

**St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Church of the San Fernando Valley**  
**a Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**  
**16643 Vanowen Street; Van Nuys, California; 91406** [stmichaelvannuys.org](http://stmichaelvannuys.org)

His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH, Archbishop of New York  
and Metropolitan of all North America [www.antiochian.org](http://www.antiochian.org)  
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Council Treasurer - Julie Bitar [jbitar027@gmail.com](mailto:jbitar027@gmail.com)

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Property Management Chair - Eric Nelson [ericnelson2520@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ericnelson2520@sbcglobal.net)  
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Head Usher - Ramez Hage [jeddo.ramez@gmail.com](mailto:jeddo.ramez@gmail.com)

# **The Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Jerusalem Temple**

**Sunday, November 21, 2021**

**Tone 5; Eothinon 11**

## **Apolytikion for the Resurrection (Tone 5)**

Let us believers praise and worship the Word; coeternal with the Father and the Spirit, born of the Virgin for our salvation. For, He took pleasure in ascending the Cross in the flesh to suffer death; and to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection.

## **Apolytikion for the Entrance of the Theotokos (Tone 4)**

Today the Virgin is the foreshadowing of the pleasure of God, and the beginning of the preaching of the salvation of mankind. Thou hast appeared in the Temple of God openly and hast gone before, preaching Christ to all. Let us shout with one thrilling voice, saying: Rejoice, O thou who art the fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation.

## **Kontakion for the Entrance Theotokos (Tone 4)**

The sacred treasury of God's holy glory, the greatly precious bridal chamber and Virgin, the Savior's most pure temple, free of stain and undefiled, into the House of the Lord on this day is brought forward and bringeth with herself the grace of the Most Divine Spirit; her do God's Angels hymn with songs of praise, for she is truly the heavenly tabernacle.

## **Daily Readings**

THE EPISTLE (for the Presentation of the Theotokos)

*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.  
He hath regarded the lowliness of His servant.*

## **The Reading from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews (9:1-7)**

Brethren, the first tabernacle had ordinances of the divine services and an earthly sanctuary. For the first tabernacle was prepared, in which were the candlestick, and the table, and the bread of the offering,

which is called the Sanctuary. And behind the second veil stood the tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies; having a golden altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, which contained a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the two tablets of the covenant; and above it the two Cherubim of glory overshadowing the Ark's lid; of these things, we cannot now speak in particular. Now these things having been thus prepared, the priests go in continually into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the divine services; but into the second the high priest enters alone, once in the year, not without blood, which he offers for himself, and for the ignorances of the people.

THE GOSPEL (for the Ninth Sunday of Luke)

**The Reading of the Holy Gospel is according to St. Luke (10:38-42; 11:27-28)**

At that time, Jesus entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to Him and said, "Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her." As He said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that Thou didst suck!" But He said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

### **The Synaxarion**

On November 21 in the Holy Orthodox Church we celebrate the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple.

#### Verses

Within the temple, Gabriel feedeth thee, O Maid,  
And shortly he shall come and shall say to thee: Rejoice.  
On the twenty-first Mary entereth the sacred fane.

Leading the procession into the Temple were virgins with lighted tapers in their hands, then the three-year-old Most-holy Virgin, led by her

father and mother. The Virgin was clad in vesture of royal magnificence and adornments as was befitting the “King’s daughter, the Bride of God” (Psalm 44:13-15). Following them were many kinsmen and friends, all with lighted tapers. Fifteen steps led up to the Temple. Joachim and Anna lifted the Virgin onto the first step, then she ran quickly to the top herself, where she was met by the High Priest Zachariah, who was to be the father of St. John the Forerunner. Taking her by the hand, he led her not only into the Temple, but into the “Holy of Holies,” the holiest of holy places, into which no one but the high priest ever entered, and only once each year, at that. Zachariah “was outside himself and possessed by God” when he led the Virgin into the holiest place in the Temple, beyond the second curtain—otherwise, his action could not be explained. The Most-holy Virgin remained in the Temple and dwelt there for nine full years. While her parents were alive, they visited her often. When God called her parents from this world, the Most-holy Virgin was left an orphan and did not wish to leave the Temple until death or to enter into marriage. The Most-holy Virgin Mary was the first of such life-vowed virgins, of the thousands and thousands of virgin men and women who would follow her in the Church of Christ. Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Christ God, have mercy upon us. Amen..

