

- A HYMN FROM VESPERS:

Make ready, O Cave, for the Ewe Lamb [Virgin Mary] comes, bearing Christ in her womb. Receive Him, O Manger, who by His word freed us from acts against reason. O Shepherds abiding in the fields, bear witness to the awesome wonder. O Magi from Persia, offer the King gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, for the Lord has appeared from a Virgin Mother, who, bending over Him like a handmaiden, worshipped Him and said to Him as He lay in her arms: "How wast Thou sown as a seed in me, and how hast Thou grown within me, O my Savior and my God?"

- WEDNESDAY EVENING SCRIPTURE STUDY:

The next session will be on January 13. We are very grateful to Fr. James for his leading the sessions each Wednesday evening, and look forward to more.

- LAST WEEK:

Last Saturday afternoon the High School group had a Zoom session with Steve Christoforou, who hosts the *You Tube* video series, *Be the Bee*. Steve received a number of difficult and challenging questions ahead of time, and graciously and wisely led us through each of them.

- HOPE:

Be flexible and patient in your spiritual life. Have mercy, have love for the potential of holiness hidden in you. Remind yourself with humility that the pain of your failure is as much part of your process of becoming as the joy coming from spiritual growth. Do not lose everything because 'everything' is not given to you quickly enough, or easily enough. Be flexible, be patient and always move forward in HOPE. —*Hieromonk Seraphim (Aldea)*

- THEOPHANY—JANUARY 6:

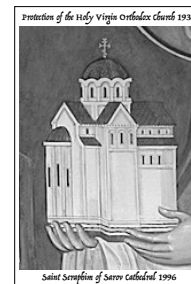
Each year at Theophany we rededicate our homes to Christ and renew the blessing of our homes—we re-sanctify them—with the Holy Water from the Church. During the time of the pandemic the blessing is more important than ever. My plan for Theophany and the weeks following: visit each home and bless (at the very least) the outside and have you bless the inside. The usual list/time-table will be posted online just after New Year's Day.

- PROSPHORA/COMMEMORATION BOOKLETS:

Don't forget to renew your commemoration booklets for 2021.

ST. SERAPHIM CATHEDRAL

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN ORTHODOX CHURCH



December 20, 2020

Sunday before Nativity



- TROPARION OF THE HOLY ANCESTORS, Tone Two:

Great are the achievements of faith. In the fountain of flames, as in refreshing water, the three holy Children rejoiced. And the Prophet Daniel proved a shepherd of lions as of sheep. By their prayers, O Christ God, save our souls.

- TROPARION OF THE PRE-FEAST, TONE FOUR:

Make ready, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all. Adorn thyself, O Ephratha, for the tree of life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave. Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the divine fruit: If we eat of it, we shall live forever and not die like Adam. Christ comes to restore the image which He made in the beginning.

- KONTAKION OF THE FOREFEAST, Tone Three – *On this day the Virgin:*

On this day the Virgin cometh to the cave to give birth to God the Word ineffably, Who was before all the ages. Dance for joy, O earth, on hearing the gladsome tidings; with the Angels and the shepherds now glorify Him Who is willing to be gazed on as a young Child Who before the ages is God.

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS THIS WEEK

- Friday, Dec. 18: 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM, Confessions
- Saturday, Dec. 19: 9 AM, Divine Liturgy
9 AM–5 PM, Toy Give-Away (see below)
Noon, Blessing Bag assembly here
Noon, Funeral at Santa Rosa Memorial Cemetery for Emoona (Eritrean family)
5 PM, Great Vespers* / Confessions
- Sunday, Dec. 20: 10 AM, Divine Liturgy*
1:30 PM, Vespers for the Pre-Feast of Nativity*
- Monday, Dec. 21: 8 AM, Matins for the Pre-Feast
4 PM, Confessions
5 PM, Vespers*
- Tuesday, Dec. 22: 8 AM, Matins for the Pre-Feast
4 PM, Confessions
5 PM, Vespers*
- Wednesday, Dec. 23: 8 AM, Matins
4 PM, Confessions
5 PM, Royal Hours*
- Thursday, Dec. 24: 11:30 AM, Vespereal Liturgy*
6 PM, Festal Matins for Nativity*
- Friday, Dec. 25: 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy for Christmas*
- Saturday, Dec. 26: 9 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Synaxis of the Theotokos
5 PM, Great Vespers*

**Indicates Streaming Service*

• PRE-FESTAL SERVICES:

Starting on the evening of December 19, the Church gives us a Winter Holy Week with the services of Matins and Vespers to spiritually, mentally and emotionally prepare us for the great day of Christmas. Saturday evening's Vespers hymns will praise those who came before Christ for their faith. Sunday's Liturgy will give us the passages from the Epistle to the Hebrews (Chapter 11) all about that faith: "All these [people] having obtained a good testimony through faith [their fidelity to God, despite the incredible struggles

they had] did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." The saints of old witnessed by their faithful lives to what was to come, that is Christ the Redeemer, and now we too are included in this great cloud of witnesses to God's love and acts in history to save the world from sin and death. On Sunday afternoon, at 1:30 PM, we will have the Vespers of the Pre-feast, and contemplate the mystery of God's coming in the flesh. Each day after that, morning and evening, we will continue with these services, singing the following **Troparion** repeatedly: *Make ready, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all. Adorn thyself, O Ephratha [the area around Bethlehem], for the tree of life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave. Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the divine fruit: If we eat of it, we shall live forever and not die like Adam. Christ comes to restore the image which He made in the beginning.*

• BLESSING BAGS / TOY GIVE-AWAY:

On Saturday afternoon a small group of our parish women will meet outside at the storage building to assemble "Blessing Bags" for those in need. At the same time, the parish is providing space for a toy give-away organized by a local charitable organization.

• COUNTY DIRECTIVES:

Sonoma County, along with most of California, issued "stay at home" directives two weeks ago. Since our parish has never actually opened up during the last six or seven months, we have nothing more to restrict, and so we will maintain our current safe practice of having a maximum of 15 people in the church for Services. Those outside who have prepared themselves for receiving Holy Communion will be invited in at the appropriate time.

• 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. 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 make our Confession prior to Christmas Day. Confessions can be heard by telephone or in-person. See the schedule for times for in-person. Call/email or text one of the priests to schedule a time other than those listed above.