

## **Christmas: An Ancient Christian Feast**

THE PRESENT FEAST, commemorating the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, was established by the Church. Its origin goes back to the time of the Apostles. In the Apostolic Constitutions (Section 3, 13) it says, "Brethren, observe the feastdays; and first of all the Birth of Christ, which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month." In another place it also says, "Celebrate the day of the Nativity of Christ, on which unseen grace is given man by the birth of the Word of God from the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world."

In the second century St. Clement of Alexandria also indicates that the day of the Nativity of Christ is December 25. In the third century St. Hippolytus of Rome mentions the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, and appoints the Gospel readings for this day from the opening chapters of St. Matthew.

In 302, during the persecution of Christians by Maximian, 20,000 Christians of Nicomedia (remembered on December 28) were burned in a church on the very Feast of the Nativity of Christ. In that same century, after the persecution when the Church had received freedom of religion and had become the official religion in the Roman Empire, we find the Feast of the Nativity of Christ observed throughout the entire Church. There is evidence of this in the works of St. Ephraim the Syrian, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church of the fourth century.

St. John Chrysostom, in a sermon which he gave in the year 385, points out that the Feast of the Nativity of Christ is ancient, and indeed very ancient. In this same century, at the Cave of Bethlehem, made famous by the Birth of Jesus Christ, the empress St. Helen built a church, which her mighty son Constantine adorned after her death. In the Codex of the emperor Theodosius from 438, and of the emperor Justinian in 535, the universal celebration of the day of the Nativity of Christ was decreed by law. Thus, Nicephorus Callistus, a writer of the fourteenth century, says in his History that in the sixth century, the emperor Justinian established the cele-

bration of the Nativity of Christ throughout all the world.

Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople in the fifth century, Sophronius and Andrew of Jerusalem in the seventh, Sts. John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maium and Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople in the eighth, the Nun Cassiane in the ninth, and others whose names are unknown, wrote many sacred hymns for the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, which are still sung by the Church on this radiant festival.

During the first three centuries, in the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Cyprus, the Nativity of Christ was combined together with the Feast of His Baptism on January 6, and called "Theophany" ("Manifestation of God"). This was because of a belief that Christ was baptized on the anniversary of His birth, which may be inferred from St. John Chrysostom's sermon On the Nativity of Christ: "It is not the day on which Christ was born which is called Theophany, but rather that day on which He was baptized."

In support of such a view, it is possible to cite the words of the Evangelist Luke who says that "Jesus began to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23) when He was baptized. The joint celebration of the Nativity of Christ and His Theophany continued to the end of the fourth century in certain Eastern Churches, and until the fifth or sixth century in others.

The present order of services preserves the memory of the ancient joint celebration of the Feasts of the Nativity of Christ and Theophany. On the eve of both Feasts, there is a similar tradition that one should fast until the stars appear. The order of divine services on the eve of both feastdays and the feastdays themselves is the same.

The Nativity of Christ has long been counted as one of the Twelve Great Feasts. It is one of the greatest, most joyful and wondrous events in the history of the world. The angel said to the shepherds, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ

## INFORMATION

Protection of the Holy Virgin & St. Seraphim of Sarov Church  
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Our Parish Secretary may be reached at the Church office on 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](mailto:lmargitich@sbcglobal.net). He is available Tuesday-Saturday, from noon onwards each day.

## PARISH CONTACTS

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the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Then suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, glorifying God and saying: Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Those who heard these things were astonished at what the shepherds told them concerning the Child. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen" (Luke 2:10-20). *From oca.org*

## 1 CORINTHIANS 13 ~ A CHRISTMAS VERSION

If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love, I'm just another decorator. If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love, I'm just another cook. If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love, it profits me nothing. If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing in the choir's cantata but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point. Love stops the cooking to hug the child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband. Love is kind, though harried and tired. Love doesn't envy another's home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens. Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way, but is thankful they are there to be in the way. Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can't. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust, but giving the gift of love will endure.

