

A Time of Preparation

THE FAST OF THE NATIVITY is the Church's wise solace and aid to human infirmity. We are a forgetful people, but our forgetfulness is not unknown to God; and our hearts with all their misconceptions and weakened understandings are not unfamiliar to the Holy Spirit who guides and sustains this Church. We who fall far from God through the magnitude of our sin, are called nonetheless to be close to Him. We who run afar off are called to return. Through the fast that precedes the great Feast of the Incarnation—which itself is the heart and substance of our calling—the Church helps draw us into the full mystery of what that call entails.

Like Great Lent, the fast of the Nativity is a journey. *Come, O ye faithful, and let us behold where Christ is born. Let us join the Magi, kings from the east, and follow the guiding star.* Let us “join the Magi,” let us “follow” and “behold.” On the fifteenth of November, the Church joins together in a journey toward that salvation first promised to Adam in God's curse laid upon the serpent (Gen. 3.14-15). The One who will crush the head of the serpent, of sin and the devil and all that is counter to the life God offers, is Him to whom the star leads us. The fast of the Nativity is our journey into the new and marvelous life of the Holy Trinity, which is offered by God but which we must approach of our own volition. In this act, we are joined to the story of our fathers. The gift of a new land and great blessings was freely given by God to Abraham, but in order to obtain it, “Abram went, as the Lord had told him” (Gen 12.4).

A journey is, by its nature, naturally ascetic. Unless my life

is already very humble, I cannot take the whole of my possessions on a journey. I cannot transport social and political ties along a journey's path. I can never be too reliant on the plans I have made for my journey: a controlling beyond the self must be admitted and accepted. This is the spirit to which the fast calls us. A journey is, by its nature, an act of movement, of transportation, of growth. What is old is left behind, newness is perceived and embraced, growth of understanding takes place. And even if the journey comes to a close in the same physical location from which it began, that place is transformed for us by the journey through which we have re-approached it. The aid shelter on a street corner in London is no different after a journey to the Middle East; but after witnessing there first-hand the struggles and torments of poverty, of suffering, of sorrow, the meaning and importance of that small shelter is indeed different for me.

Here the importance of the fast. As the Nativity approaches, that great feast of cosmic significance and eternal, abounding joy for which heaven and earth together rejoice, the fast calls me to consider: do I rejoice? Why do I rejoice? The hymnography of the Church makes it clear that this is a feast for all the world, for all creation; and the fast calls me to take my place in that creation, to realize that, despite all my infinite unworthiness, Christmas is a miracle for my soul too.

Make ready, O Bethlehem: let the manger be prepared, let the cave show its welcome. The truth has come, the shadow has passed away; born of a Virgin, God has appeared to men, formed as we are and making godlike the garment He has put on. Therefore Adam is renewed with Eve, and they call out: “Thy good pleasure has appeared on earth to save our kind.”

Adam and Eve, all of humankind, are renewed and made alive in the Incarnation of God in Christ, who “appeared on earth to save our kind.” Fallen flesh, so long bound to death, so long yearning in for growth and maturation into the fullness of life, is sewn into the garment of Christ and at last made fully alive. There is a pleasing old saying, with perhaps more

Annual Saint Nicholas Party

Saturday, December 15.

The annual St. Nicholas Party will take place on Saturday, December 15, starting at 3 PM. There will be crafts and the decorating of the church hall Christmas tree. Vespers begins, as usual at 5 PM. Following Vespers there will be a potluck and the singing of Christmas carols, with a visit from St. Nicholas! Needs: It would be great if teenagers and adults came to help with the children's crafts and clean up when we are done. We need adults without small children to help with these tasks, so that parents that do have small children can take them to Vespers. For any questions or volunteering please contact Gloria Collins at 849-6135 or email her at gypsybootsie@att.net. You may also speak with Lara Anderson at 569-0175. We are all eagerly anticipating the celebration of the Blessed Nativity!

INFORMATION

Protection of the Holy Virgin & St. Seraphim of Sarov Church
90 Mountain View Ave, Santa Rosa, CA 95407
Parish office phone: 584-9491 / fax: 585-9445
website: www.saintseraphim.com

Our Parish Secretary may be reached at the Church office
Tuesday–Saturday, 9 AM to Noon, at 584-9491.
Fr. Lawrence Margitich may be reached at the Parish office
phone, or at Lmargitich@sbcglobal.net. He is available Tues-
day–Saturday, from noon onwards each day.

