

HOLY ASCENSION PARISH NEWSLETTER, JANUARY 2012



THE HOLY ASCENSION ORTHODOX CHURCH
is the Washington, DC, parish of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA), under the omophor (or the conciliar leadership) of Metropolitan Agafangel (Pashkovsky), Bishop of Odessa & Taurida. The Holy Ascension Parish was organized on Ascension Day, 17 May 2007.

BISHOPS & LOCAL CLERGY

✠ Metropolitan Agafangel, First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, Metropolitan of Eastern America and New York, and Bishop of Odessa & Taurida ✠ Vicar Bishop Joseph (Hrebinka) of Washington ✠ Father John Hinton, priest ✠ Father Andrew Frick, deacon ✠ Seraphim Englehardt, subdeacon ✠ John Herbst, subdeacon ✠

ADDRESS

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PART 1. OUR PARISH.

The Holy Ascension parish welcomes all Orthodox people to its sacraments and all people with an interest in Christianity and the abiding Tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church. The immediate Holy Ascension parish member background is Russian émigré and American, with many other English-speaking members. Members, visitors, and people in touch online come from all ethnicities. The Church is One.

<http://www.holyascension.info/>

<http://ruschurchabroad.com/>

<http://sinod.ruschurchabroad.org/engindex.htm>

PART 2. HOLIDAYS OF JANUARY.

JANUARY 1, SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS. KING DAVID



The Sunday before the Nativity of the Lord is known as the Sunday of the Holy Fathers. On this day the Church commemorates all those who were pleasing to God from all ages, from Adam to King David to St Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos, and all those mentioned in the genealogy of *Luke* 3:23-38. The holy prophets and prophetesses are also remembered today, especially the Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths.

The troparion to the Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths--"Great are the accomplishments of faith"--is similar to the Troparion for St Theodore the Recruit (February 17/30, and the first Saturday of Great Lent. The kontakion to St. Theodore, who suffered martyrdom by fire, reminds us tha he also had faith as his breastplate (*I Thessalonians* 5:8).

JANUARY 7, THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD.

The Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, also called Christmas, is one of the Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church, celebrated on December 25/January 7. In the fullness of time, our Lord Jesus Christ was born to the Holy Theotokos Virgin Mary, thus entering into the world as a man and revealing Himself to mankind.

According to the Bible and to Holy Tradition, the Lord Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem in a cave, surrounded by farm animals and shepherds. The Infant Lord Jesus was born into a manger from the Virgin Mary, assisted by her husband St. Joseph. They were forced to travel due to an Imperial Roman census; the odd location of the birth was the result of the refusal of a nearby inn to accommodate the expecting couple (*Luke* 2:1-20). It is known that such dwellings were built and are still built built directly over animal shelters in order to make use of the heat given off by the animals.

Although three *magi*, wise men or magicians, from the East are commonly depicted as visiting during the event itself (or, in Roman Catholic tradition, 12 days thereafter), the Bible records the coming of an unspecified number of wise

men as occurring a few years after the Lord Jesus's birth (see *Matthew 2*). In either case, these *magi* came bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (*Matthew 2:11*). In the hymnography for the feast, these gifts signify the Lord's royalty, divinity, and suffering.



Scholars within the Orthodox Church have demonstrated that, under Hebrew law, male infants were both circumcised and given their actual names eight days after their birth. Within the Orthodox Church, January 1 is celebrated as the "name day" of the Lord Christ Jesus. Thus, the selection of December 25 to celebrate the Nativity of the Christ (who would not be named for eight more days) appears to be a conscious counting backwards from the first day of the calendar year--the day of his being proclaimed the Son of Man--back to His

birthday, the day of His being proclaimed Son of God.

The Nativity liturgical cycle starts with a fast of 40 days that precedes the Nativity feast. It is called the Nativity Fast, or St. Philip's Fast, or the Advent Fast--a time for the Faithful to purify soul and body to enter properly into and to partake of the great spiritual reality of Christ's Coming, much like the preparation for the feast of the Lord's Resurrection. The beginning of the fast on November 15/28 is not liturgically marked by any hymns, but five days later, on the eve of the Feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos, we hear the first announcement from the nine *Irmoi* of the Christmas Canon "Christ is born, glorify Him!" This period includes other special preparatory days announcing the approaching Nativity: St Andrew's Day, November 30/December 13; St Nicholas Day, December 6/19; the Sunday of the Forefathers; and the Sunday of the Fathers.

December 20 begins the Forefeast of the Nativity. The liturgical structure is similar to the Holy Week preceding Pascha. The Orthodox Church sees the Birth of the Son of God as the beginning of the saving ministry that will lead Him, for the sake of man's salvation, to the sacrifice on the Cross.

