

ST. NICHOLAS WEEKLY BULLETIN DECEMBER 25, 2016 THIS WEEK'S NEWS

SERVICES THIS WEEKEND: Great Vespers, Saturday, 5:00pm; Divine Liturgy, Sunday, 10:00am. **THE FULL CHRISTMAS/ EPIPHANY SCHEDULE** is available and attached to the Bulletin.

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

FOOD PANTRY. Help is needed to staff our monthly responsibility at the Orthodox Food Center **next Saturday, December 31st, from 9 am - noon** (this "5th Saturday" is our responsibility), as well as **the following Saturday, January 7th** (our regular Saturday). About 4 people are needed. Likewise, donations of food are always needed, and may be dropped off at the Food Pantry housed at St. Spyridon Cathedral. If you can help in this worthwhile ministry, please speak with **Lisa Mielnicki or Nicole Apostola**.

A HUGE 'THANK YOU' FOR THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT. This includes



**THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH
OF OUR LORD, GOD, AND SAVIOR JESUS THE CHRIST**
APOSTOLIC READING: GALATIANS 4:4-7 ☩ GOSPEL: MATTHEW 2:1-12
EVERYTHING ACCORDING TO THE FEAST

the teachers and parents who helped and coordinated, but especially the children and young people who participated by playing their roles excellently and narrating the story movingly. **God bless all of you!**

THE CHRISTMAS CENTERPIECES on the tables in the hall are available for purchase: \$25.00. Feel free to choose the one you like and leave your donation with the person at the candles.

THE 2017 CHURCH CALENDARS are here, in both English and Romanian. Pick them up at the candles. Please consider a small donation to cover the costs.

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

DATES TO REMEMBER

Sun, Dec 25 Christmas, Liturgy 10:00 am
Sat, Dec 31 Staff Orthodox Food Pantry
Sun, Jan 1 New Year's/St. Basil, Lit, 10:00 am
Thurs, Jan 5 Theophany/Great Blessing of Water
Vespers Liturgy, 6:00 pm
Sat, Jan 7 Staff Orthodox Food Pantry

GREETERS TEAM 5:

DEBORAH SEDARES & EVAN STAMOULIS

COFFEE HOUR CLEAN-UP CREW A:

MARGARITE LANDRY,
CHRISTINE MASTERJOHN

ALL ALTAR SERVERS INVITED

34 GOLD STREET, SHREWSBURY, MA 01545-6238 ♦ VOICE: 508.845.0088 ♦ FAX: 508.845.8850

E-MAIL: FRNICK@STNICHOLASCHURCH.ORG ♦ WEB: WWW.STNICHOLASCHURCH.ORG

A Parish of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas

WHEN THE FULLNESS OF TIME HAD COME

THE Epistle Lesson for the Christmas Day Divine Liturgy is taken from the St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 4:4-7. In Galatians, St. Paul takes up directly the question of the Lord's Incarnation; he gives us a full theological understanding of the Incarnation of God's Son: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, of God through Christ." (Gal 4:4-7)

One could say that in these four verses St. Paul captures the depth of Christ's Incarnation. In the Gospel accounts found in Luke and Matthew we find the story of Jesus' birth with which most of us are familiar, but it is St. Paul who begins to explain the significance of this event to us in ways that help us understand God's purpose. Almost every word or phrase in these verses is replete with meaning, so let us take a moment to understand his point.

St. Paul uses the phrase the "fullness of time" twice; here, and in Ephesians. It is a wonderful phrase encompassing the expectations of both the Jewish nation and the pagan world. For those who remember the rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar," there was a line complaining about why God had chosen to come in a time where there was no mass communication, rather than in our own time. While a point well taken, it misses the essence. We see how today's mass communication twists reality such that the true hero rarely makes it onto the front page, while the pop celebrity is lionized — until, of course, they fall.

The "fullness of time" is that opportune moment when everything that could be said, has been said. People are

ready, waiting and listening. In the first century the expectation for a 'savior' hung heavily in the air. Many of the words we now use to describe Jesus were used to describe the Roman emperor or other Messiahs. It was not only the Children of Israel who were waiting for the Messiah, everyone was. In the services preceding the Lord's Nativity we read from dozens of Old Testament prophecies pointing to His coming. People were on edge, and ready: the fullness of time.

"God sent his Son." The word 'sent' (ἐξαπέστειλεν) is a form of the word 'apostle.' This word developed a special meaning in the early Church, namely: to send someone in the service of God's kingdom. Implicit in the phrase is that God's Son existed before His birth by Mary. God is sending the pre-existing Word on a mission.

"Born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law." We can easily understand "born of a woman;" God's Son is born of Mary. What requires more explanation is "born under the law, in order to redeem those ... under the law." God chose the Jewish nation to be the people through which He would make Himself and His purpose known. His "contract" (i.e., "Covenant") with them was in the form of a series of rules and regulations by which they were to live: the Law. Living by the Law made the Jews different from all other peoples on earth. To be "born under the Law" meant and means that when born a Jew, your sole purpose in life is to fulfill God's Law. No one except Jesus has ever been able to fulfill the Law. So, not only was He born under the Law. His mission was and is to redeem His people by *fulfilling* the Law.

