

THE ORTHODOX MESSENGER

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THE FACE OF CHRIST

THE CHURCH is not like worldly organizations, with by-laws, rules and membership that rely on the agreement of the members. The Church is the Body of Christ, the risen and glorified incarnate Christ, continuing to incarnate and manifest Himself in humanity and in all creation in the Church. Unity comes from Him, not us. The moral, ethical, spiritual and transformative teachings of the Church are said by some to exclude and deprive people. The Church, as Christ incarnate on earth, must be what it is; it cannot be anything but what it is. As such, the Church *is* inclusive in the truest sense of the word. The Church is *all-inclusive*, embodying the infinite love and mercy of God, but the Divine all-inclusive love and mercy of the Church—of-fered to all without exception—requires a response on the part of all, a response toward Truth. The Church is Christ as Truth, as Way and as Life. She calls all upward toward that Truth; she leads along that Way; she imparts true and eternal Life, but only by being Herself, by being the Body of Christ. All are “free” to follow their desires down whatever road they want. The Church does not

force or coerce anyone to do anything. But if the Church is what it is, the Body of Christ, it must till the end of time not descend to the level of sin and error so that people who want to live according to their fallen desires may be “included” in her; rather she must call all people upward, out of enslavement to sin, enslavement to the fear of death which leads to more sin. She calls all to true freedom, and to the all-inclusive love and mercy of God. The Church calls all to the Wedding Feast: “...bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind” (Luke 14 and Matthew 22). In other words, let sinners, the broken and the spiritually (and actually) homeless of the world come in. However, She does not say “come as you are,” because She cannot say that and be true to the Truth that She is. Instead, She asks those who come to acquire a “wedding garment” which is the life of the Holy Spirit, to be transformed according to the image, the Face of Christ. —*borrowed*



CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO ALL

There is a particular type of joy that Christmas Day brings, unrelated, for the most part, to our own festivities, or lack of. The joy arises from the coming of God into the darkness of this world. The Gospel account tells us that Christ comes to a people who are “sitting in darkness” and “in the shadows of death.” We know that the joy of the birth of the Messiah, Jesus, to the Virgin Mary was immediately blackened by the wickedness of Herod who murdered a multitude of children. This is the image of life that is found in the Gospels, into which the Light of Christ comes. The joy arises from the realization that nothing can darken that Light. As Fr Alexander Schmemmann wrote, in Christ “...I find salvation for myself, and for other persons, for everyone, for everything.” Our celebrations may be dampened by the current pandemic, but the pandemic also clarifies for us the content of our salvation and our gratitude to Christ. The following excerpt, which seems appropriate now, comes from the diary “My Life in Christ” by St John of Kronstadt. —Fr Lawrence

He has come upon earth, He Who in the beginning created us from earth and breathed His Divine breath into us; He has come Who “giveth to all life, and

breath, and all things,” He has come, He Who by a single word called all things visible and invisible from non-existence into existence, Who by a word called into being birds, fishes, quadrupeds, insects, and all creatures, existing under His almighty providence and care; He has come, He, Whom the innumerable hosts of Angels continually serve with fear and joy. And in what humility has He come! He is born of a poor Virgin, in a cave, wrapped in poor swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. Riches, honors, glory of this world! Fall down, fall down in humility, tearful devotion, and deep gratitude before the Saviour of men, and share your riches with the poor and needy. Do not pride yourselves on your visionary, fleeting distinctions, for true distinction can only be found in virtue. Glory of this world! Learn here, before the manger, your vanity. Thus, let us all humble ourselves; let us all fall down in the dust before the boundless humility and exhaustion of the Sovereign of all, of God, Who has come to heal our infirmities, to save us from pride, vanity, corruption, and every sinful impurity. ❀

WEDNESDAYS at 7 PM

FATHER James will lead online sessions on the subject of the prophecies from the Old Testament about the coming of the Messiah/the Christ. He has compiled the following selections in preparation.

A. Promises made by God to the Patriarchs:

Genesis 3:15 (the “First Gospel” or *Protoevangelium*)
see also Genesis 12:1–3; 13:15–17; 17:6–8; 35:11;
48:3–4

B. The Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah:

Genesis 49:8–12

C. The Messiah will be a descendant of King David

(see Matthew 1:1):

2 Samuel (2 Kings) 7:8–17

1 Chronicles (1 *Paralipomenon*) 17:11–14

Psalms 88/89 :19–37

Psalms 131/132:11–12

D. The Messiah will be a future king:

Psalms 2 (esp. verse 7)

Psalms 71/72

E. The Messiah will be called a “star”

(the sign of a deified king):

Numbers 24:17, * see Revelation (*Apocalypse*) 22:16

F. the “Royal Messiah”

(the peace and justice of His Kingdom):

Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah 9:1–7

Isaiah 11:1–10

Psalms 90/91

Psalms 109/110

G. Like David, the Messiah will come from Bethlehem:

Micah 5:2–4

Jeremiah 23:5–6

Jeremiah 33:14–16

H. The Messiah will be meek:

Zechariah 9:9–10

I. The Messiah will be a “suffering servant” of the Lord:

Isaiah 53

J. The Messiah will be a “priest”:

Psalms 109/110:4

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 45:1–22

K. The transcendent origin (divinity) of the Messiah:

Daniel 7:13–14, *see Revelation (*Apocalypse*) 1:7 and
14:14

Wisdom 18:14–15

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **THE REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK** is held on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month—December 9 and 23. Volunteers: please arrive around 4 PM to help set up. This Food Bank is an important way in which our parish does outreach to the community.
- **MONTHLY CONFESSION:** Those who are receiving Holy Communion regularly are asked to make a regular and monthly confession.
When to schedule a confession? Fridays from 11:30 AM–1 PM, no appointment necessary
 On Saturdays before, during and after Vespers
 Phone or in-person appointment, time/day suits you, simply call, email or text to arrange
 Please schedule a time OTHER than Sunday morning
- **THE DECEMBER CALENDAR** is packed with Church Services. None of them are behind locked doors. Although at the moment we allow only limited number of people inside, most daily services are attended by only a few people. Come and be spiritually nourished by prayer with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Someone said to me the other day that they feel like the church has been taken from them by the corona virus. Yet, that very morning three or four of our faithful parish women came to clean the church and afterwards enjoyed coffee together on the hall porch. On Saturday, other women came to iron the red icon-stand covers, and enjoyed each other’s company. This week many will be helping at the Thanksgiving Dinner assembly, and then again at the Redwood Empire Food Bank distribution, after which we have Vespers. Each week we serve Vespers, Akathists, Liturgies, Confessions; people come to clean the church, to participate in charitable activities, etc. etc. All these things provide a healthy and productive Church life to share with one another. I am aware that some are not able to be part of this (staying sequestered for health reasons, or the difficulty presented by face masks); but for those going to work each day, to shop or to be in public, there are many opportunities to be involved in an active parish life. Please come. —Fr Lawrence

THE HOLY SUPPER OF CHRISTMAS EVE

This year, more than most, seems like a favorable time for families to mark Christmas Eve with a Holy Supper. Those in our families that are not Orthodox and do not observe the Christmas Fast might enjoy the traditions described below, and be willing to break with the festive ham, lamb or roast beef dinner on Christmas Eve.

AMONG THE ORTHODOX PEOPLE of Carpatho-Russia, like my family, 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 *Vesperal 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 (John 6:35). A tall candle is placed in the bread, as a symbol of the Star of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:9). 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. Why not build your own menu with additional appropriate dishes from your own family collection and make it a meal which very specifically lifts the mind and heart towards the coming Feast the next morning?

PRAYERS AND FASTING FOR RACIAL RECONCILIATION

I invite you to join with me in praying the *Akathist to the African Saints* and the *Prayer for Racial Reconciliation* at 12 Noon, Saturday, December 5, and to keep a fast from noon until dinner. Following the lead of Archbishop Michael of the Diocese of New and New Jersey, this service has been done (and will continue to be done) on the first Saturday of the month since June. [You can find the text of the Service here.](#) During these days of social anxiety and conflict, one of the things we can do as the Church is to fast and pray, asking for God’s help, protection and guidance for all. —Fr Lawrence

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

DECEMBER 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Nov. 29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8:30 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 1:30 PM, Vespers for Apostle Andrew 	30 - St. Andrew Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Apostle Andrew & St. Sebastian of Jackson 	December 1 2	2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Online Study of the Prophecies of Christ 	3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Akathist of the Protection of the Theotokos 	4 - St. Barbara <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11:30 AM-1 PM, Confessions 	5 - St. Sabbas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy • Noon, Akathist to the African Saints / Fast • 5 PM, Great Vespers and Lity, Feast of St. Nicholas of Myra
6 - St. Nicholas Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8:30 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy 	7 - St. Ambrose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 PM, Men's Group at Fire pit 	8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Vespers 	9 - Conception of Theotokos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy • 4 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank • 5 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Online Study of the Prophecies of Christ 	10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Akathist of the Protection of the Theotokos 	11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11:30 AM-1 PM, Confessions 	12 - St. Spyridon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy • 5 PM, VIGIL, Feast of St. Herman of Alaska
13 - St. Herman of Alaska <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy 	14	15	16 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Online Study of the Prophecies of Christ 	17 - Prophet Daniel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Akathist of the Protection of the Theotokos 	18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11:30 AM-1 PM, Confessions 	19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy • 5 PM, Great Vespers and Confessions
20 - Holy Ancestors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 1:30 PM, Vespers of the Prefeast of Nativity 	21 - Prefeast <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Matins of the Prefeast • 5 PM, Vespers of the Prefeast of Nativity 	22 - Prefeast <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Matins of the Prefeast • 5 PM, Vespers of the Prefeast of Nativity 	23 - Prefeast <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Matins of the Prefeast • 4 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank • 5 PM, Royal Hours 	24 - Christmas Eve <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11:30 AM, Vesperal Liturgy for Christmas • 6 PM, Matins for Christmas 	25 - Christmas Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30 AM, Festal Divine Liturgy 	26 - Synaxis of the Theotok. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Synaxis of the Theotokos • 5 PM, Great Vespers and Confessions
27 - Protomartyr Stephen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy 	28 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 PM, Men's Group at Fire pit 	29	30 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>No Vespers</i></p>	31 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 PM, Vespers for Feast of St. Basil and the Circumcision of XC 	JANUARY 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy of St. Basil • 5 PM, Vespers and Akathist for the Feast of St. Seraphim 	2 - St. Seraphim Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy • 5 PM, Great Vespers and Confessions

• CHURCH SERVICES are [live streamed on Facebook](#)