

**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  
 Phone: 814-375-1343 (contact Fr. Michael for any questions  
 regarding services and times)  
<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**

## JANUARY 2019

### Service & Activity Schedule

Mon., December 31, 6:00 pm  
 Vespers Liturgy Feast of Circumcision  
 Sat., January 5 - Eve of Theophany  
 Strict Fast Day  
 Vespers Liturgy – 10:00 am  
 Compline & Litya – 5:00 pm  
 Sun. January 6 – Feast of Theophany  
 Great blessing of water  
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.  
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.  
 Fellowship Hour – Simerick & Demchak  
 Sat., January 12  
 Vespers @ 5:00 p.m.  
 Sun., January 13  
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.  
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.  
 Fellowship Hour – Brennish & Thompson  
 Parish Council Meeting  
 Sat., January 19  
 Vespers @ 5:00 p.m.  
 Sun., January 20  
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.  
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.  
 Fellowship Hour – Foster & Conkey  
 Sat., January 26  
 Vespers @ 5:00 p.m.  
 Sun., January 27  
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.  
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.  
 Fellowship Hour – St. Anne's Guild

### Readers:

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

### Altar Servers:

Acolyte John Blake  
 Ivan Switala

### Reader's Schedule

	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Epistle</i>
1/6	John Conkey	John Conkey
1/13	Doug Donovan	Doug Donovan
1/20	John Conkey	John Conkey
1/27	Mark Ammerman	Mark Ammerman

### Notable Feasts in January

1/1	Feast of Circumcision
1/5	Eve of Theophany
1/6	Feast of Theophany
1/7	Synaxis of St. John the Baptist
1/17	Venerable & Godbearing Father Anthony the Great
1/30	Synaxis of Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom

### Birthdays

Mitch Tocimak	January 13
Matushka Linda Simerick	January 20
Sonya Brennish	January 30

### Anniversaries

Tom and Rhonda Demchak	January 19, 2002
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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*

**Christ is born! Glorify Him!**

**THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST  
FEAST OF ST BASIL**

On Tuesday, January 1, we will celebrate the Feast of the Circumcision of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. A vesperal liturgy will be held on Monday, December 31, in commemoration of this feast. The following quote from Genesis details the instituting of circumcision as the covenant between God and man that took place nearly 4,000 years ago.

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.’ Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ‘Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession and I will be their God.

And God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he that is born in your house and he that is bought with your money, shall be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people for he has broken my covenant.’ ” (Genesis 17:1-14).

We are told in the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 2, verse 21 “and at the end of the eight days when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” Although Christ was God and the author of the laws by which the Jews lived, He nevertheless fulfilled the law to the letter in almost every instance of His existence. Christ attested in Scripture that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

Circumcision was the rite of initiation into the nation of God. All those circumcised whether of Semitic stock or not were considered to be true seeds of the father Abraham. Thus, the parallel in the New Testament for circumcision is the rite of baptism that St. John inaugurated and to which Christ attested by His own baptism in the river Jordan.

The Feast of Circumcision began to be observed about the middle of the sixth century. Its relatively late introduction into the Christian calendar was due to the fact that this feast coincided with the civil new year, which in the pagan tradition was celebrated with riotous activity (heavy drinking and immoral freedoms); thus, the Church did not want to link a sacred feast with such abominable social behavior.

Another reason why this feast might have been late in its observance is because in the conversion of the Gentiles in the first century of Christianity, the question arose whether circumcision was essential for Gentiles wishing to be baptized into the Christian Church. The controversy, which raged between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians over this issue, was resolved at the Council of Jerusalem. St. Paul who represented the Gentile faction was aided in his argument defending un-circumcision of the Gentiles by St. Peter who related a vision he had from God in Joppa affirming that the circumcision of

Gentiles before baptism was not essential. Christ in fulfilling the Old Testamental law rendered its observance unnecessary in the new nation of God that He established—Christianity.

