

## ABOUT CHRISTMAS

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. —*St. Caesarius of Arles*

THE REASONS WHY Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world are these: 1) The love of God for the human race: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). 2) The restoration in fallen humanity of the image and likeness of God, as the holy Church celebrates it: “Man who, being made in the image of God, had become corrupt through sin, and was full of vileness, and had fallen away from the better life Divine, doth the wise Creator restore anew” (Matins hymn). 3) The salvation of men’s souls: “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). And so

we, in conformance with the purposes of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, should spend our life in accordance with this Divine teaching, so that through it we may obtain the salvation of our souls. —*St. Seraphim of Sarov*

...December 25th as the date of the Christ’s birth appears to owe nothing whatsoever to pagan influences upon the practice of the Church during or after Constantine’s time. It is wholly unlikely to have been the actual date of Christ’s birth, but it arose entirely from the efforts of early Latin Christians to determine the historical date of Christ’s death. And the pagan feast which the Emperor Aurelian instituted on that date in the year 274 was not only an effort to use the winter solstice to make a political statement, but also almost certainly an attempt to give a pagan significance to a date already of importance to Roman Christians. The Christians, in turn, could at a later date re-appropriate the pagan “Birth of the Unconquered Sun” to refer, on the occasion of the birth of Christ, to the rising of the “Sun of Salvation” or the “Sun of Justice.” *William J. Tighe, see also the following: [www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-10-012-v#ixzz3siYuSD2N](http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-10-012-v#ixzz3siYuSD2N)*

### SERVICES FOR NATIVITY ~ A Winter Holy Week

- Sunday, Dec. 20:.....4 PM, Prefeast Vespers  
4:30 PM, Crafts, Potluck and Children’s Christmas Play
- Monday/Tuesday, Dec 21/22: .....4 PM, Confessions\*  
6 PM, Prefeast Vespers  
Confessions after Vespers
- Wednesday, Dec. 23: .....Noon–5:30 PM, Confessions (please call or email to confirm)  
6 PM, Royal Hours
- Thursday, Dec. 24:.....11:30 AM, Vesperal Liturgy of St. Basil  
6 PM, Matins for Nativity
- Friday, December 25, Christmas:.....9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy

*\* It is proper for all to prepare for receiving Holy Communion for December 24 and 25 by making a Confession in the week or days prior. Confessions will be heard on the weekend, as usual, and on the days indicated above.*

Parish of the Protection of the Holy Virgin  
St. Seraphim of Sarov Church  
90 Mountain View Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95407  
Parish office phone: 707-584-9491  
website: [www.saintseraphim.com](http://www.saintseraphim.com)

The Rector, 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

Bobbi Griovski, Parish Secretary	584-9491
Fr. Michael Margitich, Pastor Emeritus	473-0314
Fr. John Schettig, Second Priest	318-1559
Fr. Theodor Svane, Intern Priest	(914) 282-0867
Serge Anderson, Parish Council Warden	291-7452
Martin Thong, Treasurer	888-7888
Bonnie Alexander, Recording Secretary	338-4962
Kira Staykow, Sisterhood President	(415) 279-0353
Eleni Rose, Agape Meal Coordinator	480-6106
Debbie Buse, Hall Event Manager	696-4986

## CHRISTMAS PLAY Sunday, December 20

The Church School children and staff are very excited to be presenting a Christmas play, *THE HOLY FAMILY*, written and directed by Carmen Anderson, on Sunday, December 20. The schedule for the evening includes a short *Vespers for the Prefeast of Nativity*, served at 4 PM, followed by a potluck meal, a visit from St. Nicholas and the play. For more information call Gloria Collins at 849-6135 or email her at [gypsybootsie@att.net](mailto:gypsybootsie@att.net).

## UPCOMING VISIT

HIEROMONK INNOCENT, the Superior of the Monastery of St. John in Manton, CA., will visit our parish for the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, December 13, which is the Feast of St. Herman of Alaska. Fr. Innocent will give a short talk in the Parish Hall during the Agape Meal—I encourage all of you to stay for this. Of course, we will not let him leave here emptied handed, but will make an offering for the Monastery that weekend as well. —*Fr. Lawrence*

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

A scripture study group, led by Deacon Nicholas Carr, meets at Gretchen McPherson's home, 6063 Elsa Ave, Rohnert Park CA

94928, on Tuesday evenings, 7 PM. Currently, the group is studying the Epistle to the Hebrews. This letter, an essay really, is read during the Great Fast at the Divine Liturgies. Very often it is said that this Epistle is difficult to understand—and indeed, without study and context, it is challenging. Deacon Nicholas is covering this Epistle now precisely as preparation for Great Lent, so that we would be more receptive and appreciative of the message of the Epistle during those holy days. All are welcome to attend.

