



St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Orthodox Church

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Services Schedule

Please see our [online calendar](#) for dates and times of Feast Day services.

Bulletin for Sunday, December 29, 2024

Welcome



Jesus Christ taught us to love and serve all people, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality. To understand that, we need to look no further than to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, it is

offered "on behalf of all, and for all." As Orthodox Christians we stand against racism and bigotry. All human beings share one common identity as children of God. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatian 3:28)

Members of our Parish Council are:

Greg Jankura - Vice President
Carolyn Neiss- President
Sharon Hanson - Member at Large
Luba Martins - Member at Large
Boris Doph - Treasurer

James Ifkovic - Secretary
Brett Malcolm - Member at Large

Pastoral Care - General Information

Emergency Sick Calls can be made at any time. Please call Fr Steven at (860) 322-2906, when a family member is admitted to the hospital.

Anointing in Sickness: The Sacrament of Unction is available in Church, the hospital, or your home, for anyone who is sick and suffering, however severe.

Marriages and Baptisms require early planning, scheduling and selections of sponsors (crown bearers or godparents). See Father before booking dates and reception halls!

Funerals are celebrated for practicing Orthodox Christians. Please see Father for details. The Church opposes cremation; we cannot celebrate funerals for cremations.

Announcements

House Blessings

House Blessing will begin the week of January 5th. Please let Fr Steven know when you would like your house blessed. Simply email him a possible date and time to get on his schedule.

Prayers, Intercessions and Commemorations



Many Years! to Aaron Hosking on the occasion of his birthday, and those who take David, Joseph and James as their patron saint.

Pray for: All those confined to hospitals, nursing homes, and their own homes due to illness; for all those

who serve in the armed forces; widows, orphans, prisoners, victims of violence, and refugees;

- All those suffering chronic illness, financial hardship, loneliness, addictions, abuse, abandonment and despair; those who are homeless, those who are institutionalized, those who have no one to pray for them;
- All Orthodox seminarians & families; all Orthodox monks and nuns, and all those considering monastic life; all Orthodox missionaries and their families.
- All those who have perished due to hatred, intolerance and pestilence; all those departed this life in the hope of the Resurrection.

Please let Fr. Steven know via email if you have more names for which to pray.

- Departed: Nona, Evelyn, John, Vera, Hansen, Bonnie
- Clergy and their families: Fr Sergei B, Fr Vladimir A
- Catechumen: Kevin, Sarah, James

- Individuals and Families: Luba, Suzanne, Rosemary, Daniel & Dayna, Kristen, Charles, Victor, Susan, Bonnie, Gregory, Frank
- Birthdays and Name's Days this Month: Dori Kuziak (B-10 Dec), Bill Brubaker (B-23 Dec), Roderick Seurattan (B-24th Dec), Malcolm Littlefield (B-25 Dec), Daniel Cummings (N-17 Dec)
- Anniversaries this Month:
- Expecting and Newborn: Lynn, David and the new born Mary, Keree, Steve and their unborn child, Katie and Aaron and their unborn child, Megan and her newborn child
- Traveling: Michael, Jason,
- Sick and those in distress: Thomas, Sheri, Joanna, Joshua, Remy, Stormy, Scott, Anne, Noah, Nancy, Cathy, Joe, Susan Hayes, Gail Galena, Sophia, Gregory, Tomas

Today's commemorated feasts and saints

27th SUNDAY AFTER

PENTECOST — Tone 2. Holy Righteous Ones: Joseph the Betrothed, David the King, and James the Brother of the Lord. Afterfeast of the Nativity of Christ. Sunday after Nativity. The 14,000 Infants (Holy Innocents) slain by Herod at Bethlehem. Ven. Marcellus, Abbot of the Monastery of the "Unsleeping Ones" (485). Ven. Mark the Grave-digger, Theophilus, and John, of the Kiev Caves (Near Caves—11th-12th c.). Venerable Theophilus and Jacob, wonderworkers of Omuch (15th c.). Ven. Thaddeus the Confessor, of the Studion (818).

- Again we pray for those who have lost their lives because of the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East: that the Lord our God may look upon them with mercy, and give them rest where there is neither sickness, or sorrow, but life everlasting.
- Again we pray for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, for those who are suffering, wounded, grieving, or displaced because of the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East.
- Again we pray for a cessation of the hostilities against Ukraine and the Middle East, and that reconciliation and peace will flourish there, we pray thee, hearken and have mercy.

