

THE FORERUNNER
The Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church
 420 Laura Street, Philipsburg, PA 16866
 V. Rev. Fr. C. Michael Simerick, Acting Rector
 Contact Fr. Michael directly at 814-375-1343
<http://nativityofstjohn-oca.org>



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

JUNE 2019

Service & Activity Schedule

Sat., June 1 – Vespers – 5:00 p.m.
 Sun., June 2 – Sunday of the Blind Man
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.
 Fellowship Hour – Conkey & Ammerman
 Parish Council Meeting
 Thur. June 6, Feast of Ascension
 Divine Liturgy -10:00 a.m.
 Sat., June 8 - Vespers– 5:00 p.m.
 Sun., June 9 – Fathers of First Ecumenical Council
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.
 Fellowship Hour - Donovan
 Sat., June 15 - Vespers – 5:00 p.m.
 Sun., June 16 – Holy Pentecost
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.
 Fellowship Hour – St. Ann’s Guild
 Fathers’ Day

 Week of June 17 – June 22 – Fast-free Week

 Sat. June 22 – Service to be announced
 Sun., June 23 – Sunday of All Saints
 Service to be announced
 Fellowship Hour – Fetcenko & Stine
 Mon. June 24 – Beginning of Ss. Peter & Paul Fast
 Sat., June 29 – Holy Apostles Ss. Peter & Paul
 Vespers – 5:00 p.m.
 Sun., June 30 – All Saints of America
 Hours @ 9:35 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy @ 10:00 a.m.
 Fellowship Hour – Brennish & Demchak

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>	
6/2	Tom Demchak	Tom Demchak
6/9	John Conkey	John Conkey
6/16	Mark Ammerman	Mark Ammerman
6/23	Doug Donovan	Doug Donovan
6/30	Tom Demchak	Tom Demchak

Notable Feasts in June

6/6	Feast of Ascension of Our Lord
6/16	Holy Pentecost
6/24	Nativity of St. John the Baptist
6/29	Holy Apostles Ss. Peter & Paul

Birthdays

Karen Blackburn	June 2
Zoie Sidorick	June 2
Vincent Ammerman	June 8
Maureen Sidorick	June 12
Nick Sidorick	June 27
Judy Everly	June 30

Anniversaries

Jack and Mary Foster`	June 18, 1949
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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, and sugar.

From the Desk of Father Michael

A CALL TO ARMS

Until the Feast of Ascension we continue in the Paschal celebration. Pascha is the central feast of our Church. The elaborate preparation before it and the forty days of celebration that follow it are meant to strengthen our faith in God's great act of love, which He perfected by His death and resurrection. We are strengthened so that we might fulfill the commission of our Lord to fight the good fight against His adversary and ours—Satan the prince of this world. For Christ said "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword." (Matthew 10:34)

When we were baptized into the Orthodox Christian faith, we committed ourselves fully to the service of God in this world. We chose to ally ourselves with God and to fight the demonic forces at work. If we were baptized as infants, our sponsors, parents, and those Christians present at our baptism took it upon themselves to commit us to this battle because they sincerely believed that the reward of our efforts was well worth any price we might have to pay.

As Orthodox Christians, we must be ready to fight at any given moment against the evil forces that confront us in our daily existence. Christ, when speaking in the Gospel according to St. Matthew about how we must attempt to receive the Kingdom of Heaven said: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life and those who find it are few." (Matthew 7:13-14)

Our task as Orthodox Christians is great, but the grace (power) which we receive from God can enable us to overcome any difficulty we might encounter. "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be open to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

Also, in St. Mark's Gospel, chapter 11, verses 22-26, Jesus assures us that what we ask of him in faith we will receive. "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, be taken up and cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it and you will. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your father also who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses."

There is a trend today to blame the evil that exists in our society on the institution. St. Paul tells us in his first epistle to the Corinthians (chapter 7, verses 20-24) that even if we are slaves it makes no difference as long as we remain with God. In a democracy, the institutions may be as good or as bad as the individuals who comprise them. Whether a person is good or bad depends with whom he is allied in his earthly existence, either with God or with Satan.

