

ST. NICHOLAS

WEEKLY BULLETIN

DECEMBER 21, 2014

THIS WEEK'S NEWS

THE YOUTH CHRISTMAS PAGEANT will be held today. Thanks to the teachers and parents who helped organize it. Special thanks to the children and young people who participated. *God bless all of them.*

CONGRATULATIONS TO CHRISTINE MASTERJOHN for completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology at Worcester State University. She plans to attend Assumption College to pursue a graduate degree in Healthcare Management.

THANKS TO THE MUSTARD SEED VOLUNTEERS! Those who cooked and those who served the meal this past Friday! The Mustard Seed is a Catholic Worker home providing dinner to about 150 people in need each day.

THE FULL CHRISTMAS/ EPIPHANY SCHEDULE is available and attached to the Bulletin.

THE 2015 CHURCH CALENDARS in both English and Romanian are in! They are available in the Narthex. A small donation toward their cost would be welcomed.

THE COAT DRIVE CONTINUES for the rest of December into January at the Orthodox Food Pantry. There is partic-



THE SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY
THE ANCESTORS OF THE LORD ACCORDING TO THE FLESH
THE GENEALOGY OF THE SAVIOR
 EPISTLE: HEBREWS 11:9-10; 32-40 ☩ GOSPEL: MATTHEW 1:1-25
 TONE 3 ☩ MATINS GOSPEL 6

ular need for men's large and extra large coats, but all kinds of coats, hats and gloves are needed. If you have good, clean and usable articles, please consider donating them. Bring them to the Church or **contact Lisa Mielnicki:** at lamielnicki@gmail.com or text her at 508-340-1547.

ARCHBISHOP NICOLAE'S PASTORAL LETTER on the occasion of the **Lord's Nativity** is available for you to read in English and Romanian available at the candles.

A NEW PARISH COUNCIL WILL BE ELECTED IN JANUARY, (the two-year term of the Parish Council expires this year). Please consider offering a stewardship of your time in this important ministry. We also are asking for people to serve on other Parish committees, if you would like to focus your efforts in just one area. How-

ever you'd like to serve, please speak with **Fr. Nick.**

TODAY WE CELEBRATE A MEMORIAL for **Ilia Zhaka, the son of Nicola and Natasha Zhaka.** May his memory be eternal!

TODAY'S COFFEE HOUR is sponsored by the **Zhaka family in memory of their son Ilia.**

DATES TO REMEMBER

- Sun, Dec 21 Children's Christmas Pageant
- Wed, Dec 24 Vigil Lit at Holy Trinity, 9:30 am
Royal Hours, 3:00 pm
Great Vespers, 6 pm
- Thurs, Dec 25 Divine Liturgy, 10 am
- Thurs, Jan 1 New Year's Day Divine Liturgy, 10 am
- Sat, Jan 3 Staff Orthodox Food Pantry

GREETERS TEAM 4:
 DEBORAH SEDARES & EVAN STAMOULIS

COFFEE HOUR CLEAN-UP CREW C:
 PRIZIO FAMILY

ALL ALTAR SERVERS INVITED

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A Parish of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas



A PRAYER OF FR. LAURENCE

LET US PRAY TO THE LORD,

WE GLORIFY YOU, Lord Jesus Christ, for allowing us to know you. Everything we have belongs to you and we possess nothing of our own, for it is you who gave us all we have. By coming into our midst, you show us how to let go of everything, and by the poverty of your birth, you teach us to be attached to nothing. As we prepare for the celebration of your earthly birthday, O Christ, keep our hearts fixed only on you, so that we may always sing: Glory to God in the heights; on earth peace, and among all love and understanding.

