

THE TRISAGION

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

From Heaven to Bethlehem by Dn. Mark Oleynik

The days immediately preceding Christmas are busy days. Extensive preparations are made in our homes and in our churches for a worthy celebration of our Lord's Nativity and most people feel at Christmastime some mellowing of heart, some meaning in every Godly act. Yet powerful forces contend against the meaning of Christmas.

Commercialism often clouds the sky that should be radiant only with the glory divine. To many children, Santa Claus—who brings what we want—is a more vivid reality than a baby born in a manger a long time ago. And parents, weary from shopping trips and the problem of thinking up something to give somebody who already has everything, are kept from pondering the real meaning of the feast.

The symbols and the legends, the music and the poetry, the colors and traditions, the gifts and the bills we associate with the season—are these all that Christmas means? Men, women, and children search for meaning.

The coming of God to man for healing and salvation, an event we celebrate at Christmas, means so much that the whole great drama of Christian redemption takes its rise from it. Jesus entered the arena of human conflict (*"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"*). He came, not under sponsorship of men, but at the behest of the Father. Throughout His earthly days, He pointed the way for men to go—summoning them to the Kingdom in a spirit of forgiving and redeeming.



Jesus' life was the demonstration of a God-oriented life, and He makes this life available to us. For all who look into His face and see there the face of God, life can never be the same again. We are redeemed from the burden of sins that would break us if they were not forgiven. We are saved from a meaningless existence and redeemed from bewilderment. With the coming of Christ, we are given the promise of a continuing and sustaining power.

In all of our haste and obsession to find the shortcuts, we have abbreviated the angels' song. We have left off the first part—"Glory to God in the highest"—and it hasn't worked. We've tried to solve our problems ourselves, while ignoring that we are created to be children of God. If we will not live as children of a heavenly Father, we are not likely to live as brothers to each other. The old saying is true: we must put God at the center of life or life will be off-center. We must remember God's love, or there will be no warmth and good in our

(continued—see "VBS 2010" on page 3)

HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Schedules

	Coffee Hour	Greeters	Altar Servers*
June 10	Judy Fryncko and Holly Torbic	Megan Leathers and David Swisher	Team B
June 17	Ellen George and Maria Stevens	Beth Roberts and Mark Radomsky	Team A
June 24	Julianne Vaughan and Beth Roberts	Mark and Leslyn Radomsky	Team B
July 1	Anne Swisher and Corene Swisher	Melody Thompson and Mark Fedkin	Team A
July 8	Mka. Jennifer Cadman and Megan Leathers	Mark and Leslyn Radomsky	Team B
July 15	Jean Miranda and Holly Torbic	Beth Roberts and Ed Miranda	Team A

* Team A: A. Craig, C. Craig, C. Doty, N. Fedkin, A. Miranda, N. Pelikan, S. Oleynik, D. Stickles, and Jo. Stickles
Team B: J. Cadman, B. Craig, M. Doty, P. Doty, K. Kuchenyawwy, J. Miranda, B. Oleynik, Je. Stickles, and J. Swisher.

■ CHAPEL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT Talking About Christianity, Part I by Fr. Basil Biberdorf

As the Chapel of the Holy Spirit continues to expand her work in Snyder County and the Strategic Growth Team at Holy Trinity begins to consider the possibilities God has in store (*see the article on the last page*), I thought it might be helpful to return to some fundamental aspects of mission for the individual Christian. Our group efforts at mission are often focused on our collective presentment to the world: our facilities, our programs, advertising, website, and so on.

What is often forgotten is the *personal* aspect of mission. Each of us knows other people—men and women we encounter every day at work, on our street, in our building, on campus—but, when faced with talking about topics that rise above football, weather, professors, and managers, we struggle with what to say. This is especially so when those around us face difficulties in their lives. How do we do it? There is not, nor should there be, a canned, formulaic answer to this question.

The absolute most important thing to do in talking about spiritual matters with other people is to *love* them. Before reading any further, look at 1 Corinth. 13:1-13. (This will wait. Go read it!) It doesn't matter how smart, how pious, how spiritual, or how learned we are if we don't love the people we're talking to. We really must be able to look into the face of the other person and see another human being with the same aching soul that each of us lives with (or has lived with). We must endeavor to see through whatever sin is there (and acknowledging it as nothing compared to our own) in order to perceive the image of God. This is a skill that takes practice and requires both personal diligence and prayer to cultivate. We must develop the habit of commending others into Christ's care through our prayers. Doing so especially after each encounter, is both an act of intercession: "The effective, fervent

prayer of a righteous man avails much" (*James 5:16*) that brings forth the Holy Spirit and applies a salve to our own hearts, which are tempted to coldness and insensitivity.

If we don't *love* the other person, any attempt to talk about spiritual things is little more than marketing, not terribly different from selling someone a car or helping them purchase a house. It may meet a need of a sort, but matters of the Faith are a lot more important than things transacted through marketing (*cf. Matthew 6:19-20*).

