

THE EKPHONESIS

December 2021— Vol 1. No. 2



The Parish Newsletter of
Holy Annunciation Orthodox Church
Liberty Hill, Texas
www.annunciationtx.com

DECEMBER CALENDAR

Saturday, December 3/4 (November 21 OS)

Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Mother of God

Friday – Great Vespers 7:00 pm

Saturday – 3rd and 6th Hours – 9:40 am

Saturday – Divine Liturgy – 10:00 a.m.

December 4/5 (November 22 OS)

Disciples Philemon and Archippos and Equal-to-the-Apostles Apphia

Saturday – Great Vespers 6:30 pm

Sunday – 3rd and 6th Hours – 9:40 am

Sunday – Divine Liturgy – 10:00 a.m.

Sunday School - Homeless Project

December 9

Bible Study – 7 pm (El Rancho—Bertram)

December 11/12 (November 29 OS)

Holy Martyr Paramon and the 370 Martyrs with him

Saturday – Great Vespers 6:30 pm

Sunday – 3rd and 6th Hours – 9:40 am

Sunday – Divine Liturgy – 10:00 a.m.

December 16

Bible Study – 7 pm (El Rancho—Bertram)

December 18/19 (December 6 OS)

St. Nicholas of Myra

Saturday – Great Vespers 6:30 pm

Sunday – 3rd and 6th Hours – 9:40 am

Sunday – Divine Liturgy – 10:00 a.m.

Sunday School

December 25/26 (December 13 OS)

Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

No Vespers on the evening of December 25th

Sunday – 3rd and 6th Hours – 9:40 am

Sunday – Divine Liturgy – 10:00 a.m.

Clergy Schedules:

Confessions may be heard on Saturdays after Great Vespers, on Sundays before 9:40 a.m. or by appointment. Fr. Elias will be on vacation from December 6 until Nativity. Abp. Irineos will serve the liturgy during this time.

Preparing for Nativity

As we enter the season of Nativity, we are in a time of preparation. The vestments for the altar have changed to red. We are in a time of fasting, as we prepare ourselves spiritually for the nativity of our Lord in the flesh. This sense of preparation will fill our services as we approach Nativity.

On December 5th, the kids will be completing a benevolence project for the homeless, which will see them prepare sack lunches for distribution. Check the weekly emails for ways that you can help. We need food donations and drivers! We are also blessed that St. Nicholas's feast day (Dec 6 (OS)/Dec 19) falls on a Sunday this year, so we can celebrate his liturgy together as we strive to model his spirit of giving and care for the poor. There will be a special Sunday school lesson after the liturgy for the kids.



Elevation of Abp. Irineos

At the meeting of the Holy Synod on November 20 (Nov. 7 OS) in Avlonos, Greece, the decision was made by the Holy Synod to elevate the Diocese of Illyricum to an Archdiocese and to promote Bp. Irineos to the rank of Archbishop. The position is effective immediately.

The proper address of an archbishop is "Your Eminence" but Abp. Irineos reminds everyone that in informal settings such as classes or trapeza, "Vladyka" is just fine!

"In him, as perhaps in no other saint, are incorporated to an incomparable degree the wondrous virtues of love and compassion. Yet it must be remembered that this love which illumined the heart of St. Nicholas for our Lord and his neighbor, this love, when confronted by stubborn evil and conscious enmity against the Truth was transfigured into burning and indignant zeal." - *St. Philaret of New York on St. Nicholas*

FINANCIALS AND ATTENDANCE

NOVEMBER ATTENDANCE

Total Attendance	91
Vespers Attendance	6
New Visitors:	5

NOVEMBER FINANCIALS

Income

Tithes	\$910
Bookstore Sales	\$70

Expenses

Insurance	\$107
Operating Expenses	\$598.25
Tithe to Diocese	\$59.80
Church Furnishings	\$358.99

PRAYER REQUESTS

Please pray each day for the catechumens: Jessica, Anny and Ryan, Dan and Christina, Ashley, Miranda and Ryan and Jacob. Pray also for Anny's husband, Ted.

December Birthdays, Namedays and Anniversaries

Birthdays:

Subdeacon Gerasimos (12/25)
Hannah (12/25)
Daniel (12/29)

Anniversaries:

Abe and Janet (12/30)

Name Days:

Catherine (12/8)
Barbara H, Barbara V and Barbara W (12/17)
Judith (12/26)

THE PRAYER RULE

The life of an Orthodox Christian is inextricably intertwined with prayer. Our Sunday worship is not our “religious time” in an otherwise secular existence. Rather, praying the Divine Liturgy on Sunday should be a continuation of our daily and constant conversation with God in prayer. St. Paul urged the Thessalonians “Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (1 Thess. 5:17-18). As the ROCA publication *Orthodox America* offered, “From the moment of waking, to the time of sleeping, we should strive not to let prayer leave our hearts.” (Feb. 1983) But how do we even make a start?