Parish Calendar

St Alexis Parish

December 29, 2024 to January 6, 2025

DECEMBER

Sunday, December 29

Sunday after Nativity
Baptism of Sarah Joseph
9:30AM Divine Liturgy

Monday, December 30

Anysia the Virgin-martyr of Thessaloniki

Tuesday, December 31

Apodosis of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ
8:30AM Matins
5:30PM Molebian for the New Year

JANUARY

Wednesday, January 1

Circumcision of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

8:30AM Liturgy of St Basil

Thursday, January 2

Forefeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

Akathist to St Seraphim of Sarov

8:30AM Matins

Friday, January 3

Forefeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

Saturday, January 4

Forefeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

5:30PM Great Vespers

Sunday, January 5

Sunday before Epiphany

Baptism of Mary Anne Miller

9:30AM Divine Liturgy

Monday, January 6

The Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

Theophany

Saints and Feasts

December 29

Sunday after Nativity

On the Sunday that falls on or immediately after the twenty-sixth of this month, we make commemoration of Saints Joseph, the Betrothed of the Virgin; David, the Prophet and King; and James, the Brother of God. When there is no Sunday within this period,

we celebrate this commemoration on the 26th.

Saint Joseph (whose name means "one who increases") was the son of Jacob, and the son-in-law - and hence, as it were, the son - of Eli (who was also called Eliakim or Joachim), who was the father of Mary the Virgin (Matt. 1:16; Luke 3:23). He was of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David, an inhabitant of Nazareth, a carpenter by Trade, and advanced in age when, by God's good will, he was betrothed to the Virgin, that he might minister to the great mystery of God's dispensation in the flesh by protecting her, providing for her, and being known as her husband so that she, being a virgin, would not suffer reproach when she was found to be with child. Joseph had been married before his betrothal to our Lady; they who are called Jesus' "brethren and sisters" (Matt. 13:55-56) are the children of Joseph by his first marriage. From Scripture, we know that Saint Joseph lived at least until the Twelfth year after the birth of Christ (Luke 2:41-52); according to the tradition of the Fathers, he reposed before the beginning of the public ministry of Christ.

The child of God and ancestor of God, David, the great Prophet after Moses, sprang from the tribe of Judah. He was the son of Jesse, and was born in Bethlehem (whence it is called the City of David), in the year 1085 before Christ. While yet a youth, at the command of God he was anointed secretly by the Prophet Samuel to be the second King of the Israelites, while Saul - who had already been deprived of divine grace - was yet living. In the thirtieth year

of his life, when Saul had been slain in battle, David was raised to the dignity of King, first, by his own tribe, and then by all the Israelite people, and he reigned for forty years. Having lived seventy years, he reposed in 1015 before Christ, having proclaimed beforehand that his son Solomon was to be the successor to the throne.

The sacred history has recorded not only the grace of the Spirit that dwelt in him from his youth, his heroic exploits in war, and his great piety towards God, but also his transgressions and failings as a man. Yet his repentance was greater than his transgressions, and his love for God fervent and exemplary; so highly did God honour this man, that when his son Solomon sinned, the Lord told him that He would not rend the kingdom in his lifetime "for David thy father's sake" (III Kings 12:12). Of The Kings of Israel, Jesus the Son of Sirach testifies, "All, except David and Hezekias and Josias, were defective" (Ecclus. 49:4). The name David means "beloved."

His melodious Psalter is the foundation of all the services of the Church; there is not one service that is not filled with Psalms and psalmic verses. It was the means whereby old Israel praised God, and was used by the Apostles and the Lord Himself. It is so imbued with the spirit of prayer that the monastic fathers of all ages have used it as their trainer and teacher for their inner life of converse with God. Besides eloquently portraying every state and emotion of the soul before her Maker, the Psalter is filled with prophecies of the coming of Christ. It foretells

His Incarnation, "He bowed the heavens and came down" (Psalm 17:9), His Baptism in the Jordan, "The waters saw Thee, O God, The waters saw Thee and were afraid" (76:15), His Crucifixion in its details, "They have pierced My hands and My feet They have parted My garments amongst themselves, and for My vesture have they cast lots" (21:16, 18). "For My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink" (68:26), His descent into Hades, "For Thou wilt not abandon My soul in Hades, nor wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption" (15:10) and Resurrection, "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered" (67:1). His Ascension, "God is gone up in jubilation" (46:5), and so forth.

