

ST. NICHOLAS WEEKLY BULLETIN SEPTEMBER 8, 2019

THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

THIS WEEK'S NEWS

TODAY WE CELEBRATE THE BIRTHDAY OF THE THEOTOKOS, even as we prepare for the Feast of the Elevation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross.

THE FEAST OF THE ELEVATION OF THE PRECIOUS CROSS is THIS Saturday, September 14th. We will celebrate the Feast with our sister parish of Sts. Anargyroi IN MARLBOROUGH. Liturgy at 10:00 AM.

WE NEED OFFERS OF BASIL to adorn the Cross for next Sunday. If you have some growing and would like to offer it, please speak with Fr. Nick.

A PITA BAKING session is scheduled for Saturday, September 21st, 9:00 AM. All help welcome. *Questions?* See Chris Toda. *ALSO*, thanks to the bakers for their hard work yesterday.

THE LORD'S PRAYER, REVISITED. A number of parishioners asked that Fr. Nick take up some questions they have from his summer sermons on the Lord's Prayer. *If you have questions* you'd like him to address, please write them down or e-mail him. He'll address them in his sermons in the coming weeks.

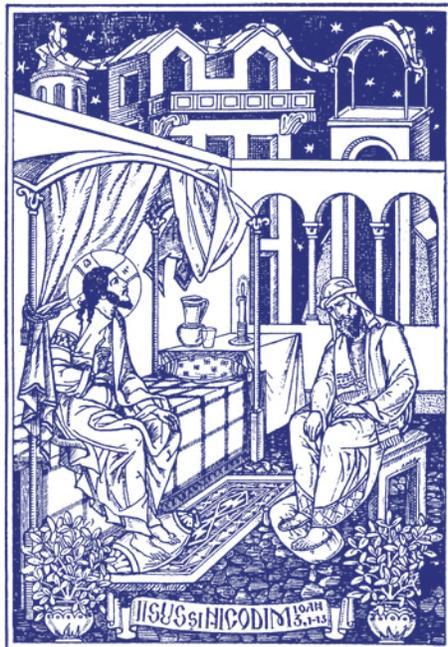
GREETERS TEAM 2:

DAN MANESCU AND CHRIS SEITH

COFFEE HOUR CLEAN-UP: HELP NEEDED

PICK UP A CUP - LEND A HAND

ALL ALTAR SERVERS INVITED



THE SUNDAY BEFORE THE CROSS NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

APOSTOLIC READING: GALATIANS 6:11-18



GOSPEL: JOHN 3:11-17

(JESUS SPEAKS WITH NIKODIMOS)

TONE 3 ☩ MATINS GOSPEL: 1

The **General Assembly for the Eastern Orthodox Management Corp. (EOMC)**, which operates Holy Trinity Nursing and Rehabilitation Center will be held on **Tuesday, September 17, 2019 at 7:00 pm** at Holy Trinity, 300 Barber Ave., Worcester, MA. **Our parish needs five delegates to the Assembly. If interested please talk to George Demake.** Also, the meeting is open to CEOC parish members and all are encouraged to attend.

DONATIONS FOR HURRICANE RELIEF may be directed to the International Orthodox Christian Charities at: www.iocc.org. The IOCC is one of the top ranked relief organizations in the world, especially noted for its low over-

head, directing most of the donations toward those in need. Help those who are suffering through our Orthodox Christian relief organization!

THANKS TO THE FOOD PANTRY VOLUNTEERS for working the Orthodox Food Center on behalf of our parish on Saturday. Our regular commitment is the first Saturday of the month from 9AM to NOON. About 4 people are needed. If you can help in this worthwhile ministry, please speak with **Lisa Mielnicki** or **Nicole Apostola**. Our next Saturday is October 5th.

WE'VE COMMISSIONED A PROSKINITARION for the Relics and Icon of St. Nicholas that our parish received from the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Italy through His Grace Bishop Siluan, and Fr. Daniel Ene. Fr. Nicolae Simion of Wakefield is sculpting this wood-carved Icon stand which we hope to be ready for the Feastday. The cost is \$3,000 and we are asking for donations to cover the cost. If you have any questions, and/or would like to donate toward it, speak with Fr. Nick or Tim.

COFFEE HOUR THIS SUNDAY is sponsored by **Dr. Nicholas & Sandra Mazanitis**.

RELIGIOUS ED

ST NICHOLAS CHURCH SCHOOL and our Youth are a central part of our parish. We need you! If you are inter-

DATES TO REMEMBER

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| Sat, Sept 14 | Lit for Elevation of Cross, 10 AM
Sts Anargyroi, Marlboro <i>Strict Fast Day</i> |
| Sat, Sept 21 | Pita Baking |
| Sat, Oct 5 | Staff Food Pantry, 9AM-NOON |
| Sun, Oct 6 | First Day of Religious Education |
| Fri, Oct 18 | Mustard Seed Meal, 5 PM |
| Sat, Nov 23 | Holiday Bake Sale |
| December 7-8 | 70TH Anniversary celebration |

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A Parish of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas

ested in teaching or assisting with Church School this year and/or working with the Youth of our parish on activities and programs geared to them, please see **Valarie Stamoulis**. The first day of Church School is **Sunday, October 6th**. **Every child is welcomed!** **PARENTS:** please complete the **REGISTRATION FORM** found at the candle stand. If you would like more information, speak with Valarie. Providing vibrant and meaningful opportunities for our Youth to learn about their Orthodox Faith and traditions, and work and play together is key to ensuring that our Orthodox Faith and the community of St. Nicholas remains vital for generations to come.

HOLY TRINITY NEWS

Holy Trinity Nursing & Rehabilitation Center's **25th Anniversary Dinner Dance Celebration will be held on Saturday, November 9, 2019**. For more information, or to reserve tickets for the event or purchase raffle tickets call Kristina Mironidis at 508-852-1000 or e-mail her at: kmironidis@htnr.

THE LATEST ISSUE of the *Holy Trinity Times* is available at www.htnr.net.

Holy Trinity provides a comprehensive **rehabilitation program of Physical, Occupational and Speech/Language Therapies**. Call 508-852-1000 for more information.

DIVINE LITURGY is celebrated every Wednesday morning at 9:30AM. And please always keep Holy Trinity Nursing Home, it's staff, directors, residents, and families in your prayers.

HOLY TRINITY is a non-profit skilled nursing and rehabilitation center and a project of the Council of Orthodox Churches of Central MA. Please keep Holy Trinity in your prayers and in your charitable plans. Contributions to the Treasured Generations Annual Fund

A PRAYER OF FR. LAURENCE

LET US PRAY TO THE LORD,

O LORD, OUR GOD: We give thanks to you and praise you for all the wonders you have accomplished for us. We ask you to consider not our failings but the virtue of the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. From the womb was she chosen, like Jeremiah; and, like Samuel, she was conceived through prayer and offered to you. In body, mind, and spirit, she was resplendent with purity and holiness. Grant that we, too, may attain a guilelessness like hers, serving you every day of our lives as you deserve.

For you deserve all glory, honor, and worship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: now and forever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

can be made at www.htnr.net and volunteers are welcome to be a part of Holy Trinity by contacting: Dana Spinney, Activities Director, at 508-852-1000 or e-mail: dspinney@htnr.net.

NAMEDAYS

September 5

St. Elizabeth the mother of St. John the Baptist

Elizabeth Anderson
Elizabeth Grace Cavanaugh
Elizabeth Florica Galeriu
Lisa Mielnicki
Karen Elizabeth Wilder

The Holy Prophet Zachariah, father of St. John

Zachary Spataro

September 8

The Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos

Maria Z. Mossaides

September 9

The Holy Ancestors of God Joachim and Anna

Ann Marie Clem
Anna Maria Collins
Ana Seith
Ann Trakadas

September 17

The Holy Martyr Faith, Daughter of St. Sophia

Faith Mayer

The Holy Martyr Sophia of Rome

Sofia Apostol
Sophia Amyra Apostola
Carol Fotos



THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

THIS is the Sunday before the Universal Exaltation of the Precious Cross. The Epistle Lesson is taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians, 6:11-18. In this passage, as well as throughout the whole Letter, St. Paul's emphasis is on "the Cross of Christ." In part, this explains why we read these verses today, in preparation for the Feast.

