

THE ORTHODOX MESSENGER

December 2017, Vol. 26, Issue 12

THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

THE ETERNAL GOD was born as a little child. One of the main hymns of Christmas ends with these words, identifying the child born in a Bethlehem cave as “the eternal God.” This hymn was composed in the sixth century by the famous Byzantine hymnographer Romanos the Melodist:

*Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One,
And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One!
Angels, with shepherds, glorify him!
The wise men journey with the star!
Since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child!*
—Kontakion of Christmas

The Child as God, God as Child...Why does joyful excitement build over the Christmas season as people, even those of lukewarm faith and unbelievers, behold that unique, incomparable sight of the young mother holding the child in her arms, and around them the “wise men from the East,” the shepherds fresh from night-watch in their fields, the animals, the open sky, the star? Why are we so certain, and discover again and again, that on this sorrowful planet of ours there is nothing more beautiful and joyful than this sight, which the passage of centuries has proven incapable of uprooting from our memory? We return to this sight whenever we have nowhere else to go, whenever we have been tormented by life and are in search of something that might deliver us...

It is the words “child” and “God” which give us the most striking revelation about the Christmas mystery. In a certain profound way, this is a mystery directed toward the child who continues to secretly live within every adult, to the child who continues to hear what the adult no longer hears, and who responds with a joy which the adult, in his mundane, grown-up, tired and cynical world, is no longer capable of feeling. Yes, Christmas is a feast for children, not just because of the tree that we decorate and light, but in the much deeper sense that children alone are unsurprised that when God comes to us on earth, he comes as a child.

This image of God as child continues to shine on us through icons and through innumerable works of art, revealing that what is most essential and joyful in

Christianity is found precisely here, in this eternal childhood of God. Adults, even the most sympathetic to “religious themes,” desire and expect religion to give explanations and analysis; they want it to be intelligent and serious. Its opponents are just as serious, and in the end, just as boring, as they confront religion with a hail of “rational” bullets. In our society, nothing better conveys our contempt than to say “it’s childish.” In other words, it’s not for adults, for the intelligent and serious. So children grow up and become equally serious and boring. Yet Christ said “become like children” (Mt 18:3). What does this mean? What are adults missing, or better, what has been choked, drowned or deafened by a thick layer of adulthood? Above all, is it not that capacity, so characteristic of children, to wonder, to rejoice and, most importantly, to be whole both in joy and sorrow?

Adulthood chokes as well the ability to trust, to let go and give one’s self completely to love and to believe with all one’s being. And finally, children take seriously what adults are no longer capable of accepting: dreams, that which breaks through our everyday experience and our cynical mistrust, that deep mystery of the world and everything within it revealed to saints, children, and poets.

Thus, only when we break through to the child living hidden within us, can we inherit as our own the joyful mystery of God coming to us as a child. The child has neither authority nor power, yet the very absence of authority reveals him to be a king; his defenselessness and vulnerability are precisely the source of his profound power. The child in that distant Bethlehem cave has no desire that we fear him; He enters our hearts not by frightening us, by proving his power and authority, but by love alone. He is given to us as a child, and only as children can we in turn love him and give ourselves to him. The world is ruled by authority and power, by fear and domination. The child God liberates us from that. All He desires from us is our love, freely given and joyful; all He desires is that we give him our heart. And we give it to a defenseless, endlessly trusting child.

Through the feast of Christmas, the Church reveals



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to us a joyful mystery: the mystery of freely given love imposing itself on no one. A love capable of seeing, recognizing and loving God in the Divine Child, and becoming the gift of a new life.

—Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

GOD SHOWERS US WITH GIFTS

GOD CREATED ADAM in the beginning, not because He needs the human race, but so that He might have a recipient of His generosity. Moreover, God commanded us to follow Christ, not because He has any need of our service, but because He wants to give us salvation. To follow the Savior is to share in salvation, just as to follow the light is to gain the light. People who are in the light do not themselves provide the light but are illuminated and made right by it; they do not contribute anything to it but, by being illuminated, they receive the benefit of the light. Similarly, to serve God does not mean giving Him any gift, nor has God any need of our service. On the contrary, it is He who gives to those who serve Him life, immortality, and eternal glory. He rewards those who serve Him without deriving any benefit Himself from their service: He is rich, He is perfect, He has no needs. God requests human obedience so that His love and His pity may have an opportunity of doing good to those who serve Him diligently.

