

# THE ORTHODOX MESSENGER

December 2019, Vol. 27, Issue 12

## RUSHING TOWARD CHRISTMAS Celebrate with Enthusiasm

HOW WILL WE APPROACH Christmas? Or, will the Feast on December 25th simply arrive—surprise!—amid the hustle and bustle of events, get-togethers, shopping and cooking (all of which are important and wonderful things, in and of themselves)? How will we celebrate the Lord's birth? If you asked a person on the street, someone under 35 years of age, what Christmas means, no doubt you would get some whacky answers. There was indeed a survey taken some years back: Two thousand Brits aged between ages 21–38 were polled for the study by the booking website [hotels.com](https://www.hotels.com). 39% of those questioned could not identify the infant born in the manger and slightly fewer, 37%, looked blank at the names Mary and Joseph. Half did not know that the Angel Gabriel told Mary she was going to be a mother. Fewer than 10% of those questioned could name the three gifts brought by the wise men of frankincense, gold and myrrh. Asked how the Nativity story would be brought up to date, 15% would replace the Three Wise Men with Three Wise Women, 10% would have a unicorn instead of a donkey and 10% said Gabriel would appear to Mary via Instagram. The study follows news that a Nativity scene was initially banned in a Scottish shopping center, with bosses saying they wanted to be “religiously neutral.”

One might chalk all this up to ignorance or lack of education about Christmas, or anti-religious feelings. Maybe, but maybe the whacky and silly answers are derived from observing how Christians celebrate Christmas

and how pointless it can all be, focused as it is on earthly goods, consumption and unreasonable expectations around behavior, gift giving and food. Let's not blame others for commenting on what they see in us. We are Orthodox Christians, and we have often failed to live up to our inheritance and have squandered the spiritual riches given to us. Let us resolve to approach Christmas in an Orthodox way, and in doing so, celebrate the feast with enthusiasm and spiritual joy.

It's been noted by many parishioners that without the additional “Lenten type” services, the times of the Christmas Fast is a bit thin. It's true, we do not have the Liturgy of the Presanctified, which provides so much depth and direction during Lent. However, there are many and wonderful Services during Advent: we celebrated a beautiful *Supplication Service for the Nativity Fast* on November 15, the first day of the fast (rather sparsely attended); we had Vigil and Liturgy for the Entrance of the Theotokos on Nov. 20/21 (again, sparsely attended); coming up we have the feasts of St. Nicholas in San Anselmo; St. Herman on Dec. 13; and the Vespers and Matins of the Prefeast the week prior to Christmas (Winter Holy Week).

All of these services are indeed part of the spiritual support system of the Nativity Fast, and include hymns which point us toward the great celebration of December 25 towards which we are headed!

The season of Advent is indeed a journey, we are headed somewhere. It may be compared to both the journey of the Wise Men to Bethlehem, seeking to worship Christ the God and Savior of the world, or the long, Divinely-led exodus and wandering in the desert of the Hebrews. One doesn't prepare for a celebration (a birthday for example), nor does one celebrate just by *thinking* about it. One *does* something.

What to do? Plan ahead: the spiritual, liturgical, prayerful celebration are without question the most important aspects of this holy day. Don't minimize these things. Let's focus on four



### *You are invited to a Christmas Play* **Mary, Did You Know** presented by the St. Seraphim Youth

Written by Matushka Esther Carr

Directed by Sophia Basch and Natasha Collins

Sunday, December 15

4:30 PM—Church Service (Akathist of St. Romanos for Nativity)

5 PM—Dinner

5:45 PM—Play Begins

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Parish office phone, or at [Lmargitich@sbcglobal.net](mailto:Lmargitich@sbcglobal.net).

### Parish Contacts

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things (a sturdy chair or table has four legs):

1. Keep the Holy Fast (does one need yet again to rehearse here all the reasons for fasting?)
2. Arrange to do, and then DO works of mercy—knowing how merciful and loving God is towards us.
3. Pray before the Lord in “the secret place.” Prayer is not just a multiplicity of words, although the psalms, the Akathists, the morning and evening prayers and prayers before Holy Communion are truly essential in teaching us how to approach God (again, is it necessary to once again encourage the use of the Prayerbook?). Find time to sit quietly with God, and let prayer arise out of the heart.
4. Finally, we prepare to celebrate, and we indeed celebrate, by going to the Church Services. The hymns direct us, nourish us, and focus us to accomplish prayer “in secret” before the Almighty God. Consider this hymn from Matins on December 20:

*Proceed, O Angelic powers! Go to Bethlehem; prepare the manger,  
for the Word comes to be born. Wisdom proceeds from the mouth of the Most  
High! Receive, O Church of God, the announcement of salvation; enter into the  
joy of the Theotokos! Let us sing with gladness, people: Christ the King of Is-  
rael, draws near!*



