

St Michael's Orthodox Church

A parish of the Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

305 Walnut Street, Jermyn, Pennsylvania 18433

<https://stmichaeljermyn.org/>

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December 17, 2023: SECOND SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY.

Forefathers of our Lord Jesus Christ – Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths

We welcome ALL of you to St Michael's. Every one of you is precious to us. *Especially all children.*

After Liturgy, please come downstairs for coffee, refreshments, and fellowship.

Services and Events

Saturday, Dec 16, 4:00 p.m. – Great Vespers and Confessions

Sunday, Dec 17, 9:30 a.m. – Divine Liturgy and Fellowship. *Memorial Service for Yonka Bartolova.*

Friday, Dec 22, 9:30 a.m. – **Royal Hours of the Nativity.** *This service lasts about 1 hour, and is a collection of hymns and readings highlighting the prophecies and the theology of the Nativity.*

Saturday, Dec 23, 4:00 p.m. – Great Vespers and Confessions

Sunday, Dec 24, 9:30 a.m. – **Eve of the Nativity.** Divine Liturgy and Fellowship.

Important Note: The time following Vespers on Saturday 12/23 (along with very limited time prior to the Divine Liturgy on Sunday 12/24) is the final opportunity to seek the Sacrament of Confession. Confessions will not be heard at the Nativity Vigil or Liturgy.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, GOD, AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Sunday, Dec 24, 6:30 p.m. – **Vigil of the Nativity**

Monday, Dec 25, 9:30 a.m. – **Festal Divine Liturgy**

Saturday, Dec 30, 4:00 p.m. – Great Vespers

Sunday, Dec 31, 9:30 a.m. – Divine Liturgy and Fellowship

Coffee Hour is offered by:

Dec 17: Maryann Dubee & Susan Schlasta

Dec 31: Mat. Dolores & Marilyn Petorak

Dec 24: Millie Telep & Mat. Alexandra

“We seek to rededicate ourselves to the teachings of the Holy Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church. We are here to provide a loving and caring community, by participating in the worship services, so we may reach-out to those who are lost and witness the love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

- Vision Statement, adopted October 17, 2022

Glory to God for all things!

Become Like Children: The Forefeast

"Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." (Mark 10:15)

Every very year as Christmas approaches, we hear a great deal of speculation about the meaning of Christmas in a society that is persistently trying to shake off its Christian identity. During such a debate about the meaning of Christmas, one comment in particular struck me: "Christmas is a feast for children."

Although the person who made this comment intended it to be taken in a negative sense, I was surprised to find myself agreeing with him. For Christ said, "**Become as little children**" (*Matt. 18:3*). What do children have that we adults are missing? First of all, they have a capacity for **wonder and innocent joy**, which in adults is tainted by cynicism and sinfulness. Secondly, they are capable of **complete trust**, which ends up being choked by the thorns of adulthood. And thirdly, they possess absolute humility. These childlike characteristics—**wonder, joy, faith, humility**—should be our response to the Nativity. Christ comes to be born not in a haughty palace decked with jewels and precious stones, but in a humble manger. So too will He not enter the hearts of the proud, but only those who are humble and "poor in spirit" (*Matt. 5:3*):

I will make you all my kinsmen, if you keep My commandments, says Christ to mankind as He comes forth from a pure womb. Granting us peace, He commands us to have lowly thoughts, and to recognize Him as Lord and to sing: We highly exalt You forever!

- Triode of Compline of the Forefeast, second hymn of the eighth Ode)

Looking upon Christ, who humbles Himself, let us be lifted up from the passions that drag us down; having learned in faith and good zeal not to think lofty things, let us be humbled in spirit; that by exalted works we may exalt Him who is being born.

- Triode of Compline of the Forefeast, third hymn of the ninth Ode)

Christmas is indeed a feast for children, and only when **we** become like children will we be able to truly rejoice in the wonder of Christmas: the eternal and Almighty God coming to us as a defenseless and vulnerable baby. This is the mystery by which we should be humbled; this is the strange wonder in which we are to rejoice as children do.

– Fr Vassilios Papavassiliou, *Meditations for Advent* (Ancient Faith Publishing, Chesterton, 2013), 57-59.