As for James, the Brother of God, see October 23.

December 29

14,000 infants (Holy Innocents) slain by Herod in Bethlehem

The infant-slaying Herod mentioned here is the same one that ruled at the time of Christ's Nativity. In those days, certain Magi, who were wise and noble men, perhaps even kings, set forth from the East, and came to Jerusalem, seeking the King of the Jews, Who had been born; and they said that in the East, where their homeland was, an unusual and strange star had appeared two years before, which, according to an ancient oracle (Num 24:17), was to signify the birth of some great king of the Jews. "For we have seen His star in the east," they

said, "and have come to worship Him" (Matt. 2:2). Hearing these things, Herod was troubled, and the whole city together with him. Then, having inquired and been informed by the high priests and scribes of the people that, according to the prophecies, Christ was to be born in Bethlehem, he sent the Magi thither and ordered them that, when they would find the Child, to inform him, so that he also - as he affirmed - might go and worship Him. But the Magi, after they had worshipped, departed by another way to their own country by a divine command. Then Herod was wroth and sent men to slay all the infants of Bethlehem and the parts round about, from two years old and under, thinking that with them he would also certainly slay the King Who had been born. But this vain man who fought against God was mocked, since Jesus the Child, with Mary His Mother, under the protection of Joseph the Betrothed, fled into Egypt at the command of an Angel. As for those innocent infants, they became the first Martyrs slain in behalf of Christ. But their blood-thirsty executioner, the persecutor of Christ, came down with dropsy after a short time, with his members rotting and being eaten by worms, and he ended his life in a most wretched manner.

December 31

Melania the Younger, Nun of Rome

Saint Melania the Younger, who was born in 388, was the grand-daughter of Saint Melania the Elder (see June 8). Her father

Publicola was an Eparch of Rome. She was joined in wedlock to a husband and became the mother of two children, both of which she lost shortly thereafter. Thus, having agreed with her husband to pass the rest of their lives in abstinence and chastity, and taking her mother Albina with her, she went off to Africa. They ransomed 8,000 captives; furthermore, they built two monasteries - one for men and one for women - in the city of Tagaste, which was in the district of Tunis. After seven years they moved to Jerusalem. Thereafter Melania shut herself up in a small and narrow hermitage by the Mount of Olives, and wearing away her body with fasting and vigil, she reposed in 434.

Because of the Apodosis of the Feast of the Nativity on the 31st of this month, the hymns of Saint Melania the Younger are transferred to December 30th along with the Martyr Anysia.

January 01

Circumcision of our Lord

Since the Mosaic Law commands that if a woman give birth to a male child, he should be circumcised in the foreskin of his flesh on the eighth day (Lev. 12:2-3), on this, the eighth day from His Nativity, our Saviour accepted the circumcision commanded by the Law. According to the command of the Angel, He received the Name which is above every name: JESUS, which means "Saviour" (Matt. 1:21; Luke 1:31 and 2:21).

January 01

Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesaria in Cappadocia

Saint Basil the Great was born about the end of the year 329 in Caesarea of Cappadocia, to a family renowned for their learning and holiness. His parents' names were Basil and Emily. His mother Emily (commemorated July 19) and his grandmother Macrina (Jan. 14) are Saints of the Church, together with all his brothers and sisters: Macrina, his elder sister (July 19), Gregory of Nyssa (Jan. 10), Peter of Sebastia (Jan. 9), and Naucratius. Basil studied in Constantinople under the sophist Libanius, then in Athens, where also he formed a friendship with the young Gregory, a fellow Cappadocian, later called "the Theologian." Through the good influence of his sister Macrina (see July 19), he chose to embrace the ascetical life, abandoning his worldly career. He visited the monks in Egypt, in Palestine, in Syria, and in Mesopotamia, and upon returning to Caesarea, he departed to a hermitage on the Iris River in Pontus, not far from Annesi, where his mother and his sister Macrina were already treading the path of the ascetical life; here he also wrote his ascetical homilies.