## 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 **11:30 AM Vespersal 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 with 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. \*

## **St Tryphon of Pechenga (1495–1583)**

FOUR SAINTS are venerated in Norway as specifically Norwegian saints. Three of them are celebrated in the summer between May and July, but St Trifon, or "Tryphon" in English, is celebrated on December 15th. St Tryphon reminds us in many ways of St. Herman of Alaska (celebrated December 13th). St Tryphon was a also missionary monk, but he lived almost two hundred years before America's great saint. He was born in 1495 (approx.) in Torzhok close to Novgorod, into a poor priestly family and was given the name Mitrofan. He was a pious young boy and attended the services in church, helping his father as often as he could. Already as a young boy he experienced a call from Christ to go to the far north, to live as a hermit and do missionary work among the locals there.

He obeyed God's calling and left for the north in his early twenties in order to live as a hermit among a subgroup of Lapps, called *Eastern Lapps* in what is now the border area between Russia, Finland and Norway. The Lapps were not yet Christians. Mitrofan learned their language and their way of life, and he built a wooden hut by the banks of the Pechenga River where people would come to see him and listen to his powerful preaching. By the grace of God his work bore fruit, and several years later, after he had turned forty years old, he was able to erect a church together with a small Christian community

that had gathered around him. The same year Mitrofan was tonsured a monk and given the name Tryphon. However, he declined ordination to the Holy Priesthood (a priest did come, three years later). After the church was built, slowly other buildings were added, and a monastery took shape and was dedicated to the Holy Trinity. St. Tryphon became the spiritual father of the community. He traveled around in the region visited the Lapps and founded communities. He was greatly loved, but also had to flee for his life from those who did not want to learn about Christ. In 1565 the monastic community consisted of twenty monks and thirty novices. The same year he also built a church in what is eastern Norway, dedicated to St. George. This small Orthodox community has survived to the present day, but only barely. Today Orthodox baptisms are again performed in or near the chapel. Another church was also built on the Norwegian side of the Pasvik river, dedicated to Saints Boris and Gleb, but the church and the land it was on was transferred to Russia in the 19th century. It became the most important Church for the Lapps.

Like St. Herman and many other great hermits, St. Tryphon also developed a deep love for the wild animals, who in turn recognized his holiness. There are accounts that a bear and other animals would visit him and keep him company. As he grew older, he withdrew into the

wilderness in order to pray and fast, yet eventually, when he became sick, he had to return to the monastery. He died about the age of ninety. He was buried where he spent his last years as a hermit. Miracles and healings took place at his grave and he answered prayers to those who called on him.

His feast on December 15th (28th according to the Old Calendar) became the national day for the eastern Lapps—who consider St. Tryphon their apostle—and was celebrated with great festivity. Today the Russian Orthodox Church in Kirkenes, Norway is dedicated to him. The monastery which St Tryphon founded was destroyed on several occasions, both by the Swedes and by the Nazis, and many monks became martyrs. Today, the monastic community—the northernmost Orthodox monastery in the world—is being revived and the monastery rebuilt. There is a fascinating documentary about the community made some years ago available on **You Tube** at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5apoJAsImg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5apoJAsImg)

—Fr. Theodor

## An Undying Love ~ Christmas Eve

*The following is an excerpt from the article [With My Own Eyes](#) by Richard Wurmbrand, a Lutheran pastor's firsthand account of prison life in Romania. Pastor Wurmbrand would eventually join the Orthodox Church. For more on his life, see [HERE](#) or at [www.oodegr.co/english/empeiries/finishing\\_the\\_race.htm](http://www.oodegr.co/english/empeiries/finishing_the_race.htm)*

WHEN I WAS IN JAIL I fell very, very ill. I had tuberculosis of the whole surface of both lungs, and four vertebrae were attacked by tuberculosis. I also had intestinal tuberculosis, diabetes, heart failure, jaundice, and other sicknesses I can't even remember. I was near to death. At my right hand was a priest by the name of Iscu. He was abbot of a monastery. This man, perhaps in his forties, had been so tortured he was near to death. But his face was serene. He spoke about his hope of heaven, about his love of Christ, about his faith. He radiated joy.