## **LITURGICAL CALENDAR**

Fast of the Holy Nativity - November 15 - December 24

[This fast is divided into two periods: 1) November 15 - December 19 - the traditional fasting discipline includes no meat, poultry, dairy, fish, wine and olive oil on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, with provision for wine and oil (some also permit fish) on Tuesdays and Thursdays; with fish, wine and olive oil on Saturdays and Sundays [A dispensation has been provided on Thanksgiving Day, November 25];  
2) December 20-24 - the traditional fast is Monday through Friday with provision for wine and olive oil on Friday, December 24.]

Thanksgiving Day (USA) - November 25<sup>th</sup>

**The Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Thirteenth Sunday of Luke**

Saturday, November 27<sup>th</sup>, Great Vespers, 5 p.m.

Sunday, November 28<sup>th</sup>, Orthros, 8:45 a.m., Divine Liturgy, 10 a.m.

## **THE CHRISTMAS FAST – ADVENT**

The Church ordains that this preparation begins on November 15. The Fast is forty days long and is sometimes known as Philip's Fast because it begins the day after November 14, which is dedicated to St. Philip the Apostle.

The Fast has very ancient origins. Leo the Great, in the Fifth Century, made mention of it as an ancient, established Fast, which gave importance to the event of the Birth of Christ by the Church, even at that time. The Christians Church did not universally observe the Fast in length and method until the Council of Constantinople in 1166 AD. It was at that Council that the ancient regulations and various customs and traditions of the churches were studied and forty days was chosen to be most representative.

Many of us want the Feast without the penitential note that precedes it. We want Christmas without Advent. The result is that most of us only “observe” the day of Christmas and fail to “keep” the day holy. The Christmas fast gives us time to meditate upon the meaning of our Lord's coming (God born as a man) – in the past, present, and future. Only to the extent that we prepare carefully for His Coming can we receive Him worthily. Hence, as Christmas approaches, we should be aware of the meaning of the Christmas fast (Advent) upon us and our souls. Consciences need examination; sins need to be forgiven. Above all, souls need refreshment with His Sacramental Presence when the Christmas Fast ends and Christ is born.

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## **OFFERINGS**

Special offerings and requests for prayer are being made . . .

by Diana & Riad Nasser for Stevie Dunphy, celebrating his 16th birthday; also remembering Diana's father. Prayers are also offered for the safety of Stevie and Nicole's safe travel to Tucson.

for the recovery and good health of Tere Chala

for the recovery and good health of Barbara Bohamed and her family

for the continued health and prosperity of Antoine & Susan Berberi and family on their move to Louisville, Kentucky; also for the speedy recovery and good health of Jeannette Berberi who resides in Falls Church, Virginia, with her daughter, Vicki.

for the one-year memorial of James Mitchell  
(+18 November, 2020), beloved brother, brother-in-law and uncle of  
Michael Mitchell and family. Memory eternal.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Church Offering Options

Your church offering may be made on-line via our website "Donation" tab or by mailing your check to the church at: 16643 Vanowen Street; Van Nuys, California; 91406. Mailing your check to the church will save our church a 3% service charge. Other options for your contributions include: a) automatic bill pay; b) recurring automatic withdrawal, both of which may be arranged with your bank. You may contact us for assistance with any of these options; especially when information of our bank routing and account numbers are needed. Note: Donations to the Building Fund must remain a separate payment from our offerings and pledges to our Operating Fund. Our General Fund and Building Fund are in different banks.

### Church Attendance

We request that everyone attending our church services wear face coverings due to the City policy. Church School in-person class sessions begin following Holy Communion. Care has been taken to ensure that our classrooms are safe for our children. Questions will also be answered by Father Timothy by e-mail at: [frtimothy@stmichaelvannuys.org](mailto:frtimothy@stmichaelvannuys.org)

**Note to Coffee Hour hosts: coffee and paper goods will be provided each week.**

#### **Holy Bread Offering List**

Nov 28 - open  
Dec 05 - Don Meena  
Dec 12 - open  
Dec 19 - open  
Dec 24, 25, 26 - open

#### **Coffee Hour Hosts Calendar**

Church School Family Lunch

Please contact Fr. Timothy (818/219-3761; [frtimothy@stmichaelvannuys.org](mailto:frtimothy@stmichaelvannuys.org)) to sign-up to offer Holy Bread.