St. Paul was writing the Galatians about the negative influence a group of Jewish converts to Christ was having on their community. Galatia was a province located in north central Asia Minor, present-day Turkey. The larger cities of Galatia contained a mixed population of locals as well as Greeks and Romans. Greek and Latin were the languages there. In the more rural areas the population was largely Galatian; they were related to the Celts and spoke a language more akin to Celtic than the languages of their neighbors.

Today's reading is the close of St. Paul's Letter to them. It starts out: "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand" (v. 11). St. John Chrysostom believes this indicates that St. Paul had written the whole Letter himself, rather than leave the task to a scribe. For him, this was an indication of the intense concern Paul had about the situation, and for the Galatians themselves. Modern scholars think that the first part of the Letter was given to a scribe to write and that St. Paul wrote this part by way of emphasis. Either way, St. Paul is clearly upset and concerned.

Here is the reason: "It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh" (v. 12-13).

It might seem odd to us that a practice done today for largely medical rea-

sons was a deeply religious question in the early Church. However, according to the Mosaic Law, the primary sign of the covenant between the Children of Israel and God was circumcision. It was and still is one act that defines Jews as a people set apart. For St. Paul, being required to accept circumcision as a condition of conversion was to subject yourself to the Old Covenant. It was a step backward.

St. Paul's contention was that these people had no interest in truly proclaiming the Good News of Christ's coming. Rather, they wanted these Galatians to undergo a ritual that was largely for show, while ignoring the true internal spiritual transformation that should occur in those who follow the Lord. These were fundamentalists. Rather than stand up for Christ — which would have probably subjected them to persecution — they took the 'zealous' route that would make them look devout, but really cost them nothing. This is what's behind the statement: "they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh."

His answer to these 'missionaries' is: "But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (v. 14-15). By the "cross" St. Paul means the whole 'economy' of our salvation; the whole of God's plan for us beginning with Adam and Eve, and culminating in the Lord's death and resurrection. He also means the cross that every Christian takes up when they decide to follow Christ. The 'world' that has been crucified to him is the world of sin and excess; the passions that lead away from God. This should be the cross that we ourselves pick up, choosing against sin and for the Lord.

St. Paul then offers a blessing: "Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God" (v.

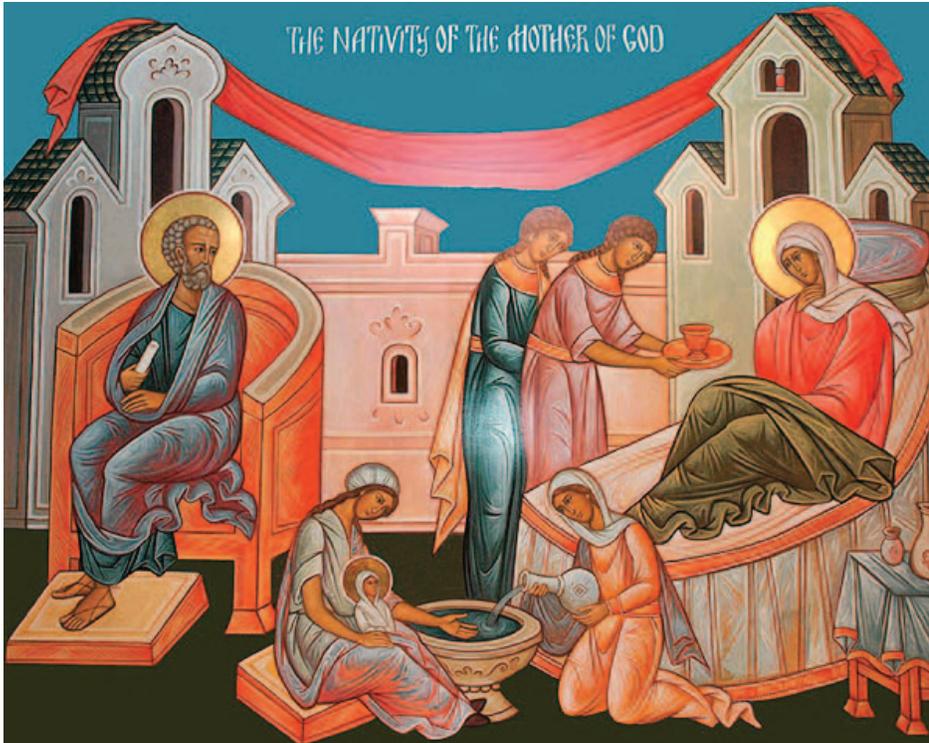
16). He is sending two subtle messages in this blessing. He is saying that those who follow the 'rule,' that is, who choose the newness of Christ over the 'dead end' of the Law, will receive God's peace and mercy. And, by referring to the 'Israel of God' he is at once answering his critics — the Judaizers — that he is not 'Jewish' enough, as well as asserting that the 'Israel of God' is now the followers of Christ.

