

# THE TRISAGION

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## Blessed New Beginnings

After many years of prayer and planning, Holy Trinity acquires the adjacent property

by Fr. John Reeves

It's official now: we closed on the former American Cancer Society building on the Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos in the Temple (November 21) and our newly named *Trinity House* became ours.

The generosity of many parishioners and non-parishioners alike has enabled us to take this leap: **Forward, Together, in Faith.**

Over the next three months, we will review bids, hire a contractor, and oversee work on the project, hoping that we can move in sometime in February. But, as with any building or remodeling program, end-dates end up being flexible. If we can't get in by then, we'll simply take time this Lent working on being patient.

If you still would like to contribute to Phase II—a gift to be paid out over the next three years—and/or to donate all or a portion of the ADA restroom on the main floor (Phase III), your benefactions would be joyfully received. ■

*(related, see FROM THE RECTOR'S DESK, next page)*



Following a *molieben* (prayer service) of Thanksgiving to God following the Divine Liturgy on November 23, Fr. John led the parish in procession to bless and tour the newly bought facility.

## Chapel Opens New Doors to the Community

Beginning with Vespers this Saturday, December 6, the Chapel of the Holy Spirit will begin worshipping in the MACC on 67 Elm Street in Beaver Springs—the same location of the Family Fun Nights. The Chapel's temporary relocation opens doors for newcomers, inquirers, and those that have expressed a need for a more central and accessible location. For a full schedule and directions, visit [holyspirit-oca.org](http://holyspirit-oca.org). ■

*(for more CHAPEL NEWS, see the penultimate page)*

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## Schedules

	COFFEE HOUR	GREETERS	TELLERS	SERVERS
December 7	POTLUCK	M. Thompson and M. Fedkin	H. Torbic and S. Stevens	Team B
December 14	J. Fryncko and M. Thompson*	M. Leathers and D. Swisher	M. Fedkin and B. Haupt	Team A
December 21	Russian Ladies*	B. Roberts and E. Miranda	M. Stevens and G. Cattell	Team B
December 28	D. Van Duin and B. & N.Troyan	L. Radomsky and M. Radomsky	R. Patel and S. Stevens	Team A
January 4	M. Leathers and D. Patel	M. Thompson and M. Fedkin	M. Stevens and G. Cattell	Team B
January 11	H. Torbic and L. Georgiou	M. Leathers and D. Swisher	H. Torbic and R. Patel	Team A

\* Denotes Fast  
 Team A: A. Miranda, N. Pelikan, S. Olynyk, D. Stickle, J. Torbic, and J. Swisher. Captains: D. Torbic, Ja. Stickle, and K. Kucheyaryy  
 Team B: J. Cadman, C. Legaspi, N. McFarland, B. Olynyk, S. Patel, and L. Torbic.

■ FROM THE RECTOR'S DESK

# Slowing Down and Preparing for Christ

Our lives go on fast forward from Thanksgiving to Christmas. The intervening days whirl by. Mercantile interests entice us to spend more than we can afford. Nostalgia for holidays past can depress us. The pressure of gifts, gatherings and relatives can stress us. By the end of the month, we can end up an exhausted, emotional wasteland facing debts needlessly incurred. What a way to welcome the New Year!

It doesn't have to be so frantic. The Church calendar teaches us to resist the temptations of avarice and gluttony which the corporate interests depend upon, by fasting and prayer, by confession of sins, and by the giving of alms. The services in anticipation of the Nativity, though not as intense as those of the Great Fast, lead us to Bethlehem. We follow our blessed Mother as the time of her fulfillment approaches.

We redeem the time, in other words, by preparing for the Birth our Redeemer, quietly, prayerfully, intentionally avoiding the allurements which so easily distract us. It's not in an Ebenezer Scrooge, bah humbug, sort of way. Rather, it is in the quiet joy that our redemption draws near and that every heart should "prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing." The Nativity Fast is that preparation. The Nativity Feast is that fulfillment. ■ — Fr. John

## The True Story of Christmas

by William J. Tighe

Many Christians think that Christians celebrate Christ's birth on December 25 because the church fathers appropriated the date of a pagan festival. Almost no one minds, except for a few groups on the fringes of American Evangelicalism, who seem to think that this makes Christmas itself a pagan festival.

### Also from Father's Desk...

- **The children** are especially encouraged to bring their parents to St. Nicholas Vespers on Friday, December 5 at 5:30 p.m. The customary evlogia from St. Nicholas will be passed out to the Sunday School who will sing in the neighborhood and decorate cookies for Christmas. Do note the earlier time in consideration of the kiddoes. (Dress warmly in bright clothing and bring flash lights for caroling.)
- **Our St. Nicholas Tree** in the narthex gives us the opportunity each year to see to it that needy persons in the community have Christmas gifts, in partnership with Strawberry Fields, a social service agency in town. Please take a tag from the tree. Each has the age, sex and Christmas wish for an individual. Bring the gift back to church by December 21 to help spread Christ's love this Christmas to the poor in our area.
- **Vespers in preparation for the Nativity** begin Sunday evening, December 21 and continue daily through December 23. Confessions will be heard following each service. The Nativity Fast is one of the four fasting periods during the church year when frequent communicants are expected to go to confession.

[However] December 25 is the result of attempts among the earliest Christians to figure out the date of Jesus' birth based on calendrical calculations that had nothing to do with pagan festivals. Rather, the pagan festival of the "Birth of the Unconquered Sun" instituted by the Roman Emperor Aurelian in 274, was almost certainly an attempt to create a pagan alternative to a date that was already of some significance to Roman Christians. Thus the "pagan origins of Christmas" is a myth without historical substance.

(continued, see CHRISTMAS ORIGINS, last page)

## Join the Homeless Ministry in '15

Thank you to all who volunteered for the Housing Transition ministry this year, especially the parents who encouraged their children to experience the blessings of sharing a meal with the less fortunate. The ministry, which organizes teams that prepare a monthly dinner for the homeless, is completing its schedule for 2015. If you who would like to join a team, let Samar Al Maalouf know ([samaralmaalouf@gmail.com](mailto:samaralmaalouf@gmail.com)).

## Penn State OCF Members to Attend College Conference

College students: Join fellow Penn State Orthodox Christian Fellowship members in spending a portion of Christmas Break at the annual College Conference at Antiochian Village. The four-day retreat, packed with speakers, prayer, and activities, begins on December 27 and will be headlined by Bishop John Abdalah of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese. Scholarships for the \$250 registration fee are available. Email [orthodox@psu.edu](mailto:orthodox@psu.edu) for details.

## Time for the Cookie Exchange!

The women of Holy Trinity will host a Christmas Cookie Exchange on Friday, December 19 at 11:30. To participate, bring a minimum of three dozen homemade holiday cookies and the recipe. A light Lenten lunch will be provided and a portion of the baked goods will be donated to Housing Transitions. See the sign up sheet in the Parish Hall to participate.

## For the Record

### BAPTISMS

➤ Elected to Parish Council at our Annual Meeting on November 9 were **Bob Roberts, President; Jay Rush, Vice President; and Bruce Haupt, Grounds Chair.** Many thanks to **Chuck Beechan, Council President for the past four years, who was term limited; and Ravi Patel, who served a two-year term as Assistant Treasurer.**



## Partnering to Serve

This Thanksgiving, 30 area families in need (114 people in all) were served a full meal through your generosity and our partnership with Strawberry Fields. Parishioners supplied the fixings; Matthew 25 volunteers purchased the turkeys and the additional foodstuffs, then sorted the items; and Strawberry Fields representatives transformed the Parish Hall into a makeshift distribution center. ■

## ■ NEWS & NOTES

### “Scripture and Tradition: What the Bible Really Says”

MCKEES ROCKS — St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, located here on 320 Munson Ave., will host a talk by Biblical scholar Dr. Edith Humphrey, Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, on Saturday, December 6. The day begins with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy at 9:30 a.m., followed by a continental breakfast and the keynote. All events are free and open to the public. For more information or directions, visit [stnicholas-oca.org](http://stnicholas-oca.org).

### Orthodox Chaplains from Penn State to Present on Webinar

Andrew Boyd, OCA Youth Department Director, will join Penn State OCF alums Fr. John Diamantis and Dn. Alexander Cadman on the next webinar of the Archdiocese's *Building Vibrant Parishes Series*. It will be offered at 8:00 p.m. on December 16. For a free registration link, email [joekormos1@gmail.com](mailto:joekormos1@gmail.com).



## ■ SUNDAY SCHOOL SCOOP

# Experiencing the Early Church by Dn. Mark Oleynik

The history of the Church begins with Pentecost. Christ gave the apostles and their successors the command to make disciples of all nations baptizing them and teaching them all that Christ commanded. This year the Sunday School middle school class is studying the Book of Acts and will be learning among other things about the miracles of healing in the Early Church, the persecution of Christians and martyrs, the conversion of Saul, the growth of the Church through conviction and evangelizing by the Apostles, and the journeys of St. Paul.

In the early days of the Church the believers gathered in homes to not only break bread together but to also share in teaching, prayer, and fellowship (*Acts 2*). To experience this unique aspect of the ancient Church, the students traveled last month to celebrate the Divine Liturgy with members of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit.

The students were quietly welcomed to light candles and gathered in closely together. Some of the students commented that “there was no border between the altar table and the congregation” and “there was no curtain.” One student observed that it “was interesting that you can watch everything that happened up close during the Liturgy.” Since there was “no director for the choir” everyone joined in singing the responses. Because of the intimacy, to some it seemed the service was shorter and that there were “fewer prayers” but it was indeed the full Liturgy.

Following the Liturgy, the students assisted in removing the church fixtures and articles and replacing them with the house furniture which “practically turned the church into a coffee hour” such that “we ate where the Liturgy was.” After partaking of the delicious food and discussing their unique experience with Fr. John and the parishioners where



“everyone was kind and friendly,” we returned to State College in the early afternoon. As one student summed up the day: “it was cool that the Liturgy was in a house just like the Apostles used to do.” ■

## Headlines from the Chapel of the Holy Spirit

*Dn. David Smith, Administrator*

### EPISCOPAL VISIT

*The Chapel was delighted to host His Eminence Archbishop Melchisedek on Sunday, November 30, getting to be a cathedral for a day. The Choir sang beautifully! Eis polla eti despota.*

### YOUTH BOWLING EVENT

*All kids from the Chapel and surrounding churches are invited to join us for an afternoon at Best Bowl in Selinsgrove on December 14 from 3-5 p.m. Contact Mka. Brenda at youth@holyspirit-oca.org for details.*

## ■ ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

# Christmas Origins: It is *Not* Pagan! (cont. from page 2)

The idea that [December 25] was taken from the pagans goes back to two scholars from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries... In the Julian calendar, created in 45 B.C. under Julius Caesar, the winter solstice fell on December 25, and it therefore seemed obvious to [Paul Ernst] Jablonski and [Dom Jean] Hardouin that the day must have had a pagan significance before it had a Christian one. But in fact, the date had no religious significance in the Roman pagan festal calendar before Aurelian's time, nor did the cult of the sun play a prominent role in Rome before him... [No Roman] cults, old or new, had festivals associated with solstices or equinoxes.

As things actually happened, Aurelian, who ruled from 270 until his assassination in 275, was hostile to Christianity and appears to have promoted the establishment of the festival of the “Birth of the Unconquered Sun” as a device to unify the various pagan cults of the Roman Empire around a commemoration of the annual “rebirth” of the sun... In creating the new feast, he intended the beginning of the lengthening of the daylight, and the arresting of the lengthening of darkness, on December 25 to be a symbol of the hoped-for “rebirth,” or perpetual rejuvenation, of the Roman Empire... If it co-opted the Christian celebration, so much the better...

The evidence indicates, in fact, that the attribution of the date of December 25 was a by-product of attempts to determine when to celebrate [Christ's] death and resurrection... [Eastern Christians calculated it to be] April 6; in the West, March 25... [The Jewish prophetic notion that prophets of Israel died on the same dates as their birth or conception] is a key factor in understanding how some early Christians came to believe that December 25 is the date of Christ's birth. The early Christians applied this idea to Jesus, so that March 25 and April 6 were not only

the supposed dates of Christ's death, but of his conception or birth as well. There is some fleeting evidence that at least some first- and second-century Christians thought of March 25 or April 6 as the date of Christ's birth, but rather quickly the assignment of March 25 as the date of Christ's conception prevailed.

It is to this day, commemorated almost universally among Christians as the Feast of the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel brought the good tidings of a savior to the Virgin Mary, upon whose acquiescence the Eternal Word of God (“Light of Light, True God of True God, begotten of the Father before all ages”) forthwith became incarnate in her womb. What is the length of pregnancy? Nine months. Add nine months to March 25 and you get December 25; add it to April 6 and you get January 6. [The former] is Christmas; [the latter] is Epiphany.

Christmas is a feast of Western Christian origin. In Constantinople it appears to have been introduced in 379 or 380. From a sermon of St. John Chrysostom, at the time a renowned ascetic and preacher in his native Antioch, it appears that the feast was first celebrated there on December 25, 386. From these centers it spread throughout the Christian East, being adopted in Alexandria around 432 and in Jerusalem a century or more later...

Thus, December 25 as the date of the Christ's birth appears to owe nothing whatsoever to pagan influences upon the practice of the Church during or after Constantine's time. It is wholly unlikely to have been the actual date of Christ's birth, but it arose entirely from the efforts of early Latin Christians to determine the historical date of Christ's death. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article is copywrited (2003) by the Fellowship of St. James and has been reprinted with permission. The full article appears on several websites, including frjohnpeck.com.*

# Holy Trinity Calendar

All events take place at 119 South Sparks Street in State College unless where noted.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
30 <b>Apostle Andrew the First-Called</b> Matins, 9am Divine Liturgy, 10am	December 1	2	3 Vespers, 5:30pm Confessions	4 <b>St. Alexander Hotovitzky</b> Penn State OCF: Dinner and Discussion, 6pm @ 124 Pasquerilla Center Adult Study Group: <i>The Epistle to Hebrews: High Priest in Heaven</i> , 7pm	5 OCF/THON Canning Trip, 5pm (thru. Sunday, 3pm) @ Red Lion, PA Church School Dinner and Christmas Caroling Night, 5pm-8:30pm Great Vespers, 5:30pm	6 <b>St. Nicholas the Wonderworker</b> Divine Liturgy, 9am (Hours, 8:40am) Choir Rehearsal, 4pm Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions
December 7 Matins/Sunday School, 9am Divine Liturgy, 10am Parish Potluck, 12pm	8	9 Homeless Ministry, 4pm @ Centre House, 217 E. Nittany Ave. Clergy Staff Meeting, 11:45am	10 Vespers, 5:30pm Confessions Parish Council Meeting, 7pm	11 Penn State OCF: End-of-Semester Game Night, 6pm @ 124 Pasquerilla Spiritual Center Adult Study Group: <i>The Epistle to Hebrews: High Priest in Heaven</i> , 7pm	12 Annual St. Herman Middle School Retreat, 5pm (thru Sunday, 3pm) @ Antiochian Village	13 <b>St. Herman of Alaska</b> Choir Rehearsal, 4pm Greeters Ministry Meeting, 4:30pm Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions
14 <b>Sunday of the Holy Forefathers</b> Matins/Sunday School, 9am Divine Liturgy, 10am Trisagion for Sara Mortimore, mother of Leslyn Radomsky, 12pm Orthodox Youth Association Monthly Activity, 6pm	15	16	17 Vespers, 5:30pm Confessions	18 Memorial Divine Liturgy for Abp. Job, 10am @ St. John the Baptist Church, Black Lick	19 Christmas Cookie Exchange and Lenten Potluck, 11:30am	20 Men's Breakfast, 9am Altar Society Nativity Decorating, 10am Choir Rehearsal, 4pm Church School Christmas Play Practice, 4:30pm Great Vespers/Conf., 6pm
21 <b>Sunday Before Nativity</b> Matins/Sunday School, 9am Divine Liturgy, 10am Annual Church School Christmas Play, 12pm Vespers, 7pm Confessions	22 Vespers, 5:30pm Confessions Choir Rehearsal, 6:30pm	23 Vespers, 5:30pm Confessions Clergy Staff Meeting, 11:45am	24 <b>Eve of the Nativity</b> Royal Hours, 10am Holy Supper, 4:30pm Nativity Vigil, 6pm (Great Compline/Litiya/Matins)	25 <b>NATIVITY OF OUR LORD GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST</b> Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am) Great Vespers, 7pm	26 <b>Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos</b> Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am)	27 <b>Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen</b> OCF College Conference (through December 30) @ Antiochian Village Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions
28 <b>Sunday After Nativity</b> <b>Holy Righteous Ones: Joseph the Betrothed, David the King, and James the Brother of the Lord</b> Matins, 9am Divine Liturgy, 10am	29	30	31 Trisagion for Joy Torbic, 6:30pm Great Vespers, 7pm	January 1 <b>Circumcision of Christ</b> <b>St. Basil the Great</b> Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am) Open House, 2pm-5pm @ 125 Wildernest Ln., Port Matilda (Oleynik's)	2 <b>St. Seraphim of Sarov</b>	3 Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions
January 4 <b>Sunday Before the Theophany</b> Matins, 9am Divine Liturgy, 10am	5 <b>Eve of the Theophany</b> Royal Hours, 10am Great Vespers/Litiya/Blessing of Water, 7pm	6 <b>THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST</b> Matins, 8am Divine Liturgy, 9am Great Vespers, 7pm	7 <b>Synaxis of St. John the Baptist</b> Divine Liturgy, 8am Trisagion for Clay (Marc) Bond, 9:30am Vespers, 5:30pm	8	9	10 Choir Rehearsal, 4pm Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions

# Chapel Calendar

All worship services take place at the Middlecreek Area Community Center (MACC), 67 Elm St., in Beaver Springs.

Tuesday 2 Choir Rehearsal, 6:30pm @ 845 Center Ave., Beaver Springs (Lyter Home)	Saturday 20 Vespers, 6pm
Saturday 6 Vespers, 6pm	<b>Sunday 21</b> Hours, 9:40am Divine Liturgy, 10am
<b>Sunday 7</b> Hours, 9:40am Divine Liturgy, 10am Bible Study on First Thessalonians/Sunday School, 12:45pm @ 350 Old Orchard Dr., Beavertown (Smith Home)	Tuesday 23 Choir Rehearsal, 6:30pm @ 845 Center Ave. (Lyter Residence)
Tuesday 9 Choir Rehearsal, 6:30pm @ 845 Center Ave., Beaver Springs (Lyter Home)	Wednesday 24 <b>Eve of the Nativity</b> Vespers/Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great for Christmas, 9:30am
<b>Sunday 14</b> Hours, 9:40am Obednitsa with Holy Communion, 10am Bible Study on First Thessalonians/Sunday School, 12:45pm @ 350 Old Orchard Dr., Beavertown (Smith Home) Youth Bowling Outing, 3pm @ Best Bowl, Selinsgrove	Thursday 25 <b>NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR</b> (Hours/Divine Liturgy, 9:40am @ Holy Trinity)
Tuesday 16 Choir Rehearsal, 6:30pm @ 845 Center Ave., Beaver Springs (Lyter Home)	<b>Sunday 28</b> Hours, 9:40am Obednitsa with Holy Communion, 10am Bible Study on First Thessalonians/Sunday School, 12:45pm @ 350 Old Orchard Dr., Beavertown (Smith Home)
	Saturday Jan. 3 Vespers, 6pm

December 2014