## Parish Council Nominations

Today: Sunday, November 21, 2021, we will be holding a brief virtual and in-person Special Meeting of the Voting Membership solely for the purpose of receiving and accepting nominations for Parish Council members to be elected for there (3), three-year terms (January, 2022 to December, 2024). At this meeting the Nominations Committee will present their report and additional nominations will be open from the floor.

It is important that persons being considered be able to fulfill the commitment to serve. Therefore it is necessary that all nominees first be personally asked if they would accept nomination, and second be approved by the Pastor as someone who is qualified. The Parish Constitution prescribes that all nominees must be at least twenty-five years of age or older, have been a pledging members of the parish for at least one year and have fulfilled the canonical requirements of the Faith [Article VI, Sec. 2]. The nominees must also be committed in attending monthly Parish Council meetings held on the third (3rd) Sunday of each month.

We sincerely thank Regan Hines [ending his first (1st) term; able to be nominated]; Subdeacon Richard Ajalat [ending his first (1st) term; able to be nominated]; and Kris Thabit [completing his first (1st) term; able to be nominated]. Our one-year appointed members whose terms are expiring are: Adam Lamar [completing his first year appointed and a three-year term], and Michael Mitchell [completing a maximum of eight consecutive elected and appointed years].

The Parish Council election will be held on two (2) consecutive Sundays: November 28 and December 5. Council members whose terms are unexpired are: Joe Ayoub, Connie Abdun-Nur Barilla, Julie Bitar, John Khouri, Deacon Andrew Monsue and Dan Raju. Charmaine Darmour is also completing her eleventh (11th) consecutive year as President of the Antiochian Women. The following names have been submitted for nomination to fill the three (3) year terms and three (3) one (1) year terms: **Richard Ajalat, Adam Lamar, Britton McLinn, Michael Paraskevas, Maria Safady** and **Kris Thabit**. Three from the list will be accepting a one-year appointment.

## **Teen SOYO Raffle**

Additional tickets for our Annual Teen SOYO Raffle will be available each Sunday until the date of the drawing, Sunday, December 19, 2021. Thank you for your support.

## **Join Our Weekly Bible Study Each Tuesday Evening at 7 p.m.**

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be held on Tuesday evening, November 23rd, at 7 p.m. We have begun a study of II Corinthians and will be reading Chapters 8 and 9 this week. A Zoom Meeting link will be provided by e-mail on Tuesday.

## **2021 Parish Christmas Card**

This is the last call for sign-ups. The purpose of the Christmas card is to provide the convenience of having greetings extended to our hierarchs and parishioners by means of a group card. It also provides the schedule of services for season. The order those listed is not alphabetical, but in a sequence based upon the date the request is received. The form is being provided on our parish website, by e-mail and upon request.

## **Bookstore Orders Available on Parish Website**

Place an order through our parish website or e-mail Bobbi Monsue (Manager) for special orders at: [bobbi\\_monsue@att.net](mailto:bobbi_monsue@att.net). Your credit card will also be accepted for payment. Please come in and browse through our expanding selection of new books, icons and special Christmas gift ideas. Special orders may also be made by request. A new book soon to arrive is: *Syria Crucified: Stories of Modern Martyrdom in an Ancient Christian Land.*

## **Thanksgiving Interfaith Service**

With the blessing of Metropolitan JOSEPH, Father Timothy is among the speakers at this year's virtual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service. You may connect today, November 21st at 4 p.m., using the following link: <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5586815091?>

<https://www.interfaithsolidaritynetwork.org/2020/11/21/interfaith-thanksgiving-service/>



ISN's Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service



# BUILDING PEACE

**A Zoom Event**  
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21  
from 4:00 to 5:00 pm

Join us to celebrate how our respective faiths 'raise us up' to live our lives beyond conflict and to build peace and foster reconciliation among us.

Full details & RSVP at  
[www.interfaithsolidaritynetwork.org](http://www.interfaithsolidaritynetwork.org)  
We will send you the Zoom link with confirmation of your RSVP.



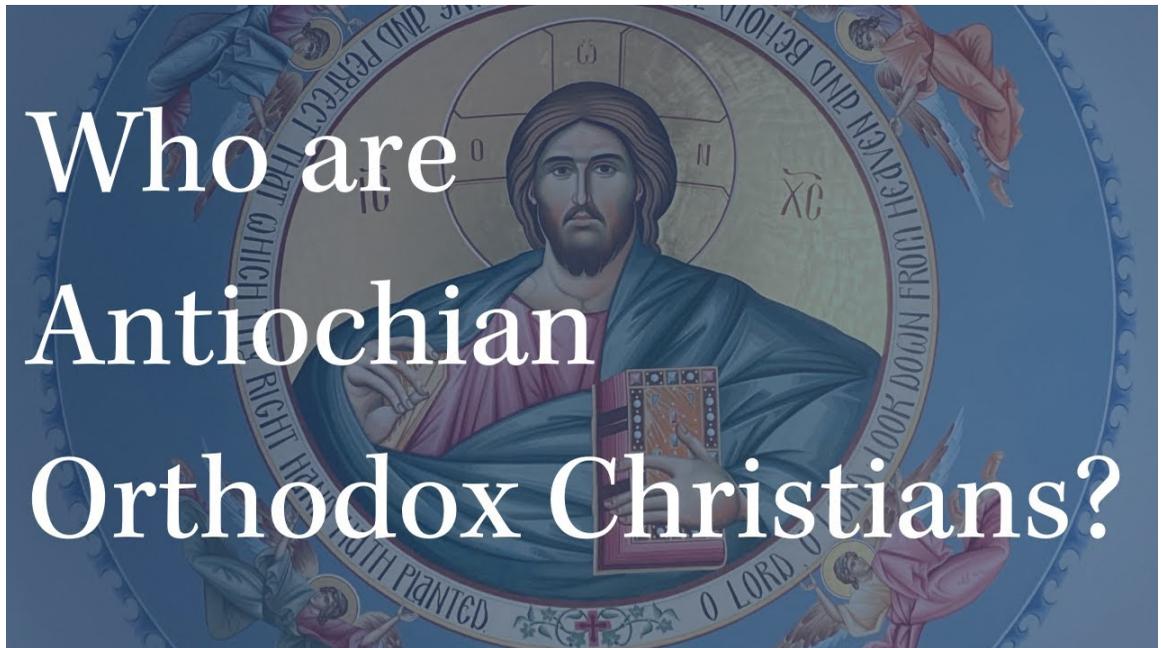
## These 7 faiths present:

Islamic Society of West Valley  
Our Lady of Grace  
Shir Ami  
St. Michael Antiochan  
Valley Outreach Synagogue  
Radha Govind Dham Hindu Meditation Center  
LA Bahai

Shaykh Suhail Mulla  
Father Marinello Saguin  
Rabbi David Vorspan  
Father Timothy Baclig  
Rabbi Sara Abrams  
Sailesh Ranchod  
Randy Dobbs

Plus: Mylene Marie, Bethel Lutheran, ISN and Tiffany Shine, ISN, The Reverend Daniel Tamm, ISN Chair & All Saints Parish, Beverly Hills, Rabbi Jim Kaufman Temple Beth Hillel, ISN

**Note: Father Timothy's recorded Thanksgiving Message is also available by connecting to the following YouTube link:**



# Who are Antiochian Orthodox Christians?

## **St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Church of the San Fernando Valley**

16643 Vanowen Street, Van Nuys, California 91406-4622  
Metropolitan JOSEPH, Archbishop of New York and all North America

Dear Parishioners & Friends of St. Michael,

St. Michael continues to support Loaves & Fishes, a local pantry serving the impoverished areas in Van Nuys and throughout the San Fernando Valley areas. Please phone 818-345-4363 should you be able to participate in our Thanksgiving and/or Christmas food collection. There are a few ways in participating:

1. If you would like me to shop for you, just write a check made out to "St. Michael Church," earmarked "Holiday Food Collection" (a tax incentive).
2. If you are doing your own shopping at Ralph's or Food-4-Less stores, don't forget to use your Ralphs Reward Card to help St. Michael Church to benefit.

3. Loaves and Fishes is also in need of the following: Personal care items including, deodorant, soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, sanitary napkins and disposable razors; baby items such as diapers, 5T Pull-Ups or larger, and baby formula; bottled water, canned food items (preferably with pull-up tabs), i.e., tuna, chicken, baked beans, fruit, vegetables, chili, soups, pasta/ravioli, peanut butter, Ensure, Carnation Instant Breakfast, coffee, tea; also any store gift cards in \$5 and \$10; clothing and household items.

**All food items must be delivered to our Community Center Narthex by today, Sunday, November 21st and Sunday December 19th.** A cart marked Food Collection will be placed in the Narthex for your donations.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours in Christ,

Cindy Tamoush

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## Upcoming Events

**St. Nicholas Cathedral Ladies Society Sweetheart Ball** - Saturday, November 27, 2021; Universal Hilton Hotel, Universal City; Social Hour, 6ths p.m., Presentation, 7 p.m., \$195/person tickets: Lauren Malouf: 818-687-0406; [lmalouf@hchc.edu](mailto:lmalouf@hchc.edu)

### **Second Installation of Church Iconography**

December 6-15; December 27 to January 8

**St. Michael (Whittier) Advent Retreat** - Saturday, December 11 beginning at 9 a.m. (RSVP to: [stmichaelwhittier@gmail.com](mailto:stmichaelwhittier@gmail.com))  
Three meditations are being presented by Father John Fenton  
The Retreat is hosted by the Society of St. Benedict and is open to all.

**St. Michael Church School Christmas Program and Family Lunch**  
Sunday, December 19, 2021

**St. Michael 30th Golf Classic:** Monday, May 23, 2022 at  
Wood Ranch Golf Club (Simi Valley)

<[www.woodranchgc.com](http://www.woodranchgc.com)>

**St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Church  
of the San Fernando Valley**

16643 Vanowen Street, Van Nuys, California 91406-4622

Dear Fellow Parishioners of St. Michael:

**Our next family lunch is scheduled for Sunday, December 19, 2021 following our Church School Christmas Program.** As in the past, donations will be received for the Church School for the meal that will help with our curriculum.

I have been asked about whether or not we are having “coffee hours” after Liturgy on Sundays. Yes, any family may host a coffee hour, however, with the understanding that they provide all paper goods: plates (if needed) and napkins. Hosts are completely responsible for the set-up and kitchen clean-up. No one person should be expected to be responsible for an early set-up and clean up each week unless someone is willing to gladly volunteer to do so. The goal of our coffee hour is: FELLOWSHIP not fundraising. We want to maximize every opportunity for all of us to meet and get to know each other.

It is recommended that coffee hours be kept as simple as possible. We have found it very convenient to order coffee (regular and decaf) in insulated containers with the paper goods, cream and sugar. This will not burden anyone to arrive extra early and to remain to clean-up after everyone leaves. **At this time, it is necessary that all food is served prepared in advance and individually wrapped. It is also requested that individually sealed beverages, i.e., water, punch and carbonated drinks, be provided.**

With limited space, now have eight (8) reception high tables that may be used indoors or outdoors, since round table and chair set-ups are sponsored in advance of outdoor luncheons. We anticipate having a fully operational banquet room once we are able to move into our new church sanctuary. For the time being, we appreciate everyone’s patience and understanding. Should you have any questions, please speak with Father Timothy.

*V. Rev. Timothy Baclig*  
Pastor

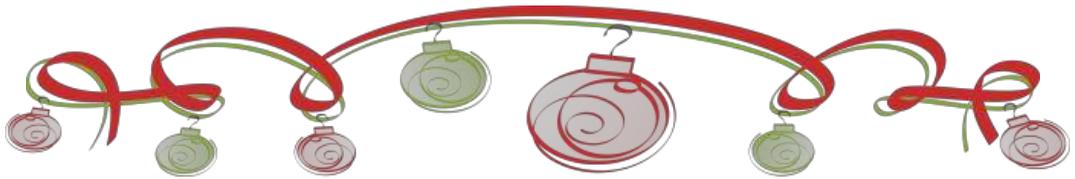


# TOY CHRISTMAS DRIVE

ACCEPTING DONATIONS UNTIL

**DECEMBER 12TH, 2021**

DONATE GENTLY USED OR NEW TOYS TO GIVE  
CHILDREN A BETTER HOLIDAY THIS YEAR!



YOU ARE ALL INVITED TO OUR PRESENTATION OF

## THE BIRTH OF CHRIST



December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Immediately following Liturgy

Come and see our short presentation of The Birth of Christ featuring our Church School students and some of our Parents as main Characters

*A LENTEN LUNCH WILL FOLLOW WITH A VISITOR FROM YOU KNOW WHO (SANTA) DURING THE LUNCHEON*

Anyone wanting to contribute, make sweets or help serve, contact  
Debi Dodds 818.489.0635, [debisdodds@gmail.com](mailto:debisdodds@gmail.com)

**ATTN: PARENTS** = Students will be fitted in costume on Dec 5<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> during Church School. Parents are encourage to also participate

*For more info, contact Lila Coudsy- 818.257.2030 [lcoudsy@aol.com](mailto:lcoudsy@aol.com)*



## SCHEDULE OF FESTAL SERVICES

[The Sacrament of Confession with Absolution is available by appointment or up until 15 minutes prior to the services.]

[All Services are Live-streamed]

### **The Sunday before The Holy Nativity**

#### **“The Sunday of the Genealogy”**

Saturday, December 18<sup>th</sup> – Great Vespers, 5 p.m.

Sunday, December 19<sup>th</sup> – Orthros, 8:30 a.m., Divine Liturgy,\* 10 a.m.

### **THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY IN THE FLESH OF OUR LORD, GOD, AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST**

Friday, December 24<sup>th</sup> (Christmas Eve and *Paramon*)

The Great (“Royal”) Hours and Typika, 6 a.m., 9 a.m., noon

The Ninth Royal Hour, 2:30 p.m. Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great\* – 3 p.m.

Saturday, December 25<sup>th</sup> (Christmas Day)

Orthros and the Christmas Canon, 8:30 a.m., Divine Liturgy,\* 10 a.m.

[There is **no** fasting from December 25<sup>th</sup> to January 4<sup>th</sup>]

### **The Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos**

#### **The Sunday after The Holy Nativity**

Saturday, December 25<sup>th</sup> – Great Vespers, 5 p.m.

Sunday, December 26<sup>th</sup> – Orthros, 8:45 a.m.; Divine Liturgy,\* 10 a.m.

### **The Circumcision of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ and the Feast of St. Basil the Great (New Year’s Day)**

Friday, December 31<sup>st</sup> (New Year’s Eve) – Great Vespers, 5 p.m.  
with prayers for the New Year

Saturday, January 1<sup>st</sup> (New Year’s Day) – Orthros, 8:45 a.m.;  
Divine Liturgy,\* 10 a.m., with prayers for the New Year

### **THE GREAT FEAST OF HOLY THEOPHANY (EPIPHANY)**

Wednesday, January 5<sup>th</sup> - The Eve (*Paramon*)

The Great and Royal Hours, 6 a.m., 9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m.

The Ninth Royal Hour, 2:30 p.m. Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great\* – 3 p.m.

Thursday, January 6th — Festal Orthros, 8:30 a.m. immediately followed by  
The Festal Divine Liturgy\* and the Great Blessing of the Waters

*\* Services with Holy Communion*

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**Pastor's Sermon**  
**The Feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos**  
**(November 21<sup>st</sup>)**

By V. Rev. Timothy Baclig

The Feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos is celebrated 40 days following the Feast of her birth (September 8). Two other Feasts, among the twelve major Feasts of the Church are: The Feast of the Annunciation (March 25<sup>th</sup>) and her “Dormition” (falling asleep), also called “The Feast of the Holy Assumption” (August 15).

The Feasts dedicated to the Holy Virgin are important because she represents the best of us: as a person who in her upbringing and personal choices was faithful, obedient and consequently chosen by God as one who was blessed; one who shared our human nature – made in God’s image, and therefore **not only chosen as holy, but was holy because of her choices. Moreover her holiness stemmed from the choices of her parents. And so the lesson about her Feasts have much to say to us about your and my family relationships.** And with this being the week of Thanksgiving when we hope, as families, to gather and give thanks, it helps us to understand something about our Traditional roots: Not for the purpose of deciding who among us are “old school” or “post modern” in our thinking, but **to understand our traditional Christian values and teaching; how meaningful they are; but also: how we live them.**

The life of the Holy Virgin is very unique. She was three years of age when her parents brought her to be dedicated to the Temple and presented to the high priest, Zachariah (who later to become the father of John the Baptist).

St. Theophylact of Ochrid says that Zachariah was so “moved by God” that he led the Virgin into the chief place of the Temple, beyond the second curtain. Many Syrian texts speak of Joachim and Anna dedicating the Holy Virgin to the temple in fulfillment of a vow they had made. They made sacrifices to God, according to the Law, received the priest’s blessing and returned home. Mary remained in their care for nine years. While her parents were alive, they visited her often. And when they passed from this life, the Holy Virgin longed to remain in the temple for the rest of her life without entering into marriage.

But this was not the case. She was confided at the age of twelve to Joseph (a widower), a kinsman of hers in Nazareth, so that she might, under the protection of betrothal, live in virginity, and thus fulfill both her desire and the demands of the Law, for it was unknown in Israel at that time for a girl to vow perpetual virginity. The Holy Virgin was the first to do this, and was later followed by the many who dedicated their lives to virginity in service of Christ’s Holy Church.

**The Feast of the Presentation had its origin, we are told, in Syria where the writings of the Feast speak of its celebration honoring the beginning of Mary’s pious education.**

The practice of making vows and dedicating a child to God begins with this very ancient practice. In Arabic this kind of commitment is called *nidr* or “vow.” It is what was practiced in certain communities where children (though much older than the age of 3 are dedicated to the service of God in monastic communities. Today this is not so common.

It boggles the mind to understand or to even accept such an idea in today’s world, when parents dedicate their child to the church. However, we live in different times. Today a young girl (or a young man) makes a personal commitment on her own. But can you imagine having an only child, such as in the case of Joachim and Anna, who was dedicated by her

parents to God? We're speaking about: placing her in the care of the Temple.

We are told that Joachim and Anna, the parents of the Holy Virgin, were childless for over 50 years. And it is very possible that their commitment to God was something that did not make it as difficult as we would think.

What follows in the life of the Holy Virgin is her being betrothed to Joseph. You know the rest of the story. It is something to be unfolded very soon in the coming Feast of the Holy Nativity.

There are definite challenges that the life of the Holy Virgin, and her parents present to us today. And Christians who take this seriously recognize that there are a number of assumptions in what we pray and believe. It would help to list some of them:

1. Marriage is consummated with the procreation of children. We hear it clearly repeated in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony ...*and that He would make them glad with the sight of sons and daughters, Let us pray to the Lord...*
2. The blessing of a marriage and the institution of a family begins with a husband and wife (a man and a woman) who desire to have children, and do not marry with an agreement to avoid having children; otherwise, we'd have to edit the prayers of our Sacrament.
3. While the church blesses a second marriage for a widowed person and recognizes the divorce of couples, there is no "blessing" for a divorce; only God's mercy.
4. Children of the faith are expected to be educated in the faith, and parents and Godparents are held responsible by the church to see that their children are nurtured and taught by the church and the faithful.

This last point is where we know there is much to be done; first because raising a child in the Christian faith presupposes that parents are practicing believers of the faith. It is not uncommon today for parents to expect the education of their children to be done by someone else. One of the honest reasons, I am told, is their own struggle with what they actually believe about a faith that they were “brought up with.”

Some of us have had the experience of being a part of “patriarchal families;” when the role of the father was being the “breadwinner” and mothers were considered “homemakers,” and the role of a child’s education was considered the primary responsibility of a mother. Today, that is not very common.

More than 15.5 million children today are living with a single mother and more than 3 million live with a single father. And there are many more facts. More than 400,000 children are in foster care. 135,000 children are adopted in the U.S. each year; 26% are from other countries. These are just a few statistics of the reality of our day. All of our families today face many challenges, even though, parents today are not having as many children as some of our grandparents did many years ago. My grandmother had nine siblings! Just think of what that was like. And in those days a house had no more than one bathroom!

I often hear from parents who tell me: “We didn’t learn so much about our Church teaching and Tradition as what is being made available today. Well, to that I must say, there is no reason why parents cannot learn with their children; and spend time praying with their children, and attending church with their children, just as many parents are today are more involved in their child’s education.

**And so the great task for all of us today is: helping young and old, married, unmarried, educated, uneducated, rich and poor, to believe by first being believers and knowing what we**

**believe! Second, to practice what we believe. If we don't get past the believing part, the practice will be of no relevance.**

**In the early church, there was a Liturgical Tradition before there was a common creed and before there was a canon of scripture!** The church's Liturgical Tradition provided the framework for teaching the faith with the creed and the canon. This was based upon our Christian motto: *Lex orandi, lex credence* — We live (and pray) what we believe.

The more this is cultivated, the more it is realized, the stronger our families will become. Our families, and our family of families (called the Church), are the product what we call the holy and “unbreakable bonds of love” blessed by God with a purpose. It comprises husbands and wives, those who are celibate, parents and children, godparents and sponsors, spiritual Fathers and Mothers, all who comprise the people of God, — Christ's church, called the Body of Christ. One of it's beginnings is in what we celebrate today in the Presentation of the all-holy Mother of God who was presented by her parents, Ss. Joachim and Anna, in the Jerusalem Temple.

*Through the intercessions of the all-Holy, Mother of God, the Theotokos, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us.*