Expressing his exasperation with the Judaizers, he says: "Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (v. 17). The word translated here as "marks" in Greek is "stigmata." Because of how we use 'stigmata' today, it has led some people to speculate that St. Paul had on his body the crucifixion wounds of Christ. However, in the ancient world this word meant something like "branding." It was used for the branding marks burned into slaves and cattle. It is more likely that St. Paul means the very real scars on his body that were the result of the multiple floggings he had received. Anyone who has seen photographs of the backs of slaves who had been flogged will immediately understand what he is talking about. His scars mark him as belonging to Christ.

He finishes this rather harsh Letter with a blessing: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen" (v. 18). He chooses words — and especially the very final word, the affectionate term 'brethren' (brothers and sisters) — that will soften whatever hurt they may be feeling, and to let them know that from his perspective all is healed.

As we reflect on St. Paul's words, let us also recommit ourselves to take up our cross and follow the Lord as St. Paul himself did.

FR. NICHOLAS APOSTOLA



The Nativity of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary (September 8th): The Most Holy Virgin Mary was born at a time when people had reached such a degree of moral decay that it seemed altogether impossible to restore them. People often said that God must come into the world to restore faith and not permit the ruin of humanity.

The Son of God chose to take on human nature for the salvation of humankind, and chose as His Mother the All-Pure Virgin Mary, who alone was worthy to give birth to the Source of purity and holiness.

The Nativity of our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary is celebrated by the Church as a day of universal joy. Within the context of the Old and the New Testaments, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was born on this radiant day, having been chosen before the ages by Divine Providence to bring about the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God. She is revealed as the Mother of the Savior of the World, Our

Lord Jesus Christ.

The Most Holy Virgin Mary was born in the small city of Galilee, Nazareth. Her parents were Righteous Joachim of the tribe of the Prophet-King David, and Anna from the tribe of the First Priest Aaron. The couple was without child, since St Anna was barren.

Having reached old age, Joachim and Anna did not lose hope in God's mercy. They had strong faith that for God everything is possible, and that He would be able to overcome the barrenness of Anna even in her old age, as He had once overcome the barrenness of Sarah, spouse of the Patriarch Abraham. Sts Joachim and Anna vowed to dedicate the child which the Lord might give them, to the service of God in the Temple.

Childlessness was considered among the Hebrew nation as a Divine punishment for sin, and therefore the righteous Sts Joachim and Anna had to endure abuse from their own countrymen. On one of the feastdays at the Temple in Jerusalem the elderly Joachim

brought his sacrifice to offer to God, but the High Priest would not accept it, considering him to be unworthy since he was childless.

St Joachim in deep grief went into the wilderness, and there he prayed with tears to the Lord for a child. St Anna wept bitterly when she learned what had happened at the Jerusalem Temple. Never once did she complain against the Lord, but rather she prayed to ask God's mercy on her family.

The Lord fulfilled her petitions when the pious couple had attained to extreme old age and prepared themselves by virtuous life for a sublime calling: to be the parents of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, the future Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Archangel Gabriel brought Joachim and Anna the joyous message that their prayers were heard by God, and of them would be born a most blessed daughter Mary, through Whom would come the Salvation of all the World.

The Most Holy Virgin Mary surpassed in purity and virtue not only all humankind, but also the angels. She was manifest as the living Temple of God, so the Church sings in its festal hymns: "the East Gate ... bringing Christ into the world for the salvation of our souls" (2nd Stikhera on "Lord, I Have Cried", Tone 6).

The Nativity of the Theotokos marks the change of the times when the great and comforting promises of God for the salvation of the human race from slavery to the devil are about to be fulfilled. This event has brought to earth the grace of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of Truth, piety, virtue and everlasting life. The Theotokos is revealed to all of us by grace as a merciful Intercessor and Mother, to Whom we have recourse with filial devotion.