

St. Nikolai Orthodox Mission of Alliance in conjunction with Orthodox Campus Fellowship, University of Mt. Union Dewald Chapel

Divine Liturgy: 9:00 am.

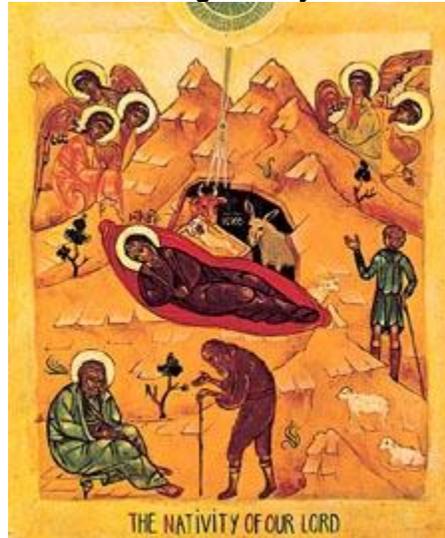
Very Reverend Father Joseph Cervo, Archpriest (AOCANA-retired)

Rev. Protodeacon James Gresh, Mission Administrator (Bulgarian Diocese OCA)

Mission Phone # 330 768-7633

Mission Website "<http://www.stnikolaiorthodoxmission.com/>

December 21, 2014: 28th Sunday after Pentecost / Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ / Sunday before the Nativity of Christ/Virgin Martyr Juliana



Tone 3 Troparion (Resurrection)

Let the heavens rejoice! Let the earth be glad!
For the Lord has shown strength with His arm.
He has trampled down death by death. He has become the first born of the dead.
He has delivered us from the depths of hell, and has granted to the world// great mercy.

Tone 2 Troparion (Fathers)

Great are the accomplishments of faith,
for the three Holy Youths rejoice in the fountain of flames as though in the waters of rest;
and the Prophet Daniel appeared a shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep.//
So by their prayers, O Christ God, save our souls!

Tone 4 Troparion of the Forefeast

Prepare, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened to all!
Adorn yourself, O Ephratha, for the Tree of Life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave!
Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the Divine Fruit;
if we eat of it, we shall live forever and not die like Adam.//
Christ comes to restore the image which He made in the beginning.

Tone 4 Troparion (St. Nikolai)

In truth you were revealed to your flock as a rule of faith, an image of humility and a teacher of abstinence; your humility exalted you; your poverty enriched you. Hierarch Father Nikolai, entreat Christ our God that our souls may be saved!

Tone 1 Kontakion (Fathers)

Rejoice, O Bethlehem! Prepare yourself, O Ephratha!
The Lamb is on her way to give birth to the Chief Shepherd she carries in her womb.
The God-bearing Forefathers will rejoice, beholding Him,
and with the shepherds, they will glorify the Virgin nursing Him.

Tone 3 Kontakion (Forefeast)

Today the Virgin comes to the cave to give birth to the Eternal Word.
Hear the glad tidings and rejoice, O universe! Glorify with the Angels and the shepherds
the Eternal God, Who is willing to appear as a little child!

Tone 4 Prokeimenon (Song of the Fathers)

Blessed are You, O Lord God of our fathers, and praised and glorified is Your name forever!

v: For You are just in all that You have done to us. (v. 3)

Epistle: Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40 (*Sunday before Nativity*)

Tone 4 Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

v: We have heard with our ears, O God, for our fathers have told us.

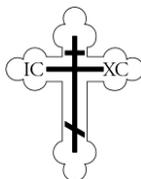
v: For You have saved us from them that oppose us, and have put to shame them that hate us.

Gospel: Matthew 1:1-25 (*Sunday before the Nativity*)

Communion Hymns

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the highest!

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous; praise befits the just! Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!



The Sunday before the Nativity of the Lord (December 18-24) is known as the Sunday of the Holy Fathers. On this day the Church commemorates all those who were well-pleasing to God from all ages, from Adam to St Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos, those who are mentioned in the genealogy of Luke 3:23-38. The holy prophets and prophetesses are also remembered today, especially the Prophet Daniel and the three holy youths (December 17). The Troparion to the Prophet Daniel and the three holy youths ("Great are the accomplishments of faith...") is quite similar to the Troparion for St Theodore the Recruit (February 17, and the first Saturday of Great Lent). The Kontakion to St Theodore, who suffered martyrdom by fire, reminds us that he also had faith as his breastplate (see I Thessalonians 5:8).

The Forefeast of the Nativity of the Lord begins on December 20. From now on, most of the liturgical hymns will be concerned with the birth of the Savior. During Matins (after the first Sedalen) on this second day of the prefeast of the Nativity we sing, "The unapproachable God in His tender mercy approaches me; He wills to be born in the flesh in the city of Bethlehem. He receives human nature from a Virgin maiden. Let us eagerly run to greet Him, crying out in fear: O Lord, glory to Thee."

2 Sunday's before Nativity, Sunday of the Forefathers: Luke 14:16-24

¹⁶ The Lord gave this parable, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, ¹⁷ and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' ¹⁸ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' ¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' ²⁰ Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' ²² And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' ²³ Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'"

Sunday, December 14, Homily:

Today we heard the "gospel of excuses", which strikes a note of sobriety as we approach The Nativity of Christ. It beacons us to be watchful, to take care, and be attentive to our lives. This time of Christmas, referred to as the "Winter Pascha" brings to mind the week before Pascha, during which we sing the hymn inspired by the gospel of Matthew 25:6 : "Behold the Bridegroom comes at midnight, and blessed is the servant whom he shall find watching, and unworthy is the servant whom he shall find heedless. Beware, therefore, oh my soul. Do not be weighed down with sleep, lest you be given up to death, and lest you be shut out of the kingdom. But rouse yourself, crying, Holy, Holy, Holy are thou O God."

