

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST ORTHODOX CHURCH

ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

A PARISH OF THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

170 Lexington Avenue, Passaic, New Jersey, 07055
www.stjohnspassaic.org

REV. FR. IGOR KSENIUK, Rector

973-473-1928 (office)
646-387-5494 (cell)
fr.igorksn@gmail.com

Department of
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

The Royal Hours at Christmas

All Divine Liturgies in the Orthodox Church are preceded by the chanting of the Hours services, consisting of psalms, hymns and prayers. But in the great cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, the Byzantine Emperor was present each year at the service beginning the celebration of the Nativity of Christ. Therefore, the Hours preceding the Vespers and Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great on Christmas Eve are given the name "Royal Hours."

The Emperor's attendance at the service was in part a demonstration of his humble acknowledgment that Jesus Christ reigns over all mortal beings. The third psalm is Psalm 45: "My heart overflows with good tidings as I sing my ode to the King; my tongue is like the pen of a skillful scribe. Thou art the fairest of the sons of men; grace is poured upon Thy lips; therefore God has blessed Thee forever. Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O mighty one, in Thy splendor and beauty. Draw Thy bow, ride forth in triumph and reign, for the sake of truth, and meekness, and righteousness." Such words could apply to only one Sovereign.

The verses of the Royal Hours make no attempt to conceal the human confusion and anguish of Joseph. He tells Mary, "I am troubled; what can I say to you? Doubt clouds my mind; depart from me! What has happened to you, O Mary? Instead of honor, you bring me shame. Instead of joy, you fill me with grief. Men who praised me will blame me."

The verses also chillingly describe the effect of one powerful man's jealousy and fear. Herod was willing to kill innocent children to keep his unique position as ruler: "Herod was filled with alarm when he saw the righteous wise men. Overcome by

Intercessory Prayers

We pray for all our fellow parishioners, and we pray especially for those who are incapable of being with us in church. Please keep in your prayers our Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Genevieve Bobenko, Mary Fehisin, Nancy Filak, Mary Hadginske, Helen Kurnewitz, Margaret Lawler, Kathleen Lazorczyk, Marian Nagel, MaryAnn Rabakozi, Anatoly & Anna Rozanovich, Nadia Sojka, Maryann Stagen, Eva Stashitsky, Ann Velebir.

... fury, he determined precisely when the child was born. Mothers were robbed of their infants: Their tender lives were reaped as a bitter harvest."

... Mary could not stop the terror and sorrow created by Herod. But she could lovingly reassure Joseph. In the verses she says: "Why are you so troubled? Why are you in misery seeing me with child? Do you not understand at all? I bear a fearful mystery! Cast your fears away, and learn a strange wonder: God in His mercy descends from heaven to earth. Within my womb He has taken flesh! When He is pleased to be born, you will see Him. You will rejoice, and worship Him, your Creator."

... The Royal Hours give us a whole atmosphere surrounding the birth of Our Lord: the venality of Herod who fears being supplanted; Joseph's fear of disgrace; Mary's faith, which leads her to inspire Joseph – and us – with words like "mystery" and "wonder" to describe the event she does not fully understand but has fully accepted.

... Father Alexander Schmemmann has rightly called the Royal Hours "one last meditation on the cosmical meaning of the Nativity, on the decisive and radical change it performed in the entire creation."

Schedule of Services

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

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27 – 3RD DAY OF THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY – SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY. HOLY RIGHTEOUS ONES. HOLY PROTOMARTYR AND ARCHDEACON STEPHEN
9:00am - Divine Liturgy

Memorial Offering

Beautiful wooden kiot (frame) for our church's set of Festal Icons was generously donated by Maryann Stagen in loving memory of her parents Mary & John Stagen, aunt Anna, and grandparents Mary & John Korinda and Julia & Michael Stagen. May the Lord rest their souls in His Heavenly Kingdom. Memory Eternal!



Announcements

◆ The "Lessons in Our Faith" video series on our Diocesan website, featuring Archbishop Michael, offers concise and informative instruction on a variety of topics. Two videos are particularly appropriate at this time of year. One offers an insightful discussion of the life and spirit of the beloved **Saint Nicholas** the Wonderworking Archbishop of the 4th century (commemorated on December 6th). The other video is "**The Nativity of Christ: 7 Questions & 7 Answers.**" Each video is available for viewing on any computer or mobile device. To view them, go to www.nynjoca.org.

◆ Registration is now open for the **6th Annual Diocesan Altar Servers Retreat**, which will be at St. Basil's Academy, Garrison NY. More details at our Diocesan website: www.nynjoca.org



December 20, 2015

29th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ
SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY

• **9:00am** – Divine Liturgy
Epistle: Heb. 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40
Gospel: Mt. 1:1-25

• **Coffee Hour** – everyone is invited for a fellowship following the service.

Schedule of Services

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

FRIDAY, 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.

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