This hymn helps us understand how to celebrate: we marvel with the angels; we endeavor to enter the Bethlehem of the heart, where Christ is born in us. He is the Wisdom and Word and Power of God the Father—and joy, that of the Theotokos, will spring up in our hearts! God is with us! When we depart Church to go home, having heard a hymn like this (the remarkable hymns of the Church reveal themselves year after year) we are to ponder it, take it to prayer before God, and let the expectation of the celebration grow within us. —Fr Lawrence

## DATE OF CHRISTMAS

DID YOU KNOW that the original Christmas festival was a holiday celebrated together with Christ's baptism on January 6? No *Sol Invictus* (Roman pagan feast of the Invincible Sun) there, I'm afraid, so that can't be the origin of Christmas. (Armenian Christians still celebrate this single feast on January 6, however, because the calendar some of them use is out of sync with the one many of us use, it will fall on our January 19.) And even when Christmas did get moved to December 25 (getting separated out from the baptism feast), it was not about *Sol Invictus*, which actually *post-dates* (you read that right!) the association of Christ's birth with December 25, being introduced by the emperor Aurelian only in AD 274. Meanwhile, St. Hippolytus said in his [commentary on Daniel](#) (written ca. AD 202-211) that Jesus' birthdate is December 25. (Maybe the pagans stole it from the Christians!) Rather, December 25 was arrived at [because it was exactly nine months after March 25](#), when the Annunciation was being celebrated, which is the feast of Christ's conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary. —*borrowed from Fr. Stephen Andrew Damick*

### Preserve Your Inner Peace

Our thoughts determine our whole life. If our thoughts are destructive, we will have no peace. a whirlpool of thoughts and can have neither peace nor tranquility... Our starting point is always wrong. Instead of beginning with ourselves, we always want to change others first and ourselves last. If everyone would begin first with themselves, then there would be peace all around! —Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica (reposed 2002)

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **CONGRATULATIONS** to the parish for providing 100 Thanksgiving Day dinners to those in need. Thanks to all who contributed to this cause, and those who worked to assemble the dinner boxes, and our coordinators, Serge and Amy.
- **THE VIGIL FOR SAINT NICHOLAS** will be celebrated at the St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, in San Anselmo (102 Ross Ave) on Thursday, December 5, at 7 PM. The Divine Liturgy of the Feast will be celebrated on Friday, December 6 at 9:30 AM. All are welcome to a festive luncheon following the Divine Liturgy.
- **ANGELS UNAWARES** — January 2 (our December date has been cancelled): Our Guests will arrive about 6 PM on Thursday, January 2, and depart about 6:30 AM on Friday morning. Michael and Rachel Dovey are the coordinators. Volunteers are needed from 4–8 PM. Any questions call Michael or Rachel Dovey at (707) 799-4117. “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them who suffer adversity...” (Hebrews 13).
- **THE REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK** is held on the second Wednesday of each month—this month: December 11. Volunteers, please arrive around 5 PM to help set up. This Food Bank is an important way in which our parish does outreach. Come and participate.
- **SENIOR LUNCH FELLOWSHIP:** Our retired and senior parishioners are invited to enjoy lunch and fellowship in the Parish Hall on December 19 at Noon.
- **THE WINTER FEAST OF ST. SERAPHIM** commemorates the repose of the Saint on January 2, 1833. On New Year’s Day, January 1 we will serve Great Vespers with the Akathist at 5 PM. On January 2 we will greet Bishop Daniel at 9:30 and begin the Divine Liturgy. All are invited to a festive lunch following the Liturgy.
- **THEOPHANY:** The Feast of the Baptism of the Savior is celebrated on January 6. It is the Twelfth Day of Christmas, and the day in which the Church in ancient times celebrated Christmas and Theophany together as one feast of the manifestation of God incarnate. Theophany, also called Epiphany, begins with the Royal Hours (comprised of Psalms, hymns, Old Testament and New Testament readings) on Friday, January 3 at 6 PM. Vespers on Saturday evening at 5 PM with the Canon of the Prefeast; Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning, Jan. 5 at 10 AM, followed by the first Great Blessing of Water and blessing of the grounds and buildings; Matins of the Feast on Sunday evening at 5 PM; Liturgy on Monday, January 6 at 9 AM. This year I plan to do the second Great Blessing of Water outdoors—weather permitting. There is a lovely freshwater stream and waterfall (that flows into Bodega Bay) behind the Bodega Bay Inn, which is owned by Ted Dechant. He has invited us to do our water blessing there. So, Lord willing, after Liturgy here on Jan. 6th, I will drive to the Inn, and set up for a blessing. Please join me there at 1:30 PM.
- **TIME FOR SPIRITUAL PREPARATION:** Please prepare yourself for the Feast of the Birth of Christ. It is appropriate and proper for us—priests and people together—to make a Confession prior to receiving Holy Communion on all feast days, but especially before Christmas. It is not appropriate for anyone over seven years of age to receive Holy Communion without a recent Confession. Our bishops teach that if we receive Holy Communion frequently, and we should each week, we should be confessing no less than once a month. Let us all receive Holy Communion on Christmas Eve and Day. **WHEN** to make a Confession? Before, during or after Vespers on Saturday evening, anytime Tuesday–Friday (Sunday morning should be reserved for those who have a long commute to Church). —Fr Lawrence

