

Do not pray that what you want may come to pass. It does not necessarily coincide with the will of God. Pray rather as you have been taught, saying: “Your will be done in me.” Pray that the will of God may be done in everything. He, in fact, wants what is good and useful for your soul, while you are not always seeking that and only that. —*Evagrius of Pontus*

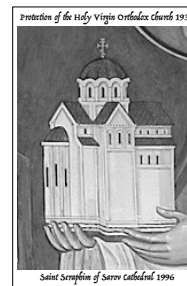
St Theophan makes the following, very relevant, observation. “Make an effort to observe yourself, if only for a single day, and you will see that self-pity distorts all of our works and kills the desire to do them. Without labor and effort, you will not do anything; but if you are grieved at forcing yourself—all stops there... But since the things required by the commandments are not of that nature, then in the face of self-pity they are always omitted... Thus it always goes with one who pities himself—what he should do, he does not do, and what he should not do, he indulges himself in doing; and he ends up good for nothing.” *Make an effort to observe yourself, if only for a single day.* Rejecting self-pity is one of the necessary first steps to choosing life in Christ. This is not a minor thing. We all do it. It runs deep and it is spiritually deadly.. This evil has long found a hidden home in my heart. Watch for it, O soul.

As Christmas approaches please do all you can to observe the fast, abstaining from meat, dairy and eggs until Christmas Day. It’s only food. The December church calendar indicates the days when we have Pre-Christmas services—consider those days as a Winter Holy Week.

We want to share with the parish that during the summer the *Planned Giving Ministry* conducted a low-profile appeal, the results of which far exceeded our expectations. The positive response is the result of several parishioners who heeded the call to designate a (Legacy) gift to the church in their will or trust. Our hearts are filled with gratitude. *Legacy gifts* are an important component of church fiscal health. I would humbly recommend to our parishioners, if possible, to consider a gift to the Church as part of *your* legacy. Christmas is coming—it’s a time for gifts. Before covid (BC), but not since, I would send out a Christmas letter to our entire mailing list. The letter was a two-part invitation: Come, celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, God made man; God is with us. Come to the glorious church services and lift up your hearts to the Lord in praise and joy, for we have been saved from darkness, sin and death and are called to enjoy enlightenment from Heaven. In that letter was also an appeal for a financial gift with a return envelope, a thank-offering sacrifice to God. There’s no need for a Christmas letter! —*Fr L*

ST. SERAPHIM CATHEDRAL

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN ORTHODOX CHURCH



December 8, 2024

Conception of the Theotokos (by anticipation)



- TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION, Tone Seven:
By Thy Cross Thou didst destroy death; to the thief, Thou didst open Paradise. For the Myrrh-bearers, Thou didst change weeping into joy, and Thou didst command Thy Disciples, O Christ God, to proclaim that Thou art risen, granting the world great mercy.
- TROPARION OF THE CONCEPTION, Tone Four:
Today the bonds of barrenness are loosed; for God hearkened unto Joachim and Anna. And though it was beyond hope, He clearly promised them that they should bear a divine child, from whom was born the Uncircumscribable One Himself Who became a mortal, and through an Angel commanded them to cry unto her: Rejoice, thou who art full of grace; the Lord is with thee.
- KONTAKION OF THE CONCEPTION, Tone Four, Model Melody:
All the world doth celebrate Anna’s conception on this day with festive joy, because it came to pass through God; for by divine grace she hath conceived her that beyond words conceiveth Word of God.

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS THIS WEEK

- Friday, Dec. 6: *No Confessions ~ Liturgy in San Anselmo for St. Nicholas Day, 9:30 AM*
- Saturday, Dec. 7: 1 PM, Sisterhood/Hall Decoration
3 PM, Play Practice
3:30 PM, Catechism, in the library, *On the Holy Spirit*
5 PM, Vespers and Confessions
- Sunday, Dec. 8: 8 AM, Divine Liturgy in the Protection Church
10 AM, Divine Liturgy
11:30 AM, Church School
Noon, Agape Meal
- Wednesday, Dec. 11: 5:30 PM, Akathist to Matushka Olga
6 PM, Vespers
- Thursday, Dec. 12: 5 PM, Angels Unawares Guests arrive
6 PM, Vigil for St. Herman of Alaska
- Friday, Dec. 13: 9 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St. Herman of Alaska
- Saturday, Dec. 14: *Nativity Retreat at Holy Trinity in SF*
3 PM, Play Practice
5 PM, Vespers/Confessions
6 PM, Dinner for the Financial Supporters and Benefactors of Project Mexico

This weekend, by anticipation, we will celebrate the Feast of the Conception of the Theotokos by her parents, the Righteous Joachim and Anna. The Feast falls on December 9—which is significant in that the birth of the Theotokos is exactly nine months later, minus one day, on September 8. This Feast is relevant to us for a number of reasons. One can meditate and celebrate how God can change barrenness into fruitfulness; we might consider the sanctity and mystery of the conception of a child, especially in light of current technologies involving IVF, frozen embryos in storage and the ever-increasing hope for a genetically customized baby. One must also recognize the sorrow and burden of those who cannot conceive, and offer them spiritual hope and assurance of God's providential care for them through the prayers of Sts. Joachim and Anna). Not least, we find in these

two elderly saints a model of faithfulness in marriage—to God first and to one another—despite the shame, disappointments and sorrow they suffered for many years. And when God did grant them to conceive a child, who would become the All-Holy Lady Theotokos, in their joy and promise to God, Joachim and Anna offered back to Him this new gift they just received. That's an amazing thing to do—but, our children belong to God, not to us, we are caretakers, and we eventually pass away. This righteous couple understood that everything is a gift from God, and lived according to gratitude. “Isn't it true” said the late Met Anthony of London “that gratitude springs up in our hearts more powerfully, more gloriously when what we receive is undeserved, when it is a miracle of divine and human love? When we think that we deserve something and receive it, we receive it as our due.” Saint Paul says, “It is a greater joy to give than to receive;” Let that be our constant our disposition of mind and heart. —*Fr Lawrence*

Angels Unawares is a program run by the *Redwood Gospel Mission* (RGM), in which Sonoma County church communities provide a meal and a place to sleep every night of the month for those who are unhoused. Our parish partners with the RGM, and welcomes those in need (usually on the first Thursday of each month). Come out to greet and serve our guests this month on Thursday, December 12 at 5 PM. Please speak with Sadik Bradbury to let him know you will assist him with prep and serving.

We are very pleased to welcome back on Friday, December 13, Ekaterina and Anton Daineko. Anton will be working here for about a month to begin painting the four pendentives under the dome, with the Four Evangelists, Sts. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And yes, there will be scaffolding.

Holy Trinity Cathedral in San Francisco (Van Ness and Green Sts) will host the annual Pre-Nativity Retreat on Saturday, December 14. The speaker this year will be Peter Bouteneff, Professor of Dogmatics at St. Vladimir Orthodox Seminary. [See this LINK for details.](#)

Our practice in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) is to prepare ourselves for receiving Holy Communion each week by making a frequent confession—once a month being the norm. We are also instructed to do the *Prayers of Preparation*, found in any common Orthodox Prayer book, before coming to Liturgy. I would encourage all of you to remember that Saturday evening Great Vespers is also part of our preparation. At least start with coming once or twice a month, and see. You'll be glad you did.