*(author unknown)*

## “MISSION AND SACRIFICE” ~ PARISH HISTORY

In recognition of the 75th Anniversary of our Parish, Fr. Michael asked that a history of it be compiled. This responsibility was laid upon the able shoulders of Paul Trimble, a good friend of us all from Nativity of Christ Orthodox Church in Novato. Paul spent a year poring over our records – and historical documents in other archives – as well as interviewing parishioners, several of whom have since reposed. The resulting manuscript was edited by Dana Ames and Vladimir Baer and published as a nicely bound, 100 page book that chronicles our Parish from its roots in Imperial Russia to mid-August of 2011. The price was kept reasonable, \$15, so that we might all have a copy. *Mission and Sacrifice* was first presented at the luncheon banquet on the Parish Feast day, October 1. Many copies have been purchased, and only a limited number remain in the Bookstore inventory. This record of the beginnings and growth of our two churches, Protection of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. Seraphim of Sarov, belongs on every parishioner's bookshelf. If you have not acquired a copy for your home and family, please avoid disappointment and do so now. Those of us who already have a copy of *Mission and Sacrifice* should consider purchasing others as gifts for family, friends or financially less well off, fellow parishioners. There will not be a second edition until 2036.

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- SAINT NICHOLAS ORTHODOX CHURCH in San Anselmo will celebrate its Altar Feast, on December 6, Saint Nicholas Day. Vigil will be served on Monday, Dec. 5 at 7 PM. The next morning, Tuesday, Dec. 6. His Grace, Bishop Benjamin will preside at the Divine Liturgy, which begins at 9:30 AM. A festal lunch will be served. We encourage and support our sister parish when we participate in this feast, yet there is another benefit: when we hear the joyful hymns about the coming birth of Jesus and those about Saint Nicholas at the Vigil and Liturgy we deepen our own preparations for Christmas. This feast calls us to prepare for Christmas day.
- Father Andrew Morbey (former rector of our parish in the 1980s) will be giving a retreat at Holy Trinity Cathedral in San Francisco, on Saturday, December 10. Registration and continental breakfast will begin at 9:00 am. Fr. Andrew, Dean of Saint Mary's Cathedral in Minneapolis, will begin speaking at 10 AM on the topic "The Great Mystery in the Cave." The retreat will conclude with a closing prayer at 2:30. Suggested donation for the retreat is \$30 per person (includes breakfast and lunch). Please send checks, payable to: Stewards, Holy Trinity Cathedral, 1520 Green Street, San Francisco, CA 94123. Application deadline is Sunday, Dec 4.
- WOMEN'S BOOK STUDY GROUP: The December meeting will take place on December 7, at 7 PM at the home of Lukia Pertz, 101 Boas Dr., #16, Santa Rosa, CA 95409. The book being read is "Discerning the Signs of the Times."
- WWW.SAINTSERAPHIM.COM: Your Parish Council vigorously debated the benefits of turning to professional oversight of our presence on the Internet. In the end, we chose to contract with Orthodox Web Solutions, a professional IT management group that also maintains the Diocese of the West website, and websites of many other Orthodox Churches. Bookmarking [www.saintseraphim.com](http://www.saintseraphim.com) on your browser will give you

instant accessibility to Parish news and calendar and links to the Diocese of the West and OCA websites. With the disruption of normal routines by our (overwhelmingly successful) construction project, there has been little opportunity to add many other features to [www.saintseraphim.com](http://www.saintseraphim.com). Recently, photos of the wine crush that took place two weeks ago were posted, as was the most recent weekly homily.

- ANNUAL PRE-CHRISTMAS ST. NICHOLAS PARTY. Tentatively, the date has been set for Sunday afternoon, December 18. Crafts at 4 PM, followed by the Kontakion for Nativity by Saint Romanos the Melodist, at 5 PM, then a Pot-luck dinner and Christmas Carols. Those interested in helping out please see Gloria Collins.

- FRIENDS' MEETING at the Monastery in Calistoga, Sunday, December 4 at 4 PM. Father Lawrence and Matushka Ann will be sharing slides and commentary from last year's trip to Istanbul. Specifically they will speak about the ancient churches of that city.

- CHOIR MEMBERS: Please note the rehearsals scheduled for Sundays during December. When Nicolas Custer returns from his trip, he will confirm or adjust these dates.

- CHRISTMAS CAROLING: Anyone interested in organizing for a Christmas Carol outing to nursing homes and shut-ins during the week prior to Christmas, please see Father Lawrence.

- SAINT SERAPHIM DAY, JAN. 2: We celebrate the second of our Annual Parish Feast Days on January 2 each year, the repose of St. Seraphim. Services: Vespers, Jan. 1 at 5 PM; Liturgy with His Grace Bishop Benjamin, Jan. 2, at 9:30 AM.

