

ST. MARK'S ORTHODOX CHURCH

ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA (OCA.ORG)

DIocese of Eastern Pennsylvania (DOEPA.ORG)

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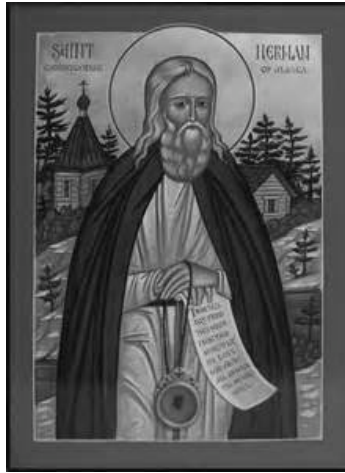
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Church School Director: Jennifer Sremanak



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2015

28th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST — Tone 3. REPOSE OF

VEN. HERMAN OF ALASKA, WONDERWORKER OF ALL AMERICA (1837). **Sunday of the Forefathers.** Martyrs

Eustratius, Auxentius, Eugene, Mardarius, and Orestes, at Sebaste (4th c.). Virgin Martyr Lucia (Lucy) of Syracuse (304). Ven. Arkády (Arcadius) of Novotorsk (11th c.). Ven. Mardárii (Mardarius), Recluse, of the Kiev Caves (Far Caves—13th c.). Ven. Arsenius of Latros (8th-9th c.). Ven. Nicodemus (Romanian).

Epistle: Colossians 3:4-11

Gospel: Luke 14:16-24

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Confessions: Saturdays Following Vespers
Also by appointment

Great Vespers: Saturdays at 6pm
Vigil Eve of Feasts at 7pm

Divine Liturgy: Sundays at 9:30am
Feast Days at 9:15am

UPCOMING SERVICES AND EVENTS:

- Sunday, December 13:** Hours and Divine Liturgy – 9:10am; Panikhida for Zoran Djokic, First Anniversary; Coffee Hour and Church School. **Last Scrip Orders before Christmas!**
- Tuesday, December 15:** Mirrors of Truth – 7pm
- Wednesday, December 16:** Akathist – 9:15am; Prison Ministry – 7pm
- Thurs, December 17:** Parish Council – 7pm
- Saturday, December 19:** Advent Retreat: Food Cupboard 9am–10:30am, St. Mark's – 11am–3pm; Great Vespers and Confessions – 4pm
- Sunday, December 20:** Hours and Divine Liturgy – 9:10am; Coffee Hour and Church School

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Christmas Food Sale: Thank you to all who made yesterday's sale the best so far. We sold more inventory than ever, and virtually sold out. This would not have been possible without the help of all involved, but special thanks to Jeanette Ruano who handles all the orders from announcement to packing and more, together with the cooks who made halupki, nut and poppy seed roll and soup, particularly the Martiaks. The efficient sales staff also added tremendously to the quality of the sale for ourselves and our customers. We are grateful to all for sharing their time and talent. A complete accounting will be published when the books are closed on the sale. Next sale will be Super Bowl Sale on Saturday, February 6, 2016.

Nativity Retreat: The parish will welcome Fr. Victor Gorodenchuk, Dean of St. Stephen's Cathedral to present an Advent/Nativity Retreat on Saturday December 19 from 11am to 3pm, followed by Confessions and Great Vespers at 4pm. Fr. Victor will speak on *Byzantine Liturgy: Evident History and Hidden Meaning*. The day will begin at 9am at the Wrightstown Food Cupboard, packing Christmas baskets for families in need in our area. All are invited to participate in both parts of our Retreat.

Scrip Program: Today. Some vendors have introduced smaller denomination gift cards for the Christmas season, check the updated list of vendors. Questions? Call Mat. Heidi at 570 906-1389.

Wrightstown Food Cupboard:

Pasta, sauce, tea, coffee, juice are always welcome. If you would rather make a monetary donation put it in an envelope with "Food Pantry" and drop in the Question Box. These donations will go towards purchasing Christmas turkeys and hams for the baskets.

A WISE INVESTMENT:

Brethren, God returns a loan a hundredfold, when it is lent to Him through the poor.

St. Nicholai of Zhica. The Prologue, December 7.

REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS:

- ✦ The sick and the suffering.
- ✦ Those persecuted for their faith.
- ✦ The lost and the lonely.
- ✦ Those in prison.
- ✦ The hungry, the homeless, the abused and the abandoned.
- ✦ The indifferent to those in need.
- ✦ Those who hate us and those who love us.



