clergy to care for the liturgical and sacramental needs of the community itself.

For centuries the bishops have been traditionally selected from among the monks. These additional callings, however, are considered to be acts of God's will expressed in his People, and are not the purpose or intention of the monastic vocation as such. Indeed one must enter a monastery only in order to repent of his sins, to serve God and to save his soul according to the ideals of monastic asceticism. Saint Herman of Alaska was first dedicated to the monastic life, and only then, in obedience to his spiritual father, left his solitude to become a great missionary.

Saint Herman of Alaska

The elder Herman of Alaska, missionary monk of Spruce Island near Kodiak, died on the thirteenth of December in 1837. He is the first formally canonized saint of the Orthodox Church in America. The feast day of his death now forms a central part of the liturgical celebration of the Winter Pascha for Orthodox Christians living in North America.

The young monk Herman was a hermit in the monastery of Valaamo in Russian Finland. He was chosen to be a member of the first missionary team being sent to the Russian lands in Alaska. He was not ordained. He was not formally educated. He had no particular human skills. His only grace was that he was a holy man, a person of genuine faith and continuous prayer.

Herman came to America with the first group of missionaries. He alone survived, living for many years as a simple monk on Spruce Island. He taught the people the gospel. He attended to their spiritual and physical needs. He defended them against the cruelty of the Russian traders. He pleaded their cause before the imperial throne. He was beaten and persecuted by his own people for his condemnation of their injustices and sins. He identified wholly with the afflicted and oppressed. He died in obscurity, foretelling his glorification in future years by the Church that would emerge from his own humble efforts and those of the waves of immigrants who would inhabit the continent. And he revealed himself from heaven to those who, like him, remained faithful to God, including the great missionary bishop, the widowed priest and “apostle to America,” Saint Innocent Veniaminoff.

American Christianity desperately needs the witness of Saint Herman, for the American way of life is so radically opposed in so many ways to the life of this man and the Lord Jesus whom he served. Power, possessions, profits, pleasures: these are the things that Americans are known for. These are the goals that we are schooled to pursue. These are the things in which we take pride. And, sadly enough, these are also the things that many of us are taught to value by our “religious leaders,” both by their words and their examples. But this way is not the way of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is not the way of His saints.”

THE INCARNATION



The Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is one of the great mysteries in the Christian faith. The word incarnation means a clothing or a state of being clothed with flesh. In theology, it means the union of divinity with humanity in Christ.

The early fathers, when speaking about the Incarnation, always speak of it within the perspective of redemption (God saving man). It was generally assumed that the very meaning of salvation was that the intimate union between God and man had been restored, and it was inferred therefrom that the redeemer had to belong himself to both sides to be at once both divine and human, for otherwise the broken communion between God and man would not have been established.

The patristic fathers did not deal with the subject of incarnation with its relationship to the original purpose of creation. They always dealt with the question of the Incarnation on the level in which it was experienced by man; that is, the sin of the world was abrogated and taken away by the Incarnate One and He only, being both divine and human, could have done it.

Since the emphasis on the Incarnation in Orthodox theology is on redemption, let's look more closely at how and what God has redeemed through His birth. St. Athanasius explains “It is we who were the cause of His taking human form, and for our salvation that in His great love He was both born and manifested in a human body. For God had made man thus (that is, as an embodied spirit), and had willed that he should remain in incorruption. But men, having turned from the contemplation of God to evil of their own devising, had come inevitably under the law of death. Instead of remaining in the state in which God had created them, they were in the process of becoming corrupted entirely, and death had them completely under its dominion. For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again.”

Man, created by God both body and soul, was created to live for eternity; however, through sin, man's body tended toward corruption (death) and thus caused an unnatural and in fact subhuman existence for his soul. God did not intend man to live bodiless, but man is man precisely because he is both soul and body. Since man had lost this relationship through sin and death, that is the relationship between soul and body, man was no longer man.

How could this horrible end to God's beautiful creation be rectified? The answer is only by God Himself. God formed for Himself a body out of the womb of a virgin to be the temple of His Spirit. Thus, the mortal was linked to the immortal. Because it is impossible for God to die, when Christ was put to death, He did not suffer corruption. Christ, because He was God, resurrected both body and soul. “The

Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father's Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all, and, itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection."

St. Athanasius explains that God brought glory to all human bodies by indwelling in one. He gives as an example—a king or a president who visits one house in the city brings glory to the entire city. He explains that the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Savior of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death.

The Incarnation of God, according to St. Athanasius, did not only create the possibility of putting an end to death by an omnipotent power but it also served to once more renew in man the knowledge of His existence. When God created man, He did so by creating him in His Image. He placed him in the created world. These two facts alone should have been evidence enough for man that God exists. However, man through his sinfulness chose to worship the creation and to disregard that image in himself which was of God. God, therefore, gave unto man the law and the prophets, which if man had adhered to would have renewed in him the image of God that he had forgotten. However, man chose to disobey the law and to put the prophets to death.

"What then was God to do?" is the question St. Athanasius asks and he answers: "What else could He possibly do, being God, but renew His Image in mankind so that through it men might once more come to know Him and how could this be done save by the coming of the very Image Himself, our Savior Jesus Christ. Men could not have done it, for they are only made after the Image; nor could angels have done it, for they are not the images of God. The Word of God came in His own person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father, Who could recreate man made after the Image."

God's becoming man has abolished once and for all the possibility of death, and also God has renewed in us the knowledge of Himself in such a way that no man should be confused again. We as Christians assert that we believe in God not only because of what He has told us but also because of what He has shown us through His Coming.

PREPARATION FOR THE CHRISTMAS NATIVITY SEASON

In order to celebrate Christ's holy birth with the appropriate solemnity and joy, our preparation during the Advent season is imperative. Please keep in your hearts and minds that Christ is the reason for the season. Keep the fast and participate as frequently as possible in the liturgical sacramental services. May God reward you for your best efforts.

BAKED GOODS AND PIEROGI SALE

St. Ann's Guild is planning to bake nut, poppy, apricot, and raisin rolls in preparation for the Christmas holiday. On Monday, December 3, the ladies plan to make the rolls starting at 9:00 a.m. The rolls will be sold at \$10.00 each. If enough orders are obtained for potato and cheese pierogis, the ladies will make them on Wed., December 5 (in the afternoon prior to the vespereal Divine Liturgy – time to be determined) and on Thursday, December 6, starting at 9:00 a.m. Price for a dozen pierogis is \$10.00. Note: Please submit all orders and money collected by November 28 to Bonnie Fetcenko.