About the year 370, when the bishop of his country reposed, he was elected to succeed to his throne and was entrusted with the Church of Christ, which he tended for eight years, living in voluntary poverty and strict asceticism, having no other care than to defend holy Orthodoxy as a worthy

successor of the Apostles. The Emperor Valens, and Modestus, the Eparch of the East, who were of one mind with the Arians, tried with threats of exile and of torments to bend the Saint to their own confession, because he was the bastion of Orthodoxy in all Cappadocia, and preserved it from heresy when Arianism was at its strongest. But he set all their malice at naught, and in his willingness to give himself up to every suffering for the sake of the Faith, showed himself to be a martyr by volition. Modestus, amazed at Basil's fearlessness in his presence, said that no one had ever so spoken to him. "Perhaps," answered the Saint, "you have never met a bishop before." The Emperor Valens himself was almost won over by Basil's dignity and wisdom. When Valens' son fell gravely sick, he asked Saint Basil to pray for him. The Saint promised that his son would be restated if Valens agreed to have him baptized by the Orthodox; Valens agreed, Basil prayed, and the son was restored. But afterwards the Emperor had him baptized by Arians, and the child died soon after. Later, Valens, persuaded by his counsellors, decided to send the Saint into exile because he would not accept the Arians into communion; but his pen broke when he was signing the edict of banishment. He tried a second time and a third, but the same thing happened, so that the Emperor was filled with dread, and tore up the document, and Basil was not banished. The truly great Basil, spent with extreme ascetical practices and continual labours, at the helm of the church, departed to the Lord on the 1st of January, in 379. at the age of forty-nine.

His writings are replete with wisdom and erudition, and rich are these gifts he set forth the doctrines concerning the mysteries both of the creation (see his Hexaemeron) and of the Holy Trinity (see On the Holy Spirit). Because of the majesty and keenness of his eloquence, he is honoured as "the revealer of heavenly things" and "the Great."

Saint Basil is also celebrated on January 30th with Saint Gregory the Theologian and Saint John Chrysostom.

Rest from labour.

January 02

Seraphim the Wonderworker of Sarov

Saint Seraphim was born in the town of Kursk in 1759. From tender childhood he was under the protection of the most holy Mother of God, who, when he was nine years old, appeared to him in a vision, and through her icon of Kursk, healed him from a grave sickness from which he had not been expected to recover. At the age of nineteen he entered the monastery of Sarov, where he amazed all with his obedience, his lofty asceticism, and his great humility. In 1780 the Saint was stricken with a sickness which he manfully endured for three years, until our Lady the Theotokos healed him, appearing to him with the Apostles Peter and John. He was tonsured a monk in 1786, being named for the holy Hieromartyr Seraphim, Bishop of Phanarion (Dec. 4), and was ordained deacon a year later. In his unquenchable love for God, he continually

added labours to labours, increasing in virtue and prayer with titan strides. Once, during the Divine Liturgy of Holy and Great Thursday, he was counted worthy of a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who appeared encompassed by the heavenly hosts. After this dread vision, he gave himself over to greater labours.

In 1794, Saint Seraphim took up the solitary life in a cell in the forest. This period of extreme asceticism lasted some fifteen years, until 1810. It was at this time that he took upon himself one of the greatest feats of his life. Assailed with despondency and a storm of contrary thoughts raised by the enemy of our salvation, the Saint passed a thousand nights on a rock, continuing in prayer until God gave him complete victory over the enemy. On another occasion, he was assaulted by robbers, who broke his chest and his head with their blows, leaving him almost dead. Here again, he began to recover after an appearance of the most holy Theotokos, who came to him with the Apostles Peter and John, and pointing to Saint Seraphim, uttered those awesome words, "This is one of my kind."

In 1810, at the age of fifty; weakened with his more than human struggles, Saint Seraphim returned to the monastery for the third part of his ascetical labours, in which he lived as a recluse until 1825. For the first five years of his reclusion, he spoke to no one at all, and little is known of this period.

