

ST. NICHOLAS NEWS

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ST. NICHOLAS ORTHODOX CHURCH

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December 23 & 30, 2012

Special Double Issue

29TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PARISH CALENDAR HI-LITES

Please see monthly calendar for all events

Sun., Dec. 23 12th Sunday of Luke. Martyrs Menas et al.

9:30 Divine Liturgy - Tone 4 pp 90-92.

Board Meeting

Sun., Dec. 30 Sunday of the Holy Ancestors.

9:30 Divine Liturgy - Special Propers. See Handouts.

Sat., Jan. 5 10 Holy Martyrs of Crete.

5:00 PM Vespers

SUN., JAN. 6 VIGIL OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD.
Sunday of Holy Forefathers.

9:30 Divine Liturgy - Special Propers. See Handouts

8:00 PM Great Compline for the Nativity of Our Lord.

MON., JAN. 7 NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

9:30 AM Divine Liturgy - pp. 132-135.

FEASTS & FASTS

Philipovka (Philip's Fast, or Christmas Lent) continues until Christmas Eve, January 6 civil (Dec. 24 Julian). It is called Philip's Fast because it begins the day after the Feast of St. Philip the Apostle on Nov. 14/27. The *Traditional Fast* requires: (a) Strict Fast (no meat, dairy, and in some places no wine or oil) on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; (b) no

meat on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The MINIMUM Diocesan Rule is no meat on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Christmas Eve is ordinarily a DAY OF STRICT FAST in preparation for the celebration of the Birth of Our Lord. *However*, this year, because Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday, it is not a Strict Fast Day. We only fast from meat on Christmas Eve. However, we must keep STRICT FAST on the previous Friday, Jan. 4 civil calendar (Dec. 22 Julian)

No dispensation has been granted from fasting on Dec. 24, 25, or Jan. 1 (civil calendar).

Theophany Eve, Jan.18 civil calendar (Jan. 5 Julian) is a day of Strict Fast, as we prepare for the celebration of the Baptism of Our Lord in the Jordan.

Feasts: The Feasts of Christmas and Theophany are the two most important commemorations of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, reminding us that God so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son. As we celebrate these feasts, we do *not* fast between Christmas day and Theophany Eve. It is not proper to fast and mourn while the Bridegroom resides with us.

Did you know that this period, Christmas to Theophany, is what is meant by the "12 Days of Christmas?" Try it: count the days.

THE HOLY MYSTERY OF CONFESSION: I am always available for Confessions after any weekday service unless otherwise noted. I note this especially on the December Calendar just as a reminder that it is ESPECIALLY important that we receive the Mystery

of Confession sometime during the Christmas Fast, in preparation for the celebration of the great feasts of Our Lord's Birth and his Theophany. If it is not possible for you to make any of the scheduled Confession times, you can make an appointment with me for Confession.

PEOPLE STUFF

Please remember in your prayers:

Living: Stephanie Bonk. Gloria Bracey. Jennifer Collins. Susan Danchak. Louis & Terri DiMichele. John & Jen Hrywnak. Gary Joyce. Joseph Kacaba. Lorraine Kacaba. Dee Lositski. Peggy Majcher. Emma Sacco. Amy Shimo. Connie Lou Slater Kathryn Stocoski. Jeff Thomas. Ann Marie Tigue. Gary Wassel. Julia Worobey.

At Home: Michael Andreosky. Elizabeth Basalyga. Steve & Julie Roberts. George & Anna Senich.

In Assisted Living Homes: Kathryn Derenick. Julie Kovacs. Irene Munchak. Julie Soares.

Francis Shimo, father of John Shimo, fell asleep in the Lord this past week. Please pray for John and all the Shimo family. We will celebrate a 40-day memorial for Francis on Sunday, January 27.

For 12/23:

Altar Vigil Candle: (1) Memory of Edward Bonk, Sr. (2) Memory of Anna & Michael Toth.

Eternal Light: Memory of Edward Bonk, Sr., by Stephanie & family.

For 12/30:

Altar Vigil: (1) Memory of John Baron - Bill & Beverly Thomas.

PARISH EVENTS

Parish Board meets today.

2013 CHURCH ENVELOPES are available for pick up in the Church hall.

Also, THE 2013 CHURCH CALENDARS are now available in the hall (As was pointed out to me, the 2012 calendars advertised the last couple weeks are no longer available. And if they were, you wouldn't want one anyway). If you haven't picked yours up yet, please do so.