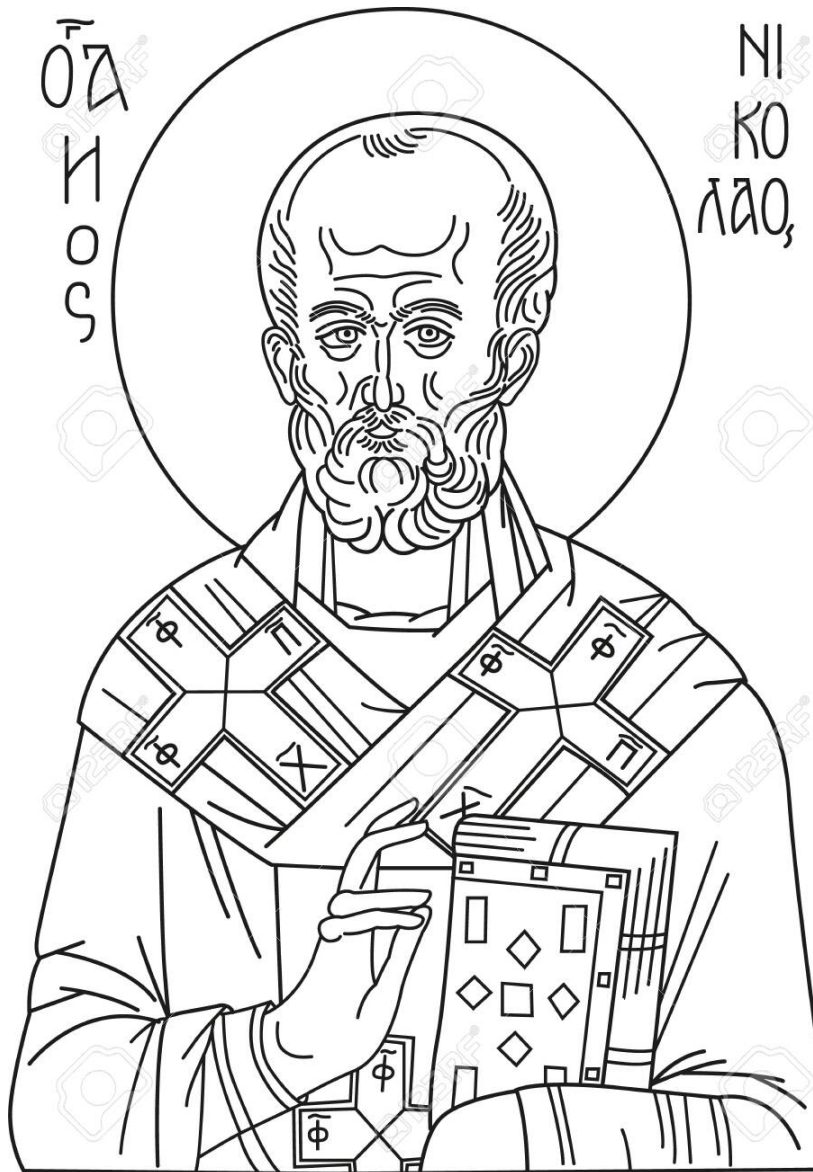
For the Orthodox Christian, a life of prayer starts with a personal prayer rule. The personal prayer rule consists of those daily prayers said without fail. It is personal because not everyone will say the same prayers as part of their rule. Some prayers may well overlap, but your prayer rule is yours and yours alone. The typical prayer rule includes morning prayers and evening prayers and should be considered to also include mealtime prayers. A prayer rule will prescribe not only the prayers to be said, but also when they are to be said. A prayer rule may develop organically or it may be prescribed by your priest. However, it is important to have that consistent and daily rule and to follow it. Abp. Irineos reminds us that it is more important to faithfully practice a short prayer rule than to have an extensive rule that you can only follow on occasion!

Archimandrite Sergius explained that with a prayer rule, “the goal is union with God. When using a rule of prayer we must be flexible and do what works for us; our goal is to maintain the connection with God and cultivate a real relationship, not just fulfill our ‘rule’ of prayer.” Because we are seeking this communion with God in prayer, our rule should not be said in the midst of performing other tasks, such as driving, cooking or any other distracting activity. Rather, it should be said quietly while standing before your icon corner, preferably with candles lit.