After five years, he began receiving visitors little by little, giving counsel and consolation to ailing souls. In 1825, the most holy Theotokos appeared to the Saint and revealed to him that it was pleasing to God that he fully end his seclusion; from this time the number of people who came to see him grew daily. It was also at the command of the holy Virgin that he undertook the spiritual direction of the Diveyevo Convent. He healed bodily ailments, foretold things to come, brought hardened sinners to repentance, and saw clearly the secrets of the heart of those who came to him. Through his utter humility and childlike simplicity, his unrivalled ascetical travails, and his angel-like love for God, he ascended to the holiness and greatness of the ancient God-bearing Fathers and became like Anthony for Egypt, the physician for the whole Russian land. In all, the most holy Theotokos appeared to him twelve times in his life. The last was on Annunciation, 1831, to announce to him that he would soon, enter into his rest. She appeared to him accompanied by twelve virgins-martyrs and monastic saints-with Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Theologian. With a body ailing and broken from innumerable hardships, and an unspotted soul shining with the light of Heaven, the Saint lived less than two years after this, falling asleep in peace on January 2, 1833, chanting Paschal hymns. On the night of his repose, the righteous Philaret of the Glinsk

Hermitage beheld his soul ascending to Heaven in light. Because of the universal testimony to the singular holiness of his life, and the seas of miracles that he performed both in life and after death, his veneration quickly spread beyond the boundaries of the Russian Empire to every corner of the earth. See also July 19.

January 04

Synaxis of the 70 Apostles

The Seventy Disciples and Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ are those Whom our Saviour chose in addition to the Twelve and sent forth unto the work of preaching. With the passage of time, others were added to their number by the Holy Apostles, who, with the accompaniment and assistance of the Seventy, were preaching the Gospel of Christ in various lands. Although their number eventually exceeded seventy, they were all nonetheless referred to as "of the Seventy" out of reverence for the number of Apostles which the Lord chose.

The divine Apostle and Evangelist Luke describes the calling and the sending forth of the Seventy as follows in his Holy Gospel (Luke 10:1-16): "After these things the Lord appointed another seventy disciples, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place, whither He Himself would come. Therefore said He unto them, the harvest is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He send forth

labourers into His harvest. Go then: behold, I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry neither purse, nor bag, nor sandals: and greet no man on the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter first say, Peace be on this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it; if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you; And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveeth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding know ye this, that the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be brought down to hades. He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that

despiseeth you despiseeth Me; and he that despiseeth Me despiseeth Him that sent Me."

After the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Lord, and after Pentecost, on which all the Apostles and men and women disciples of Christ, together with the Most Holy Theotokos (some 120 in number), were gathered in the upper chamber, they received the grace of the All-holy Spirit and went forth throughout the ends of the world, everywhere preaching and teaching the Gospel of Christ, and leading to the true Faith the peoples who were sunk in the darkness of impiety and idolatry.

Hymns of the Day



Tone 2 Troparion (Resurrection)

When You descended
to death, O Life
Immortal,
You slew hell with the
splendor of Your
Godhead.

And when from the depths You raised the
dead,
all the powers of heaven cried out://
"O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to
You!"

Tone 4 Troparion (Feast)

Your Nativity, O Christ our God,
has shone to the world the light of wisdom!

For by it, those who worshipped the stars,
were taught by a star to adore You,
the Sun of Righteousness,
and to know You, the Orient from on high.//
O Lord, glory to You!

Tone 2 Troparion (Righteous Ones)

Proclaim the wonder, O Joseph,
to David, the ancestor of God;
you have seen a Virgin great with child;
and you gave glory with the shepherds;
you worshipped with the **Magi**,
and received the news from the Angel.//
Pray to Christ God to save our souls!

Tone 3 Kontakion (Righteous Ones)

Today godly David is filled with joy;
Joseph and James offer praise.
The glorious crown of their kinship with
Christ fills them with great joy.
They sing praises to the One ineffably born
on earth,//
and they cry out: "O Compassionate One,
save those who honor You!"

Tone 3 Kontakion (Feast)

Today the Virgin gives birth to the
Transcendent One,
and the earth offers a cave to the
Unapproachable One!
Angels with shepherds glorify Him!
The Wise Men journey with the star,//
since for our sake the eternal God was born
as a little Child!

Tone 2 Prokeimenon (Resurrection)

The Lord is my strength and my song; / He
has become my salvation. (Ps. 117:14)

V. The Lord has chastened me sorely, but He
has not given me over to death.
(Ps. 117:18)

Tone 4 Prokeimenon (Righteous Ones)

God is wonderful in His saints, / the God of
Israel. (Ps. 67:35a)

(Instead of "It is truly meet...", we sing:)

Magnify, O my soul, the most pure Virgin
Theotokos,
more honorable and more glorious than the
heavenly hosts.

