

# SUNDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS



*Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord*



# December 20, 2015

SUNDAY BEFORE NATIVITY - OF THE HOLY ANCESTORS – **TONE 5**  
THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR IGNATIUS THE GOD-BEARER, BISHOP OF ANTIOCH  
SCHEDULE OF SERVICES FOR THE WEEK OF DECEMBER 21 – DECEMBER 27

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24 - *VIGIL OF THE NATIVITY*

10:00 AM - Royal Hours

10:00 PM - *3 Нами Бог!* "Велике Повечір'я" "God is with us" Great Complines  
followed by Divine Liturgy

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25 – *THE NATIVITY IN THE FLESH OF OUR LORD, GOD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST*

9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy

For all parishioners

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26

**Please Note:** No Great Vespers at our parish. Instead join the Melkite community for Great Vespers at 5:00 PM at Holy Angels with their Bishop NICHOLAS (Samra.)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27 – SUNDAY AFTER NATIVITY: DAVID, JOSEPH, AND JAMES;

THE HOLY APOSTLE, PROTOMARTYR AND ARCHDEACON STEPHEN;  
OUR VENERABLE FATHER AND CONFESSOR THEODORE THE BRANDED, BROTHER  
OF ST. THEOPHANES THE HYMNOGRAPHER

9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy

For All Parishioners

*If you are reading the bulletin during the Liturgy (including the homily),  
please **stop** and be attentive – будьмо уважні!*

## FLOWER COLLECTION

Special envelopes are available in the back of the church do help with the purchase of flowers for the Feast of Nativity.



## Greeting Cards

Christmas Cards and various other greeting cards are for sale in the Church Hall. Please see Mary Kitt to purchase.

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12-24-1997

I HATE TO ASK YOU NICE FOLKS TO MOVE,  
BUT THE INN'S MARKETING DEPARTMENT  
FIGURES THAT IT WILL ONLY BE A MATTER  
OF TIME BEFORE THIS TREE GETS BETTER  
RECOGNITION THAN YOUR SON

## THE ROCK AND SAND STORY:

Two friends were walking in the desert. At a certain point they had an argument and one of them slapped the other. The one who was slapped was hurt, but without saying anything he wrote on the sand: Today my best friend slapped me. They continued walking until they came upon an oasis where they decided to go for a swim. But the one who was slapped almost drowned and his friend saved his life. When he recovered he wrote on a rock: Today my best friend saved my life. The one who slapped him and then saved his life asked him: "When I slapped you, you wrote on the sand and now you wrote on the rock. Why?..." The other friend replied:

"When someone hurts us, we must write it on sand where the winds of forgiveness can wipe it out. But when someone does something good to us we must engrave it on rock, where no wind can wipe it out."

Learn to write the wounds caused by others on sand, and engrave the benefactions done by them on rock.

*(from Sacred Convent of Holy Angels)*

### PARISHIONERS THAT ARE HOME BOUND



If you or a loved one cannot make it to Church, Fr. James would be more than pleased visit at your home, in the hospital, at a nursing home, or any other place. It is no inconvenience at all.

Please be sure to schedule a visit.

## Church Decorating and Cleaning

Please come on Tuesday, December 22nd at 10:00 AM to help clean and decorate the Church for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord.



### LET'S GO CAROLING!

ON JANUARY 2ND, LET'S GATHER AT THE CHURCH AT 10:00 AM TO GO CAROLING AT THE HOMES OF OUR SHUT-INS. WE WILL CONTINUE TO GO CAROLING DEPENDING UPON INTEREST AND PARTICIPATION. PLEASE CONTACT FR. JAMES IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING, WOULD LIKE TO BE VISITED OR KNOW OF SOMEONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO BE VISITED.



## ***JESUS IS NOT YOUR IMAGINARY FRIEND***

blogs.ancientfaith.com

At some point in our history, we began to attribute a merely mental reality to anything that was not an object and reduced the importance of objects to what they could contribute to our mental reality. We live in a sea of psychology. Things, we believe, are only what we think they are. My “relationship” with you means nothing more than the set of inner experiences and dispositions I have towards you. In many ways, a very good version of “virtual reality” is just as good as “reality” itself.

The assumptions behind this are absurd. First, we posit something called “psychological” that is somehow distinct from our bodies. But, more importantly, we ignore the most obvious forms of relationship that are biological at their very core. **How I “feel” about something or someone is considered the actual definition of what takes place between us.**

I have written recently about the culture of sentiment. I want to turn our attention in this article to how our sentimental psychology distorts our concept of God and what it means to be in relationship with Him. When many Christians speak about “having a relationship with Jesus,” they have in mind something psychological. It means that they *think* about Jesus and *talk* to Jesus and trust that He *thinks* about them and will do what He has promised. But such relationships are simply a caricature of what God intends for us and distorts the nature of the Christian life.