"So that we might receive adoption as children." God's entire objective, His sole purpose — what we describe as His "economy" — is to make us children.

This access to the Father is not through biological means; it is by adoption. God's Son becomes one of us so that we can share in what He is. St. Athanasius' famous phrase: "God became human so that humans could become God" is another way of saying the same thing. Another Patristic saying phrases it this way: we are given the possibility to become, by choice, what God is by nature. By choosing to follow Christ — to be one with Him in Baptism and the Eucharist — we have Jesus as our brother and God as our Father.

"And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" The Holy Spirit continually and eternally "proceeds" from the Father to rest on the Son. When we become children through Christ, this same Spirit is poured out on us. It is this Spirit who guides us in our prayer, even when we don't know what to pray for ourselves (cf. Romans 8:26). The Holy Spirit searches our hearts.

"So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God." Not many of us know what it is like to be a slave (although people are still slaves even in our own time!), but we all know what it is like to feel trapped, without choices or freedom to really choose. God makes us His heir and truly free. Christ is born to free us from all kinds of bondage.

Brothers and sisters, free yourselves from bondage to the passing things of this world. God has made us free in the birth of that Child humbly born in a cave. Cut away the noise and distractions of the world. Let us not simply put Christ back into Christmas, but rather, put our Christmas celebration back into Christ. Let us be firm in the hope of the promise given us, putting all our faith in Christ our Lord. While we may be terrified to put our lives in God's hands, remember, He put His life in our hands,

through Mary, His mother, and Joseph, His stepfather. When we want to understand God's love for us, meditate on this: the universe's creator allows himself to be nurtured and raised by a teenage mother and a working-class father, in a "back-water" village in Galilee.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

FR. NICHOLAS APOSTOLA



A PRAYER OF FR. LAURENCE

LET US PRAY TO THE LORD,

GLORY TO YOU, Lord Jesus Christ, for allowing us to love you. No one can adequately describe the perfection of your goodness, though your ineffable love is evident throughout creation. In coming into our midst as one of us, you did not consider it below your divine dignity to take on our flesh, nor did you undo or disturb the virginity of your mother. In all that you have done for us, whether before your birth or after, you draw us forever toward your divine goodness and love. Therefore, as we begin the celebration of your birthday, teach us, once more, to perceive your goodness, to reflect on it at all times, and to respond to it throughout our lives, that it may be clear to all the world that we are truly your disciples.

For you are, indeed, our God, and we give you glory, together with your eternal Father and your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit: now and forever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

NAMEDAYS

December 18

The Sunday of the Holy Ancestors of the Lord, according to the flesh

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

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

Christopher Blanchard

Chrysanthi Charalambides

Cristina M. Culcea

Christopher Demake

Cristean Dumitriu

Kristjan Endriko

Cristina Gavala

Cristian Ionete

Christine Kelly

Christian Andrew Polymeros

Christian Prizio

Christopher Rucho

Christina Soriano

Christina Soter

Christo Spyrou

Christian Thoren

Christina Thoren

Christine Toda

Christina Marina Tonna

Chris Zaruha

Cristian Zaruha

December 26

The holy and righteous Joseph, the betrothed of the Virgin

Josephine Mbuti

Joseph Opio

The Holy Prophet and King David

David Zonia

December 27

The Holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen

Stephanie Elizabeth Demake

Stephanie Keimig

Stephen Keimig

Stephanie Sparages

Stephen Sparages

Steven Thoren

December 31

St. Melania the Younger, nun of Rome

Melanie Mentis

HOLY TRINITY NEWS

The residents wish to thank the parishes for the wonderful Christmas gifts they brought to Holy Trinity Nursing & Rehabilitation Center, which brought them delight and comfort to their holiday season. The staff and residents are very grateful for the thoughtfulness of the parishes and *wish everyone a Blessed New Year!*

Support Holy Trinity through the United Way. It's not too late! The deadline is December 30th. Donate online at unitedwaycm.org and click on the "Donate" button in the upper right corner. Make sure to designate: "**Holy Trinity Nursing & Rehabilitation Center, Worcester, MA**" in the comments/questions window. You may also call Doreen Thornburg at United Way: 508-757-5631, ext. 210. Also, check to see if your employer has a matching gift program.

CHRISTMAS & THEOPHANY SCHEDULE

SUNDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2016

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

FRIDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2016

Royal Hours 9:30 a.m.

CHRISTMAS EVE SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2016

Great Vespers 5:00 p.m.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2016

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

NEW YEAR'S DAY

CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD ✨ FEAST OF ST. BASIL THE GREAT

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS SUNDAY, JANUARY 1, 2017

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

EVE OF HOLY THEOPHANY THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, 2017

Royal Hours 3:30 p.m.
 Vespers Liturgy of St. Basil 6:00 p.m.
 Great Blessing of Water at end of Liturgy

SUNDAY AFTER HOLY THEOPHANY SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2017

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



HOUSE BLESSINGS. The blessing of homes at Theophany will begin on Saturday, January 7, 2017, 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).