We as Orthodox Christians must be faithful to the commitment we made at our baptism, and we must unceasingly strive to fulfill God's will on earth.

It is imperative that we be wise soldiers of Christ. Firstly, we should know without any doubt who God's and our enemy is in this world. Scripture and the Church clearly state that it is Satan.

Secondly, we must strengthen ourselves for our encounters with Satan. The Church prescribes that we do so by receiving the sacraments of Penance, Absolution, and Communion as frequently as possible and also that we fast and pray individually for God's grace.

Thirdly, being strengthened, we must then without fear strive to overcome the forces of the evil one that encompass us. Only by knowing the enemy and by using the grace that we receive from God to overcome him can we fulfill our Christian purpose by fighting the good fight and by remaining steadfast until His Second Coming.

SUNDAY OF THE BLIND MAN – June 2

All infirmity has its origin in sin. This consequence came about with the first sin of Adam and Eve in Paradise and has proliferated down through the ages to our present day. With regard to the paralytic whom we commemorated several Sundays ago, we were told his paralysis was precipitated by his own personal sin. In the instance of the blind man recorded in the gospel read on this Sunday, when Jesus was asked by His apostles who sinned, this man or his parents, the Lord replied “Neither, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

Jesus is not implying by this statement that the man was made blind by God but due to the sinfulness of our human condition. It is possible to suffer diverse illnesses due to the sinfulness of others, yet God, through His coming into the world via His incarnation, has placed Himself in the midst of all suffering that suffering might not be in vain. Through Him, therefore, all suffering is transformed and manifests His glory.

It is not accidental that the Lord, in order to heal the blind man, makes clay of the spittle and sends him to the pool of Siloam to wash. He who fashioned us from clay in the beginning uses clay to repair the broken flesh of the blind man that he might receive his physical sight. He who in the beginning brought forth life by His spirit moving over the face of the waters uses His spittle and the waters of the pool of Siloam to prefigure the restoration of our spiritual blindness and ultimately the restoration of our lives through holy baptism.

The blind man suffered the infirmity of blindness from his birth but had restored to him his physical sight and in addition his spiritual sight that enabled him to recognize the Messiah in the person of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the Jews, who could see physically, utilized their sight to no avail in not recognizing the miracle performed by Jesus. In addition, they remained spiritually blind to the Lord’s true identity.

May we continue to nurture our spiritual sight restored through baptism that our physical sight may continue to be a blessing to us by enabling us to see the hand of the Lord in all things.

ASCENSION OF OUR LORD – Thursday, June 6

Why is it that the word “Ascension” fills us with such joy? In fact, not only the word “Ascension” but any word with the connotation of “up.” “The Lord has gone up with a shout,” says the psalmist. “Upbeat” is a common term. “I’ve been up to the mountaintop,” said Martin Luther King. “Lift up your spirit,” says the scriptures. All of these statements and phrases bring delight to the ear and spirit because “up” is at the heart of their meaning.

“Down” has the opposite connotation from our experience. A common question asked today, “Are you feeling down?” “Down in the lowest pit,” says the scriptures, and another—“He shall be cast down.” A popular song of not too many decades ago “Down in the Boondocks” again reflects the negative connotation for the word “down.”

In contemplating the word “up” we immediately envision freedom—freedom from all of those things that hold us down, that ensnare us. Even the thought of being free from the force of gravity is liberating. It is not an accident, therefore, that the ultimate act of salvation planned by God for us is to lift us up. He came down to earth that He might lift us up to the heights of heaven.

The Ascension, therefore, can be understood by anyone who has ever contemplated freedom or has had the urge to break the bonds that hold us down. Only those, who through sin have perverted their human instincts and aspirations, can find no delight in God’s ascension and in His promise to lift us up that we might ascend with Him on high.

However, in the scriptures, we discover a startling fact—that the Kingdom of Heaven is actually within us. The real “up” with regard to salvation is to once again be able to commune with the living God on the highest level of human existence. This can occur only when the soul is given the number one priority, when it’s elevated to its rightful place above the flesh.