Today's Scripture

Epistle: Colossians 3:4-11

Brethren, When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Gospel: Luke 14:16-24

The Lord spoke this parable: "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' 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.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' 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.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' 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.' For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper."

Hymns of the Day

Sunday Troparion (Tone 3)

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 the world great mercy.

Forefathers (Tone 2)

Through faith Thou didst justify the Forefathers, / betrothing through them the Church of the gentiles. / These saints exult in glory, / for from their seed came forth a glorious fruit: / she who bore Thee without seed. // So by their prayers, O Christ God, have mercy on us!

Prophet Daniel & the Holy Youths (Tone 2)

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!

Forefathers (Tone 6)

You did not worship the graven image, / O thrice-blessed ones, / but armed with the immaterial Essence of God, / you were glorified in a trial by fire. / From the midst of unbearable flames you called on God, crying: / "Hasten, O compassionate One! / Speedily come to our aid, // for Thou art merciful and able to do as Thou dost will!"

Donations & Memorials

- \$150 in memory of Sam Mattise, by his wife Joanne.
- \$75 for Christmas and in memory of Michael Kitchura, by his wife Annemarie Kitchura and family.
- \$25 for Christmas Flowers in memory of Andrew Hanchak, by his wife Dorothy.
- \$50 in memory of Yonka Bartolova, by her husband Anton, son Svetoslav, and daughters Polina & Kamelia.
- \$100 for Christmas by George, Marilyn, & Joshua Petorak.

Giving Opportunities: We welcome the following donations. Please see Fr John if interested.

- \$80 towards sacramental wine (approx. once every 2 months)
- \$150 (total) for new Bookmarks for the Holy Gospel (in six colors)
- \$64 for two embroidered cross-shaped liners for the Crosses on the Holy Table

Donations are accepted for **Vigil Lights, in the Altar and in front of the Relics**. You may donate in memory of the departed, or for your health or the health of family members.

So that our Church can meet our growing financial obligations, we ask all parishioners, when not in Church, to send in your **weekly offering envelopes** to St. Michael's Church, 305 Walnut St., Jermyn, PA 18433. *Thank you!*

In your prayers...

Please pray for our **Protodeacon Gabriel Petorak**, who was hospitalized last week. Please consider sending a note or card to Pdn. Gabriel & Mat. Delores, 218 Walnut St, Jermyn, PA 18433.

Please also remember in your prayers those who are ill or recovering from illness or injury:

Fr Michael Evans, Fr Joseph Chupek, Fr Peter Telencio, Edward & Karen Hojnicky, Gregory Hansen, Olga Krutz, Maryanne Krisa, Michael Krisa, William Hummer, Barbara Mosley.

ESPECIALLY AS CHRISTMAS APPROACHES, please remember those who are alone or confined. TODAY is a good day to send them a Christmas letter or card, so that it is delivered on time.

- **Eileen Dance**, Carbondale Nursing & Rehabilitation Center #202, 10 Hart Place, Carbondale, PA 18407
- **John Drutarosky**, Carbondale Nursing & Rehabilitation Center #307, 10 Hart Place, Carbondale, PA 18407
- **Theresa Krenitsky**, Carbondale Nursing & Rehabilitation Center #307, 10 Hart Place, Carbondale, PA 18407
- **Nicholas Mattise**, Personal Care at Allied Terrace, Room 218, 100 Terrace Ln, Clarks Summit, PA 18411
- **Barbara Palubniak**, 629 Hill St, Mayfield, PA 19433
- **Peggy Petrilak**, 127 Petrilak Lane, Greenfield Twp, PA 18407
- **Peter Senio**, The Gardens of Green Ridge, 2751 Boulevard Ave, Scranton, PA 18509
- **Jerry & Marilyn Soroka**, c/o Glenmaura Senior Living, 11 Glenmaura National Blvd, Moosic, PA 18507
- **Paul Kostiak**, along with **Dolores Brophy**, 631 Jefferson Ave, Jermyn, PA 18433
- **Paul & Barbara Mosley**, 623 Cemetery St, Mayfield, PA 18433

Second Sunday before the Nativity: Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

The earthly ancestors of Christ are remembered on this Sunday of the Nativity Fast, and include all the great Fathers and Mothers and Prophets of the Old Testament, starting with Adam, Abraham, the Righteous Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, including Holy Prophet Elias and Daniel, and concluding with Holy Prophet Zechariah (Zachary), Joachim and Anna, Holy Prophet and Forerunner John the Baptist and The Theotokos. They lived before the Law and under the Law, especially the Patriarch Abraham, to whom God said, "In thy seed shall all of the nations of the earth be blessed" (*Gen 12:3, 22:18*).