The gospel parable we heard today concerns the great banquet. The Lord Jesus was the guest of a Pharisee, and he speaks about banquets, where to sit (in the lowest place – so you can move up – not down). He says that when you host dinners, don't just ask your family, neighbors and your rich friends, but invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the cripples and the blind. Everyone in this Gospel has excuses, their perceived 'good reasons' not to come to the banquet. Let us think about our own excuses. Perhaps we are too tired on Sunday. Perhaps the church has too

many hypocrites. Perhaps the banquet (the Liturgy) is too boring, and our own personal activities promise more enjoyment. So many are ready to decline the invitation, and send regrets. But isn't this where the hypocrites belong in the sheer light of reality? And who among us is not a hypocrite? If the banquet seems dull, isn't that just a reflection of our own dullness? People's sight becomes dim because they are locked inside themselves. Perhaps we believe that we, relatively speaking, are a good person. A sense of entitlement makes many feel they are chosen, therefore they don't need to attend the banquet. Many rationalize, I'll stay home. But God is not bound to our disloyalty. He can always look to another who is willing to accept His invitation.

Let us look now more carefully at the three specific excuses in this parable:

1. I've just bought a field. (notice the urgency) Please excuse me. A piece of ground = Property = wealth = possessions and investments are more important.
2. I've just bought Five Oxen = power, which often is a by-product of material success.
3. I've just got married. I can't come. Many choose the company of a spouse, family, friends and even recreation over the Master's banquet.

Of course, we need property and possessions, tools-technology, family and friends, but in themselves, these things are like wells without water. They are means without an end and they are idolatry. Nothing fails us like our successes. Nature without going to something greater ends in death.

So the master was angry at all the excuses, and he told his servants to go into the alleys, the streets and highways, and compel those to come in that his house might be filled. This is clearly our great commission to go out and try to compel others to come to the banquet.

We are guests at a great banquet. Here (i.e. the Altar Table) is the banquet table. God does not coerce us to come here. Instead, this is where we find joy. Psalm 36 (that is sung as part of the "Great Doxology," just prior to the start of Liturgy every Sunday) says: "For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light shall we see light. Continue your loving kindness to those who know you."

So let us go out and invite the sinners and the outcasts. No one will be denied, even at the last moment. But compel the invited to put on the garment of righteousness, to put on Christ. In his paschal Sermon, St. John Chrysostom writes, "If anyone has arrived even at the eleventh hour, let him not fear on account of his/her delay. For the master is gracious, and receives the last even as he received the first."

Thankfully, Our Father's mercy is wider than the ocean, and greater than the heavens. Glory be to God Who has shown us the Light!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CONFESSIONS:

Father Joe will be hearing confessions during Coffee Hour on Sunday, December 21, 2014.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES:

Wednesday, December 24, Nativity Matins - 6 pm.

Wednesday, December 24, Festal Liturgy - 7 pm.

PRAYERS requested

For The Health and Salvation of:

Candi (friend of John and Lynette Baier)

Jim (Cousin of Fr. David)

George Borojevich (brother of Wally and Debby)

Mother Ana

Nanci Stradley (Pancreatic Cancer)

Dawn Shaheen

Patricia Kosivich, friend of and helper to Mother Ana

Father Joe Cervo

Doreen Wishnok (friend of the Krupko's who is battling breast cancer)

George Ralich, (Dan's father)

Katie (Granddaughter of Father Stevo Rocknage, St. Sava Church in McKeesport, who is battling a rare genetic disease)

Stefanie Waseman

Metodija Damljanovic (4 year old child who fell ill suddenly and grandson of Prota Vasko Sokolovic)

Roland Augspurger (friend of the Krupko's who is battling cancer)

Jenny Codrea (friend of the Blebea's)

Joe Novak

Jake Krupko

Kerri Baugher (friend of the Krupko's who has cancer)
Fr. Basil Duesenberry

For The Repose of the Souls of:

+Wendy (friend of Lana Baier)
+Father Djuro Majerle
+Max

(Please give us any updates to the prayer request list at the beginning of each month)

COFFEE HOUR:

December 7 - Larry and Deanna Dordea
December 14 - Corbin and Georgie Washington
December 21 - The Krupko and Catania Families
December 24 - Father Joe and Linda Cervo
December 28 - The Novak Family

Please see Cathy or Tom Baier if you would like to sign up for Coffee Hour. We are already signing up for 2015 Coffee Hours. THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE HOSTED COFFEE HOUR!!!! If anyone is interested in chairing Coffee Hour sign ups, please let us know.

DONATIONS:

Please note, any special donations will be added directly to our building fund unless otherwise specified by the donor. God bless all who have generously donated to and support our mission.

CHRISTMAS GIVING:

Last year, we adopted two local families and purchased food and gifts for them for Christmas. We are planning to do the same project this year. Allison Krupko has volunteered to chair this charitable offering. We will be taking collections to purchase gifts. Please make checks payable to St. Nikolai Orthodox Mission.

BUILDING PROJECT:

We are finalizing plans to begin phase one construction of our mission building project. If you have not made a commitment and would like to, please discuss this with either Father Joe or Deacon James by email or phone and/or by making your check payable to St. Nikolai Orthodox Mission of Alliance. May God Bless all donors for their support of our Mission and purpose in celebrating Orthodoxy.

CHOIR PRACTICES:

Choir Practice will be held at the Gresh Home on Wednesdays at 7:00 pm. Please join us.

DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES:

Amy and Matthew Catania – 29th

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS:

Jaga Radosevic – 25th
Kate White – 28th
Father Dragan Filipovic – 30th

(We are preparing the 2015 calendar and need birthdays and anniversaries for anyone not currently on our calendar)

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