Christ, who was the God instituting the law to Abraham, deemed it necessary to also adhere to its observance 2,000 years later. We as Christians have received laws from Christ that are far more important to observe than those of the Old Testament. The Old Testamental laws were instituted to prepare men for the eternal laws that were initiated with Christianity.

What are some of these new laws which were instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Firstly, the law of baptism for all of those wishing to enter the citizenry of the Kingdom of God. Secondly, the participation in confession and communion. Christ gave power and a command to His apostles that they should go forth preaching the word of God baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and that whatever they loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven and whatever they bound on earth shall be bound in heaven (confession).

Let us contemplate the life of Christ and particularly the way in which He fulfilled the observances of the Old Testamental law (for example, that of circumcision). By following His example, let us begin to participate and to be obedient to the Christian law that was given to us so that we might inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

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### ***St. Basil the Great***

The following is an excerpt taken from The Prologue from Ochrid, Lives of the Saints, by Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic:

St. Basil was born in the reign of the Emperor Constantine, in about 330. While still unbaptised, he spent fifteen years in Athens studying philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy and other contemporary secular disciplines. Among his fellow-students were Gregory the Theologian and Julian, later the apostate emperor. When already of mature years, he was baptised in the Jordan together with his former tutor Evulios. He was Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia for nearly ten years, and died at the age of fifty.

A great champion of Orthodoxy, a great torch of moral purity and zeal for the Faith, a great theological mind, a great builder and pillar of the Church of God, Basil fully deserved his title “the Great.” In the Office for his Feast, he is referred to as a bee of the Church of Christ, bringing honey to the faithful but stinging those in heresy. Many of the writings of this Father of the Church have survived—theological, apologetic, on asceticism and on the Canons. There is also the Liturgy that bears his name. This Liturgy is celebrated ten times in the year: on January 1st, on the eves of Christmas and the Theophany, on every Sunday in the Great Fast with the exception of Palm Sunday, and on the Thursday and Saturday in Holy Week.

St. Basil departed this life peacefully on January 1, 379, and entered into the Kingdom of Christ.

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## **THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR**

The third important feast in the triad of commemorations that make up the winter Pascha, which includes our Lord’s glorious birth and His circumcision, is His baptism, which we will celebrate on Sunday, January 6. Jesus was not baptized as an infant but awaited His cousin, the Forerunner and Baptist John, to make preparations for the event by calling all to a baptism of repentance. Jesus was sinless and did not need to enter into a baptism of repentance, just as He did not need to be born as a man and suffer and die for us. However, He submitted to His birth and baptism for the same reasons He submitted to death and resurrection. He desired to identify totally with us by entering into what had become our sinful and fallen nature in order to redeem us.

St. John the Baptist called all to a baptism of repentance. Repentance was imperative then and is crucial now if we wish to benefit by participating in this glorious feast. Baptism, by its very nature, suggests purification, cleansing, and renewal, for such is the nature and property of water. But for cleansing to occur and newness of life to be made possible, seeking repentance is pivotal. Repentance suggests a turning around from our sinful course that we might begin again in a new direction toward God, refraining from sinful diversions.

What is revealed to us via this most solemn commemoration of our Lord's baptism is that He has come to fill all things with His presence. He is in nature as is made evident by His transforming the waters of the Jordan through His entry into them at His baptism. Those who witnessed the baptismal event some 2,000 years ago due to their repentance were able to recognize Him as the savior whom they were anticipating for centuries. We through our repentance are given the opportunity to see the Lord's presence not only in nature but also His presence in death, even the death on the cross, that we through His life and death might receive eternal life.

Our Lord's great condescension in becoming one of us will never truly be understood, for it is a great mystery. This does not mean that we can learn nothing regarding the eternal mysteries revealed through the great feasts. By being faithful and obedient to the Lord and seeking His forgiveness, radiant beams from these eternal events enlighten our understanding and reveal what God has done for us that we might be saved. Let us first through repentance immerse ourselves in the hallowed waters of this eternal event commemorating our Lord's baptism. Then may we, our homes, and all things deemed worthy of a blessing be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit via the waters sanctified on the Feast of Theophany.