The less God has need of anything, the more human beings need to be united with Him. Consequently, a human being's true glory is to persevere in the service of God. —Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, 130-200 A.D.

MANY THANKS

THE THANKSGIVING FOOD BASKET drive organized by Serge Anderson and Amy Ramirez Margitich provided one hundred complete dinner boxes for the needy on Thanksgiving Day. The boxes included a turkey, all the trimmings, vegetables, dessert and Martinelli's sparkling cider. We thank all the benefactors who so generously donated funds, as well as those who assembled the dinner boxes, to make this worthy cause a success.

NATIVITY SERVICES

THE WEEK BEFORE CHRISTMAS is a week of preparations and errands. It is also a time of spiritual preparation for Orthodox Christians. These days are something of a winter "Holy Week" with the evening Vespers and Small Compline hymnography meditating upon the incarnation and mankind's diverse response to it. Take some time to spiritually prepare yourself by attending some—or even all—of the Pre-Feast Services. Put first things first.

THE DATING OF CHRISTMAS

...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 F. Tighe, *Touchstone Magazine*

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **ANGELS UNAWARES** (formerly known as the Nomadic Shelter): Our guests arrive about 6 PM on Thursday, December 7. Volunteers are asked to come about 5 PM to assist with setting up the Hall for dinner. Any questions call Rachel (799-4117) or Michael Dovey (618-6585).
- **ORTHODOXY IN SAN FRANCISCO AND TOKYO IN THE 19th CENTURY**: Holy Trinity Cathedral in SF will host a retreat led by Fr. John Takahashi, who will present an account—using Cathedral archives and the diaries of St. Nicholas (Kassatkin) of Japan—of the founding of Holy Trinity Cathedral in SF and the establishment of the Orthodox Church in Japan, which occurred within ten years of each other. The retreat will take place on Saturday, December 9 from 9:30 AM–2:30 PM. Call 415-673-8565 for more information.
- **SAINT NICHOLAS ORTHODOX CHURCH** in San Anselmo will celebrate its Altar Feast, on December 6, Saint Nicholas Day. Vigil will be served on Tuesday, Dec. 5 at 7 PM. The next morning, Wednesday, Dec. 6, Archbishop 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 and helps us in that effort.
- **THANKS TO A GENEROUS DONATION** our church bells are going to be taken down, then repositioned, and the ringer's platform and console rebuilt, in order to make ringing easier (the 3,000 lb. bell needs to be rehung in any case). The project is being managed by Constantine Stade, who is the recognized U.S. expert in ringing and set-up of Russian style bells. The work which will be done now will transfer over to the projected bell tower, which we hope to build in the next two years. A drawing of the proposed Bell Tower appears below.
- **CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PLAY**: The children of St Seraphim Cathedral will offer their annual Nativity Play—written and directed by Carmen Anderson—on December 17th. The "Nativity Kontakion" of St. Romanos the Melodist will be chanted at 4:30 PM in the Protection Church, followed by dinner and the Play. Please bring a dessert to share.
- **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 Archbishop Benjamin, Jan. 2, at 9:30 AM.
- **HOUSE BLESSINGS AFTER THEOPHANY**: The Feast of Theophany (Baptism of Jesus and blessing of water) is January 6. Please contact Fr. Lawrence between now and then to arrange a house blessing.
- **PARISH RETREAT WITH Fr. Timothy Pavlatos**, Saturday, January 27 at 9:30 AM. See the Flyer for more info.



PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

DECEMBER 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26 – St. Innocent of Irkutsk • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • Noon, Agape Meal	27	28	29 • 6 PM, Vespers for St. Andrew the Apostle	30 – St. Andrew • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy and Trisagion for Konstantin Sakovich • 8 PM, Cantiamo Concert	DECEMBER 1 • 8 PM, Cantiamo Concert	2 • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>on Repentance and Faith</i> • 4 PM, Children's Choir • 5 PM, Great Vespers
3 – Prophet Zephania • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Agape Meal	4	5 • 7 PM <i>Vigil for St. Nicholas in San Anselmo</i>	6 – Saint Nicholas Day • 9:30 AM, <i>Divine Liturgy in San Anselmo</i> • 6 PM, Vespers	7 • Noon, Senior Lunch • 5 PM, Nomadic Shelter	8	9 • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>on the Holy Spirit</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers
10 – Stephen and Angelina • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Agape Meal	11	12 • 6 PM, Vespers for St. Herman of Alaska	13 – St. Herman of Alaska • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy • 5 PM, Food Bank • 6 PM, Vespers	14 • 7 PM, Parish Council Meeting	15	16 • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>on the Church and the Theotokos</i> • 4 PM, Children's Choir • 5 PM, Great Vespers
17 – Holy Ancestors • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Agape Meal • 4:30 PM, Kontakion, Dinner, Christmas Play	18	19 • 6 PM, Pre-Fast Vespers	20 • 6 PM, Pre-Fast Vespers	21 • 6 PM, Pre-Fast Vespers • 6:45 PM, 40th Day for Fr. Michael	22 • 9 AM, Royal Hours • 3–6 PM, Confessions • 6 PM, Pre-Fast Vespers	23 - Pre-Feast of Nativity • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy • 5 PM, Great Vespers
24 – Christmas Eve • 10 AM, Liturgy • <i>No Agape Meal</i> • 5 PM, Matins for Nativity	25 – Christmas Day • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy	26 – Synaxis • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Synaxis of the Theotokos	27 • 6 PM, Akathist for Nativity	28	29	30 • 4 PM, Confession • 5 PM, Great Vespers
31 – Sunday after Nativity • 10 AM, Liturgy • Noon, Agape Meal • 5 PM, Vespers for New Year's Day and St. Basil	1 – St. Basil Day • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 5 PM, Vespers and Akathist for St. Seraphim Day	2 – St. Seraphim of Sarov • 9:30 AM, Hierarchical Divine Liturgy	3 No Vespers	4 • 5:30 PM, Panikhida for Barbara McMil. • 5 PM, Nomadic Shel. • 6 PM, Royal Hours for Theophany	5 • 6:15 PM, Matins for Theophany	6 – THEOPHANY • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy and Blessing of Water • 5 PM, Great Vespers

• USHERS: *Dec. 3*—Elsie and Martin; *Dec. 10*—John and Roz; *Dec. 17*—Shannon and Ted; *Dec. 24*—Alexandra and Preston; *Dec. 31*—Vipassana and Michael

St. Seraphim Orthodox Cathedral
invites you to a retreat. . .

Philotimo as Sacramental to Marriage

*The primary purpose of
marriage,
the proper mindset, and the
right disposition to have in
our marriage.*

Guest Speaker: Rev. Timothy Pavlatos, M.Div., M.S., LMFT

Director of Family Wellness Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco



Fellow in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, Fr. Timothy is also a national certified counselor, a Clinical Fellow in the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, a certified Prepare/Enrich facilitator, a certified Gottman facilitator, and a certified clinical trauma professional.

Over the past several years, Fr. Timothy has focused on marriage and parenting enrichment, interpersonal neurobiology and trauma. He and Presvytera Victoria have been married since 1995 and are raising their nine children.

Suggested donation \$25

Register by January 17

**Protection of the Holy Virgin Parish
St. Seraphim Orthodox Cathedral**

Saturday,
January 27, 2018

Contact the Parish Office
with questions or to register.

protectionoffice@sbcglobal.net
707.584.9491

**90 Mountain View Ave.
Santa Rosa, CA 95407**

Check-in: 9am-9:30am
Presentation: 9:45am-3:30pm

Lunch will be included.

Detach here and mail with your payment.

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Number of Tickets: _____ Amount: _____ Method of Payment: Check _____ Credit/Debit _____

Card #: _____ Card Exp: ____ / ____ Security Code: ____

Register online at www.saintseraphim.com or write check to St. Seraphim Orthodox Cathedral and mail it with registration form to:
90 Mountain View Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95407