On the eve of the Nativity, the Royal Hours are read and the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is served with Vespers. At these services the Old Testament prophecies of Christ's birth are chanted. There is also a tradition of a special Holy Supper--even of a single 12-course lenten dinner--to be served before the Orthodox family goes to the church.

The Vigil of Christmas begins with Great Compline because Vespers has already been served. At Compline there is the singing of the troparion and kontakion of the feast with special hymns glorifying the Savior's birth. There are also the special long litanies of intercession and the solemn blessing of the five loaves of bread together with the wheat, wine, and oil. The faithful partake of the bread soaked in the wine and are also anointed with the oil. This part of the festal vigil, which is done on all great feasts, is called in Slavonic the *litya* and in Greek *artoklasia*, or *the breaking of the bread*. The

order of Matins is that of a great feast. Here, for the first time, the full Canon “Christ is born” is sung while the faithful venerate the Nativity icon.

Concluding the celebration of the Nativity of Christ is the Liturgy. It begins with psalms of glorification and praise instead of the three normal antiphons. The troparion and kontakion mark the entrance with the book of the gospels. The baptismal line from *Galatians* 3:27 once again replaces the Thrice-Holy. The epistle reading is from *Galatians* 4:4-7, the gospel reading is the familiar Christmas story from *Matthew* 2:1-12, and then the liturgy continues in the normal fashion.

The second day of the feast starts a two-day celebration of the Synaxis of the Theotokos. Combining the hymns of the Nativity with those celebrating the Mother of God, the Church points to Saint Mary the Theotokos as the one person through whom the Incarnation was possible. St. Stephen, the First Martyr, is also remembered on these two days. The festal period extends to Theophany, during which time the Christmas songs are sung and fasting and kneeling in prayer are not called for. Throughout this time, some Orthodox Christians greet each other with the words: “Christ is born!” and the response: “Glorify Him!” Many in the English-speaking world will also use the phrase “Merry Christmas!”

Troparion (Tone 4)

*Your Nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shone to the world the Light of wisdom!
For by it, those who worshipped the stars,
Were taught by a Star to adore You,*

*The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know You, the Orient from on High.
O Lord, glory to You!
Kontakion (Tone 3)*

*Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One,
And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One!*

*Angels with shepherds glorify Him!
The wise men journey with a star!
Since for our sake the Eternal God was born as a Little Child!*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, AFTERFEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST, RIGHTEOUS DAVID THE KING, JOSEPH THE BETROTHED AND JAMES THE BROTHER OF THE LORD.

The holy and righteous King David was the second king of all Israel, after Saul, ruling around 1000 B.C. He was also a prophet, having written a great number of the Psalms, and was one of the Forefathers of Christ. The Church commemorates him together with all the ancestors of Christ on the Sunday of the Forefathers, depending on the day on which the Nativity falls and also on the first Sunday after the Nativity, along with St. Joseph the Betrothed and the Apostle James the Just, who died in AD 62, and who was the first Bishop or Patriarch of Jerusalem. According to the *Protoevangelion of James*, St. James was the son of St. Joseph—along with the other ‘brethren of the Lord’ mentioned in scripture—from a marriage prior to his betrothal to Saint Mary the Theotokos. St. James wrote an epistle that is part of the New Testament. St. James is commemorated on October 23, on December 26 and also on this first Sunday after the Nativity, along with David the King and St. Joseph again, and on January 4 among the Seventy Apostles.

JANUARY 14, FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST.

The Feast of the Circumcision of Christ is a Christian celebration of the circumcision of the Lord Jesus in accordance with Jewish tradition, eight days, of course, after His birth. The Circumcision of the Lord Jesus has traditionally been seen as the first time the Blood of Christ was shed, and thus the beginning of the process of the Redemption of Man, and a demonstration that Christ was fully human and obedient to Biblical law. The feast day appears on 1/14 January in the liturgical calendar of the Orthodox Church.

The feast is celebrated with an All-Night Vigil, beginning the evening of December 31/January 13. The hymns of the feast are combined with those for Saint Basil the Great. After the Divine Liturgy the next morning, Russian Orthodox churches often celebrate a New Year Molieben (service of intercession) to pray for God's blessing for the beginning of the civil New Year. The Orthodox commemorate the Indiction, or Ecclesiastical New Year, on September 1. According to the Julian calendar, 1 January will correspond to 14 January on the Gregorian Calendar until the year 2100.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15: THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, SAINT SERAPHIM OF SAROV, SAINT SYLVESTER.