In his book “The Celebration of Faith, Vol. 2” Father Schmemmann writes:

“The feast of the Ascension is the celebration of heaven now opened to human beings, heaven as the new and eternal home, heaven as our true homeland. Sin severed earth from heaven and made us earthly and coarse, it fixed our gaze solidly on the ground and made our life exclusively earthbound. Sin is the betrayal of heaven in the soul. It is precisely on this day, on the feast of the Ascension, that we cannot fail to be horrified by this renunciation that fills the whole world. With self-importance and pride, man announces that he is strictly material, that the whole world is material, and that there is nothing beyond the material. And for some reason he is even glad about this, and speaks with pity and condescension, as he would of buffoons and boors, of those who still believe in some sort of “heaven.” Come on brothers, heaven is the sky, it’s just as material as everything else; there is nothing else, there never was and never will be. We die, we disappear; so in the meantime, let’s build an earthly paradise and forget about the fantasies of priests. This in brief, but absolutely accurately, is the end result and high-point of our culture, our science, our ideology. Progress ends in the cemetery, with the progress of worms feeding on corpses. But what do you propose, they ask us, what is this heaven you talk about, into which Christ ascended? After all, up in the sky nothing of what you are speaking exists.

Let the answer to this question come from John Chrysostom, a Christian preacher who lived sixteen centuries ago. Speaking about heaven, he exclaims: “What need do I have for heaven, when I myself will become heaven...” Let the answer come from our ancestors, who called the church “heaven on earth.” The essential point of both these answers is this: heaven is the name of our authentic vocation as human beings, heaven is the final truth about the earth. No, heaven is not somewhere in outer space beyond the planets, or in some unknown galaxy. Heaven is what Christ gives back to us, what we lost through our sin and pride, through our earthly, exclusively earthly, sciences and ideologies, and now it is opened, offered, and returned to us by Christ. Heaven is the kingdom of eternal life, the kingdom of truth, goodness and beauty. Heaven is the total spiritual transformation of human life; heaven is the kingdom of God, victory over death, the triumph of love and care; heaven is the fulfillment of that ultimate desire, about which it was said: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9). All of this is revealed to us, all of this is given to us by Christ. And therefore, heaven permeates our life here and now, the earth itself becomes a reflection, a mirror image of heavenly beauty. Who descended from heaven to earth to return heaven to us? God. Who ascended from earth to heaven? The man Jesus.”

Salvation is not a magical act, but will be granted to those who can rise above the material plane of existence in which we are immersed and allow their souls to soar to God, affording that communion that He ordained for us with Him from the very beginning.

FEAST OF PENTECOST – Sunday, June 16

On Sunday, June 16, fifty days after Pascha, our holy Orthodox Church commemorates the Feast of Pentecost, which, before it became a Christian commemoration, was celebrated by the Jews. The Jewish feast of Pentecost was also called “the Feast of Weeks” because it took place seven weeks and one day (50 days) after the Saturday termed “the Massot” (the first Saturday after the Passover). Pentecost was the closing festival of the harvest and of the paschal season.

In the early tradition of the Feast, the beginning of the harvest festival (the first day after the Saturday of the Massot) was celebrated by offering a sheaf of barley. Fifty days later at Pentecost, the completion of the festival was commemorated by offering two loaves of bread made from the newly harvested wheat. In general, the Feast connoted a renewal, the coming of life. Winter had passed and spring brought forth the fruits of the world, and the faithful thanked God for the harvest. In the latter centuries before the

coming of Christ, it was customary to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in commemoration of the Feast and to spend the day in joyful festivity after first offering gifts in the temple.

Bearing all this in mind, it is clear why God chose to send forth the Holy Spirit upon the new church on this day of Pentecost. St. Paul stated that the Holy Spirit makes all things anew. Thus, appropriately on this Jewish feast commemorating renewal, the Holy Spirit takes up its abode among men transforming and enlightening them. Because there were representatives from many nations in Jerusalem on that day (who came to make their pilgrimage as was the tradition), the new Christian church was able to expose small numbers of individuals from all parts of the known world to the truths of Christ's death, resurrection, and the establishment of His church.