Your prayer rule will primarily consist of the prayers of the Church. Orthodoxy has nothing against spontaneous prayer, and often the prayer rule includes intercessions for family, friends and clergy that you may make as you wish. However, we do use established and tested prayers of the saints as the foundation of our prayer life. These prayers have been effective over time; they are theologically sound; and they call to God with the words of those who have been revealed to us as saints. The saints continue to fulfill their role as our examples, not just in life, but in prayer.

If you don’t have a personal prayer rule, the time to start is now! Visit with Fr. Elias or Ab. Irineos to put together a rule that works for you.

KID'S CORNER



The Feast Day of the St. Nicholas is on December 6 (December 19 on the civil calendar). St. Nicholas was a Greek bishop and known the world over for his generosity and care for the needy.

KID'S CORNER

A Man Named Nicholas

Today I am going to tell you a story about a very kind and generous man. He was born almost three hundred years after Jesus ascended to heaven. This man was named Nicholas. He came from a town called Myra, far away from here in what is now the country of Turkey. Nicholas' parents loved Jesus very much and taught Nicholas how to be a good Christian. When Nicholas was a boy, his uncle was the Bishop of Myra. When Nicholas grew up, he became a priest.

Nicholas loved children very much even though he didn't have any children of his own. One day, Nicholas heard about a poor man in his town who had three daughters. The man could no longer take care of his daughters. He had no money to feed them or pay for their weddings. This made Nicholas so sad that he made a plan. Nicholas waited until it was dark. He filled a bag with money and threw it through the man's window. The man was surprised when he found the bag of money in this girl's shoe the next morning! He wondered who left it there. After the man paid for the oldest girl's wedding, Nicholas filled another bag with money and secretly threw it through the window again. Again, the man found the money in a shoe the next morning and was able to pay for the second wedding. A third time, Nicholas filled still another bag with money and tossed it in the house. This time the man saw Nicholas, who begged him not to tell anyone what he had done. He was so happy that Nicholas had been so kind.

One day, Nicholas' uncle, the Bishop of Myra, died and Nicholas became the new bishop. Even after he became a bishop, he still found time to look after the children and poor in his town.

Bishop Nicholas became a saint and now we know him as Saint Nicholas. Many children call him Santa Claus. We remember Saint Nicholas because of his kindness and the generous gifts he gave to others. We remember Saint Nicholas in the Orthodox Church on December 6. This day comes a few weeks before Christmas. One reason we give gifts to one another at Christmas is to remember the kindness Saint Nicholas had for those around him.

Sunday School Classes will be the 1st and 3rd Sundays of each month. In December we will learn about Nativity and St. Nicholas and complete a project focused on almsgiving.

Words of the Liturgy



By Fr. Elias Greer

“Holy Things are for the Holy”

Just before the Communion of the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ, standing in the sanctuary facing the altar table, the priest raises the Holy Lamb, the Bread of the Bloodless Sacrifice, which has become the Body of Christ, and says these words: “the holy things are for the holy”. These words have the sound of a mystery which is, indeed, contained therein. But no mystery should be deprived of an inner meaning with which these words, these minor words are also imbued.

Apostle Peter, in his First Epistle General speaks to the still young Christian Church: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ... the people of God.” This is how Apostle Peter describes the members of the early Church and all of us together with them. There is no doubt that the early Christians consisted of sinners as well as saints. There are quite a few sinners in today's Church, starting with ourselves. And yet the apostle calls all of them and all of us the chosen nation, the royal priesthood, the holy people, the people of God. This sets the standard for the attitude of God and the Church towards man, towards the people of the Church. Through the mystery of Baptism, every person receives the absolute guarantee of holiness. From the font, the baptized individual arises holy, washed clean of all sin, all untruth, all defilement. This holiness is sealed with Chrismation. Thus all newly baptized are given the fullest potential of holiness which the Church recognizes in them through their entire life.

The burden of responsibility for the preservation of this gift lies no longer on the Church, but on the conscience of the individual, on his or her treatment of the gift of

free will, freedom of choice between good and evil. The holiness is lost, it is dissipated on the roads and crossroads of life, but it is also restored through the mysteries of Confession and Communion. And the Church continues to stand by her original estimation: she continues to believe in us, in “the chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people of God.” And the Church invests not only her priests, but all her members with the great gift of officiating. According to the Orthodox teaching, the great mystery of the Eucharist is performed not by the priest alone, but by the entire Church, the entire “royal priesthood”, the entire “people of God”.