The Prophet Daniel

The Prophet Daniel was a captive carried away to Babylon by order of Nebuchadnezzar, after the fall of the kingdom of Judah during the sixth century before Christ. His ministry as a prophet came late in his life. While remaining loyal to his faith in the one God, Daniel attained a high position of the court of Nebuchadnezzar and was known for his skill in the interpretation of dreams (*Daniel 1:17 and 2:14*) and of mysterious handwritings on the wall. He is included in the Septuagint among the prophets and was referred to by Christ as a prophet in Mark 13:14 and in Matthew 24:15. By tradition his age at death was near 100 years.

The Three Holy Youths: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah

The Three Holy Children, Hananiah (*Shadrach*), Mishael (*Meshach*), and Azariah (*Abednego*) were companions of the Prophet Daniel in the tribe of Judah. They were taken prisoner and led away as captives with other Jews during the Babylonian Captivity. Eventually they were taken into the court of King Nebuchadnezzar as servants, stripped of their Hebrew names, and given Babylonian names which honored pagan deities. They later would be delivered by God from death after being placed in furnace by Nebuchadnezzar.

The Faith We Hold

The Communion of Saints. In their spiritual care of each another Christians also rely on intercessory prayers. They ask for one another's prayers and believe that "the prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." (*James 5:16*) But life continues after death. It would be strange to think that the prayers of a devout Christian reach God during his temporal life in this world, but not afterwards when he has "departed and is with Christ." (*Phil 1:23*) Indeed epitaphs from the time of the martyrs show that **from the very beginning of Christianity**, those who have departed into the kingdom of God **have been asked to pray** for those left behind.

The more deeply a Christian comes to know his own soul and the brighter he is illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the more deeply he also sees his own sinfulness and its opposite, the greatness of the mercy and love of God. Thus compassionate love towards all human souls fettered by sin grows in him, and prayer for them takes an ever-greater place in his life. If this is the case during man's sojourn in the world of time, how much more reason there is for his prayer to continue when he has gone to the kingdom of glory. According to the vision of St. John, there "the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God." (*Rev 8:4*)

There is a constant communion of prayer between the visible, earthly part of the Church, and the invisible, heavenly part, and indeed each day of the year is dedicated to the memory of some saints whose names are known. The stories of their struggles are told in hymns dedicated to them and they are asked to make intercession. Thus we follow the Apostle's exhortation: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith." (*Heb 13:7*) In glorifying the saints' spiritual struggle and victory, the Church is in fact glorifying God's work of salvation, the work of the Holy Spirit; it experiences the salvation already accomplished in them, the goal towards which the members of the Church militant are still pressing on. (*Phil 3:12, 14*)

First among the saints and always to be praised is Mary, the Favored One, the ever-Virgin Mother of God. (*Luke 1:28, 48*) In her, in St. John the Baptist and in the Apostle John, all of whom led celibate lives, as well as in their countless followers, virginity was restored to the honour which naturally belonged to it before the Fall. (*Gen 2:25*) Thus one alternative Christian way is monastic asceticism, which is for those who have received a calling to this way of life. (*Mt 19:11-12; 1 Cor 7:7*)

The veneration of the saints and our communion with them in prayer are the Church's living experience. For those who lack this experience, it is hard to understand the communion of saints as a communion of prayer. The Church has never adored [*worshipped*] any other than the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The saints, as well as all the sacred things through which Divine grace is communicated to man, are venerated, not adored.

– Abp Paul of Finland, *The Faith We Hold* (SVS Press, 1980), 27-28.