

THE TRISAGION

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Incarnate Christ in Embryo

*“Today the Virgin cometh to the cave,
to give birth to the Pre-eternal Word...”*

— KONTAKION HYMN OF THE FOREFEAST

In our Nativity hymns, the constant theme is that the Virgin carries within her womb God in the flesh. From mid-November onward, our expectations are heightened as the approach of the Feast draws near: The Theotokos draws near to Bethlehem bearing “Christ in embryo.”

“Christ in embryo”: This emphasis on the “contents” of the Virgin’s womb bears scrutiny as we not only prepare to celebrate our Lord’s birth but as we look at the Church’s moral teaching on the contents of every woman’s womb: the humanity of every unborn child, its innate dignity and worth.

We cannot celebrate the Virgin’s bearing Christ in her womb without relating our celebration to that of the Church’s moral teaching in regard to abortion. In fact, from the first century the Church’s opposition to abortion was seen as paramount to belief in the Incarnation of Christ. To believe that the One carried in Mary’s womb was fully God and fully Man would be contradicted if moral practice allowed for termination of pre-born life on the grounds that “it” isn’t human or that “it” isn’t a person. Theologically this is untenable.

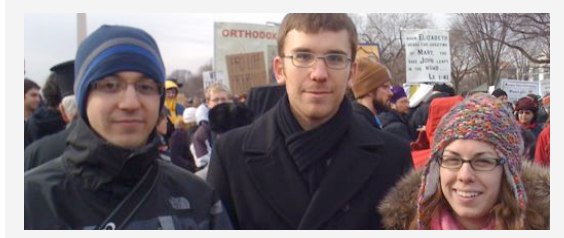
For those moderns who have deviated from traditional morality, it is telling that those most

supportive of abortion are those least likely to see Christ as Divine: God and Man, as we believe.

Our theology always has moral consequences. To believe otherwise is to disconnect what we believe from how we are called to act. As we prepare for our Lord’s Nativity in the Flesh, listen closely to the hymns of the Feast. They prepare us not only for a celebration on Christmas Day but also for the ongoing celebration of human life in the unborn, whose author is always God and which gift is always precious to him. *- Fr. John*

Holy Trinity to Sponsor Trip to 2012 March for Life

Several ministries at Holy Trinity—including the Church School and the Penn State Orthodox Christian Fellowship—are making arrangements for a Monday, January 23, 2012, pilgrimage to our nation’s capital. We will stand in support of the millions of innocent unborn children lost to abortion each year. Next year’s March For Life marks the 25th anniversary of the event. More details will be forthcoming in the coming weeks, but please mark your calendars now and begin making the necessary arrangements for as many members of your family to attend.



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Schedules

Coffee Hour		Greeters		Altar Servers*	
December 4	Russian Ladies	Leslyn and Mark Radomely	Team A		
December 11	Elaine Fites and Dee Patel	Melody Thompson and Mark Fedin	Team B		
December 18	Julianne Vaughan and Beth Roberts	Melvin Leathers and David Swisher	Team A		
December 25	Christ Is Born! Glory Him! (No Coffee Hour)	Beth Roberts and Ed Miranda	Team B		
January 1	Russian Ladies	Leslyn and Mark Radomely	Team A		
January 8	Elaine Fites and Dee Patel	Melody Thompson and Mark Fedin	Team B		

* Team A: C. Dook, N. Fedin, A. Miranda, N. Peltan, S. Olegun, D. Spolnik, and Jr. Spolnik
Team B: M. Dook, P. Dook, K. Kucheryavskiy, J. Miranda, B. Olegun, Jr. Spolnik, and a trainee.

■ SUNDAY SCHOOL SCOOP

Our Sunday Best (Part IV) by Deacon Mark Oleynik

We conclude this series with some practical considerations for parents with young children. The most essential thing you can do is to simply bring your children to church to get them familiar and comfortable with being in the presence of God. Certainly, there are many excuses we as parents can make for keeping our kids away, such as, “I don’t want my children to bother others”, “my children are too young to understand what is going on”, or “all they want to do is walk around; I’ll bring them when they get a little older”. In the end, however, there is almost no excuse (save perhaps sickness) that is justifiable for keeping your children away from church. Bring your children and let God open their hearts to Him.

Very small children can be allowed some latitude in their movements (though they should not wander around aimlessly), but parents should set some very specific boundaries—perhaps keeping them at an arms length or two so that these boundaries can be enforced. Without a doubt this will be tested (many times) and each time our child wanders we must bring him back. Consistency is essential here.

Next, try sitting as close to the front as possible (if you arrive late this may not be possible). When our daughter Hannah began walking and talking it became obvious that she wanted to see what was happening. It became quite difficult to explain and show her from behind a forest of people. Being in the front of the church was uncomfortable at first for us but we got used to it and so did our children. (Think of it from a child’s perspective: how would you like it if all you saw were people’s legs and back? That would get boring real fast!)

Parents may find it is necessary at times to leave the church to give their children a break for a

Extra “Scoops”

STUDENTS TO ATTEND RETREAT

Many of our middle school students will be attending the annual St. Herman of Alaska Retreat at the Antiochian Village near Ligonier on December 9-11. This is the third year that our parish has sponsored our students and by all accounts it is a wonderful weekend of learning, worship, and fellowship. You can download registration forms at holotrinity-oca.org.

YOUTH TO PERFORM NATIVITY PLAY

On Sunday, December 18 following the Divine Liturgy, our children will once again act in a play presenting the story of our Lord’s birth. Those interested in participating should attend the “rehearsal” on Saturday, December 17, at 4:30 p.m. Everyone is invited to see and hear the telling of Christ’s birth.

while. If this happens, do not feel embarrassed, but simply carry your child or hold his hand as you leave. Always keep the break to a minimum and use it to refocus and “refresh” your child—and not as a “recess” time (kids are smart: they will quickly figure out that by misbehaving they will go to the back of the church or downstairs for some “fun”).

While you are removed from the service, talk with your child and let him know that it is important for him and you to return to the church as soon as possible. Explain what is happening in age appropriate language and set their expectations as to what’s going to happen next.

For example, when it is time for the gospel tell your child it is now Jesus’ “story” time and we have to listen carefully to what He said. During the Great Entrance, explain that the gifts of bread and wine (under the fancy covers) are being brought to the altar table to be consecrated by God for our food.

(continued—see OUR SUNDAY BEST, last page)

Fellowship Planning Mission Trip

Men’s Fellowship meets every third Saturday for breakfast to gather for food, friendship and Christian “guy talk”. We talk about issues which affect us as husbands, fathers, and men in general. In short, we talk about how we can put our faith into practice.

Now we have an opportunity to take brotherhood a step further. OCMC has presented us with an opportunity to lead a team to Marshall, Alaska to finish construction of the church there. (Marshall is the Yukon village where Fr. John spent part of his sabbatical in 2010, originally missionized by St. Yakov Netsvetov in the 1840s.) Our responsibility will be to man at least half of the 12-man team and provide the clergy leadership.

The total cost of the July 21 to August 4 trip is \$1,020 per person (not including airfare); participants will have the option to attend St. Herman’s Pilgrimage on Spruce Island August 6-9. Orthodox men, aged 18 and upward, in good health with some carpentry skills are eligible. A final decision is due by December 17 at our final breakfast for the year. Please speak to Fr. John or Dn. Alex for more information, or to sign-up.

Our Sunday Best (continued from page 2)

As a final point, a few words should be said about our dress—adults and children alike. Though God does not demand us to “dress up” for Him, the fact is, as followers of Christ in all areas of our life, we should offer Christ our “best” and not just our “leftovers” (e.g., Cain and Abel). Our dress should always, especially at church, be becoming of a Christian. We should dress modestly, not in a flashy way that brings attention to ourselves. We should dress with respect for God, for others, and for ourselves.

I offer this to you for your personal reflection, and not to be a means to judge others. Hopefully, we all will wear our “Sunday best” every day! ■

Adopt A Night at Centre House

For the past two years volunteers from our parish have provided dinner each month for the residents at Centre House, a ministry of Housing Transitions. Participants in the ministry buy ingredients, bring them to the shelter, and prepare and enjoy the meal together with the residents. Currently our parish assists once a month (on every second Tuesday), but we are able to increase the frequency if more are interested in volunteering. If transportation or meal affordability is an issue for you, **Matthew 25** is able to help. To learn more, contact Diana van Duin at dmv11@psu.edu.

Thanksgiving Drive A Success

Our parish showed great love for its neighbors last month during the recent **Matthew 25** Food Drive, providing complete Thanksgiving meals for 32 local families (134 people in all). Thank you!

Helpers Needed to Install Icon

We need a few volunteers to install the Pantocrator icon on December 8. If you are interested, and do not fear heights, contact Deacon Alexander.

Parish Holds Annual Meeting

At the Holy Trinity Annual Meeting held after Liturgy on November 13, a quorum of parishioners voted to approve and support a balanced budget of approximately \$198,000 in annual income and expenses (see the January *Trisagion* for the final 2011 figures and the complete 2012 budget). Michael Pelikan, Michael Stickles, and Ed Miranda were re-elected to the two-year term Council positions of Secretary, Treasurer, and Vice-President—Building, respectively. They will be reinstalled on January 16.

For the Record

DEATH

➤ **Felicia Efemia Kowalczyk Loope** of Mt. Union, departed this life November 13, with burial taking place November 18. May her memory be eternal!

■ ORTHODOX YOUTH ASSOCIATION Youth Serve Shelter at Outing

by Fr. Basil Biberdorf

Last month, Holy Trinity's Junior Orthodox Youth Association (JOYA) stepped out of its usual routine. (The ministry offers those in grades 5 through 8 the opportunity to gather regularly for fun, fellowship, and friendly competition. Past activities have included video game tournaments, game nights, hay rides and pumpkin picking, corn mazes, mini golf, and retreats, all planned with the aim of encouraging not only "social time" but rather a time to get to know each other for mutual support and specifically *Christian* friendship.) But this outing was different: it saw twelve JOYAns serving residents at the Housing Transitions Centre House facility in State College.

Housing Transitions is already familiar to us at Holy Trinity; we lead the preparation of meals there on a regular basis (see article on the last page). We had too many JOYAns to lead meal preparation effectively, but we had plenty to provide some decorations for Thanksgiving Day and beyond. With help from Caryl Strauss, Laura Rush, and Matushka Dea, twelve young men and women from Holy Trinity created paper snowflakes and stuffed decorative pumpkins (ask any JOYAN about the stuffing!) for the public and private areas at Centre House and enjoyed tasty treats with residents.

There was plenty of fun and joking among the group as they worked on the projects and, in some cases, spoke with some of the residents who were looking on. However, this was not intended to be a "feel good" mission. Rather, the goal was for the

participants to begin to see those in need in our community, even when it often seems that there are few, if any, such individuals in Happy Valley.

What did our JOYAns learn? They learned more about responding to our Lord's warning that "as much as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me" (*Matthew 25:40*). They learned that the men, women, and children living at our local homeless shelter are real human beings. They also learned that care often includes confidentiality (covering our brothers' nakedness, in a sense), in that they were asked to refrain from sharing identities of Centre House residents in the event they knew them already. They learned that a dozen smiling faces,

even if noisy, can bring some joy among those whose lives can seem a little bleak at times. In short, they learned more about being Christians in the fullest sense of the term, manifesting the love of Christ in caring for others.

This growth as Christians is a central part of JOYA. Thank you to the parents who make sure that events are placed on the family calendar in support of this effort. Thank you to the JOYAns who participate in our activities and make it a joy to be part of a great group. ■

REMINDER: *The St. Herman Middle School Retreat at Antiochian Village is December 9-11. If you have not yet signed up, please contact Fr. Basil or Dn. Mark as soon as possible.*



The Twelve Days of Christmas

by Igumen David (Lewis)

The Twelve Days of Christmas has been immortalized by the song which we all have heard for so many years. But what is it all about?

At a time when it was illegal in the country of Great Britain for anyone to teach the Catholic faith, to celebrate a Catholic Mass, or to be a Catholic priest; there was a great deal of desire to make sure that the Catholics of England would not forget their faith. One of the ways they did this was to make up songs that did not particularly sound religious, but which contained enough symbolism about the Faith that people would be able to remember their catechism from the lyrics of the songs.

Each of the items listed in the song for the twelve days carries a reference to theology. The first day, a single gift—God the Father; the second, two gifts—Father and Son; the third, three gifts—the Trinity, etc. The twelve days refer to the twelve apostles. They did what every good teacher tries to do to make their students learn: They attach some other meaning to the subject, and the students can easily learn their lesson.

It amuses me when I see people on television estimating what the cost would be if these gifts were to be given today. They say it would be in the high thousands, if not at least a million dollars. **No!** It is the cost of eternal life that was being taught by this song, which the children learned so they could remember their church teaching. **And**, those twelve days of Christmas are the twelve days from

St. Nicholas Tree to Bring Joy

December marks the "advent" of the St. Nicholas Tree, which will be decorated with Christmas requests of local families. Add to this year's Nativity joy for an unknown neighbor by fulfilling one of these requests. Full details will be announced after Liturgy on December 4.

Women to Host Two Special Events This Nativity Season

HOLY SUPPER

The Women's Ministry is sponsoring Holy Supper, a traditional lenten meal for everyone in the parish on the Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord beginning at 4:30 p.m. before the Vigil. Being the last meal of the forty-day Advent Fast, the twelve fasting foods usually served are: barley, honey, stewed prunes, pierogi, sauerkraut, potatoes, lima beans, garlic, bread, mushroom soup and salt. Holy Trinity will provide the fish for the meal; please bring a favorite Nativity lenten dish to share with our parish family. Please sign up using the list in the Parish Hall so that we have an accurate count.

CHRISTMAS COOKIE EXCHANGE

The Women's Ministry is hosting a Cookie Exchange on Friday, December 16 at 11:30 a.m. To participate, bring a minimum of three dozen homemade holiday cookies and the recipe. A light lenten lunch will be provided. See the sign up sheet in the Parish Hall to participate—the more that do, the greater the variety of cookies/recipes to take home and less holiday baking! Have to work that day? Join us during your lunch break. It will be festive with fellow-"ette"-ship!

Questions? If you would like to assist at either event or have any questions, please see Matushka Kelly Oleynik or email ohkellyoh@hotmail.com.

Christmas Day until Epiphany. They are not the twelve days before the Feast, but the twelve days after the Feast; a bridge between the two Feasts. ■

Nativity Poinsettias Available

Poinsettias for the commemoration of your living or departed loved ones, and for the adorning of our temple for the Nativity services, are now available to purchase for \$10 each. To make an offering, sign the list in the Narthex by December 10. Following the festal season, your plant(s) can be taken home.