

SS Peter & Paul Orthodox Church Newsletter

Volume 17, Issue 12

December 2017

October Council Highlights

- ✘ October Operating Income was \$13,330.71 and Operating Expenses were \$13,955.71 resulting in a net loss of **\$625.**
- ✘ Neighborhood Nativity outreach to be held December 9, 2016 at 10am. See David Bieber for more information.
- ✘ Defibrillators have arrived.
- ✘ New storage shed delivered.



SS Peter & Paul Orthodox Church
 1614 E. Monte Vista Rd.
 Phoenix, AZ 85006
 602.253.9515

www.sspeterpaulaz.org
www.oca.org
www.orthodoxfellowship.org

The Right Reverend DANIEL
 Bishop of Santa Rosa
 Rector

480.287.0240 Mobile
 frdaniel@sspeterpaulaz.org

Priest David Balmer, Attached
 Retired

Deacon Drew Maxwell

Andrew Evans
 Council President
 480.948.7929

Barbara Harp
 Choir Director
 bharp@vosymca.org

Stephanie A. Homyak
 Church School Director
 Newsletter Editor
 623.869.0470

Stephanie_Homyak@yahoo.com

Mike Wagner
 Web Master

Mike@sspeterpaulaz.org

Barbara Peterson
 Myrrhbearers Altar Society
 602.803.0280

Preparing for Nativity

This November in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) the children marked the beginning of the Nativity Fast with a procession through our atrium and solemnly set our prayer table with a red cloth, candles and other special items to help them begin to prepare for the birth of Christ. They have heard Old Testa-

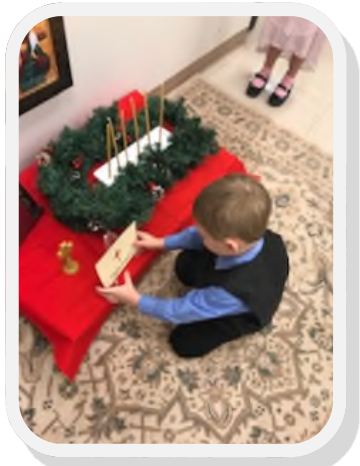


three-dimensional figures of the people and angels involved in each event. When we come back to the atrium after our Christmas Break, the children will participate in a joyous Nativity Celebration and procession through our atrium.

It has been remarkable to see the joy with which the children are responding to the CGS program and humbling to observe the beauty of each individual



Savior's birth. In order to help the children realize that Jesus was a historical person who lived in a real time and place in history, they were given a presentation in which they were shown the tiny land of Israel on a globe and then a large, raised surface map of Israel. In this way the children were able to see and feel the land of Israel and hear about the most important places in Jesus' life (Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem) and their significance.



ment prophecies about the Messiah and have begun to ponder, "Who is this Jesus?" as we continue on toward the

In the coming weeks the children will continue to hear Messianic prophecies concerning Christ and will experience the Annunciation and the Nativity of Christ in a hands-on, practical way using scripture, dioramas, and



relationship with

Christ.

Message From Our Rector

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the conclusion of every celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the priest (when more than one priest concelebrates, it's the junior priest) offers the prayer known as "The Prayer before the Ambo," the Ambo being the raised area in ancient churches that corresponds, more or less, to what we now know as the solea, or, in our church, the steps leading into the Altar. The prayer is offered in front of, "before" the Ambo and sums up what we have just accomplished in the Divine Liturgy, our common praise of God, and our intercession for the Church and the world.

"Blessing those that bless thee, O Lord, and sanctifying those that trust in thee, save thy people and bless thine inheritance, preserve the fullness of thy Church, sanctify those that love the beauty of thy house. Glorify them in return by thy divine power, and forsake us not that hope in thee. Give peace to thy world, to thy churches, to the priests, to all civil authorities, and to all thy people. For every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down

from thee, the Father of lights, and unto thee do we send up glory, thanksgiving, and worship, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen."