For example, in the single most important moment of His ministry with His disciples, Christ takes bread, blesses and breaks it saying, “Take, eat. This is my body...” This event has been the occasion for endless thought and discussion ever since. But all of the thought and discussion mean nothing

unless we take and eat. For it is important to know that the “relationship” we have with Jesus is rooted in something quite concrete: We eat His flesh and drink His blood. And though being quite concrete about this essential Christian act may seem somehow too literal for some, and not “spiritual” enough, the opposite is the case. The error lies with the “imaginary” communion that has come to be the feature of modern Christianity. We do well to remember that the language of eating and drinking belongs to Christ. It is how He described the action.

I will push the envelope a bit further. The Eucharist in many Christian communities is properly equated with the “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.”

*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. (Heb 13:15)*

Of course, in the various anti-sacramental theologies of some Protestant groups, this concept is used to trump the idea of the Eucharist as sacrifice. What we offer to God are words, ideas, thoughts and commitments. It is these psychological aspects that have come to have value while physical notions have been relegated to the category of “superstition.”

The Scriptures do not view praise and thanksgiving as psychological events:

*But You are holy, You who inhabit the praises of Israel. (Psa 22:3)*

God *inhabits* the praises of Israel. This is not the language of psychology nor a description of mere verbal and mental communication. It is the language of *ontology*, the language of *being*. It describes what is *real*.

The praise that we offer to God is not simply an idea. It is a *sound*. And sound is a *physical* event. Just as bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, so, too, does God *inhabit* our praise. We do not communicate telepathically, no matter how many might think it superior and possible. The Second Person of the Trinity is called the “Word of the Father.” The Logos [Word] is not a mental concept within the mind of the Father. He is *Word*. In Hebrew, He is *Davar*. And interestingly, the word “*Davar*” can mean both “word” and “action.” This notion of word is common and important in the Scriptures:

*“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and bud, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but shall accomplish what I please, and prosper in the purpose for which I sent it. (Isa 55:10-11)*

and

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb 4:12)*

Our modern habits of mind immediately read such passages and translate them into the terms of mental imagination and psychological function. This is deeply contrary to the understanding of Scripture and the traditional Christian treatment. In Ancient Israel (and generally in modern Jewish practice as well), the Divine Name (YHVH) is never spoken. It may be written (clearly the concept can be *thought*), but the physical expression of the Name

with the voice is forbidden. Instead, the word for Lord (*Adonai*), is voiced. This is not superstition, but a recognition of the substantial, sacramental character of the Word.

In a similar manner, our voiced praise is itself a sacrament. It is united with God – “He *inhabits* the praises of Israel.”

The psychologizing of relational realities is a relatively modern phenomenon. At its worst, it has created the current notion that “**my reality**” is “**whatever I feel.**” This absurdity has created a rash of neurotic protests over “perceived” slights and “micro-aggressions.” But such notions are only the most recent development in a long process of substituting psychological abstractions for true ontological realities. Recovering the true nature of reality is essential to a healthy Christian spiritual life.

It is interesting that the Scriptures put as much emphasis on truth-telling as they do. The issue is not a moral abstraction (“don’t tell lies because it’s wrong”). Rather, speaking a lie is an attempt to create a false reality, to put forward a creation that competes with the true creation of the good God. The damage of a lie is greater than its mere psychological effects. It is an “anti-sacrament,” an attempt to instantiate hell in our midst.

The Divine Liturgy is easily the most profound example of the *substance* of praise. The service must be understood as offering and sacrifice (for so it is self-described throughout).

*We also offer to You this reasonable worship: for the whole world, for the holy, catholic and apostolic Church;*

*For the precious gifts offered and sanctified...that our God, Who loves mankind, receiving them upon His holy, heavenly, and ideal altar as a sweet spiritual fragrance, will send down upon*

*us in turn His divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit...*

*[You] alone are holy, You accept the sacrifice of praise from those who call upon You with their whole heart. Accept also the prayer of us sinners, and lead us to Your Holy Altar. Enable us to offer You gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our sins and for the errors of the people. Account us worthy to find grace in Your sight, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to You, and that the good Spirit of Your grace may dwell upon us and upon these gifts here offered, and upon all Your people,*

Not only are the holy gifts of bread and wine offered as a "bloodless sacrifice," but so, too, the prayers and praises are described as offerings. The incense is described as an offering as well. And with all of these we pray that God will accept them "upon His heavenly altar and send down upon us in turn the grace of His all-holy Spirit."