PARISH CONTACTS

Fr. Michael Margitich, Pastor Emeritus	473-0314
Fr. John Schettig, Assistant Pastor	318-1559
Fr. John Ramos, Attached.....	570-9849
Deacon Jeremiah Crawford	823-5878
Deacon Nicholas Carr.....	588-8753
Sub-Deacon Marc Richardson	545-4047
Nicolas Custer, Choir Director	584-9491
Nilus Veenis, Sacristan	526-2284
Serge Anderson, Parish Council Warden.....	291-7452
Petar Griovski, Treasurer	762-4742
Bonnie Alexander, Recording Secretary.....	778-8528
Lisa Moroz, Sisterhood President.....	360-5119
Parmenas Davis, Church School Coordinator.....	823-2921
Shenina, Scrip Manager.....	321-7417
Eleni Rose, Agape Meal Coordinator	480-6106

than a touch of truth to it, that humankind drew its first full breath at the infant Christ's first cry.

We are called, then, to approach this great mystery as God's condescension into our own lives, personally and collectively. The Canon of Matins for the Nativity lays it out clearly: *He establishes a path for us, whereby we may mount up to heaven.* The Nativity is not only about God's coming down to us, but about our rising up to Him, just as sinful humanity was lifted up into the person of Christ in the Incarnation itself. We are called to arise, then, during the fast that is the journey into this Feast. *O blessed Lord who seest all, raise us up far above sin, and establish Thy singers firm and unshaken upon the foundation of the faith.* The faithful take up this call through the abandonment of those things which bind, rather than free, in order that a focus on God as "all in all" might become ever more real and central to daily life. Meals are lessened and regimented, that a constant, lingering hunger may remind us of the great need we each have for spiritual food that goes beyond our daily bread. The number of Church services is gradually increased, that we might know whence comes that true food. Sweets and drink are set aside, that we might never feel content with the trivial and temporal joys of this world. Parties and social engagements are reduced, that we might realize that all is not so well with us as we often take it to be. Anything which holds the slightest power over us, whether cigarettes or television, travel or recreation, is minimized or—better—cast wholly aside, that we might bring ourselves to be possessed and governed only by God.

The fast is an ascetic time, designed by the Church to strip away common stumbling blocks into sin, to provide us with the means of self-perception that we lack in our typical indulgence, and to begin to grow the seeds of virtue. All these are necessary if we are ever to know even partially, or appreciate even menially, the "depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Romans 11:33). We must take up the task of our own purification, gifted by God and

achieved only through His grace, that we might approach Him on Christmas Day as did the Magi and the shepherds in Bethlehem: *Come, O ye faithful, inspired by God let us arise and behold the divine condescension from on high that is made manifest to us in Bethlehem. Cleansing our minds, let us offer through our lives virtues instead of myrrh, preparing with faith our entry into the feast of the Nativity, storing up treasure in our souls and crying: Glory in the highest to God in Trinity, whose good pleasure is now revealed to men, that in His love for mankind He may set Adam free from the ancestral curse.* (Sticheron of the Sixth Hour, Christmas Eve). —Archimandrite Irenei (Steenburg)

St Caesarius of Arles, On the Coming of Christ

SINCE THE LORD'S birthday is approaching, let us with Christ's help prepare ourselves for the nuptials and heavenly banquet by being clear of all dissipation and adorned with good works. Let us give alms to the poor, attend vigils more promptly, pray or chant the psalms standing in church; observe peace with all men, and recall to harmony those whom you know are at variance. If with the help of Christ you are willing to fulfill these things faithfully, you will be able to approach the Lord's altar in this life with an easy conscience and in the future life will happily arrive at eternal bliss.

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- THE MYRRH STREAMING "Iveron icon of the Theotokos" from Hawaii, will be at the Nativity of Christ Greek Orthodox Church, 1110 Highland Drive, Novato, CA 94949, 415-883-1998, on Saturday Dec. 8. Akathist at 9 AM.
- SISTERHOOD MEETING: All parishioners—men and women—are invited to participate. Sunday, December 9, 12:45 PM or so, in the Hall.
- TALK ON THE INCARNATION: Vincent Rossi will present a talk on the Incarnation of the Word of God, on Thursday, December 20 at 6:45 PM, after Vespers. Vespers of the Prefeast of Nativity will be served each evening at 6 PM from Dec. 19–Dec. 23.
- ROHNERT PARK STUDY GROUP: Sessions continue on Tuesday evenings, 7 PM, December 4, 11 and 18. The group meets at 1354 Oak View Circle #327 Rohnert Park. Contact Deacon Nicholas and Deacon Jeremiah for further information on topics and content. Contact Debi Shrimplin for directions, 536-9112.
- CONCERT ON DECEMBER 29: Nicolas Custer will conduct the "Sotto Il Doumo" ensemble in a short concert of Renaissance Christmas hymns, Saturday, December 29, following Great Vespers.
- SAINT SERAPHIM DAY, JAN. 2: We celebrate the second of our Annual Parish Feast Days on January 2, the repose of St. Seraphim. Services: Vespers and Akathist, January 1 at 5 PM; Liturgy with His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin, Jan. 2, at 9:30 AM followed by a festal meal.
- HOLY THEOPHANY: January 6—the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord in the Jordan—and the Twelfth Day of Christmas—is on a Sunday. We will begin the Theophany celebration with Vigil on Saturday evening, January 5. After the Sunday Divine Liturgy we will serve the Great Blessing of Water. The Blessing of Homes will begin that day as well.
- ATTENTION ALL PARISH SENIORS! After the Divine Liturgy on Dec. 13—for the memory of Saint Herman of Alaska, our American patron saint—we will be having a special festal luncheon in the parish hall. The children from St. Michael's Orthodox School (Rose Ave) will be providing some special entertainment and a lovely dessert. Please come and join in the festivities! Also, please remember to bring your gifts for the "Giving Tree" project! We have two name tags left on the tree! If you haven't participated, please take one of the name tags, buy an age appropriate gift, wrap it, attach the name tag and bring the gift to the luncheon. If you have already contributed, could you find it in your heart to choose one more?! Thank you.
- DON'T FORGET...save the date: January 10th, we will be having a progressive "House Blessing." There will be a sign-up sheet at the Dec. 13th luncheon. Hope to see you there!
- REDWOOD GOSPEL MISSION BARRELS IN PARISH HALL AND NARTHEX: Please bring canned goods and coats/jackets in excellent condition which will be delivered to the Redwood Gospel Mission downtown.
- PHOTO DIRECTORY UPDATE: Those who missed the opportunity the last few Sundays to have your photo taken for the planned parish photo directory, please see Aaron Brodeur after the Divine Liturgy. He will be stationed with his camera in front of the storage building.

PARISH FINANCES FOR OCTOBER

- Income: \$74,830
- Expense: \$54,184
- Loan Expenses: \$26,854

- **Income** includes some extraordinary income:

\$22,000from Glendi to the Building Fund
\$14,000given for the Frescos of Theophany and the Meeting of the Lord
\$10,000memorial bequest/Eugene Gordenev Estate
\$1,200for rental of Parish Hall

- **Expenses** includes extraordinary expenses:

\$21,843to pay off the Russian Home of Mercy loan (use of the Glendi funds)

THE HOLY SUPPER OF CHRISTMAS EVE

AMONG THE ORTHODOX PEOPLE of Carpatho-Russia there is a wonderful tradition of having a “Holy Supper” on Christmas Eve, just before going to Church for the Vigil. While the menu and details of the meal may be different from family to family and region to region, the general idea is as follows:

On Christmas Eve, the late morning 11 AM Vespers Liturgy is celebrated. We keep a strict fast (no food or liquids) before this service and until Holy Communion. After the Liturgy we go home to prepare the meal. Back in the “old country,” twelve dishes are prepared, in honor of the Holy Apostles. The foods, prepared with oil, but without dairy products due to the fast, usually include fish, soup, stuffed cabbage, stewed plums, mashed potatoes, honey, garlic, etc. The dining table is covered with a white linen cloth in memory of the swaddling clothes of Christ Child, and an extra place is set to receive a stranger, remembering that the Holy Family found no lodging in Bethlehem’s Inn.

In the center of the table is a large round loaf of bread, which symbolized Jesus as the Bread of Life. A tall candle is placed in the bread, as a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem. Straw is laid down on the floor and some of it also placed on the table or under the white tablecloth, symbolizing the fact that Jesus lay in a manger. The father greets everyone with the exclamation: “Christ is born!” And just as in Church, all answer “Glorify Him!” Wine is poured by the father, or the eldest, for a toast, recalling the act of our Lord Jesus at the Last Supper, and offered these words: “Grant, O God, that we may live to an even better Holy Night next year. May the Lord give good health to you, my dear wife, and to our children, to my good and bad neighbors, to my friends and enemies. May God bless all Christians here and abroad, and may He grant eternal memory and heaven to the departed. And above all, my Sweetest Jesus, born this day, bring peace, health and happiness!” All reply with the prayer: “Grant this, O Lord!” The mother sprinkles all the family members with Holy Water so that their minds and hearts would open to the meaning of the Birth of Christ. The father also takes Holy Water, sprinkling his livestock and household animals, and treating them to sugar or salt and plenty of feed. Many people wistfully feel that perhaps the animals speak at midnight on Christmas Eve. One would be fearful that they might complain to God if mistreated! Beware, those with livestock and pets.

