

ST. MARK'S ORTHODOX CHURCH
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA (OCA.ORG)
DIocese of Eastern Pennsylvania (DOEPA.ORG)

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Church School Director: Jennifer Sremenak



SUNDAY DECEMBER 18TH, 2016

Tone 1. Sunday before the Nativity. Martyr Sebastian at Rome and his companions: Martyrs Nicostratus, Zoë, Castorius, Tranquillinus, Marcellinus, Mark, Claudius, Symphorian, Victorinus, Tiburtius, and Castulus (ca. 287). Ven. Sebastian, Abbot of Pshekhónsk Monastery (Vologdá—ca. 150). Righteous Simeon, Wonderworker of Verkhotúr'ye (1694). St. Modestus, Archbishop of Jerusalem (633-634). St. Florus, Bishop of Amisus (7th c.). St. Michael the Confessor at Constantinople (ca. 845).

Epistle: Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40

Gospel: Matthew 1:1-25

 **SCHEDULE OF SERVICES** 

Confessions: Saturdays Following Vespers
Also by appointment

Vespers: Saturdays at 6pm

Vigil: Eve of Feasts at 7pm

Divine Liturgy: Sundays at 9:30am
Feast Days at 9:30am

UPCOMING SERVICES AND EVENTS:

- Sun, Dec 18:** Hours and Divine Liturgy – 9:10am Coffee Hour. Church School. Carolling at The Birches, 1pm.
- Wed, Dec 21:** Akathist – 9:15am. Prison Ministry – 7pm.
- Fri, Dec 23:** Royal Hours followed by Vesperal Liturgy – 8am.
- Sat, Dec 24:** **Holy Supper – 5pm.** *Vigil of the Lord's Nativity –7pm*

Names Day

Nancy Anastasia Letzo
Sonja Anastasia Lengel
Anastasia Killough
Sarah Browne

Birthdays

Maria Miloslav

Christmas Schedule: Royal Hours and Vespers Liturgy start at 8am on Friday morning. Vigil for the Feast of the Nativity at 7pm on Saturday. Divine Liturgy at the usual time on Christmas Day. Divine Liturgy at 9:30am on Monday the 26th. Vespers for St. Stephen's Day at the Cathedral on Monday at 7pm, Divine Liturgy for St. Stephen's Day on Tuesday at St. Stephen's Cathedral at 10am.

Food Sale: Thank you to all who participated in our Christmas Food Sale. While the final tally is not yet in it appears it has been our most successful sale to date, with profits of at least \$4800.

Mary Queen of Peace: Liturgical Objects from the Middle East: an exhibit curated by Fr. John Perich at Villanova University Art Gallery, December 5-21.

Nativity Fast:

Confessions are available at the usually scheduled times but also by appointment. Speak with Fr. Martin.

80th Novogodny Ball will take place on Sunday 1/15/17 for the benefit of St. Tikhon's Summer Youth Camp & other deserving charities. For info & reservations call Paul Fedoronko at 610-328-6911 or email novogodnyball@verizon.net

Scrip: Today. Last chance for Christmas shopping. Ask Mat. Heidi about the vendors if you have any questions.

Vigil Lights

From Alan Lee Litvin

For the Health of: Sharyn Litvin, Tara Litvin-Ring

In Memory of: Shane Litvin on his 42nd birthday. May God grant you eternal peace.

The Meaning of Christmas, Fr. Vladimir Berzonsky,

<https://oca.org/reflections/berzonsky/the-meaning-of-christmas>

"The Source of life and of Salvation from despair and the condition for the existence of the whole world is contained in only these three words: 'The Word became Flesh' [John 1:14]" (Feodor Dostoevsky, The Possessed drafts)

The question, "What does Christmas mean?" has as many answers as people in our society. Opportunity for merchants, vacation days for school children, parties and exchange of gifts even for non-Christians, since it has become a national holiday even in a nation that forbids official recognition. All including Christians, even Orthodox Christians, define the event by their own understanding, and by doing so limit the meaning of Christmas. There can be no definition, because the birth of the Son of God transcends every attempt to explain the inexplicable or comprehend the incomprehensible. We can only thank the Holy Trinity for the nativity of the Messiah and celebrate His life on earth.

Christmas is a mystery, a glorious event in history, the awesome phenomenon when *"Christ Jesus Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant and coming in the likeness of men..."* (Philippians 2:5). The kenotic condescension of the Holy Trinity expressed by the evangelist John, "The Word became flesh," can only be explained by the word "love." Such a divine love for human beings transcends the ability to grasp with our limited capacity, which is why the Orthodox Church services for this season, filled with joy, wonder and gratitude, point to the inexplicable event without even trying to elucidate the wonder. *"Heaven and earth join in celebration...Wise men and shepherds welcome Him...Angels and humans sing with joy..."* The glorious hymn of laudation: *"God is with us!"* requires an explanation, because that phrase has been misused, wrongly applied and abused by some Christians through the ages. What it does not mean is that God endorses a nation or purpose against His other children.

Gott mit uns, for example, was a battle cry of Nazi Germany equal to the present day war shout of radical Muslims: Allahu akhbar! as those flying into the Twin Towers yelled. "With us" is the joyous awareness of the awesome mystery that Creator became Creature, the Eternal condescended to human limits including death, love beyond all human comprehension has manifested itself in Christ Jesus the Son of God Who became the Son of Man for our sake.

Christ appears on earth as the most precious Gift that we cannot hope to recompense, certainly never earn or comprehend. Why does God love us so much, and how can we repay Him? Nobody, not even the Lord Almighty, offers gifts without expecting something in return. We know there is nothing we have as our own except the present of freedom. We are not robots, and even if "*our days are like grass...*" (Psalm 103:15), nevertheless, in our brief life span we have time to consider the gift of life and the Source of life. We can come to the realization that this lifetime may be short, but the promise of the gift of eternity is part of the reason for the incarnation of the Son of God. Salvation is Christ's purpose for His birth. Christ is life, and yet He died so that we might share eternal life with Him. Yet another mystery.

He offers us life everlasting, but He does not insist we accept it—or Him. He "*stands at the door and knocks,*" but it is for us to open to Him or leave Him outside. Such respect is almost too much; however, He treats us with a freedom that we feel we do not deserve or that we may not appreciate. We throw away our freedom with excess of passions, with some form of addiction to drugs, alcohol, overindulgence, wallowing in despair or foolish behavior—and Jesus remains standing outside the door of our heart, patiently waiting to be invited inside. How can He love us that much?