For you are God and we give you glory together with your Father Who is without beginning, and your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit: now and forever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

NAMEDAYS

December 15

*The Hieromartyr Eleftherios,
Bishop of Illyria*

Lillian Chachi

December 17

*St. Dionysios of Zakynthos,
Bishop of Aegina*

Denise Sparages

The Holy Prophet Daniel

Dan Manescu

Dana Manescu

Dan Alexandru Nedelescu

Robert Daniel Salerno

December 21

*The Forefather of our Lord, the Pa-
triarch Jacob*

Jacob Datz

The High Priest Aaron

Aaron Paul Christo

Adam the first man

Adam Donabed

Adam Mayer

*The Holy Prophetess Abigail, wife of
David*

Abigail Mayer

The Righteous Deborah

Deborah Rucho

Deborah Sedares

COMMUNITY NEWS

A HOLY LAND PILGRIMAGE is being organized by **Fr. Timothy Lowe**. The dates are **April 23 to May 10, 2015**. If you are interested, speak with **Fr. Nick** for more details.

HOLY TRINITY NEWS

Holy Trinity Nursing & Rehabilitation Center & Holy Trinity Hospice are Orthodox Charities and rely on your donations to continue the mission of providing the best care possible.

The Righteous Noah

Noah Peter Christo

The Righteous Rebecca

Rebeka Tanacea

The Righteous Sarah

Sarah Maria Blanchard

Sarah Maria Bourisk

December 25

*The Holy Nativity of our Lord and
God and Savior Jesus Christ*

Christy Belba

Christopher Blanchard

Chrysanthi Charalambides

Cristina M. Culcea

Christopher Demake

Cristean Dumitriu

Kristjan Endriko

Cristina Gavala

Cristian Ionete

Christine Kelly

Christian Andrew Polymeros

Christopher Rucho

Christina Soriano

Christina Soter

Christos Spyrou

Christina Thoren

Christine Toda

Christina Marina Tonna

Chris Zaruha

Cristian Zaruha

December 26

*The holy and righteous Joseph, the
betrothed of the Virgin*

Josephine Mbuthi

Joseph Opio

The Holy Prophet and King David

David Zonia

December 27

*The Holy Protomartyr and Archdea-
con Stephen*

Stephanie Keimig

Stephen Keimig

Stephanie Sparages

Stephen Sparages

Steven Thoren

December 31

St. Melania the Younger, of Rome

Melanie Mentis

PEACE, PEACE, ... WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE

“**A**nd suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill among people’” (Luke 2:13-14). This is the way that the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ was announced to the shepherds. This same announcement has continued to be proclaimed down through the ages and throughout the whole world as a reminder of that birth 2,000 years ago. The Prophet Isaiah calls the Messiah: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). No one ever doubted but that the birth of the Christ would signal the inauguration of the era of peace.

“Well,” you might ask, “if Christ’s birth begins this era of peace, why don’t we have it? Why, even now, 2,000 years after the birth of the Prince of Peace, are we no closer to true peace?” The answer to this question lies at the heart of the Christian message for the world. The dissonance between the longed-for promise and the reality of our human condition becomes especially poignant during the Christmas season. But before we begin to attempt an answer, we might want to look at how we could have prejudiced the answer by the way we ask the question.

As Christmas approaches we will hear news commentators speak about the ‘time of peace’ or the ‘season of giving.’ People will be getting themselves into the Christmas spirit. Stores will

help by creating a conducive ambience. Cable stations will provide us with a steady stream of Christmas-themed movies and programs. The radio will be filled with Christmas mood music (the largest growing niche radio market is “all-Christmas, all the time” — check your dial).

We are expected to be filled with an abundance of good feelings. We believe that love and generosity will abound, springing up in people and places where it has rarely appeared before. Is it any wonder that people are more severely depressed and despondent during the Christmas season than at any other time of the year? Who or what could live up to this level of expectation?

The reality is that many of us are filled with guilt over how we have failed the ones we love, as well as how we have fallen short of even our own hopes and expectations. Because the birth of the Christ calls us to fulfill our higher purpose, the degree to which we feel we have “missed the mark” is intensified all the more deeply. We often attempt to compensate for the myriad ways in which we have disappointed ourselves and others through a few grand acts of giving. We are looking to be redeemed and Christmas is designed for redemption. Here’s the problem: instead of finding redemption before the Savior’s icon, we usually look for it in a Black Friday check-out line.