The Holy Spirit descended upon the members of the new Church in fiery tongues. St. John Chrysostom explains that the Holy Spirit not only descended upon the twelve apostles but also on all of those who were meeting in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost (approximately 120 persons). Father Lossky, commenting on St. John's commentary, adds that although the Holy Spirit descended upon all those gathered in the room, the gifts of the Holy Spirit were many, and each person received the measure of the Holy Spirit according to his office. Thus, the apostles were gifted according to their office of apostleship, and the others present according to their offices within the new Church.

St. John Chrysostom further explains that as all the nations of the world were separated by language because of their sins at the Tower of Babel incident, it was only befitting that the Holy Spirit should unite all nations since the power of sin had been abolished by the Son of God. Thus, God's instruments, the apostles, who were commissioned to bring all men into union and communion with God, spoke in a language or languages understood by all nations.

The Feast of Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian Church. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church not only fulfills Old Testament prophecies but also the promise of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as well when He said that He would send forth the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth. St. John the Baptist also prophesized about the descent of the Holy Spirit and vividly explained in what manner the Holy Spirit would be received. "I baptize you with water; but He who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Let us pray fervently that the Holy Spirit, which descended upon the Church on Pentecost and abides with us, will illumine our hearts and minds to the knowledge of the truth of the Gospel teaching. May the Holy Spirit strengthen us that we might persevere in our struggles in this world in our preparation for the life to come.

FATHERS' DAY – Sunday, June 16

FATHERHOOD

A universal word that speaks volumes with regard to caring, nurture, love, sacrifice, and compassion is the word "mother." Our Lord Jesus Christ, when He came to save us via His incarnation, selected a worthy earthly mother who has become the symbol of motherhood for all—the blessed Theotokos.

Our Lord came as the Messiah to teach us all things. Most importantly, He came to teach us about the personhood of God. He revealed the Godhead of the Trinity as His father and instructed us to come to know Him as our father. In fact, when we contemplate God, we are compelled to think of Him as Father. We all have earthly fathers, and some have known and others will come to know the joy of fathering children through the blessed union of holy matrimony ordained by God.

The attributes of fatherhood, like the attributes of motherhood mentioned earlier, are also worthy of admiration and emulation for they originate in God the Father Himself. Some of the most important attributes pertaining to fatherhood are faithfulness, perfect obedience, courage and strength to lead, and sacrificial love.

Earthly fathers are commissioned by God through the attributes mentioned to lead their families unto the Kingdom of Heaven. In order to secure their leadership position, fathers must exhibit the attributes of fatherhood so that they may gain the trust and respect of their family members. In seeking obedience from those subject unto them, they must demonstrate their faithfulness and obedience to God in all things.

Our prayer this Fathers' Day is that our Orthodox fathers will take seriously their divine commission to lead their families unto salvation. They must come to realize that to emulate God in bringing forth life through the act of procreation and sustaining physical life is not sufficient. God, by His example, does not only create and nourish life. He has revealed to us His plan to save our lives as well. Earthly fathers have been commissioned to assist Him in leading their families via the Church unto salvation. May God strengthen all our fathers for this most sacred task

NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST – Monday, June 24

On Monday, June 24, we celebrate the glorious Feast of the Nativity of St. John, the Forerunner and Baptist of Christ. He is called the greatest born of woman before the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His holy birth, life, and death truly touch on the greatness that all human beings are called to by their love, faith, and obedience to the living God.

By his holiness and extreme asceticism, he captured the attention of all around him and caused many of them to repent and earnestly prepare for the coming of Christ. In the tradition of all scriptural/religious heroes. He centered and focused all the attention given to him on the one he came to herald—the Savior, Christ.