### *Why Was Jesus Born?*

A Four Part Study for Advent 2011  
Based on the book by St. Athanasius the Great

#### *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*

Taught by Fr. Philip Tolbert

All Sessions will start at 7:00 PM at  
Holy Dormition Bulgarian Orthodox Church Parish Hall  
1521 Rose Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95407

First Class – November 29

*St. Athanasius as Spiritual Guide for 21st Century Christians*  
[If possible, please read pp. 3-10 and 17-24 of the book before class.]

Second Class – December 6

*The Mirror of God in the Soul: Creation and Fall*  
[If possible, please read pp. 25-31 of the book before class.]

Third Class – December 13

*The Divine Dilemma and Its Solution: Part I*  
[If possible, please read pp. 31-37 of the book before class.]

Fourth Class – December 20

*The Divine Dilemma and Its Solution: Part II*  
[If possible, please read pp. 37-47 of the book before class.]

Books may be purchased at Not of This World Bookstore  
553 Mendocino Ave, Santa Rosa, CA 95401, 546-2314.

# PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## DECEMBER 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>November 27</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Confessions</li> <li>• 9:30 AM, Reception of Catechumens (Beth &amp; Karen)</li> <li>• 10 AM, Liturgy/Team A</li> <li>• 12:45 PM, <i>Choir Rehearsal</i></li> </ul>	28	<b>29</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers for Apostle Andrew</li> <li>• 7 PM, On <i>The Incarnation</i>, by St. Athanasius at Dormition Church</li> </ul>	<b>30 - St. Andrew</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>1</b> <i>[Fr. Lawrence in Riverside, CA. for church consecration, back late Saturday]</i>	2	<b>3</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3:30 PM, Catechism</li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers &amp; Confessions</li> </ul>
<b>4 - St. Barbara/John of Damascus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9-10 AM, Confessions</li> <li>• 10 AM, Liturgy/Team B</li> <li>• Church School to follow</li> <li>• 4 PM, Calistoga, <i>Friends Mtg</i></li> </ul>	<b>5</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 PM, Vigil in San Anselmo for St. Nicholas</li> </ul>	<b>6 - St. Nicholas Day</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>9:30 AM, Liturgy in San Anselmo</b></li> <li>• 7 PM, On <i>The Incarnation</i>, at Dormition Church</li> </ul>	<b>7</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <i>Fr. Lawrence at clergy retreat in Dunlap, CA.</i> </div>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Retreat with Fr Andrew Morbey in SF at Holy Trinity Cathedral</i></li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers &amp; Confessions</li> </ul>
<b>11 - Holy Ancestors of XC</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 AM, Liturgy/Team A</li> <li>• 11:30 AM, Church School</li> <li>• 12:45 PM, <i>Choir Rehearsal</i></li> </ul>	<b>12</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Vigil for St. Herman of Alaska</li> </ul>	<b>13 - St. Herman</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 7 PM, On <i>The Incarnation</i>, at Dormition Church</li> </ul>	<b>14</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>15</b> <i>[Fr. L. in SF all day for Diocesan Council]</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>7 PM, Parish Council Meeting</b></li> </ul>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3:30 PM, Catechism</li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers &amp; Confessions</li> </ul>
<b>18 - Sunday before Nativity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9-10 AM, Confessions</li> <li>• 10 AM, Liturgy/Team B</li> <li>• 11:30 AM, Church School</li> <li>• 12:45 PM, <i>Choir Rehearsal</i></li> <li>• 4 PM, <i>St. Nicholas Party</i></li> </ul>	19	<b>20</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Prefeast Vespers</li> <li>• 7 PM, On <i>The Incarnation</i>, at Dormition Church</li> </ul>	<b>21</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 6 PM, Prefeast Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>22</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 6 PM, Prefeast Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>23</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Royal Hours for Nativity</li> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>24 - Christmas Eve</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 5 PM, Vigil for Nativity</li> </ul>
<b>25 - NATIVITY OF CHRIST</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9:10 AM, Hours</li> <li>• 9:30 AM, Liturgy (Altar Teams A &amp; B to serve)</li> </ul>	<b>26 - Synaxis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Synaxis of the Theotokos</li> </ul>	<b>27 - St. Stephen</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy in San Anselmo for St. Stephen Day</li> </ul>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers &amp; Prayers for New Year</li> </ul>

- **St. Nicholas Party: Sunday, December 18.** 4 PM—crafts for kids; 5 PM—Kontakion for Nativity; 5:30 PM—Pot-luck dinner and Christmas Carols
- Saint Seraphim Day Services: Sunday, Jan. 1, Vespers & Akathist at 5 PM; Monday, January 2, Divine Liturgy with His Grace, Bishop Benjamin.