Included within the text of this ancient prayer is a quote from the

Letter of James: "Every good gift and every perfect gift

is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights..." (James 1:17). Indeed, the

insertion of this scripture verse acknowledges that all the gifts we have in this life, everything that has been given to us "is from above" and is

given by God, "the Father of Lights" in "Whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). All we have and all we are is a gift from God.

At each Divine Liturgy and every time that we acknowledge all of God's many and abundant gifts to us, we should be most aware that the greatest and most perfect Gift that God has bestowed upon us is the Gift of His Son, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. This greatest and most perfect of Gifts is what we are preparing to celebrate as we commemorate Christmas, the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord, God, and Savior. And so, all of our preparations and activi-

ties during this pre-holiday season should be a reflection of our awareness of the Gift we are celebrating and the gratitude we have for the Gift of Salvation in Christ. Every carol we sing, every gift we wrap, give, or receive, every guest we welcome, every meal we prepare, every cake or cookie that is baked (or eaten!), every day we fast, and every prayer we utter should be meant as an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord. If we remember this during these preparatory weeks and days leading us to the Nativity, we can be sure that whatever might otherwise distract or frustrate us during this hectic time of the year is placed firmly within the larger context of our lives and our faith. In briefer words: all our preparations should help us understand that what we are preparing to celebrate is the Birth of the Savior and the presence in our lives of Christ Emmanuel, "God with us."

Keeping this focus can be difficult. So much distracts us. Sometimes it's simply physical tiredness that figuratively, and sometimes literally, blurs our vision. But we can be attentive nonetheless, we can be vigilant. And even now we can (should?) firmly resolve to have the weeks ahead of us, and all the activities that are part of these weeks, be a means to a spiritually rewarding feast.

As we approach the light-filled



Message From Our Rector (cont'd)



days of the Lord's Nativity, I ask your prayers and assure you of mine. In addition to so many other blessings, one of the greatest blessings the Lord has bestowed upon me is the blessing of serving you and our Saints Peter and Paul Church community throughout these eleven-some years. You are all part of the "blessings from above," sent into my life by the Father of Lights. I am grateful for all of you.

May the Lord, born of the Virgin and laid in a manger for us and for our salvation, continue to bless you and all your loved ones. May the festal days which are approaching be a source of much joy and many blessings and may the new year which is about to enter provide many more blessings to you all.

With love in Christ Emmanuel,

+Bishop Daniel

FROM THE CHURCH TREASURER

The last month of the year is now upon us. Now is your chance to make sure your 2017 church pledges/donations/contributions are in and accounted for in this year. Please consider the church in your year-end financial planning, especially for tax purposes. Year-to-date donation statements are available at the back of the church. If yours is not there, see Dave Homyak in the church office. Please be sure to turn in your donations for 2017 *on or prior* to December 25th or contact the Treasurer. Money received after then will be attributed to 2017.

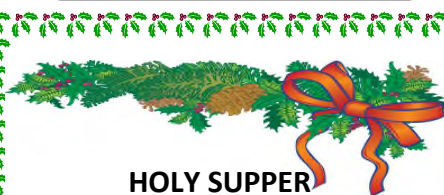
MAKING CHARITABLE GIFTS

The best value often comes from donating appreciated assets (such as stocks), because donors can get a **full** deduction, while skipping capital-gains tax, on the asset's growth. Cash donations to charities are often deductible up to 50% of adjusted gross income, while the limit for gifts of other assets is often 30%. Possible not allowed portions of the total gift for that particular year are usually carried over to future years as further deduction(s). ***SS Peter and Paul is eligible to receive these types of gifts or donations.***

Are you concerned that the charitable deduction could shrink next year? If so, make a large donation to a "donor-advised" fund and thus qualify for a full write-off within the current year. Assets can then grow tax-free in the "donor-advised" fund until the donors specify tax-free recipients, such as your church, in later years. There's no deduction at that point.

SS Peter and Paul aspires to acquire surrounding property as it becomes available on the market for further expansion (**parking**) and growth purposes. In order to be able to take advantage of these availabilities when the time comes, the church will need to have the financial reserves available so to be able to act when the time comes. Please consider your church in your financial and estate planning.

