

Today a Savior is Born in the City of David



Let Us Give Thanks Unto the Lord

When we recently celebrated the Thanksgiving holiday with the Akathist “Glory to God for All Things,” I read the entirety of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann’s final sermon, delivered on Thanksgiving Day, 1983. Its most memorable words are also its first words: “everyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation and eternal joy.”

It is the priestly vocation of every Christian to make thanksgiving, and not just formally, but from the heart. Every eucharist is a thanksgiving to God for His love and care for us, and for His mighty work of salvation, which He has done for us in Jesus Christ. In Chrysostom’s words, He “called us from non-existence into being,” and for this alone we ought to render Him praise. But much more than that, He has shone forth His love for us by overlooking our willful and terrible sins and not abandoning us to the death and futility that our

deeds and intentions deserve. Instead, to quote St. Basil, Christ demonstrated God’s supreme love: “becoming incarnate of a holy Virgin, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being likened to the body of our lowliness, that He might liken us to the image of His glory.”

So for this as well we must give Him thanks! For of our own selves and from our own merits we are worthy of nothing but non-existence, but He has loved us and called us not only to be living and rational creatures, but also to be sharers of His everlasting glory, even co-enthroned “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). How great! How awesome! How worthy of praise! The angels and saints and the many-eyed cherubim call unto all creation: “let us give thanks unto the Lord.” And let us all thunder back with as much voice as God gives us power to muster: “it is meet and right.”

(continued, see RECTOR’S DESK, following page)

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Schedules

	COFFEE HOUR	GREETERS	TELLERS
Dec 3	A. Stickle, M. Leathers, L. Georgiou	M. & T. Chambers	G. Cattell & B. Haupt
Dec 10	H. Torbic, A.T. Pelikan, Mka. K. Oleynik	M. Fedkin & K. Bazilevskaya	M. Fiori & H. Torbic
Dec 17	Russian Ladies Group B (Elena G.)	M. Leathers & K. Oleynik	M. Fedkin & M. Stickle
Dec 24	C. Swisher, T. Chambers, & C. Pellock	J. Houser & A. Stickle	K. Cattell & B. Haupt
Dec 31	Russian Ladies Group A (Katya F.)	M. Fedkin & K. Bazilevskaya	G. Cattell & H. Torbic
Jan 7	TBD	TBD	M. Fiori & M. Fedkin

■ FROM THE RECTOR’S DESK

# Thanksgiving

It is fitting; it is correct; let us give thanks unto the Lord! This is our calling. This is our vocation as human beings: “it is meet and right.”

And it is with special joy and thanksgiving in our hearts that we should approach this blessed Nativity season and the end of the year. Now is the time to remember Christ’s love for us. Now is the time for us to reflect on *auld lang syne* and give everything back to God in thanksgiving. Do we have enemies? Let us forgive them as Christ now so demonstrably forgives us. Do we have heartache? Let the babe in the manger transform our tears into joy. Do we have faithlessness? Behold, the “Faithful and True” has appeared (Rev 19:11). And “if we are faithless” toward Him, still “He remains faithful” to us, for He loves us more than we can possibly love our own selves (2 Tim 2:13).



Do any of us have treasures? Let us place them in the service of the child that is born. Can we sing like the angels? Let us form a choir! Can we not sing? Let us at least throng together and go to meet him like the shepherds! Grace has come forth. The Son of God has become the Son of the Virgin. Adam is pardoned. Eve is set free. The stars themselves rejoice in their courses. Let us give thanks unto the Lord. Let us glorify the King of Kings. Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! Christ is born! Glorify Him!

— Fr. Ignatius

■ HOMILETICS

# On the Nativity

*The following excerpt is taken from St. Gregory Palamas’ Homily on the Nativity (58), taken from Saint Gregory Palamas: The Homilies (Mount Tabor Publishing, 2009). St. Greogry was the Archbishop of Thessaloniki in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and a theologian best known for articulating the distinction between the essence and energies of God.*

This is the festival of the virgin birth! The pre-eternal and uncircumscribed and almighty Word is now born according to the flesh, without home, without shelter, without dwelling, and placed as a babe in the manger, seen by men’s eyes, touched by their hands, and wrapped in layers of swaddling bands. He is not a spiritual creature coming into being after previously not existing; nor flesh which is brought to birth but will soon perish; nor flesh and mind united to form a rational creature, but God and flesh mingled unconfusedly by the divine Mind to form the existence of one theandric hypostasis, who entered the Virgin’s womb for a time. By the good pleasure of the Father and the co-operation of the Spirit, the Word who transcends being came into being in this womb and by means of it, and now He is delivered from it and born as an infant, not losing but preserving the signs of virginity. He is born without suffering, as He was conceived without passion, for as His mother was shown to be above the pleasure of passion when she conceived, so she is above grievous pains when she gives birth. “Before the pain of travail came upon her, she escaped it” as Isaiah says (Isaiah 66.7 LXX), and she brought forth in the flesh the pre-eternal Word. Not only is His divinity inscrutable, but the manner in which He was united with the flesh is past understanding, His condescension unsurpassable, and the human nature He assumed divinely, ineffably sublime, and so far above all thought and speech, that it does not admit of any comparison with creation. Even though you see in the flesh the child born to the Maid who knew no husband, He is still beyond compare. It says, “He is fair in beauty beside the sons of men” (Psalm 45.2 LXX). It does not say “fairer” but simply “fair”, so as