The following regarding the birth of St. John is taken from “The Prologue of Ochrid” written by Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic:

“Six months before his appearing to the most holy Virgin Mary in Nazareth, the great Gabriel, archangel of the Lord, appeared to Zacharias the High Priest in the Temple in Jerusalem. Before he revealed the miraculous conception by a virgin who had not known a man, the archangel revealed the wondrous conceiving by an old and barren woman. Zacharias was unable at once to believe the words of God’s herald, and for this his tongue was bound in dumbness and remained thus until the eighth day after John’s birth. The kinsfolk of Zacharias and Elizabeth gathered together on that day for the infant’s circumcision and naming. When they inquired of the father how he wished the child to be called, he, being still dumb, wrote on a slate: ‘John’. At that moment his tongue was loosed and he began to speak.

Zacharias’s house was on the heights between Bethlehem and Hebron. The news of the angel’s appearing to Zacharias, of his dumbness and of the loosening of his tongue at the exact moment that he wrote ‘John’, was carried throughout all Israel, coming to Herod’s ears. So, when he sent men to kill all the infants around Bethlehem, he sent men off to Zacharias’s family house in the hills, to slay John also. But Elizabeth hid the child in good time. The king was enraged at this, and sent an executioner to the Temple to kill Zacharias (for it was then his turn to serve in the Temple again). Zacharias was killed between the court and the Temple, and his blood clotted and solidified on the paving slabs, and remained as an enduring witness against Herod. Elizabeth hid herself and the child in a cave, where she soon died. The young John remained in the wilderness alone, in the care of God and His angels.”

SAINTS PETER & PAUL – Saturday, June 29

Saturday, June 29, marks the commemoration of Saints Peter and Paul, the two great apostolic pillars of our Christian faith. To have as our intercessors before the throne of God these two giants of Christian apostleship should be for all of us always a humbling and awesome experience.

The following is an excerpt from the *Prologue from Ochrid* by Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic regarding Saints Peter and Paul:

The Holy Apostle Peter

The son of Jonah and brother of Andrew the First-Called, of the tribe of Simeon and the town of Bethsaida, he was a fisherman and was at first called Simon, but the Lord was pleased to call him Cephas, or Peter (Jn 1:42). He was the first of the disciples to give clear expression to his faith in the Lord Jesus, saying: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Mt. 16:16). His love for the Lord was very strong, and his faith in Him went from strength to strength. When the Lord was put on trial, Peter denied Him three times, but it needed only one look into the face of the Lord, and Peter's soul was filled with shame and repentance.

After the descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter became a fearless and powerful preacher of the Gospel. After his first sermon in Jerusalem, about 3,000 souls were converted to the Faith. He preached the Gospel throughout Palestine and Asia Minor, in Italy and in Illyria. He performed many wonders, healing the sick and raising the dead, and even his shadow had the power of healing the sick. He had a major struggle with Simon the Magician, who declared himself to be from God but was actually a servant of the devil. He finally put him to shame and overcame him. Peter was condemned to death on the order of the wicked Emperor Nero, a friend of Simon's.

After installing Linus as Bishop of Rome and exhorting and encouraging the flock of Christ there, Peter went to his death with joy. When he saw the cross before him, he asked the executioner to crucify him upside-down, because he felt himself to be unworthy to die in the same way as his Lord. And so this great servant of the greatest Master went to his rest and received a crown of eternal glory.

The Holy Apostle Paul

Born in Tarsus and of the tribe of Benjamin, he was formerly called Saul and studied under Gamaliel. He was a Pharisee and a persecutor of Christians. He was wondrously converted to the Christian faith by the Lord Himself, who appeared to him on the road to Damascus. He was baptized by the Apostle Ananias, named Paul and enrolled in the work of the Great Apostles. He preached the Gospel everywhere with burning zeal, from the borders of Arabia to the land of Spain, among both the Jews and the heathen, and receiving the title of 'the Apostle to the Gentiles.' His fearful sufferings were matched only by his superhuman endurance. Through all the years of his preaching, he hung from day to day like a thread between life and death. Filling his days and nights with toil and suffering for Christ, organizing the Church in many places and reaching a high level of perfection, he was able to say: 'I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me' (Gal. 2:20). He was beheaded in Rome in the reign of Nero, at the same time as St. Peter.