In practical terms, "love" means practical action. It means making ourselves available to develop a friendship, often starting with finding common interests and activities. It can also mean taking their burdens (and sins) onto our own shoulders through self-sacrifice. The fun stuff is easy, but the self-sacrifice can require real inconvenience, time, and expense. Nonetheless, actions are only actions when they're done, not merely thought. Further, the results are not instantaneous, but develop only with time and effort and a lot of listening. (I'll talk more about listening next time.) I encourage each of you to consider someone near to you who needs to hear the Gospel. What can be done to develop your love for this person? How can you show forth the Gospel without saying a word? ■



Photo Credit: Brenda Smith

Faithful attendees of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit gather with His Grace Bishop Melchisedek following the Divine Liturgy.

those who follow him. Jesus spoke clearly against such behavior (*cf. Mark 9:42*).

Pastors (the bishops and priests of the Church) have the obligation to deal pastorally with every human being placed into their care by God himself, and as such, it is their task to navigate the sin-infested waters of daily life in order to help men and women find salvation. Here indeed the pastors must take into account the received teaching (Biblical, canonical, and pastoral) and the condition/experience of the specific individuals before them in order best to dispense the spiritual cure. Such is truly a pastoral art. And through this lens, we can see that the teaching of the Church on homosexual acts or

so-called "gay marriage" is no more a condemnation of these individuals than is the teaching of the church against fornicators, adulterers, liars, gluttons, drunkards, and those afflicted with other selfish passions. All of these sins lead to spiritual death; many of them lead quickly to bodily death. The task of the pastor is to diagnose the disease and prescribe the cure. The disease for every human person is sin, the cure involves turning from it and embracing Christ and his medicines—the disciplines and sacraments of the Church. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE: Fr. John Parker heads the Department of Evangelization of the Orthodox Church in America and pastors a church in Charleston, S.C. The conclusion of his article will appear in next month's Trisagion.

Strategic Growth Team Forms; Begins Work

On May 31, Holy Trinity commenced a new phase of strategic planning for the next decade. Assuming the current rate of growth continues, the parish will eventually find itself at a crossroads. To make the best decision at that time, small groups comprised of members of the newly formed Strategic Growth Team will analyze various scenarios—including acquiring property around our existing location to a full relocation, as well as alternatives in between. Each option's strengths, weaknesses, and overall compatibility to our vision, the Great Commission, and Matthew 25 will be thoroughly examined, reviewed, then presented to the entire parish over the course of several months.

For the Record

WEDDING

➤ **Sarah Rauterkus and Joshua Cattell** were crowned in marriage on May 20, sponsored by Dn. Mark and Mka. Kelly Oleynik. Many years!

DEATH

➤ **Christine Demchak**, 83, of Philipsburg reposed in the Lord on May 22. Memory eternal!

AWARDS

➤ **Maria Stevens** was accepted into Gorbik Master Choral Class at St. Vladimir's Seminary, receiving a scholarship from Holy Trinity. Congratulations!

Ethnic Food Festival to Benefit Men's Mission to Alaska



Photo Credit: Mark Fedkin

Various ethnic foods will be available for takeout at Holy Trinity on Saturday, June 30 starting at 11 a.m. While supplies last, enjoy several Greek and Russian specialties, including holupki, halushki, pastisio, moussaka, borscht, pirogi, kolachi, baklava, and koulourakia. Sacred art tours featuring the parish's hand painted frescos will also be offered free of charge to the public. All proceeds from the bake sale will benefit the Men's Mission to Alaska. To be a part of this community event, see Mark Radomsky.

■ ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

On Same-Sex Marriage, Part I

by Fr. John Parker

To the Orthodox Christians who waver in this: repent! Return to your first love, whose words and ways are Life! To the seekers: seek Christ in his fullness and splendor, and all of the following, however difficult it may be to live, will make sense. In either case we must all begin with Jesus Christ.

If the Gospel is indeed “Good News” then we have to be able to see sin as death—without despairing—because we know Jesus Christ who has trampled down death by death, and who bestows life upon us in the tombs; [a]nd because we have found life in him and in following him. Orthodox Christian teaching on homosexual activity is or should be quite well known and self-evident; however...I believe it is necessary for a counter-point, public restating of Orthodox teaching in this area...