(continued, see NATIVITY, following page)

■ NEWS & NOTES

## Independent Incorporation for the Chapel of the Holy Spirit

For those who were not present at the annual meeting, we voted unanimously for the Chapel to incorporate separately from Holy Trinity. The Chapel will be renamed “The Orthodox Christian Church of the Holy Spirit” and will receive possession of its real estate on Kern St. in Beavertown, as well as all of its cash assets Holy Trinity has held in trust for it. All of these things are subject to approval by His Eminence Melchisedek, but he has already indicated that it is his intention to allow these things to advance. This reorganization is expected to happen in 2024.

## Calling All Christmas Cookie Bakers!

Do you like to bake Christmas cookies? Add a little Christmas cheer to those in need this Christmas! We are looking for 13-14 bakers to make 30 homemade Christmas cookies to add to the CommonFood December food distribution. For more information, please contact Leoni Georgiou at leomcfar@comcast.net or at (814) 280-7599. If volunteering to bake, please let Leoni know by Friday 12/8. Cookies will need to be baked & given to Leoni for packing by Thursday December 14th.

## Holy Supper

Holy Supper is a traditional Lenten meal on Christmas Eve, the last meal of the Nativity Fast. We will continue this annual parish family tradition by bringing a favorite Lenten food and sharing it with all that are present. The supper will begin at 4:30 PM on December 24<sup>th</sup> in the parish hall. If you have any questions, including food ideas, contact Pdn. Mark or Matushka Kelly.

## A Special Christmas Request

Dear to God, it is my joy every year to ask the parish for certain "Christmas presents," and I want to express my sincere thanksgiving to the whole parish for once again filling up my whole list (and then some) from 2022. This year, however, I have an extra special request. To those who have not filled out pledges towards the mortgage payoff campaign, please prayerfully consider making a pledge. And if you don't like pledging things, then just contribute towards it outright. At our last count we had over \$83,000 pledged and almost \$33,000 received, but we are still well shy of our \$305,000 goal. We all know that in order for Holy Trinity to begin her next chapter, we need to "burn the mortgage." So let's do it! To pledge, fill out one of the pledge forms included in this month's Trisagion and return it to Michael Stickles, Corielle Stickles, or Maria Fiori. May God bless you for your generosity. — Fr. Ignatius

## Many Years!

May God grant many years to the newly crowned Anthony & Julie Cassar, Scott & Sophia Parkhill, and Micah & Tiffany Cattell!

## Share the Good News!

All families and parishioners are invited to sing Christmas carols around town on Friday, December 8th from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. A light meal will be served prior to caroling along with hot chocolate to end the evening. Please join us and bring a friend as we share the good news of the coming Nativity of our Lord. Don't forget to dress warmly and bring your bells.

## Saint Nicholas Tree Drive

Our Saint Nicholas Tree drive enables the disadvantaged in our community to receive gifts through the Matthew 25 Ministry’s partnership with Strawberry Fields. This year we will be providing gifts to 40 people (24 adults and 16 children) who would not otherwise have any presents to open on Christmas. Each tag on the tree has the recipient’s age, gender, and wish. To participate, take a tag and bring the wrapped gift(s) back with the tag securely fastened. The deadline for dropping off gifts at church is Sunday, December 17. Thank you!

## Christmas Poinsettias

Make a donation toward buying the poinsettias for the nave in memory of a loved one or in thanksgiving to God. All commemorations will be printed in the Nativity bulletin and those who sponsor poinsettias can take them home after the New year. There is currently a sign-up in the narthex, as well as online. Thank you!