On my left side was the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest almost to death. He had been arrested by his own comrades. Don't believe the newspapers when they say that the Communists only hate Christians or Jews—it's not true. They simply hate. They hate everybody. They hate Jews, they hate Christians, they hate anti-Semites, they hate anti-Christians, they hate everybody. One Communist hates the other Communist. They quarrel among themselves, and when they quarrel one Communist with the other, they put the other one in jail and torture him just like a Christian, and they beat him.

And so it happened that the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest nearly to death had been tortured nearly to death by his comrades. And he was dying near me. His soul was in agony. During the night he would awaken me, saying, "Pastor, please pray for me. I can't die, I have committed such terrible crimes."

Then I saw a miracle. I saw the agonized priest calling two other prisoners. And leaning on their shoulders, slowly, slowly he walked past my bed, sat on the bedside of this murderer, and caressed his head—I will never forget this gesture. I watched a murdered man caressing his murderer! That is love—he found a caress for him.

The priest said to the man, "You are young; you did not know what you were doing. I love you with all my heart." But he did not just say the words. You can say "love," and it's just a word of four letters. But he really loved. "I love you with all my heart."

Then he went on, "If I who am a sinner can love you so much, imagine Christ, who is Love Incarnate, how much He loves you! And all the Christians whom you have tortured, know that they forgive you, they love you, and Christ loves you. He wishes you to be saved much more than you wish to be saved. You wonder if your sins can be forgiven. He wishes to forgive your sins more than you wish your sins to be forgiven. He desires for you to be with Him in heaven much more than you wish to be in heaven with Him. He is Love. You only need to turn to Him and repent."

In this prison cell in which there was no possibility of privacy, I overheard the confession of the murderer to the murdered. Life is more thrilling than a novel—no novelist has ever written such a thing. The murdered—near to death—received the confession of the murderer. The murdered gave absolution to his murderer.

They prayed together, embraced each other, and the priest went back to his bed. Both men died that same night. It was a Christmas Eve. But it was not a Christmas Eve in which we simply remembered that two thousand years ago Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It was a Christmas Eve during which Jesus was born in the heart of a Communist murderer.

These are things which I have seen with my own eyes. 🐣

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28:**  
No Catechism this Saturday  
5 PM, Great Vespers
  - **SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29:**  
9 AM, Matins (Confessions from 9–10 AM)  
10 AM, Divine Liturgy (no Church School this weekend)  
Noon, Agape Meal  
1:15 PM, Vespers for St. Andrew the Apostle
  - **MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30:**  
9 AM, Divine Liturgy for St. Andrew the Apostle, and the Trisagion for the Reposed (anniversary of the repose of K. Sakovich)
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- **DUE TO FAMILY AND WORK** obligations, David Winterton has stepped down from being the parish treasurer. Thankfully, David had been working with Martin Thong—a CPA—for a couple of months, and so Martin has been appointed the Interim Treasurer. He has agreed to stand for election at the Annual Meeting. If you recall from the discussion at the last Annual Meeting, a qualified person is to be appointed treasurer by the rector, ratified by vote at the Annual Meeting, and serve ex officio, with full voting rights.
  - **THE REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK** distribution will take place on Wednesday, December 9. Volunteers: please try to arrive by at 5 PM.
  - **THE MASTER PLANNING** group (all are invited) will meet on Thursday, December 10 at 7 PM, in the Parish Hall.
  - **THE SENIOR/RETIRED LUNCH** will be held on Thursday, December 10, Noon. Chris Clemens volunteered to prepare the luncheon.
  - **THIRD ANNUAL THANKSGIVING DINNER PROJECT:** Thanksgiving dinner “boxes” were prepared here for 50 Sonoma County families living in poverty—the boxes were delivered to Catholic Charities for distribution on the day before Thanksgiving. Many thanks to those who sponsored a box. We thank the organizers, Serge Anderson and Amy Ramirez Margitich, and those who assisted. This effort is extremely appreciated and impactful.
  - **PARISH COUNCIL:** Meeting on Thursday, December 17, at 7 PM.
  - **OUR PARISH WILL** host the Nomadic Shelter once again on Christmas Eve, December 24. Guests arrive about 6 PM, and will have dinner here. Our Christmas Eve Service (Matins) runs from 6–7:15 PM or so, after which the Choir will make a procession to the Hall to sing Christmas Carols and Nativity Hymns.
  - **SAVE THE DATES:** “Greek Dancing for Exercise” in the Parish Hall, Tuesdays January 19–February 23 from 7–9 PM, hosted by the Sisterhood. Come support this Sisterhood project, while working on your New Year’s resolution to get some exercise. Beginners and children over 12 years of age welcome. Flyers coming soon.