Therefore, as he raises the Holy Lamb, the Body of Christ, presenting it to the entire Church, the priest says: “The holy things are for the holy.” The 'holy things' are what he holds in his hands at this moment -- the Sacraments. “For the holy” means that the Sacraments are intended for all of us, all members of the Church in whose eyes we are all holy, we are the people of God. And we, in full and humble recognition of our sinfulness and unworthiness, respond: “One is Holy, One is the Lord: Jesus Christ.”

Our Little Lending Library

By the grace of God, we received a number of books from Fr. Symeon Parson’s widow for use at the parish. The gift was fortuitous, as Fr. Elias had just suggested that we start a parish library to make books available for lending to parish members and catechumens. With this gift, we’ve put a few books into the library in the trapeza room. We will be adding books ranging from introductory materials to theological writings.



If there are any books you would like to see added, please let Bp. Irineos or Fr. Elias know. Likewise, if you have a book you’ve found helpful and would like to donate it, let us know.

To borrow a book, simply put your name on the card in the book, and drop the card in the file box. There are no “due dates.”

ORTHODOX Q&A

What are the Royal Hours?

As the Nativity services approach, we will have the opportunity to attend a special service that is only served a few times a year: the Royal Hours. You may be familiar with the 3rd and 6th Hour prayers we read before the Divine Liturgy, but what are the Royal Hours?

From the earliest days of the Church, there have been appointed certain prayers to be read at certain times (or certain Hours if you will). This derives from the Jewish practice of having appointed times for prayer. During the Babylonian Exile, when the Temple was no longer in use, the first synagogues were established, and the services of Torah readings, psalms, and hymns were held at specific fixed times of the day.

In the early Church, which borrowed heavily from the Jewish structure of liturgical worship, hours of prayers evolved consisting of Psalms, hymns and prayers.

The service of the Royal Hours is served three times a year, on the eves or shortly before Nativity, Theophany and Pascha. It is a special service that reads the four principal Hours of prayer together, and is called Royal Hours because the emperor would traditionally be in attendance. Obviously, there is no emperor anymore, but as we prepare to celebrate the incarnation of our heavenly King, what better title than Royal Hours could we have?!?

This year, the Royal Hours will be read on January 6 (Christmas Eve). We will spend two hours reading Psalms, singing hymns of the Incarnation, reading scripture from both the Old and New Testaments, and praying.

FASTING RECIPES

Mt. Athos Tahini Soup

Ingredients

- 2 1/2 quarts water
- 1 cup short-grain white rice
- 7 -8 tablespoons tahini paste
- 1 -2 lemon, juice of
- 2 carrots, finely grated
- 1 tablespoon fresh green onion, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon parsley, finely chopped (optional)

Directions

- Boil rice in water and salt until tender.
- Remove from flame and add half of lemon juice.
- In a medium bowl mix tahini with one cup of soup broth until creamy, adding more broth if necessary.
- Mix in remaining lemon juice.
- Pour mixture into soup stirring constantly until liquids blend.
- Stir in carrots, green onions, and parsley.
- Adjust seasoning.

This fasting soup is a staple on the Holy Mountain of Mt. Athos, where the monks follow a fasting regimen year round. It is rich, thick and flavorful. An immersion blender is very helpful in making this soup, though you can do it with a lot of whisking and stirring!



Nativity Sermon of St. Isaac the Syrian (7th Century)

This Nativity night bestowed peace on the whole world - So let no one threaten;

This is the night of the Most Gentle One – Let no one be cruel;

This is the night of the Humble One – Let no one be proud.

Now is the day of joy – Let us not revenge;

Now is the day of Good Will – Let us not be mean.

In this Day of Peace – Let us not be conquered by anger.

Today the Bountiful impoverished Himself for our sake;

So, rich one, invite the poor to your table.

Today we receive a Gift for which we did not ask;

So let us give alms to those who implore and beg us.

This present Day cast open the heavenly doors to our prayers;

Let us open our door to those who ask our forgiveness.

Today the Divine Being took upon Himself the seal of our humanity,

In order for humanity to be decorated by the Seal of Divinity.



Holy Annunciation Orthodox Church

Abp. Irineos (Placek), Rector

Fr. Elias Greer, Parish Priest

Subdcn. Gerasimos Floyd

E-mail: info@annunciationtx.com

512-782-9940

512-627-7674 (cell)

5205 County Road 236, Liberty Hill, Texas 78642

www.annunciationtx.com

*Sharing the faith of the Apostles and the love of Christ
with all who seek His Truth*