I must state up front the clear, beautiful, and life-giving words of the prophet Ezekiel who proclaimed—as we pray in our precommunion prayers—that God desires not the death of a sinner, but that he should turn from his wickedness and live (*Ezekiel 18:32*). I must also declare that the church’s teaching is the church’s teaching, and this teaching is neither a matter of private interpretation, nor of personal opinion. We receive our interpretation of the Holy Scriptures through the teachings of the Holy Fathers of the Church, which they themselves received from the Apostles, who learned to live the Gospel directly from the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

The Orthodox Church biblically, dogmatically, canonically, and pastorally opposes and rejects same-sex marriage, and declares homosexual acts clearly and undeniably to be sins. Similarly it names sin all fornication, adultery, perversion, pornography, and sexual cohabitation of any kind (apart from one man and one woman united in Holy Matrimony). It is likewise important to state that a “private opin-

ion”—especially one espoused publicly—contrary to the teaching of the Orthodox Church constitutes a betrayal of the Orthodox faith, a denial of the teachings and example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and is worthy—canonically and pastorally—of separation from the Chalice, especially for those who insist in perpetuating such opinions. It would be a faithful and honorable act for those who have these opinions, as St. Paul says, having examined themselves and kept these opinions, to refrain from the chalice, lest they draw unto themselves condemnation and judgment.

The dogmatic and moral teachings of the church, once again, are not matters of private interpretation or personal opinion. The dangerous trend in post-modern culture to reduce everything to “for me...” (as in “for me, this is a sin, but for them...”) misses the blatantly obvious ascetical point of Christianity which, in summary, is a denial of one’s self, one’s will, [and] one’s opinions in order to take up the Cross of Christ (whatever that may be for each one of us), and to follow Him... To do so not only ignores, perhaps to one’s peril, the received teaching of 2,000 years of Christianity, but also places one’s self, opinions and observations above those wiser and more pious and faithful than we. It must be remembered that such Holy Fathers and Saints of the Church knew the human heart and the human condition far more profoundly than most of us ever will. For one in the Church to persist in holding and/or teaching an opinion contrary to the Church’s teaching is 100 percent opposed to Orthodox Christianity.

It is all the more devastating and dangerous when a leader—be it pastor or president—proclaims in word written or spoken some opinion contrary to the teachings of the faith he claims to profess. To do so both endangers the leader and misleads

Young Adults Plan Outing

Area young adults will enjoy an afternoon basking in the summer sun at Whipple Dam State Park on Sunday, June 10 from 2 to 6 p.m. There will be several outdoor activities for 18- to 35-year-olds including beach volleyball, hiking, paddle-boats, kayaking, and swimming. Afterwards the group will eat at the local BBQ place, Doan’s Bones. A donation of \$5 per person will be collected for the food. Email youngadults@holytrinity-oca.org or call (814) 574-2454 if you need information, a ride, or directions. Bring friends and/or children!

Archdiocese Sponsors Outing

Watch the Pirates take on the Chicago Cubs with fellow Orthodox Christians from the Archdiocese on Monday, July 23 at 7 p.m. The cost is only \$22 and includes a replica Clemente jersey. To order tickets or learn more, contact John Schultz at (304) 479-5071 or email jpswv@comcast.net by June 22.

Abp. Kyrill Five-Year Memorial

This year’s observance of Archbishop Kyrill’s repose will take place on Sunday, June 17 at 6 p.m. at Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City. His Grace Bishop Melchisedek will serve a Panikhida at the late archbishop’s grave.

Do You Have the Gift of Prayer?

Holy Trinity is exploring the start of a new ministry this Fall. Those who have the gift of intercession and may be interested in coordinating volunteers that will keep prayer lists parishioners can subscribe to are invited to contact the Parish Office for more information. Thank you!

Orthodoxy 101 Begins Series

This summer (June-August), *Orthodoxy 101* moves to first and third Tuesdays at 7 p.m. and begins a new series studying *The Orthodox Way* by Bishop Kallistos Ware. The group is perfect for all inquirers to the Orthodox Faith and those who wish to gain a basic knowledge of Apostolic Christianity.

■ SUNDAY SCHOOL SCOOP

VBS 2012

(continued from page 1)

relationships. The birth of Jesus tells us that we must first look up to a higher world before we can look out on a better one.

Although, we always try to “fit” in the real meaning and joy of Christmas for our children during the Advent season we are often overcome by the many distractions mentioned above. With these things in mind, the theme of our Vacation Bible School (VBS) is “From Heaven to Bethlehem,” giving our children the opportunity to study the Nativity of Christ.

By studying the Nativity in the summer, there will be dedicated time (away from the distractions) to understand how we prepare for the feast, to explore Christ’s genealogy, to learn about the winter saints, and of course study of the Feast itself. Additionally, there will be lessons about Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, and the journey Mary and Joseph made to Bethlehem.

VBS will be conducted in the evening (5:15 p.m. to about 8:15 p.m.) this year and includes dinner. It is open to all children from Pre-Kindergarten through “rising” sixth graders. There is no cost to participate. Visit holytrinity-oca.org or see the display in the Parish Hall for more information or to register. ■

Extra “Scoops”

TEACHERS NEEDED!

Would you like to help children grow in Christ and learn about the Church? If so, why not be a part of our Sunday School instructional staff—your skills and talents are needed beginning in September. Please see Deacon Mark if you are interested or have questions.

MAKE THIS SUMMER HOLY AS WELL

There are several feast days celebrated during the summer. Don't forget to celebrate these days by attending the Vespers and Divine Liturgy as a family.