Fr. Nik will be away this coming week. I will be spending Christmas with my family. I hope to leave

today and plan to be back by Saturday sometime (depending on the weather). If there is an emergency you can still reach me on my cell phone. Meanwhile,

Also please call Fr. Mark Leasure at 570-562-1170.

ST. NICHOLAS BANQUET: the Raffle Winners at the banquet last week were as follows:

1st prize/ Money Tree - Frank Pucher

2nd prize/Afghan - Lorraine Kacaba

3rd prize/\$100 Cash - Mike Andreosky

4th prize/Afghan - Orbin

5th prize/\$100 Supermarket Gift Certificate - Dawn Kieffer

6th prize/Afghan - Carol Pugh

Mystery prize winners include: Missy Brizinski, Colten Kieffer, Judith Bonk, Shelby Hrywnak, Amy Shimo, Joan Spilka, and Ann Kofel

Pirohi Sales ended for the year this past Friday. The next Sale is scheduled for Fri., Jan. 25. Please make a note of this date, but meanwhile take a well-deserved rest. We thank all who have so diligently worked to make this, the major fund-raiser for the parish, such an ongoing success!

God bless you all & many years!

Christmas Cookie Walk! Thanks and God's blessings also on those who organized and ran the Cookie Walk - it seems like it was also a great success! We also thank those who donated their time and baking talent to the Walk!

Charity Collection! I spoke about this charity need last Sunday. You received a copy of the letter that I received from *Bread Basket*, which supplies the local food banks around our area. This letter requests help with buying hams for Christmas for those in our area who are in need. This special collection will be taken at the end of the sermon today, separately from the general collection. Please allow yourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit in deciding how much to give.

YOUR GIFTS TO GOD AND HIS CHURCH

New Litija Tray donated: Our old Litija Tray was literally breaking apart and so we needed a new one. We blessed and used our new Litija Tray for the first time on St. Nicholas Day.(you will all have the

opportunity to see it at Christmas Eve services).

The Litija Tray was donated in memory of John & Mary Hafich by Stephen & Julia Roberts. Thank you.

December 16, 2012

\$ 604.00	General Collection
\$ 49.00	Holy Days
\$ 80.00	7 Day Light
\$ 1836.00	Pirohi
\$ 115.00	Flowers
\$ 7.00	Eternal Light
\$ 10.00	Vigil Light
\$ 161.00	Maintenance & Repairs
\$ 2862.00	Total Collection

AROUND AND ABOUT

Annual Community Christmas Day Breakfast, sponsored by the University of Scranton. Tuesday, Dec. 25, 8 AM – 11 AM. At the DeNaples Center, 900 Mulberry St., Scranton, 3rd Floor.

There is no cost to guests. Reservations are not necessary. Those who would like to enjoy a holiday breakfast with company are welcome to attend. Flyers with information are in the church hall.

DIOCESAN NEWS

ACRY Lots-O-Luck Calendars now available. This is the 21st consecutive year that the ACRY has run this fundraiser for the benefit of our diocese, raising over \$200,000 in that time!

- See Millie Orzolek for your calendar.
- Deadline for purchasing is January 15, so get yours today!

THE PARADOX OF CHRISTMAS

By V.Rev. Fr. Dimitri Cozby

Christmas, the feast of our Lord's Nativity, is a joyful celebration. The images we commonly associate with the season appeal to our most cheerful and tender sentiments. At the center of the feast lies the sweet figure of the infant Jesus, cared for by His blessed Mother, watched over by His foster father, hymned by angels, honored and worshipped both by local shepherds from among His chosen people and by mysterious strangers from the east.

Certainly the Church encourages that joy and sharpens it by reminding us of its true significance,

that the Child we honor is God become man for our salvation. Thus, in the hymns we echo the cry of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest," and add our own refrain, "Christ is born! Glorify Him!"

However, precisely because the Church seeks to remind us of the true meaning of the feast, our celebration mixes in disquieting, uncomfortable elements. We are reminded of the anxiety that attended the birth: the puzzling circumstances surrounding the conception and St. Joseph's early doubts about the Virgin's honor; the difficulties of the forced journey to satisfy the decree of an alien, pagan government; the humble, even primitive setting of the birth. Most disturbing is the Gospel for the feast, which concludes with an allusion to King Herod's paranoid suspicions. It thus prepares us for the next Sunday's horrid sequel, when the vile prince's distrust murderously explodes in the extermination of innocent children.