## ■ CATECHESIS

# Does God Need Us to Worship Him?

*The following is taken from “Essential Orthodox Christian Beliefs,” an adult catechesis freely available on the OCA website.*

The most important thing one can say about worship is that God doesn’t need it. God is the source of all life, beatitude, and joy, the One who is without beginning, who is changeless, and who is never moved by necessity or need. We worship because we need to worship, not because God needs it. God is self-sufficient; He doesn’t need anything. Though this might be taken for granted by many now, it was not the way the ancients thought. In the ancient Near East, for example, men lived with the gods in a kind of symbiotic relationship—they took care of the gods’ needs, offering sacrifice and tending their temples, and the gods in turn took care of them, blessing their crops, and giving them prosperity and peace. Each needed the other. In fact, in the creation stories of the ancient Near East, the gods created mankind to do the work they no longer wanted to do. And in the ancient Epic of Gilgamesh (which contains the story of the Flood also recounted in the Book of Genesis) it is said that when a sacrifice was finally offered again after the Flood, the gods swarmed around it like flies, hungry because no sacrifices were offered during the time of the Flood. It was otherwise for the God worshipped by Israel and the Christians. The whole notion that God needs our worship and our sacrifices is decisively and derisively dismissed in such works as Psalm 49. In this Psalm, Yahweh speaks to his people and declares He does not need their sacrificial animals: “For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is Mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?” Here God ridicules the idea that He is enriched by sacrifice or that He could need anything from men. The rebuke is wry to the point of sarcasm: if God really wanted meat, He would hardly wait to be served it by Israelite priests! What He really wants from his people is not meat, but gratitude and righteous relationship: “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving

and call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and You shall glorify Me” (vs 14–15). This demand for righteousness of life is all-important—so much so that if it is lacking, God not only doesn’t need our worship, but more than that, He will not accept it. When Israel practiced injustice with the rich grinding the face of the poor, the prophetic rebuke was stunning. God thundered to Israel, “What to Me is the multitude of your sacrifices? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they have become a burden to Me, I am weary of bearing them” (Isa 1:11–14). One could scarcely get further away from the concept of a divine-human symbiosis that governed notions of religion in the pagan world. Worship is important not because God needs it, but because we do. Yet our worship must be the offering of a righteous life, a life itself offered in love to God. If we withhold our love from God and turn our backs on him, if we walk in a way He hates and live lives of unrighteousness, our worship is not acceptable to him. In biblical thought, sacrificial worship and ethical living are inseparable, and the former must flow from the latter. Otherwise, our sacrifices will be spurned as the offerings of hypocrisy. They will not result in our drawing close to God and our union with him, but in our condemnation. This was the consistent message of the prophets: Has Yahweh as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying Yahweh’s voice? Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice!” “Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? He has showed you, O man, what is good: and what does Yahweh require of you, but to do justice and to love loyalty, and to walk humbly with your God?” (1 Sam 15:22; Mic 6:6, 8). To worship him truly we must first love him and show our love in humble obedience and righteousness.

## ■ HOMILETICS

# On The Nativity



*St. Gregory Palamas*

not to compare incomparable things: the nature of God Himself to that of mere men.









That is why God who sits upon the cherubim (Psalm 99.1) is set before us as a babe on earth. He upon whom the six-winged seraphim cannot look, being unable to gaze intently not only at His nature but even at the radiance of His glory, and therefore covering their eyes with their wings (Isaiah 6.2), having become flesh, appears to our senses and can be seen by bodily eyes. He who defines all things and is limited by none is contained in a small, makeshift manger. He who holds the universe and grasps it in the hollow of His hand, is wrapped in narrow swaddling bands and fastened into ordinary clothes. He who possesses the riches of inexhaustible treasures submits Himself voluntarily to such great poverty that He does not even have a place at the inn; and so He enters into a cave at the time of His birth, who was brought forth by God timelessly and impassibly and without beginning. And—how great a wonder!—not only does He who shares the nature of the Father on high put on our fallen nature through His birth, nor is He subject merely to the utter poverty of being born in a wretched cave, but right from the very start, while still in the womb, He accepts the final condemnation of our nature. He who is by nature Lord of all is now ranked with the servants and enrolled with them (Luke 2.1-6), clearly making humble service to others no less honorable than the exercise of lordship,

or rather, showing the servants as having greater honor than the earthly ruler at that time, provided of course they understood and obeyed the magnificence of grace. For the man who then seemed to rule the world was not counted with the King of heaven, though all his subjects were, nor was this earthly ruler reckoned then as one of them, but the heavenly Lord was.