It is more than proper to understand all

of this in a manner far more substantive than the merely mental and imaginary notions of modernity. Our praise is not *mere* words. Our words are themselves a true substance, inhabited by God. And so is the whole of our spiritual sacrifice. The sacrifice is not spiritual by virtue of being mental or somehow non-material. There is pretty much nothing about a human life that is immaterial. We are material beings, embodied souls. We offer to God the spiritual sacrifice of substantive praise, the spiritual sacrifice of burning incense, the spiritual sacrifice of bread and wine, the spiritual sacrifice of our souls and bodies. And in this primary exchange, we receive again from God the reality of His grace, the Divine Energies, the Life of His all-good and life-creating Spirit.

We live in a world of true wonder, not in a world of the imagination. We give to God what He has given to us: Thine Own of thine Own.

### **IS PLUMP A PREREQUISITE?**

A holy man was having a conversation with the Lord one day and said, "Lord, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like." The Lord led the holy man to two doors. He opened one of the doors and the holy man looked in. In the middle of the room was a large round table. In the middle of the table was a large pot of stew, which smelled delicious and made the holy man's mouth water. The people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles that were strapped to their arms and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful. But because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths. The holy man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. The Lord said, "You have seen Hell."

They went to the next room and opened the door. It was exactly the same as the first one. There was the large round table with the large pot of stew which made the holy man's mouth water. The people were equipped with the same long-handled spoons, but here the people were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking. The holy man said, "I don't understand." It is simple," said the Lord. "It requires but one skill. You see they have learned to feed each other, while the greedy think only of themselves."

## Sunday offering for December 13

Amount	Number
\$10.00	1
\$11.00	1 (loose)
\$15.00	1
\$20.00	2
\$25.00	1
\$40.00	5
\$50.00	4
\$85.00	2
\$200.00	1
\$300.00	1
\$400.00	1
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\$1571.00	

Parishioner Total: \$1571.00

Average / parish household (42): \$18.93

Weekly Stewardship Goal: \$2200.00

**Deficit: (\$554.00)**

**Year-to-date deficit: (\$48,179.00)**



DO NOT TRUST  
THE MINDSET OF  
SECULAR PEOPLE.  
... DECIDE WHAT  
YOU WANT MOST:  
THE SYMPATHY OF  
THE WORLD OR A  
RETURN NEAR TO  
GOD?

— ST PAISIOS



Pay attention carefully. After the sin comes the shame; courage follows repentance. Did you pay attention to what I said? Satan upsets the order; he gives the courage to sin and the shame to repentance.

+ *St. John Chrystotom,  
Homily 8, On Repentance and Almsgiving*

## Sunday offering for December 6

**Apologies for publishing incorrect information in last week's bulletin. Here is the corrected information.**

Amount	Number
\$15.00	1
\$20.00	3
\$25.00	1
\$40.00	2
\$47.00	1 (loose)
\$50.00	2
\$60.00	1
\$80.00	1
\$100.00	1
\$150.00	1
\$200.00	1
\$600.00	1
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\$1517.00	

Parishioner Total: \$1517.00

Average / parish household (42): \$18.28

Weekly Stewardship Goal: \$2200.00

**Deficit: (\$608.00)**

**Year-to-date deficit: (\$47,625.00)**

## GOD'S EXTENDED HAND

FOCUS (Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve) has provided us with a special bin for collecting donations of clothing, toiletries, etc. to be distributed at GEH. It is located near the door of the church hall.

### Pastor:

Fr. James Bankston: (619) 905-5278

### Pastoral Council:

Vladimir Bachynsky: (619) 865-1279

Mark Hartman: (619) 446-6357

Luke Miller: (858) 354-2008

### Social Committee Chair:

Megan Hartman (619) 540-4291

### Finance Committee:

Bohdan Knianicky: (619) 303-9698



**Українська Греко-Католицька Церква  
Святого Йоана Хрестителя  
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Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church**

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**Pastor:** Fr. James Bankston  
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Fr. James' cell phone: (619) 905-5278

***Celebrate and Be Glad***

Let us strive to comprehend the mystery. The reason God is in the flesh is to kill the death that lurks there. As diseases are cured by medicines and assimilated by the body, and as darkness in a house is dispelled by the coming of light, so death, which held sway over human nature, is done away with by the coming of God. And as ice formed on water covers its surface as long as night and darkness last but melts under the warmth of the sun, so death reigned until the coming of Christ; but when the grace of God our Savior appeared and the Sun of Justice rose, death was swallowed up in victory, unable to bear the presence of true life. How great is God's goodness, how deep his love for us!

Let us join the shepherds in giving glory to God, let us dance with the angels and sing: Today a Savior has been born to us. He is Christ the Lord. The Lord is God and He has appeared to us, not as God, which would have been terrifying for our weakness, but as a slave so as to free those who live in slavery. Who could be so lacking in sensibility and so ungrateful as not to join all here present in our gladness, exultation, and radiant joy? This feast belongs to the whole of creation. Let everyone join in and be grateful. Let our voices too ring out in songs of jubilation!

*St. Basil the Great*

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