### CANTIAMO SONOMA

sings

### Make We Joy!

A Christmas Concert on December 3 & 4 ~ at 8 PM  
St. Seraphim Orthodox Church

The music of Peter Philips, Franz Biebl, Morten Lauridsen, William Walton, Kenneth Leighton, John Tavener and more! An evening of candlelight and music sure to delight and inspire. See Nicolas Custer for tickets

- **SAINT SERAPHIM DAY, JAN. 2:** We celebrate the second of our Annual Parish Feast Days on January 2, the repose of St. Seraphim. **SERVICES FOR THE FEAST:** Vespers and Akathist, January 1 at 5 PM; Divine Liturgy with His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin, Jan. 2, at 9:30 AM followed by a festal meal. Vespers for Saturday evening at 5 PM.

- **SAVE THE DATE:** January 10th, I am organizing a “Progressive House Blessing” (i.e. going from home to home). There will be a sign-up sheet in the Narthex toward the end of the month. —Fr. Lawrence

# PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## DECEMBER 2015

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>NOV. 29 - Martyr Paramon</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> <li>• 1 PM, Vespers for St. Andrew the Apostle</li> </ul>	<b>30 - St. Andrew</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy / Memorial for Konstantin Sakovich</li> </ul>	<b>1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Calistoga, 9 AM, Liturgy for St. Philaret</i></li> <li>• 7 PM, Scripture Study/McPherson home</li> </ul>	<b>2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>3</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 PM, <i>Cantianmo Christmas Concert</i></li> </ul>	<b>4</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 PM, <i>Cantianmo Christmas Concert</i></li> </ul>	<b>5</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 AM, Baptism of Blaise Inlow</li> <li>• 3:30 PM, Catechism</li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers for St. Nicholas</li> </ul>
<b>6 - St. Nicholas of Myra</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 11:45 AM, Church School</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> </ul>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 PM, Scripture Study/McPherson home</li> </ul>	<b>9</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 5 PM, <i>Redwood Empire Food Bank</i></li> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>10</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noon, Senior Lunch</li> <li>• 7 PM, Master Plan Meeting</li> </ul>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3:30 PM, Catechism</li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers</li> </ul>
<b>13 - St. Herman of Alaska</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 11:45 AM, Church School</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> </ul>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 PM, Scripture Study/McPherson home</li> </ul>	<b>16</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>17</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 PM, Parish Council Meeting</li> </ul>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3:30 PM, Catechism</li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers</li> </ul>
<b>20 - Holy Ancestors of Christ</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 11:45 AM, Church School</li> <li>• Noon, Potluck Agape</li> <li>• 4 PM, Prefeast Vespers</li> <li>• 4:30 PM, St. Nicholas Party</li> </ul>	<b>21 - Prefeast</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Prefeast Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>22 - Prefeast</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Prefeast Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>23 - Prefeast</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Royal Hours</li> </ul>	<b>24 - Strict Fast Day</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11:30 AM, Vespersal Liturgy for Nativity</li> <li>• 6 PM, Matins</li> <li>• <b>6 PM, Nomadic Shelter</b></li> </ul>	<b>25 - Christmas</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy for Nativity</li> </ul>	<b>26</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers</li> </ul>
<b>27 - Protomartyr Stephen</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</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 for St. Basil, Circumcision of Christ</li> </ul>	<b>JANUARY 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy (St. Basil)</li> <li>• 5 PM, Vespers and Akathist for Saint Seraphim</li> </ul>	<b>2 - St. Seraphim of Sarov</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Feast Day Meal</li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers</li> </ul>