These are the personal ways in which we grapple with the tension of the

season that lies between our hopes for what could be, and how they actually are. But, there are other dimensions to this ‘spirit of the season.’ One important one is the ‘cessation of hostilities’ not only between individuals, but also among nations. The birth of the Savior draws us toward the hope for a general truce, an actual tangible peace.

The most dramatic example of such a truce that really happened within our (possible) memory, is the Christmas truce during the First World War. Tired and sickened of the hostilities, soldiers from both sides spontaneously climbed out of their trenches on Christmas Eve of 1914, exchanged gifts, sang carols, and buried their dead. Finally they played football (soccer) together. At the close of Christmas day they crawled back into the trenches and resumed killing one other once again.

I often feel that our Christmas celebrations are like this World War I truce. We declare it unacceptable to be hateful or selfish — but of course, only for the period of the truce. Come January 1st, after the exuberant welcoming of the New Year, after all the Christmas trees are dismantled and discarded, when the ‘season’ officially comes to a close, when the truce is lifted, we feel able to attack one another again.

“Christ is born,” a hymn of the Church cries out, “glorify Him!” Peace between human beings starts with restoring the peace between us and God. Peace can only be based on this healthy Divine-human relationship. Before the creation of the world God understood that there would be a need to bridge the gap between us and Him. He understood that Adam and Eve would fail their calling. He knew there would be a need to restore the loving communion between the Father and His chil-





dren. The prophets repeated this message. Christ's birth is the Good News that God has fulfilled His promise. This is the peace proclaimed by the angels. God has visited peace on His people in the person of Jesus Christ, His very own Son.

"Christ comes from the heavens," the hymnographer continues, "meet Him! Christ is on the earth, be lifted up!" I truly don't understand what most people mean by the 'Christmas spirit.' I suspect that they mean a Christmas spirit made up of the things we have been talking about: a human-made peace or even a magical one. Some of us expect the season to bring a peace that will appear and remain. We are disappointed when it evaporates. We feel betrayed by God without ever understanding that what we felt and hoped for was simply self-delusion. It is like a person in the desert dying of thirst who sees a mirage. However much we might desire the sand to become an oasis, the reality will finally hit us.

But the Father, through the gift of His Son, offers us not illusion, but reality. He offers us a new relationship: the

possibility to meet Him. "Christ comes from the heavens, meet Him!" We are given the opportunity to meet God, to walk with Him, to talk with Him. Not only this, but to "be lifted up." If we want, if we choose, we are given the possibility to be raised to heaven and to become like God. In the birth of Jesus Christ, God has presented us with the sign of His love, with the promise of total peace; not a temporary cessa-

tion of hostilities, but a permanent eternal peace, resting in His love.

All other forms of peace pale by comparison. They are like the desert mirage: we know they will vanish at any moment. We can climb out of our trenches, bury our dead, exchange gifts and carols, and then play football, even while knowing that tomorrow we will return to the same dark reality.

Our world is engulfed in all kinds of

sorrow. Who could have conceived, even just a few years ago, how much terrorism and suicide-bombing would change the nature of our daily lives? The cold war and mutually assured nuclear destruction seem almost quaint by comparison. The Israeli-Palestinian-Lebanese-Syrian cauldron of only a decade ago now seems easy to resolve compared with the hardening of hostilities and atrocities that have emerged in this region during the past few years.

Then there are civil and territorial wars throughout Africa. Today, some of these seem as though they might be resolved peacefully, but even at that, a bomb here and a massacre there, and the fragile peace will likely evaporate. Hostilities in many places in Central and South America have lessened, but violence is a fact of life for far too many people. Mexican drug cartels, anyone?

One is afraid to speak of Afghanistan and Pakistan; of Iran and Iraq. What will happen in Syria and Jordan and Turkey? Can saner heads prevail?

In each one of these conflicts we find honest negotiators trying to find a way out, a way to move forward. — May God bless them and their efforts! These are the peacemakers of which the Lord



speaks in the Beatitudes. Their efforts are necessary and holy, but they are not sufficient.