YOUTH BEAUTIFY THE CHURCH



HOLY SUPPER

Please join us for Holy Supper on Saturday, December 24th following Compline.

Please contact Marty Gala to confirm that you will be attending. We look forward to seeing everyone there to celebrate this joyous feast.



Knowing the Master's Manger

Fr. Lawrence Farley In the opening verses of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah we find the following words: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken: 'Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know; My people does not understand'" [Isaiah 1:2-3]. With these words the prophet begins his extended denunciation of his people, calling Israel back in repentance to loving fidelity to their covenant God.



They needed to be called back. At that time in around the seventh century BC they not only worshipped Yahweh their God, but also Baal, the fertility god, the god of the storm and of rain and life. Doubtless they regarded it as a kind of syncretistic ecumenism, a broadness of sympathy and generosity of devotion. They probably also regarded it as keeping up to date: Yahweh might have been appropriate for the time of their desert sojourn, but for their life in agricultural Canaan, they needed now a more agricultural god. Yahweh might have been okay for the Bedouin part of their history, but Baal was more suited for their settled life on the land. Anyway, Israel then worshipped

both Yahweh and Baal, and attributed their agricultural prosperity primarily to the latter.

What the majority in Israel considered ecumenical broadness of mind, Isaiah considered simply as apostasy and unfaithfulness. Yahweh was their God, and Baal, the god of Canaan, had nothing to do with them. Devotion to Baal therefore was pure adulterous idolatry, a spiritual defection from their true Husband and Protector. Adultery, as everyone then knew, was punishable by death. What else then could Israel expect for its apostasy?

The prophet Isaiah therefore began his ministry by calling Israel to recognize this fact. But he did not just announce judgment and destruction, but also called Israel back to repentance and forgiveness and life. Yahweh their God did not desire their death, but their repentance. He was willing to sit down and reason with them, and promised that if they would but repent, though their sins were like scarlet, they would become white as snow [Isaiah 1:18].

For now, though, Isaiah began by pointing out their ingratitude. Any father in those days could legitimately expect gratitude and obedience and respect from his sons. But though

Yahweh had reared and brought up Israel, giving them life and protecting them as a father did his sons, He received no gratitude, obedience, or respect from His people. And it was worse than that—even dumb animals knew where their food came from. The ox knew its owner, and the donkey knew its master's manger, and they waited by that feed trough every day for the master to pour in food for them to eat. Both ox and donkey (the usual domestic beasts of burden) knew the sound of their master's footsteps, and had gratitude to him for filling the manger. They knew who to thank for their food, and prosperity, and life. But Israel somehow did not know who to thank. Israel was dumber than their farm animals. They regarded their food and agricultural prosperity not as coming from Yahweh, but as coming from Baal. Israel did not know their master's manger.

This ox and donkey, by the way, found their way into the Nativity icon and into every Christmas scene ever since. When we see the Nativity scene, either eastern or western, we see the ox and the donkey standing by the manger over the newborn Christ. Why? Neither Saint Matthew nor Saint Luke mention any animals in their narratives. But the Church, reading this prophecy of Isaiah, beheld the Master's manger and thought of Jesus. For what was the Master's manger to which the prophet here referred? Surely it was the manger into which the newborn

(Continued on page 6)

The Significance of our Blessed Father Herman of Alaska

Fr. Lawrence Farley

In 1970, when our Church first received its autocephaly from the Russian Church, it immediately did two things. First, it changed its name from the somewhat unwieldy “the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America” to the more accurate “the Orthodox Church in America”. Secondly, it canonized Herman of Alaska. This latter task was then ours to do; the rule says that whichever Church possesses the relics of a saint is the Church charged with the task and privilege of canonization. Thus, for example, although Saint Tikhon was the ruling bishop of the American diocese, he died on Russian soil and therefore the Russian Church, which retains his relics, was the Church which got to canonize him, regardless of any connection Saint Tikhon might have had with the American Church. Bishop Tikhon may have had a special love for his American children and left his heart in San Francisco, but he left his relics in Moscow, and whoever retains the relics, retains the joyful task of canonization. Thus in like manner, after 1970 the Blessed Father Herman of Alaska was ours to canonize.

