

SS. PETER & PAUL

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Rev. Joseph McCartney, Rector

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Gospel Reading ~ Matthew 1:1-25
Epistle Reading ~ Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40
Sunday before the Nativity

This Week at a Glance

Sat, Dec. 29th

6:00 pm - Great Vespers

Sun, Dec. 30th

9:00 pm - 3rd & 6th Hours

9:30 am - Divine Liturgy

Historical Items

Our sales counter in the basement has been liquidated and will not be restocked. Instead we will use that area to store historical items from the parish to celebrate our long and rich history. If you have any documents, artifacts or old photos that you would like to have considered for inclusion in the display, please see Fr Joseph.

Gospel Meditation

We read the genealogy of our Lord, that part readers of Scripture often pass over, because it demonstrates that Jesus was really born as a man, He has a human lineage, ancestors, both sterling characters and reprehensible ones, in-laws and outlaws, just like all of us do. He does not avoid the riff raff of this world, He embraces them! I saw a bumper sticker at the Episcopal Divinity School yesterday that read, "God bless the whole world. No exceptions!" Our God does bless the whole world, no exceptions! This God does this, "no exceptions", by being born as a human child, taking on all of human nature.

A god that forever stands at a distance from his creation is no god at all. A god who limits his contact with humanity to laws and books is no god at all. At least he is not a god of love. But the true God is a God primarily and absolutely of love and this He proves by coming to earth, taking on human flesh to meet us face to face, to touch us, to share all our joys and sorrows, to care for us and to die for us in order to make it possible for us all to share the life and kingdom of His Father forever and ever; a life more beautiful, more abundant, more thrilling, more exciting, more glorious than anything we could ever create or imagine in our wildest dreams. The Incarnation of the Son of God is absolutely essential! Had He not become Man we would never be able to know Him like this – intimately and personally. He would remain always the "God up there," the Unapproachable, the Unattainable, the Fearful and Capricious Judge, the God we would always have to try and satisfy – like Zeus! But we Orthodox do not recognize this deity as God. We have looked in the eyes of Jesus Christ and have seen God staring back at us with human eyes!

Annual Parish Meeting

We will have our annual Parish Meeting on **Sunday, January 27th** immediately following Divine Liturgy. This annual meeting is open to eligible voting members of our parish only. Visitors and non-members will be asked to exit the church hall prior to the start of the meeting. Please keep in mind that a "voting member" is one who 1.) Has received communion and confession in the last year in our parish. (*Confession in home parish is required unless a blessing is received from the rector to confess to a different local Orthodox priest.*) 2.) One who has fulfilled financial obligation in the past year, which is currently defined by the parish council as a minimum contribution of \$275 per person in the last year. If you haven't fulfilled these obligations you must do so **before Christmas** to be considered an eligible voting member.

Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ

The Feast of the Nativity of Jesus is one of the most joyful days of the Orthodox Church. It ranks next to the greatest holiday, the Resurrection of Jesus. The Feast of the Birth of Jesus is also known as the "Incarnation of Christ." This means that Jesus became a man and came into the world to save us. We also refer to this joyous feast as Christmas.

The icon of the Nativity tells the story of Christ's birth from the Scriptures. It also shows that all creation is taking part in Christ's birth. The angels give thanks with their song; the heavens give the star; the Wise Men give their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The poor, humble shepherds give their praise and amazement; the earth gives the cave, and humanity gives the Virgin.



This Holy Icon is an icon with many scenes. First, it stresses the importance of the Theotokos, the Mother of Jesus. She is placed in the center and is the largest figure in the icon. In this icon, she is kneeling with crossed arms, looking at the Christ child. The three stars, denoting her virginity before, during, and after the Nativity, are on her garments. The Christ Child, in the center of the icon, is in swaddling clothes and is lying in the manger. In the background is the dark cave where He was born. In the cave are an ox and a donkey guarding the newborn Babe. Even though the Gospels say nothing of the cave, this information is from Holy Tradition. Neither do the Gospels speak of the ox and the donkey, but all icons of the Nativity include these animals. Including the animals in the icon fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 1:3, "The ox knows his master, and the donkey his master's crib; but Israel does not know me, and the people have not regarded me." The long ray of light from the star points directly to the cave. This ray comes from the star and travels to all parts of the world. It teaches that this bright star is an astronomical happening, and is a messenger from heaven announcing the birth of Jesus.

On the left hand side of the icon is another scene. The Wise Men, who were led by the star, are riding horses to bring their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus. The Wise Men are of various ages. One is without a beard. In those days, young men did not wear beards. The other Wise Man has long hair and a long beard, which indicates that he is much older. These details teach that regardless of age and appearance, the Good News was given to each and everyone.

Opposite the Wise Men is the scene with the humble shepherds. An angel proclaims the glad tidings. A young shepherd plays a reed instrument. This scene reveals that the music of the humans was added to the hymn of the angels. Across from the shepherd's scene is the heavenly choir of angels. They are giving glory to God. The angels serve two purposes in the Nativity of Christ. They give glory to God and announce the good news to all mankind. The background shows a very rugged terrain. This is not a true representation of the land in this area. Joseph could not find room in Bethlehem, so they went outside of Bethlehem to a cave. This rocky mountain formation only serves as a background for the event.

In the lower part of the icon are two more scenes. In the right hand corner are the two women Joseph brought to take care of the Christ child. They are bathing Him just as any baby is bathed. The humanity of Jesus is clearly shown in this setting.

Opposite the bathing of Jesus scene sits a sad and worried Joseph. He is not part of the central group the Christ Child and the Theotokos. Joseph is not the natural father. Joseph is troubled and despondent. There is an old man talking to Joseph. The old man is Satan. Satan can appear in many forms. Here he is as an old man who is tempting Joseph and disturbing him. Satan is telling Joseph that virgin birth is impossible. He's telling Joseph that he's a fool if he believes this. This story comes to us from Holy Tradition. The sad Joseph shows us not only his personal predicament but the dilemma of all mankind the difficulty of accepting that which is "beyond words or reason."

The tree, which is in the middle of the lower part of the icon, is a symbol of the Tree of Jesse. This tree refers to Isaiah 11:1-2, "But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him." King David was often mentioned as the son of Jesse and Jesus was from the House of David.

The Holy Icon of the Nativity reminds one to praise and glorify the Birth of Christ. The celebration of Christmas each year serves to remind each and everyone of us that Christ came for you and me.