Saint Seraphim of Sarov (1759–1833), born Prokhor Moshnin, is one of the most renowned Russian monks and mystics in the Orthodox Church. He is generally considered the greatest of the 19th-century *startsy* (elders) as well as the first. He is remembered for extending the monastic teachings of contemplation, *theoria*, and self-denial to the layperson, and he taught that the purpose of the Christian life was to acquire the Holy Spirit. Seraphim was glorified (canonized) by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1903. The date of his death is his major feast day. Reverence for him is not limited to the Orthodox; Pope John Paul II referred to him as a saint in his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.

Saint Sylvester was Bishop of Rome from 314 until December 31, 335. He led the Church of Rome during the two first decades following the Edict of Milan. He is commemorated on January 2/15.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, THEOPHANY.

Usually called the Feast of Theophany "God shining forth" or "divine manifestation"), it is one of the Great Feasts of the liturgical year, being third in rank, behind only Paska (Easter) and Pentecost in importance. It is celebrated on January 6/19. The earliest reference to the feast in the Eastern Church is a

remark by St. Clement of Alexandria in *Stromateis*, I, xxi, 45:

And there are those who have determined not only the year of our Lord's birth, but also the day... And the followers of Basilides hold the day of his baptism as a festival, spending the night before in readings. And they say that it was the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, the fifteenth day of the month of Tubi; and some that it was the eleventh of the same month. (The 11th and 15th of Tubi are January 6 and 10 respectively.)



Today in Eastern Orthodox churches, the emphasis at this feast is on the shining forth and revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Second Person of the Trinity at the time of his baptism. It is also celebrated because, according to tradition, the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist marked one of two occasions only when all three Persons of the Trinity manifested themselves simultaneously to humanity: God the Father by speaking through the clouds,

God the Son being baptized in the river, and God the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove descending from heaven. The other occasion was the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Thus the holy day is considered to be a Trinitarian feast.

The Orthodox consider Jesus' Baptism to be the first step towards the Crucifixion, and there are some parallels in the hymnography used on this day and the hymns chanted on Good Friday.

The Eve of the Feast is called *Paramony* in Greek and *Navechérie* in Slavonic. Paramony is observed as a strict fast day, on which those faithful who are physically able, refrain from food until the first star is observed in the evening, when a meal with wine and oil may be taken. On this day the Royal Hours are celebrated, thus tying together the feasts of Nativity and Good Friday. The Royal Hours are followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, which combines Vespers with the Divine Liturgy. During the Vespers, 15 Old Testament lections that foreshadow the Baptism of Christ are read, and special antiphons are chanted.

The Orthodox Churches perform the Great Blessing of Waters on Theophany. The blessing is normally done twice: once on the Eve of the Feast – usually at a Baptismal font inside the church – and then again on the day of the feast, outdoors at a body of water. Following the Divine Liturgy, the clergy and people go in a *Crucession* (procession with the cross) to the nearest body of water, be it a beach, harbor, quay, river, lake, swimming pool, water depot, etc. (ideally, it should be a body of “living water”). At the end of the ceremony the priest will bless the waters. In the Greek practice, he does this by casting a cross into the water. If swimming is feasible, any number of volunteers may try to recover the cross. In Russia, where the winters are more severe, a hole is cut into the ice so that the waters may be blessed. In such conditions, the cross is not cast into the water, but is held securely by the priest and dipped three times into the water.

The water that is blessed on this day is known as “Theophany Water” and is taken home by the faithful, and used with prayer as a blessing. People will not only bless themselves and

their homes by sprinkling with Theophany Water, but will also drink it. The Orthodox Church teaches that Theophany Water differs from regular holy water in that with Theophany Water, the very nature of the water is changed and becomes incorrupt, a miracle attested to as early as St. John Chrysostom.

Theophany is a traditional day for performing Baptisms, which are reflected in the Divine Liturgy by singing the baptismal hymn, “As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Alleluia,” in place of the Trisagion.

On Theophany the priest will also begin making the round of the parishioner's homes to bless them. He may perform a short prayer service in each home, and then go through the entire house, gardens and outside-buildings, blessing them with the newly blessed Theophany Water, while people present all sing the troparion and kontakion of the feast. This is normally done on Theophany, or at least during the Afterfeast, but if the parishioners are numerous, and if many live far away from the church, it may take some time to bless each house. Traditionally, these blessings should be finished before the beginning of Great Lent.