If He had been born from seed, He would not have been a new man and, being part of the old stock, and inheriting that fall, He would not have been able to receive the fullness of the incorruptible Godhead in Himself and become an inexhaustible source of hallowing. And so, not only would He not have been able to cleanse, with abundance of power, our forefathers’ defilement caused by sin, but neither would He have been sufficient to sanctify those who came later. Just as water stored in a tank would not be sufficient to provide a large city with enough to drink continuously, but would require its own spring, so that it is never surrendered to the enemy on account of thirst, in the same way, neither a man nor a holy angel who, by sharing in grace, had the ability to make things holy, would suffice to sanctify everyone at all times. But creation needed a well containing its own spring, that those who drew near it and drank their full might remain undefeated by the attacks of weaknesses and deprivations inherent in the created world. So neither an angel nor a man, but the Lord Himself came and saved us, being made a man like us for our sake, and continuing unchanged as God. Building now the new Jerusalem, raising up a temple for Himself with living stones (Ephesians 2.20-21; 1 Peter 2.5), and gathering us into a holy and worldwide Church, He sets in its foundation, which is Christ (1 Corinthians 3.11), the ever-flowing fount of grace. For the Lord’s eternal fullness of life, the all-wise and omnipotent divine nature, is made one with human nature, which was led astray through lack of counsel, enslaved to the evil one out of weakness, and laid in the deepest caverns of Hades for want of divine life, that the Lord might instill into it wisdom and power and freedom and unfailing life.

May we all attain to this, at the future glorious advent and epiphany of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom belongs glory unto the ages. Amen. ■

# Holy Trinity Calendar LIVE Please note that at this time, all services at Holy Trinity are being live-streamed. To watch them online, please visit [holytrinity-oca.org/YouTube](https://holytrinity-oca.org/YouTube)

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
 26  Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am)	 27	 28	 29  Confessions, 4pm Vespers, 6pm Orthodoxy 101, 7pm	 30	 December 1	 2  Choir Rehearsal, 4pm Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following
 3  Sunday School, 9am Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am) Online Directory Presentation, 12 noon	 4	 5  Great Vespers, 6pm	 6 <b>St. Nicholas</b> Divine Liturgy, 8am  Confessions, 4pm Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following	 7	 8  Online Directory Photos/Updates, 1-5:30pm Sunday School Caroling, 5:30-7:30pm	 9  Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following
 10  Sunday School, 9am Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am) Online Directory Photos/Updates, 12 noon	 11	 12	 13  Confessions, 4pm Vespers, 6pm Parish Council Meeting, 7pm	 14	 15	 16  Choir Rehearsal, 4pm Christmas Play Practice, 4:45pm Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following
 17  Baptism – Silas Johnson, 9am Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am) Sunday School Christmas Play, noon	 18	 19	 20 <b>St. Ignatius of Antioch</b> Divine Liturgy, 8am  Confessions, 4pm Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following	 21	 22	 23  Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following
 24  Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am)  Holy Supper, 4:30pm Nativity Vigil, 6pm	25 <b>Nativity of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ</b> Divine Liturgy, 9am	26	27  Vespers, 6pm	28	29	30  Great Vespers, 6pm
31  Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am)  Great Vespers, 6pm	January 1, 2024  <b>St. Basil the Great</b> Divine Liturgy, 10am	2	3  Vespers, 6pm	4	 5 <b>Eve of Theophany</b> Vespersal Divine Liturgy, 9am  Vigil of Theophany, 6pm	6 <b>Theophany of Christ</b> Divine Liturgy, 9am Great Blessing of the Waters, following  Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following

## Chapel Calendar

All events take place at 145 North Kern Street in Beavertown, unless where noted.

- 12/2/2310:00 a.m. CHS Ladies’ Tea/Brunch @ the Rectory (bring a friend!)
- 12/2/236:00 p.m. Great Vespers; Confessions following
- 12/3/2310:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.; fellowship immediately following; catechesis @ 1:30 p.m.
- 12/5/236:00 p.m. St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Great Vespers/Litya
- 12/9/236:00 p.m. Great Vespers; Confessions following
- 12/10/2310:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.; fellowship immediately following; catechesis @ 1:30 p.m.
- 12/12/236:00 p.m. Choir rehearsal
- 12/16/2310:00 a.m. Nativity Church Cleaning/Decorating
- 12/16/236:00 p.m. Great Vespers; Confessions following
- 12/17/2310:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.; fellowship immediately following; catechesis @ 1:30 p.m.
- 12/17/236:00 p.m. Christmas Caroling (from the Rectory)
- 12/19/236:00 p.m. Choir rehearsal
- 12/23/2310:00 a.m. Forefeast of the Nativity Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.
- 12/23/236:00 p.m. Great Vespers; Confessions following
- 12/24/2310:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.; fellowship immediately following
- 12/24/236:00 p.m. Vigil/Litya for the Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ according to the Flesh
- 12/25/2310:00 a.m. Nativity Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.
- 12/26/236:00 p.m. Choir rehearsal
- 12/30/236:00 p.m. Great Vespers; Confessions following
- 12/31/2310:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.; fellowship immediately following
- 12/31/236:00 p.m. Great Vespers/Litya with Moleben (Prayer Service) for the New Year
- 1/1/2410:00 a.m. New Year Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.

All events take place at 119 South Sparks Street in State College, unless where noted.  
Events listed at **Trinity House** take place at 123 South Sparks Street, in State College.

December 2023