It is significant that the first saint of North America was a simple missionary, one who continued to embrace humility all the days of his life, even to the point of shunning ordination. He lived and died as a simple missionary to this land, and it is as a missionary that he points the way forward for us today. For we Orthodox in North America are very different than our Orthodox older brothers in other lands.

Take Russia, for example. Orthodoxy was planted there before Russia was Russia, and before the words “Russia” or “Ukraine” had any national meaning. In 988, it was simply the land of the Rus, and the land’s nationhood post-dated the planting of the Ortho-

dox Church there. Orthodoxy thus grew up with the nation, and became part of the country’s DNA. The Orthodox Church is thus now firmly ensconced in Russia, to the point where it is hard to imagine that country without also seeing it standing under the three-barred cross of Orthodoxy.

Or take Greece, for another example. The Gospel was planted in Hellenistic soil long before those living on the soil became the nation of Greece. When Paul brought the Church there, he found Macedonia in the north and Achaia in the south; the unified country of Greece came much much later. Even in Byzantine times the term “Greek” did not mean “inhabitants of the former Macedonia and Achaia” but rather “pagan”. Once again we see the Church predating the nation so that the nation evolves and grows up with ecclesiastical blood flowing through its veins. The Church is thus ensconced in Greece as it is in Russia, and it is not surprising if its bishops swagger just a bit. After all this time, they are somewhat entitled.

It is otherwise here in North America. Here the nations of America and Canada have existed before Herman and the other missionaries ever arrived. And, praise-worthy evangelistic enthusiasm notwithstanding, it seems unlikely that Orthodoxy will ever convert North America in the way that it once converted those in the land of the Rus or those in Macedonia and Achaia. Orthodoxy became ensconced there; it will not become similarly ensconced here, so that our bishops should not plan on swaggering culturally here anytime soon. We will never be the ones in charge, as we are in Russia and Greece. We will remain missionaries.

The example of Saint Herman of Alaska reveals that this is perfectly fine. Becoming ensconced or culturally dominant is not

our goal; faithful proclamation of the Gospel is. Obviously we have to aim at converting absolutely everyone, since God loves absolutely everyone. But our evangelistic zeal should not blind us to the real situation. The reality is that the cultural tide is now flowing against us, and in a few generations America will not be a Christian country in any sense that Saint Herman (or Saint Paul) would recognize. Indeed, in Canada this has already happened. Radical secularization continues apace throughout the continent, and the Land of the Free seems determined to become the Land of the Secular. And in this land, missionaries will be needed. Perhaps it is providential therefore that the first saint of the land was just such a missionary. We need the example of the simple missionary Herman of Alaska now more than ever.

O Blessed Father Herman of Alaska, pray unto God for us!

Reprinted from the Orthodox Church in America web site,
<https://oca.org/reflections/fr.-lawrence-farley/the-significance-of-our-blessed-father-herman-of-alaska>

What shall we offer Thee, O
Christ,
Who for our sakes hast ap-
peared on the earth as a man?
Every creature which Thou
hast made offers Thee thanks.
The angels offer Thee a song;
The heavens, their star;
The wise men, their gifts;
The shepherds, their wonder;
The earth, its cave;
The wilderness; the manger;
And we offer Thee a virgin
mother.
O Pre-eternal God, have
mercy on us!

Royal Hours

Knowing the Master's Manger

(Continued from page 4)

Christ Child was laid! Thereafter the place of the ox and the donkey was assured in any picture of the Nativity of Christ.