The Feast of Theophany is followed by an eight-day Afterfeast on which the normal fasting laws are suspended. The Saturday and Sunday after Theophany have special readings assigned to them, which relate to the Temptation of Christ and to penance and perseverance in the Christian struggle. There is thus a liturgical continuum between the Feast of Theophany and the beginning of Great Lent.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY

AFTER PENTECOST, MARTYR POLYEUCTUS

This Martyr St. Polyeuctus of Melitene in Armenia died in 259. Christian tradition states that he was a wealthy Roman army officer who was martyred at Melitene, Armenia, under the Emperor Valerian. Symeon Metaphrastes writes that, moved by the zeal of his friend Saint Nearchus, Polyeuctus had openly converted to Christianity. “Enflamed with zeal, St. Poly

euctus went to the city square, and tore up the edict of Decius which required everyone to worship idols. A few moments later, he met a procession carrying 12 idols through the streets of the city. He dashed the idols to the ground and trampled them underfoot."He was tortured by the authorities and ignored the tears and protestations of his wife Paulina, his children, and his father-in-law Felix. He was beheaded. The French playwright Pierre Corneille wrote the a tragedy of *Polyeucte* that appeared in 1642.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 29: THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, CHAINS OF SAINT PETER.

The Liberation of St. Peter is a story told in the *Acts of the Apostles* in which St. Peter is rescued from prison by an angel. Although described in a short textual passage, the tale has given rise to theological discussion and been the subject of many artworks.

Acts 12:3-19 tells how St. Peter was put into prison by King Herod, but the night before his trial an angel appeared to him, and told him to leave. St. Peter's chains fell off, and he followed the angel out of prison, thinking it was a vision (v. 9). The prison doors opened of their own accord, and the angel led St. Peter into the city.

When the angel suddenly left him, St. Peter came to himself and returned to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. A servant girl called Rhoda came to answer the door, and when she heard Peter's voice she was so overjoyed that she rushed to tell the others, and forgot to open the door for St. Peter (v. 14). Eventually St. Peter was let in and describes "how the Lord had brought him out of prison" (v. 17). When his escape is discovered, King Herod orders the guards put to death (v. 19)

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PART 3. LITURGIES DURING THE US CIVIL MONTH OF JANUARY 2012.

All Sunday Liturgies begin at 10:00 AM. A luncheon buffet follows all Sunday liturgies. Volunteers may offer help with cooking at home and last preparation at the church.

Currently a regular schedule also designates a family that is responsible for cleaning the church after the services. The duty is for one month at a time. If you wish to volunteer, please see the warden/starosta, Mr Gontscharow.

Sunday, January 1, Twenty-ninth Sunday After Pentecost,
Sunday of the Holy Fathers, Hours & Divine Liturgy at
9:40 AM.

Thursday, January 5, Matins at 6:30 PM.

Friday, January 6, Eve of the Nativity of Christ, Royal Hours,
Typica, Great Vespers, & Divine Liturgy at 6:40 AM.
Great Compline & Matins at 5:30 PM.

Saturday, January 7, Nativity of Christ, Hours & Divine
Liturgy at 9:40 AM.

NATIVITY RECEPTION, VIENNA, VIRGINIA
All-Night Vigil at 5 PM.

Sunday, January 8, Thirtieth Sunday After Pentecost,
Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ, Righteous David the
King, St. Joseph the Betrothed, and St. James the
Brother of the Lord. Hours & Divine Liturgy at 9:40 AM.

Friday, January 13, All-Night Vigil at 6:30 PM.

Saturday, January 14, The Circumcision of Christ, Hours &
Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great at 8:40 AM.
All-Night Vigil at 5:30 PM.

Sunday, January 15, Thirty-First Sunday After Pentecost,
St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Sylvester, Hours & Divine
Liturgy at 9:40 AM.

Tuesday, January 17, Matins at 6:30 PM.

Wednesday, January 18, Eve of Theophany, Royal Hours &
Vespers Divine Liturgy of St. Basil at 6:00 AM.
Great Compline and Matins at 6:30 PM.

Thursday, January 19, Theophany, Hours, Divine Liturgy, &
the Great Blessing of Water at 6:40 AM.

Saturday, January 21, Vigil at 5 PM.

Sunday, January 22, Thirty-Second Sunday After Pentecost,
Martyr Polyeuctus, Hours & Divine Liturgy at 9:40 AM.

Tuesday, January 24, Vespers & Matins at 6:30 PM.

Saturday, January 28, All-Night Vigil at 5 PM.

Sunday, January 29: Thirty-Third Sunday After Pentecost,
Chains of St. Peter. Hours & Divine Liturgy at 9:40 AM

Tuesday, January 31, Vespers & Matins at 6:30 PM.

Saturday, February 4, All-Night Vigil at 5 PM.

Sunday, February 5, Sunday of the Publican & the Pharisee,
Hieromartyr Clement, New Martyrs & Confessors of
Russia, Hours & Divine Liturgy at 9:40 AM.

Church calendars for the civil year 2012 are on sale
at the book stand for \$5.00 each.



Please report any questions and all corrections to the newsletter
preparer--patrick Brown, hpcjfbrown@cox.net