I behold a strange, most glorious mystery:
heaven—the cave;
the cherubic throne—the Virgin;
the manger—the place where Christ lay:
the uncontainable God, Whom we magnify in
song.

Communion Hymn

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him
in the highest! (Ps. 148:1)
Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous; praise
befits the just! (Ps. 32:1)
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Gospel and Epistle Readings

Epistle Reading

Prokeimenon. 4th Tone. Psalm 67.35,26.

God is wonderful among his saints.
Verse: Bless God in the congregations.

The reading is from St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 1:11-19.

Brethren, I would have you know that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

Gospel Reading

Sunday after Nativity

The Reading is from Matthew 2:13-23

When the wise men departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about

to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more." But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaos reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Wisdom of the Fathers

The Ancient of Days, who in times past gave

Moses the Law on Sinai, appears this day as a babe. As Maker of the Law He fulfills the Law, and according to the Law He is brought into the temple and given over to the Elder.

Anatolios

Festal Menaion. Great Vespers.

Nathanael too enters ... saying, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" ... Nevertheless, He is not ashamed to be named even from thence, signifying that He needs not ought of the things of men; and His disciples also He chooses out of Galilee.

St. John Chrysostom

Homily 9 on Matthew 2, 4th Century

Beyond the Sermon



THE HYMN
Heirmos, 9th Ode,
Matins of December 29
"It is impossible for
God to be seen by
people; and angelic
orders dare not to look
at Him. But the Word
incarnate has been
seen by mankind,
through you,

O all-pure Virgin.

Now magnifying Him, joining the celestial
hosts, all generations call you blest."

THE SERMON

A Humble God

It is not possible for us to see God directly with our biological eyes. Today's hymn also mentions that even the angels do not dare look at Him. In fact, no one can see God in a direct and visible manner. Christ's contemporaries only saw the human nature of God in the person of Jesus. The Apostles Peter, James, and John witnessed the glory and radiance of Christ's divine nature during His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. With the Nativity of Jesus through the Most Holy Theotokos, we are able, however, to come into contact with the Messiah, the incarnate Word of God. As Christians, we continue to meet Christ in the Gospel and the sacramental life of the Church. Through the life of prayer, we can actually increasingly connect ourselves to God and His Divine Grace. How is this even possible, one may ask? God Almighty is inaccessible in His essence, yet we can experience Him in His energies. With our spiritual senses, we can feel His Grace permeating our lives. Every day, we can discern the gifts He bestows on us, the many miraculous interventions He makes on our behalf, and the unfailing protection He grants us. God's omnipresence can be perceived through His continued and sustained presence in our everyday lives here on earth.

In the spiritual life of a Christian, Divine Grace starts being more actively perceived

as certain basic conditions are met. The first and most basic requirement is repentance. Repentance can be realized with our determination to cleanse ourselves and move beyond our mistakes, our passions, and sins. Living a life of daily repentance helps us spiritually regenerate ourselves and frees up room within our hearts for Christ to come and dwell in us.

Secondly, we need to internalize God's commandments and, above all, the commandment to love. When love genuinely permeates our hearts, we can feel God's Grace and His presence. The evangelist John assures us that: "he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him" (1 John 3:24).

A third aspect of our spiritual life is our active participation in the holy sacraments of our Church. Frequently receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion is especially important. In every Divine Liturgy, we offer bread and wine. Christ comes, sacrifices Himself, offers Himself for the forgiveness of our sins and our salvation. God allows us to receive Him with our human senses in the form of His Body and Blood. He does this out of infinite love for us. God wants all of us to be saved. That is, He wants all of us to be united with Him. God wants our hearts to burn with the desire to be close to Him. When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we surrender ourselves entirely to His mercy, to His love. God is no longer part of a dream or a fantasy. By actively engaging in the practice of our faith, we can actually arrive at a personal and direct encounter with God. Along with our human

eyes, let us open the eyes of our souls so that we can experience God manifesting Himself all around us.

Why Do We Have Our Homes Blessed?

by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div.