Then we also find in the middle of these hostilities ordinary people trapped by hatred and anger — sometimes their own hatred and anger, sometimes the anger and hatred of others — but still hoping and praying for an end to the violence. Notice that our Liturgy is full of prayers for peace. These are not new prayers and petitions; they are ancient. And, here we are given a clue into the nature of the problem.

Even if an agreement is reached in one place or another, it will not change the basic reality. A human-made peace based on human-made principles cannot last. Every negotiated peace is based on a balance of interests and power. People of ill-will take advantage at the slightest indication of weakness. How many times have we seen a hard-won peace evaporate with the first bomb?



God became one with us so that we might become like Him, even gods. [St. Athanasius says: “God became human, so that we might become gods.” St. Peter says that we are “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4)]. He did not become human to sanction the mess into which we had fallen and in which we continue to exist. He came to lift us up from it and bring us to another way of life.

If you listen closely to what is being said this Christmas season, you will find that what most people mean by peace is either a slight (but totally unrealistic) alteration of the status quo so that people are no longer killing one another, or some supernatural tranquility which comes over the world like an enormous stun-ray from an orbiting satellite. It doesn't matter if they're talking about the international situation or their own lives; it's the same. What we seem not to want to recognize is that God's action

has happened. He's waiting for our response. The status quo is not the right answer. Neither is the escapist zap from above. These both let us off the hook. We need to do our part. We need to answer God's call.

We started by asking the question: Where is this promised peace? God's gift to us of His Christ and our acceptance of Him gives us a different way of looking at the question. We can see that Christ's birth does

indeed begin the era of peace, but only if we want it. The peace promised is God's peace on God's terms, not our peace on ours. And so, the question is not: “Where is this promised peace?” but rather, “Do we want to accept God's peace?” Are we willing to change the focus of our lives so that we can participate in it?

It is common during this time of the year to decry secular notions of Christmas. I don't want to fall into this trap. Yet, when one separates “Christmas” from the “Christ” then the true meaning of the event is lost. It was (and is) a sacrifice for God to become human, in the person of the Son. The sacrifice of his incarnation will be fully realized on the Cross. The birth in Bethlehem's cave and the angelic proclamation of peace cannot be separated from the future reality of the painful walk to Golgotha.

The Incarnation of our God to save and transform the human race and all of creation was and remains the central and only message of Christmas. There can be no peace at Christmas or at any other time without recognizing and accepting the saving reality of Jesus Christ.

One of my favorite carols is “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.” The combination of the melancholy melody and the encouraging words seem to me to capture the double-nature of our Lord's birth. Here's the first verse:

“God rest ye merry gentlemen let nothing ye dismay.

“Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas day.

“To save us all from Satan's power when we had gone astray.

“O, tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy. O, tidings of comfort and joy.”

Comfort and joy, indeed!

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

—Fr. Nicholas Apostola

CHRISTMAS & THEOPHANY SCHEDULE

SUNDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2014

Matins 9:00 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
 Children's Christmas Program after the Liturgy

CHRISTMAS EVE WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2014

Liturgy for the Vigil (at Holy Trinity) 9:30 a.m.
 Royal Hours 3:00 p.m.
 Great Vespers 6:00 p.m.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2014

Matins 9:00 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2014

Matins 9:00 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD ✨ FEAST OF ST. BASIL THE GREAT THURSDAY, JANUARY 1, 2015

Matins 9:00 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 10:00 a.m.

EVE OF HOLY THEOPHANY MONDAY, JANUARY 5, 2014

Royal Hours 9:30 a.m.
 Vespers Liturgy of St. Basil 6:00 p.m.
 Great Blessing of Water at end of Liturgy

SUNDAY AFTER HOLY THEOPHANY SUNDAY, JANUARY 11, 2015

Matins 9:00 a.m.
 Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.



HOUSE BLESSINGS. The blessing of homes at Theophany will begin on Wednesday, January 7, 2015, and continue until all homes are blessed. As in the past, we will be setting times when we will be coming to bless your home. If there is a specific time that is more convenient for you, please call Fr. Nick to arrange it (508.845.0088).

