

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

A PARISH OF THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

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Department of
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
ORTHODOX CHURCH in AMERICA

Taking Hold

On December 28 the Church celebrates the memory of not one person but a large group of martyrs – twenty thousand men, women and children. They gave their lives early in the fourth century.

These Christians are known as the 20,000 Martyrs of Nicomedia, a city in the northwestern area of what is now Turkey. Because they were living during the reign of the emperor Maximian Hercules, their faith put them in serious danger. The pagan emperor was eager to reduce the growing number of Christians, who seemed a threat to his own authority.

He saw a chance as the Feast of the Nativity approached in the year 302. Nicomedia had an especially large Christian population, and the believers would be gathered in the local church for the feast, beginning their worship in the first hours of the new day.

Sure enough, soon after midnight the church was so full of people that there was hardly room to stand. Candles, incense, chanted prayers and singing added to the festive atmosphere, in anticipation of the service that was about to begin.

But the emperor had made his plans. His soldiers, at the command of his official representative, surrounded the church so that nobody could get out. Then the official pushed his way to the front of the church. He announced that the gathered believers had a choice: they could offer sacrifice to the gods immediately, or be burned to death by the soldiers who were prepared to set the building aflame with everyone inside.

The stunned Christians realized that they had no chance of escape against the armed soldiers surrounding them. Before panic could set in, the courageous archdeacon rose and addressed the crowd with great passion.



December 22, 2013

26th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday Before the Nativity of Christ
Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ

- 9:00am – Divine Liturgy
Epistle: Heb. 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40
Gospel: Mt. 1:1-25
- Fellowship – everyone is invited for Coffee Hour following the Divine Liturgy
- “The Nativity Story” movie - segment 3

Schedule of Services

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24 – EVE OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST
4:30pm - Great Compline & Matins

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25 – THE NATIVITY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

9:00am - Divine Liturgy, followed by Festal Luncheon in the church hall. Please join us.

(continued on the next page)

Intercessory Prayers

We pray for all our fellow parishioners, but we pray especially for those who are incapable of being with us in church. Among them are:

Michael, Mary and Max Bakaletz, Genevive Bobenko, Pauline Bodnar, Nancy Filak, Dorothy Gentner, Mary Hadginske, Helen Kurnewitz, Margaret Lawler, Kathleen Lazarczyk, Emil Mikulik, MaryAnn Rabakozi, Anatoly & Anna Rozanovich, Nadine Sojka, Eva Stashitsky, Ann Velebir.

“My brothers and sisters!” he called out. “Think of where we are, and remember the reason why we have gathered tonight. We have come to celebrate because Our Lord was born as a Man, to come among us and save us. He is about to be sacrificed for us on the holy altar as we perform the Divine Liturgy. Should we not be ready to sacrifice our lives for Him in this holy place, at this holy time?”

These words inspired the believers. Overcoming fear, they were ready now to submit to the terrible flames, still singing praise to God. The church burned for days, but the smoke didn't put forth the usual stench. Instead it was fragrant, and those who passed the ruined building saw a golden light, caused by something other than fire, emanating from it.

On this day we read the following words from I Timothy: “Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (6:12).

That night in Nicomedia, twenty thousand martyrs “took hold of eternal life” in a way they didn't expect. But what better way could there be than singing to the Lord in church, in celebration of His birth for our salvation?

Schedule of Services

(continued from previous page)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26 – 2ND DAY OF THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY – SYNAXIS OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS
9:00am - Divine Liturgy

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27 – 3RD DAY OF THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY – HOLY PROTOMARTYR AND ARCHDEACON STEPHEN
9:00am - Divine Liturgy

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28
4:00pm - Great Vespers

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29
9:00am - Divine Liturgy



Announcements

- ◆ The last part of “The Nativity Story” movie will be shown today after the coffee hour. Everyone is welcome to stay.
- ◆ Envelopes for 2014 and our parish wall calendars have arrived and are available in the candle room. Many thanks to the calendar sponsor – J.C.Fila Lexington Memorial Home.

Welcome Visitors

We welcome all visitors to our Divine Liturgy. It is our joy to have you with us today. If this is your first visit to our parish, we welcome you and invite you to return as often as you are able. While Holy Communion may only be received by prepared Orthodox Christians, our non-Orthodox guests are welcome to join us in venerating the Cross, receiving blessed bread at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, and for fellowship in our Church Hall after the service.