### A HYMN OF THE PREFEAST OF CHRISTMAS

Let us celebrate, O ye people,  
the fore-feast of the nativity of Christ,  
let us lift up our minds and hearts to Bethlehem,  
and let us see the great mystery in the cave;  
for Eden hath been opened and God hath come forth  
from the pure Virgin,  
being perfect in both humanity and divinity.  
Therefore, let us cry aloud:  
Holy God, the Father who hath no beginning!  
Holy Mighty, the Son made flesh!  
Holy Immortal, the Comforting Spirit!  
O Holy Trinity, glory to Thee!

# PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## DECEMBER 2019

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>1 - St. Philaret the Merciful</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8:30 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> </ul>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers, Potluck, Study of Romans</li> </ul>	<b>5</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 PM <i>Vigil in San Anselmo for St. Nicholas</i></li> <li>• 8 PM <i>Cantiamo Concert</i></li> </ul>	<b>6 – St. Nicholas Day</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9:30 AM, <i>Divine Liturgy/ San Anselmo</i></li> <li>• 8 PM <i>Cantiamo Concert</i></li> </ul>	<b>7</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 AM, <i>Retreat in SF at Holy Trinity Cathedral</i></li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers and Confessions</li> </ul>
<b>8 - St. Patapios of Thebes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9:40 AM, Hours</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 11:45 AM, Church School</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> <li>• 1:15 PM, Vespers for the Conception</li> </ul>	<b>9 – Conception</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy /feast of the Conception of the Theotokos</li> </ul>	<b>10</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Catechism, <i>On Repentance</i></li> </ul>	<b>11</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank</li> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers, Potluck, Study of Romans</li> </ul>	<b>12</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6:15 PM, Great Vespers for St. Herman of Alaska</li> </ul>	<b>13 – St. Herman Day</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy and Panikhda</li> </ul>	<b>14</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3:30 Catechism <i>On the Holy Spirit</i></li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers and Confessions</li> </ul>
<b>15 – Holy Ancestors of Christ</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8:30 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 11:45 AM, Church School</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> <li>• <b>4:30 PM, Akathist, Dinner, Nativity Play</b></li> </ul>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6:30 PM, Master Plan Review</li> </ul>	<b>18</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers, Potluck, Study of Romans</li> </ul>	<b>19</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noon, Senior Lunch</li> <li>• 6 PM, Prefeast Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>20</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7:30 AM, Prefeast Matins</li> <li>• 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions</li> <li>• 6 PM, Prefeast Vespers</li> </ul>	<b>21</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>On the Church</i></li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers and Confessions</li> </ul>
<b>22 - Sunday Before Christmas</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8:30 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> <li>• 1:15 PM, Pre-feast Vespers</li> <li>• 2:30 PM, Baptism</li> </ul>	<b>23</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7:30 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 4 PM, Confessions</li> <li>• 6 PM, Royal Hours for Nativity</li> </ul>	<b>24 – Fast Day</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11:30 AM, Vespersal Liturgy</li> <li>• 6 PM, Festal Matins for Nativity</li> </ul>	<b>25 – Christmas</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> </ul>	<b>26 – Synaxis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy, Feast of the Synaxis of the Theotokos</li> </ul>	<b>27</b> <i>In San Anselmo, 9:30 AM Divine Liturgy for Feast of St. Stephen</i>	<b>28</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers (<i>Parish Council Reception at Rectory</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>29 - Sts. Joseph, David &amp; James</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8:30 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> </ul>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers for St. Basil &amp; Circumcision of XC</li> </ul>	<b>1 – New Year's Day</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers and Akathist for St. Seraphim</li> </ul>	<b>2 – St. Seraphim Day</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9:30 AM, Greeting of Bishop, Divine Liturgy and Fellowship Meal</li> <li>• <b>5 PM, Angels Unawares</b></li> </ul>	<b>3</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Royal Hours for Theophany</li> </ul>	<b>4</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers, Prefeast of Theophany</li> </ul>