VIGIL LIGHTS:

From The Swan Family:

For the Health of:

Constance, Michelle, Kathryn, Venus, Michael, Neville, Mary Anne, Nicole

In Memory of:

Thomas Jr.

From the Moser Family:

For the Health of:

Lina, Fr. John, Fr. Vincent, George

In Memory of:

Dn. John, Veronica, Rebecca

BIRTHDAYS:

- Sharon Burkett
- Protodeacon Gregory Moser



December 14, 2015

Scriptural Giving; No. 6

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever. Over the past several week we have discussed Scriptural giving in Genesis. As we know salvation history begins properly with the call of the Patriarch Abram, later known as Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees and the Lord's promise to bless him and his descendants after him.

In our last lesson we discussed Jacob, the grandson of Abraham and his flight from his brother Esau to Haran. In Haran he worked for his father-in-law Laban, who took advantage of him and changed his wages ten times. But the Lord blessed Jacob in spite of the cunning nature of his father-in-law with eleven children, prospered him and enabled him to sooth the tensions with his brother Esau by softening his heart with a generous gift. Initially, upon his return to the land of Canaan, Jacob was fearful of his brother and he prayed:

"O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,' 10 I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. 11 Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children. 12 For You said, 'I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.'" (Gen. 32: 9ff) Whereas, he only had a staff when he fled his brother and considered himself wholly unworthy of the Lord's blessings, he now returns acknowledging that all he had attained was from the Lord and the Lord had immensely blessed him.

Jacob who was greatly afraid of the wrath of his brother because of his own previously manipulative behavior, and sent Esau a gift to soften his heart, . . . *"he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: 14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15 thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys."* God's faithfulness to Jacob is revealed in a variety of ways, but here in the abundance of his blessings. The Lord had blessed him so greatly, he was able to appease his brother's wrath with a magnificent gift. Even by today's standards, this would be a very costly gift for a shepherd.

If you remember the Lord's promise to Jacob, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14 Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (Gen. 29:13ff) Likewise, Jacob was faithful in fulfilling his vow unto the Lord, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, 21 and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God. 22 This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You." Jacob returned home, but the prosperity and blessing he enjoyed were not his own doing and he knew it. It was not because of his father-in-law, but in spite of him. Jacob knew that all that he had upon his return was because the LORD had blessed him.

Later in Jacob's life there was a famine in the land so he and his sons moved to Egypt, where his sons were eventually enslaved by Pharoah after Jacob's death. As we know the Lord raised up Moses to deliver His people because of His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Their passing through the Red Sea is compared to our Baptism, because it is by passing through the Red Sea, they were freed from slavery to Pharoah and Pharoah's armies were destroyed. Yet not all those who were set free entered the promised land because of

their disobedience and lack of gratitude for God's saving activity. Likewise, by Baptism we are freed from bondage to Satan and the power of the demons is crushed. We are set free and given the potential of eternal life by using our newfound freedom in a way that glorifies God. We like Israel of old are sojourning to the Kingdom and to a city whose builder and maker is God. Having said that, we are also partakers of the Kingdom and eternal life as we use our freedom, gifts, talents and abilities to glorify God. Yet like Israel of old, some may not enter the Kingdom, because of disobedience and ingratitude.

Israel of old having passed through the Red Sea, were made free and the Lord gave them the Torah (which literally means teaching) to help them regulate life within the community and maintain their relationship with Him. One's relationship with his neighbor is a good indicator of one's love for God (Remember the parable of the Good samaritan?). He instructed that each tribe was to have its own territory when they entered the promised land except the sons of Levi. They were the priests who maintained and served in the Tabernacle and were supported by the Tithe from the other eleven tribes. Throughout the first five books of the Bible, we hear the recurring phrase, *"I am the Lord God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,* preceding the Lord's commandments or teachings. The Lord, expects obedience out of gratitude for His saving acts. As part of the Torah or teaching the Lord gave instructions on giving of the first fruits. We are told in the Book of Numbers chapter 18:

8 Then the Lord spoke to Aaron, "Now behold, I Myself have given you charge of My offerings, even all the **holy gifts** of the sons of Israel I have given them to you as a portion and to your sons as a perpetual allotment. 9 This shall be yours from the most **holy gifts** reserved from the fire; every offering of theirs, even every **grain offering** and **every sin offering** and **every guilt offering**, which they shall render to Me, **shall be most holy** for you and for your sons. 10 As **the most holy gifts** you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. **It shall be holy to you.** 11 This also is yours, the offering of their gift, even all the **wave offerings** of the sons of Israel; I have given them to you and to your sons and daughters with you as a perpetual allotment. Everyone of your household who is clean may eat it. 12 **All the best** of the fresh oil and all **the best** of the fresh wine and of the grain, **the first fruits** of those which they give to the Lord, I give them to you. 13 **The first ripe fruits** of all that is in their land, which they bring to the Lord, shall be yours; everyone of your household who is clean may eat it. 14 **Every devoted thing** in Israel shall be yours. 15 **Every first issue of the womb of all flesh**, whether man or animal, which they offer to the Lord, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. 16 As to their redemption price, from a month old you shall redeem them, by your valuation, five shekels in silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. 17 But the firstborn of an ox or the firstborn of a sheep or the firstborn of a goat, you shall not redeem; **they are holy.** You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar and shall offer up their fat in smoke as an offering by fire, for a soothing aroma to the Lord. 18 Their meat shall be yours; it shall be yours like the breast of a wave offering and like the right thigh. 19 All the **offerings of the holy gifts**, which the sons of Israel **offer to the Lord**, I have given to you and your sons and your daughters with you, as a perpetual allotment. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord to you and your descendants with you." 20 Then the Lord said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel.

21 "To the sons of Levi, behold, **I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance**, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting. 22 The sons of Israel shall not come near the tent of meeting again, or they will bear sin and die. 23 Only the Levites shall perform the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the sons of Israel they shall have no inheritance. 24 For the tithe of the sons of Israel, which they offer as an offering to the Lord, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore I have said concerning them, 'They shall have no inheritance among the sons of Israel.'"

25 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 26 "Moreover, you shall speak to the Levites and say to them, 'When you take from the sons of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present an offering from it to the Lord, **a tithe of the tithe.** 27 Your offering shall be reckoned to you as the grain from the threshing floor or the full produce from the wine vat. 28 So **you shall also present an offering to the Lord from your tithes**, which you receive from the sons of Israel; and from it you shall give the Lord's offering to Aaron the priest. 29 **Out of all your gifts you shall present every offering due to the Lord, from all the best of them, the sacred part from them.**' 30 You shall say to them, 'When you have offered from it **the best of it**, then the rest shall be reckoned to the Levites as the product of the threshing floor, and as the product of the wine vat. 31 You may eat it anywhere, you and your households, for it is your compensation in



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The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia

return for your service in the tent of meeting. 32 You will bear no sin by reason of it **when you have offered the best of it**. But you shall not profane the sacred gifts of the sons of Israel, or you will die.”

The above passage is only a sampling of the instructions the Lord gave the children of Israel concerning offerings, yet it is quite clear there were a variety of offerings in addition to the tithe. The tithe was primarily to support the priestly tribe and the Tent of Meeting. The tithe came from the first fruits of produce as well as livestock. Even the first born child was included, but to be redeemed as a remembrance that ALL comes from God. Some offerings were to be totally consumed by fire upon the Altar, others could be eaten by the priests and their families, yet even the priests were to offer a tithe of the tithe to Aaron the High Priest! Offerings were considered Holy. The tithe was the basic offering *everyone was expected to give*, 10% of the first fruits of the produce and livestock. Other offerings were thank offerings, sin offerings, guilt offering, etc. above and beyond the tithe. Therefore, almsgiving, i.e., charity for the poor, the widow and the orphan were above the tithe. As we proceed through Holy Scripture, we will find amongst the prophets that the litmus test of a person's sincere devotion to God is their care and concern for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the stranger. James, the brother of our Lord says, *“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world”* (James 1:27). In the Book of Leviticus chapter 19, we read: 9 *‘Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.*

The major points, we find once again, is every good and perfect gift comes from God. There is nothing we have that did not come from Him. Secondly, because He is our Creator and Redeemer, we should honor the Lord and express our gratitude through giving back to Him the First-Fruits of ALL He has blessed us with. Third, our gratitude to the Lord for His saving acts in our own life is not limited to what we offer to Him, but is also expressed in our helping those in need, i.e., the poor, the widow, the orphan and the stranger. In 1 John 3 we read: 14 *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.* The Scripture here does not simply refer to those as brothers who share the same earthly mother and father or ancestral heritage, but all who have in common our Heavenly Father and are made in His image and likeness.

Yours in Christ,

+ Mark

Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania