



St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church
 Weekly Newsletter
 Sunday, December 20, 2020

Sunday before Nativity

Colossians 1:12-18

Matthew 1:1-25

Parish Directory Update

All letters for the parish directory updates have been mailed or emailed at this time. If you have not received a letter, it means we have no mail/email contact information on file for you – please contact the office to provide your information. You may either mail the completed form back to the church or [email it to the office](#).

Upcoming Meetings

- Choir Practice - Tuesday 12/15 at 7pm
 Contact [Matt Gordon](#) for link

Philly OCF

- Bible study - Tuesday 12/29, 11am
[Zoom link](#)
 Mtg ID #880 5713 0161
 Password: Scripture
- Regular meetings will resume in January after winter break – check back here for the date

- The following services will be held in the church and streamed on the [website](#):
 - **Tuesday 12/15** – Matins, 9am
 - **Tuesday 12/15** - Akathist, 7pm ([email Dn. Joseph](#))
 - **Wednesday 12/16** – Paraklesis, 6pm
 - **Thursday 12/17** – 3rd Hour, 9:30am
 - **Saturday 12/19** – Liturgy, 10am
 - **Saturday 12/19** – Vespers, 5pm
 - **Sunday 12/20** – Orthros and Liturgy, 9:30am
- To attend one of the services listed above at the church, please sign up via Sign Up Genius ([December services](#)). When doing so, please keep in mind the following:
 - reserve the number of slots for family members attending (For example, if there are 3 household members attending, reserve 3 slots.)
 - those who are elderly, have pre-existing conditions, or currently are not feeling well are asked to remain home.
 - children who are too young to keep a mask on are asked to remain home.
- To set up a time to receive communion, please sign up via the [Sign Up Genius](#). Please reserve only one slot per household unit. Prior to arriving at the church for communion, please say the [Morning Prayers](#) and the [Prayers of Preparation before Communion](#).
- Confession is also being scheduled by appointment. To set up an appointment, please email the church office and provide a few dates/times you are available. The office will email you to confirm your appointment time.

Troparion of St. George

O liberator and deliverer of captives, helper of the poor and needy, a healing physician of the sick, a contender for kings, O great among Martyrs, the victory-clad George; intercede with Christ our God for the salvation of our souls.

If you attend a service, you must wear a mask/face covering out of care for ourselves, our brothers and sisters in Christ, and our neighbors.

Nativity Greetings

[Metropolitan JOSEPH's Advent message \(video\)](#)

[Bishop THOMAS' Advent message](#) (click on image on website homepage to view full text)

Holiday Flowers

If you would like to make a donation for Nativity flowers, please make a donation online or via cash/check to the church. Please send a list of those the flowers are in honor of and in memory of, as well as which of the people are Orthodox and non-Orthodox on the list to the [church office](#). Fr. Joel will remember them in prayers from Nativity through Theophany.

Wisdom of the Holy Fathers

A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.
+ St. Basil the Great

A Note from Parish Council

Parish Council would like to express our gratitude to our parish community for your continued giving during this challenging year. Because of your incredible generosity, we have been able to keep the church running and extend this generosity to our larger community. If you intend to make an additional gift to the church as we approach the end of the year, please be sure to make your gift by 12/23 (if sending a check) so we have ample time to receive your gift and process it by year end to recognize it for this tax year. (Gifts can also be made online any time.) Thank you!

Church History

This week we continue a series on the Essentials of Faith. The hope is that we can all learn and be edified and come to a "knowledge of the Truth" (1 Tim. 2:4), and to witness to the things of faith that were "delivered to the saints" (Jud. 1:3) in the Church, which is the "pillar and ground of Truth". (1 Tim. 3:15) May God bless the labor. These lessons are taken from Fr. Thomas Hopko's series [The Orthodox Faith](#).

(cont. on next page)

SUNDAY SCHOOL

The 2020-21 Sunday School year curriculum focuses on the 12 Great Feasts of the church. Classes rotate through an activity each week, and everything is done remotely. The schedule for December is listed below. Parents whose children are registered will receive additional information for the upcoming week from the church office by Thursday each week.

To register your child(ren) and to ensure we have updated contact information for parents, please fill out this brief form:

<https://forms.gle/HmNKu2Fa2TpPm6Jz6>

December Feast: Nativity of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (12/25)

December 6

- Elementary school: Ask Abouna
- Middle school: At home resources
- High school: Class (via Zoom)

December 13

- Elementary school: At Home Resources
- Middle school: Class (via Zoom)
- High school: Ask Abouna

December 20

- Elementary school: Class (via Zoom)
- Middle school: Ask Abouna
- High school: At home resources

December 27

No Sunday School

Russia: Missionary Activity - Kronstadt

Saint John of Kronstadt (1829–1908) was an outstanding example of what can be called a “home missionary.” Originally he wanted to be a missionary to eastern Siberia, but he came to realize that there were many in his own region around Saint Petersburg who were very poor and very much in need of the Church’s ministry to soul and body. As a parish priest in the naval city of Kronstadt across the bay from Saint Petersburg, he became famous throughout Russia as a brilliant preacher, healer of the sick, protector of orphans and the poor, teacher of children, ardently loving pastor of his flock, faithful servant at the altar (serving Liturgy every day, at which up to 5000 would attend, necessitating the practice of group confession), and prophet to the nation. His insistence on regular participation in the holy sacraments by those who came to pray with him in his parish helped lead to the Eucharistic revival among Russian Orthodox Christians in the 20th century.

The famous “House of Industry” which Saint John founded in Kronstadt included a free elementary school, a carpentry teaching-workshop, a drawing class, a women’s workshop for sewing, a workshop for shoemaking, a library for children, a zoological collection, a military gymnasium, and a bookshop for children and adults. His powerful and insightful spiritual counsels, as given in his diary, have been published with the title *My Life in Christ*.

The Spread of Orthodoxy in the Lower 48 States in America

The latter part of the 19th century saw the arrival and growth of the Orthodox Church in America’s “Lower 48.” Thousands of immigrants, especially in the years after 1880, came to the New World from the traditional Orthodox homelands of the Old World, seeking economic opportunity. Pan-Orthodox communities developed in Galveston, Texas (perhaps as early as 1862); New Orleans (1865); San Francisco (1867); Pittsburgh (1891); and various other places. The parish in New Orleans was given some of its churchly vessels by the Russian tsar Alexander II (r. 1855–1881).

In 1870 the first bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands was named—Bishop John (Mitropolsky). In 1872 Bishop John moved the center of the diocese from Sitka to San Francisco, to much more readily reach out to the general American public with the story and presence of Holy Orthodoxy. Fluent in English, he was also a well-trained theologian, and until he returned to Russia in 1876, he wrote much in the local press about Orthodoxy. He also wrote a substantial study of the religious environment of the contemporary American society of his day, entitled *From the History of Religious Sects in America*.

Also in 1870, Nicholas Bjerring (1831–1900), a Danish Roman Catholic married layman teaching in Baltimore, Maryland, converted to Orthodoxy, was ordained a priest in Saint Petersburg, Russia, and was sent to open a kind of embassy chapel in New York City. Father Bjerring translated many liturgical works into English from German, and made great efforts, including publishing for a few years a magazine about Orthodoxy, to make the people of New York (especially Episcopalians) familiar with the faith and worship of the Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, funding for the chapel was withdrawn in 1883 by a decision of the Holy Synod of the Church of Russia. Father Bjerring had to close it, and very sadly, he left the Orthodox Church shortly thereafter. The next Orthodox church to be established in New York City was Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, founded in 1891.

Guidelines for the Nativity Fast

November 15 - December 24

The Nativity Fast is one of the four Canonical Fasting Seasons in the Church year. This is a *joyous* fast in anticipation of the Nativity of Christ. That is the reason it is less strict than other fasting periods. The fast is divided into two periods. The 1st period is November 15th through December 19th when the traditional fasting discipline (no meat, dairy, fish, wine, and oil) is observed. There is dispensation given for wine and oil on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Similarly, fish, wine, and oil are permitted on Saturdays and Sundays. The 2nd period is December 20th through 24th when the traditional fasting discipline (no meat, dairy, fish, wine, and oil) is observed. There is dispensation given for wine and oil only on Saturday and Sunday during this period. Here are the guidelines:

Meat	Dairy	Fish	Wine	Oil
beef, chicken, pork, turkey, elk, veal, lamb, deer, rabbit, buffalo, and so forth	milk, eggs, cheese, butter, yogurt, cream, and so forth	fish with a backbone (not including shrimp, octopus, shellfish, squid, or other seafood.	(some include all types of alcohol in this category)	(some include all types of oil in this category)
Abstain.	Abstain.	Permitted only on Saturdays and Sundays before December 20. (some permit fish Tuesdays and Thursdays also)	Permitted only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, & Sundays before December 20.	Permitted only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, & Sundays before December 20.

Abstinence includes refraining from the food and drink mentioned above, as well as from smoking. The Eucharistic Fast means abstaining from at least the previous midnight for communing at a morning Liturgy.

The Purpose of Fasting

The purpose of fasting is to focus on the things that are above, the Kingdom of God. It is a means of putting on virtue in reality, here and now. Through it we are freed from dependence on worldly things. We fast faithfully and in secret, not judging others, and not holding ourselves up as an example.

- Fasting in itself is not a means of pleasing God. Fasting is not a punishment for our sins. Nor is fasting a means of suffering and pain to be undertaken as some kind of atonement. Christ already redeemed us on His Cross. Salvation is a gift from God that is not bought by our hunger or thirst.
- We fast to be delivered from carnal passions so that God's gift of Salvation may bear fruit in us.
- We fast and turn our eyes toward God in His Holy Church. Fasting and prayer go together.

- Fasting is not irrelevant. Fasting is not obsolete, and it is not something for someone else. Fasting is from God, for us, right here and right now.
- Most of all, we should not devour each other. We ask God to "set a watch and keep the door of our lips."

Do Not Fast

- between December 25 and January 5 (even on Wednesdays and Fridays);
- if you are pregnant or nursing a newborn;
- during serious illness;
- without prayer;
- without alms-giving;
- according to your own will without guidance from your spiritual father.