Our Lord's birth, with all its tenderness and beauty, is not an isolated event. Christ came into the world because of our fall, the corruption of our nature by sin. Therefore, for all its joy, the Nativity is God's loving response to the tragedy of our sin. The eternal God becomes a Child because we rebelliously deny that we are His children. Christ enters a world where spotless women like His Mother must endure the reproaches of envy and ignorance; where power flows to the ruthless like Herod, not to the good and just; where righteous men like the magi must resort to subtlety and deceit to escape the intrigues of the wicked; where innocent children are slaughtered to satisfy hatred and greed.

Even our personal lives do not escape the universal corruption. We strive for the purity of the Theotokos, but we too often fall prey to envy and ignorance. Rather than searching out the secrets of our hearts and opening them to the cleansing light of Christ, we conspire with ourselves to hide old sins and to court new ones. We seek humility, yet we also turn on others with the brutality that might match Herod's.

We must temper the joy of Christmas with somber reflection, because our life in this world merges both good and evil. "What earthly joy is unmixed with grief?" the Orthodox funeral service admonishes. Hope attends the birth of the Child—but poverty, both material and spiritual, characterizes the world He

enters. We adore the quiet courage of His Mother, yet we give her Child no shelter, no dwelling place in our hearts and lives. We yearn to share the simple wonder of the shepherds and the sophisticated adoration of the magi, but our souls and minds are too often as murky and twisted as Herod's, and we too break forth in vengeance and malice.

Above all, the Nativity wears a solemn aspect because it is a stage of our Lord's incarnation, a process which culminates in His death on the Cross. The ultimate end of sinful man is death, and our Lord entered the world in order to share our common fate. The Child of Bethlehem, like every human child, enters the world in order to die. The death of those other innocent children of Bethlehem foreshadows the death of this Child, grown to perfect manhood. The manger of Bethlehem marks the beginning of the road which ends on Golgotha at the foot of the cross. Yet the death of the God-man is not an ordinary birth. Holiness Himself enters the world to change and transfigure. The birth and the death are part of God's transcendent act of triumph through submission. God submits to the consequences of sin in order to eliminate those consequences from the lives of His children. He assumes the weakness of a child and He endures the indignity of an unjust death. God saves by humility, He conquers in weakness, He reasserts His lordship over creation by taking to Himself the outrages perpetuated upon His creatures by sin. He restores us to spiritual health and wholeness by accepting the effects of our corruption. He enters our weakness to fill us with His strength, our sinfulness to cleanse us with forgiveness, our defilement to restore us to holiness. He dies in order that He may rise again, and thereby raise us up with Him.

What begins in the simple sweetness of the birth of a Child grows into the majesty of the Cross, the redeeming humiliation of the death of God. The obscurity of the Child's birth prefigures His hiddenness in the tomb. But the obscurity is not complete:

He is proclaimed by angels, adored by simple folk, worshipped by the cultured and educated, feared by kings. There is also a grandeur and a glory in the Nativity, and these too prefigure a splendor to come, that of His resurrection and of the power and mystery of His Kingdom.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus sums up the paradoxes of our Savior's advent: "What He was He continued to be; what He was not He took to Himself...His inferior nature, the humanity, became divine, because it was united to God..., because the higher nature prevailed in order that I too might be made God so far as He is made man. He was born—but He had been begotten; He was born of a woman—but she was a virgin. The first is human; the second, divine. In His human nature He had no father, but also in His divine nature no mother....He dwelt in the womb—but He was recognized by the prophet, himself still in the womb, leaping before the Word, for whose sake He came into being. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes—but He shed the swathing bands of the grave by His rising again. He was laid in a manger—but He was glorified by angels, and proclaimed by a star, and worshipped by Magi...He was baptized as man—but He remitted sins as God...He was tempted as man, but He conquered as God; yea, He bids us be of good cheer, for He has overcome the world...He dies, but He gives life, and by His death destroys death."

Christmas, our Lord's Nativity, begins these paradoxes. Therefore, we should approach this feast with both gladness and awe, with gravity as well as rejoicing. We must first appreciate the depth of our sinfulness, which made the Lord's birth and death necessary. Only then can we appreciate the depth of our sinfulness, which made the Lord's birth and death of divine love which the Nativity manifests and the true glory opened to us by the incarnation. As we celebrate this feast, may the simple tenderness of our Lord's Nativity point us to the grandeur and humility of His crucifixion, to the glory of His resurrection, and to His Kingdom of eternal love and light.

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