After dipping her forefinger into honey in a bowl, the mother makes a sign of the cross on the foreheads of all present, including herself. The use of honey symbolizes her prayer that the lives of all present would be sweet without bitterness. After the Holy Supper, all then go to the Church for the evening Nativity Vigil, to hear the Psalms, the Troparion “Thy Nativity, O Christ our God...” the Kontakion “On this day the Virgin beareth...” the prophecy from Isaiah “God is with us” many other hymns, and of course, the Gospel of the birth of the Lord. Afterwards Carols are sung as all return home to prepare themselves for the Divine Liturgy on Christmas morning. *Menu options:* The traditional Holy Supper consists of twelve dishes in honor of the number of apostles. This is a fast day, so all dishes should be selected and prepared without meat, cheese, eggs or dairy products. In addition, small portions should be served in keeping with the character of fasting, this is not a feast. Feel free to build your own menu with additional appropriate dishes from your own family collection.

THE RENEWAL OF HUMANITY...the perfection of our humanity, according to the teaching of St. Irenaeus, must be brought to pass by the dispensation of the Incarnation of the Son of God, not by any kind of doctrine, not by the writing of any book. By taking flesh and becoming man, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, made men partakers of the Divine nature. Assuming human nature in the unity of His Hypostasis, the Son of God by taking flesh became the New Adam, the Progenitor of the new humanity. “Beholding him that was in God’s image and likeness fallen through the transgression, Jesus bowed the heavens and came down, and without changing He took up His dwelling in a Virgin womb: that thereby He might fashion corrupt Adam anew.” St. Irenaeus says that the Son of the Most High became the Son of man in order to make man a son of God. In the new humanity, built upon the foundation of the Incarnation of the Son of God, the unity of our human nature, broken by sin, is restored. Christ Himself named this new humanity the Church. From *Holy Scripture and the Church*, St. Hilarion Troitsky, in *Orthodox Word*, 2009

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

DECEMBER 2012

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 AM, <i>Holiday Bazaar</i> • 3:30 PM, Catechism • 5 PM, Great Vespers, Confessions
2 – Sts. Barbara, John of Damascus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9–10 AM, Confessions • 10 AM Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, <i>Holiday Bazaar</i> 	3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6:30 PM, Funeral Service for Konstantin Sakovich 	4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Funeral Divine Liturgy for K. Sakovich • 7 PM, Rohnert Park Study Group 	5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6:30 PM, <i>Vigil in San Anselmo for St. Nicholas</i> 	6 – St. Nicholas of Myra <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30 AM, <i>Liturgy in San Anselmo for St. Nicholas</i> 	7	8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Novato, Myrrh-streaming icon • 3:30 PM, Catechism • 5 PM, Great Vespers, Confessions
9 – Conception by St Anna <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9–10 AM, Confessions • 10 AM Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 1 PM, PARISH SISTERHOOD MEETING 	10	11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 PM, Rohnert Park Study Group 	12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Vespers for St. Herman of Alaska 	13 – St. Herman of Alaska <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8:30 AM, Matins & Divine Liturgy for St. Herman of Alaska • 11:15 AM, Senior Fellowship Lunch 	14	15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 PM, St. Nicholas Party Crafts and set-up • 3:30 PM, Catechism • 5 PM Great Vespers, Confessions • 6 PM, St. Nicholas Party (carols, pot-luck)
16 – Holy Ancestors of Christ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9–10 AM, Confessions • 10 AM Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal 	17	18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 PM, Rohnert Park Study Group 	19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Vespers of the Prefeast of Nativity 	20 - Beginning of Prefeast <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Vespers of the Prefeast of Nativity • 6:45 PM, a talk on the Incarnation of Christ, Vincent Rossi 	21 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 PM, Vespers of the Prefeast of Nativity 	22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM Great Vespers, Confessions
23 – Sunday before Christmas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9–10 AM, Confessions • 10 AM Liturgy • 11:30 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 5 PM, Royal Hours 6 & 9 	24 – Fast Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 AM, Vesperal Liturgy of St. Basil • 6 PM, Matins of Nativity 	25 – Nativity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30 AM, Festal Divine Liturgy for Nativity 	26 – Synaxis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Synaxis of the Theotokos 	27 – St. Stephen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30 AM, <i>Liturgy in San Anselmo for Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen</i> 	28	29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM Great Vespers, Confessions • 6 PM, Short Christmas Concert by <i>Sotto Il Doumo*</i>
30 – Sts. David, Joseph and James <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9–10 AM, Confessions • 10 AM Liturgy • Noon, Agape Meal 	31 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Vespers for St. Basil/New Years 	January 1 – St. Basil <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy of St. Basil • 5 PM, Vespers and Akathist for Repose of St. Seraphim of Sarov 	2 – Saint Seraphim <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30 AM, Hierarchical Divine Liturgy for St. Seraphim of Sarov, Festal Agape to follow 	3	4 – Fast Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Royal Hours for Theophany of the Lord • 6 PM, Vespers of the Prefeast 	5 – Eve of Theophany <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Vigil for Theophany

* **Saturday, December 29:** A Concert of Renaissance Christmas Hymns by *Sotto Il Doumo*, a chamber choral ensemble, conducted by Nicolas Custer