Begin Everything with Prayer

Since we are reminded in Scripture to begin whatever we do with prayer, it has been the practice of Orthodox Christians for centuries to have new dwellings blessed either before or just after settling in. This has been extended to one's business or office, and even college dorm rooms. "The service performed by the priest to bless the new dwelling is somewhat similar to the consecration of a church [in the Russian practice] in that holy water, holy oil, and incense are used and a lesson from the holy Gospel is read. All the rooms of the house are sprinkled with holy water and each of the four outer walls are anointed with the sign of the Cross with holy oil, a candle placed before them, and after the censuring of the house, the lesson from the Holy Gospel is read [in Greek practice the service of the Small Blessing of Waters is generally done]. At the conclusion of the blessing, the inhabitants are blessed with holy water: the husband first, followed by the wife and then the children - the oldest first. Relatives and friends present are then blessed." (Marriage and the Christian Home, by Rev. Michael B. Henning, p.24.)

Back to "The Fall"

From Scripture we know that whatever God created was good, but with "the Fall", evil entered the world, corrupting the creation. God the Father sent His Son Jesus to save it by effecting a "new creation". This is celebrated at Theophany, specifically with the Great Blessing of Water. "The consecration of the waters on this feast places the entire world - through its 'prime element' of water - in the perspective of the cosmic creation, sanctification, and glorification of the Kingdom of God in Christ and the Spirit." (The Orthodox Faith, Vol. II, Worship, by Fr. Thomas Hopko, p.127.) All the readings, hymns, prayers, and actions of the day speak of God's presence in our entire world and universe, His creation. Through water all of the creation is once again sanctified by God, becoming good again, the way God had intended.

The Feast Of Theophany

The Feast of Theophany (or Epiphany) commemorates the Baptism of our Lord in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. We know from the troparion of the day that "the Trinity was made manifest" to us. But there's more to it than this. "When Jesus descends into the depths of the river, there occurs a profound upheaval. It is not the one baptized who is purified, for he is spotless; but it is the water that is transfigured and illumined. This water, which was believed to be transparent and purifying, is in fact polluted, inhabited by evil spirits, servants of the old gods. ... By purifying the elements, by sanctifying matter, Jesus frees the cosmos from the powers of evil." (The Incarnate God, Vol. I, Catherine Aslanoff, French edition editor, translated by Paul Meyendorff, p.163.)

The Great Blessing of Water and the Home

The Great Blessing of Water takes place at the end of that day's Liturgy. Since our homes cannot be brought to the Church, the Church - through the priest and cantor - go to the homes. There the service of blessing, which began in the church, is finished with the sprinkling of water in the home. Traditionally, in most Orthodox parishes, the priest personally visits all his parishioners each year to pray with them in the place where they live, and to bless their surroundings with the newly sanctified water of Theophany (January 6/13). By sanctifying our living quarters, our private place, we extend the grace of God to our individual dwellings. (In very large parishes a yearly visit may not be possible. In areas of the country where the winter is harsh, I know of at least one parish where houses are blessed at the beginning of the ecclesiastical year in September.)

We also bring the blessed water to our homes to use throughout the year to bless our homes and to drink whether we are ill or as part of our daily prayer life. "There are many occasions in family life when a sip of holy water can help to remind us of the blessing that was given 'to bestow sanctification', 'unto healing of soul and body', 'to be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal', as the priest prayed in the litany of Epiphany day." (Little Falcons: Water, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1998, p.33.)

Weaving Christ into Our Lives

The blessing of homes by these holy waters maintains the spiritual association between the 'family church' and the parish, as well as again providing for the sharing of God's spiritual gifts. ... This annual blessing is not as elaborate as the blessing of the new dwelling, but because of this it should not be overlooked, for it is in this way that the grace of God is extended to individual dwellings." (Marriage and the Christian Home, p.25.)

If the priest comes to bless the home when the children are present, they have the opportunity to see the parish priest in a different and personal situation. If the priest permits, they can lead the way through the house, or hold a candle. They can show him their rooms or pets or favorite toys. They receive a blessing with water. For children, the house blessing shows the connection of the Church to the home.

In Summary

What does it mean to ask God to bless something? All things in the world have been spoiled right along with us. God must bless His world again in order for it to be the way that He wants it to be. For this reason God sent His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the world: to bless everyone and everything that He made, to make all things good again. When the priest comes to bless our homes, he asks God to have mercy on the house, to rid it of every evil and to fill it with every blessing. What a wonderful way to begin the New Year!