The prophet Isaiah speaks to us today as well, for we no less than ancient Israel have trouble knowing the Master's manger. We also fail to see that our life, strength, prosperity, and food come from God. We imagine that our ability to find food and earn our daily bread comes from ourselves. We get up each morning and go to work and labor hard at our forty hour a week jobs to earn our living. Surely our food comes from ourselves? We forget that the strength and health by which we labor come as gifts from God. More than that, our very ability to rise every morning and get out of bed come as gifts from God. For one

day we will not rise from our beds, but the doctor will come and pronounce us dead and draw the sheet over our faces. No labour for us that day. That day will mark the end of God's gift of life to us.

All the more reason today to know our Master's manger, and to recognize that all that we have comes from Him. Oxen and donkeys know who their true benefactors are, and we should be at least as smart as they are. As we bend over our daily mangers and sit at our tables to eat our daily bread, let us give thanks to God, and know that all that we have and ever will have comes from Him.

Reprinted from the Orthodox Church in America Web site, <https://oca.org/reflections/fr.-lawrence-farley/knowning-the-masters-manger>*

Sunday Before Nativity Vespers Hymn

Behold, the time of our salvation is at hand.
Prepare yourself, O cavern,
For the Virgin approaches to give birth to her Son.
Be glad and rejoice, O Bethlehem, land of Judah,
For from you our Lord shines forth as the dawn.
Give ear, you mountains and hills
And all lands surrounding Judea.
For Christ is coming to save the people
Whom He has created and whom He loves

Tropar of the Pre-Feast of Nativity

Prepare, O Bethlehem,
For Eden has been opened to all.
Adorn yourself, O Ephratha,
For the Tree of Life blossoms forth from the Virgin in the cave.
Her womb is a spiritual paradise planted with the fruit divine;
If we eat of it, we shall live forever and not die like Adam.
Christ is coming to restore the image which He made in the beginning

Around SS Peter & Paul

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS/ANNIVERSARIES

December 1 Andrew Blischak
3 Grace Weiss
5 Natalya Delsante
Frank Bolton
6 Deborah Kossob
11 Isolda Akhba
15 Svetlana & John Tanner
16 Nick Stchur
Dasha O'Brien
23 Daniel Gill
26 Joseph Gala
28 David & Stephanie Homyak
Svetlana Tanner (Fleenor)
29 Larry & Teddi Gardner
31 Tristan Sourk

Many Years! Mnogaya Leta!

THEOPHANY HOUSE BLESSINGS

The rich liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church includes a variety of services and blessings. Each year, after the celebration of the Feast of Theophany and the Blessing of Water (January 6), it is customary for the priest to visit parishioners homes, bringing with him the newly blessed Holy Water to sprinkle and thereby bless the home. Bishop Daniel will be available to bless homes throughout the month of January. To arrange to have your house blessed, please speak with Bishop Daniel.

PRAYER LIST

"I was sick and you visited me."

Matt 25:36

We offer prayers to all of our parishioners who are ill or unable to attend services:

Harold Homyak
Ann Garza
Rose Kurowski
Tillie (Tatiana) Kulek
Anna Michkofsky
Vickie Kulik
Frank Kulik
Marilyn Bezkorovainy

If you know of anyone else in need of our prayers, please contact Bishop Daniel.

Bits and Pieces

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to the Servants of God who were received into the Orthodox Church and the fullness of Faith in November: Michael, Brittany, Joshua, Grace, Abree, James, Emily, Sophia, Tamara, Mikhail, Jaden Isaiah, and Emma. Many years!



TIME FOR THANKS

As we enter the season of the Lord's Nativity, we pause and give thanks for the many blessings we have received throughout the year, especially the blessings received because of the generosity in time, talents, and treasures of our parish community. There are too many people to name individually. The Lord knows you all... But please be assured of the gratitude of Archbishop BENJAMIN, Bishop DANIEL, Father David, Father Mihai, Deacon Andrew and all the clergy and faithful of our parish community. May the Lord Himself be your recompense!

SAINT NICHOLAS CELEBRATION

Our annual visit from Saint Nicholas will take place during coffee hour on Sunday, December 10th. Saint Nicholas will join us in preparing for our celebration of Christ's Birth and, as he always does, distribute pre-Christmas "treats" to the young and to the young at heart.

SAINT NICHOLAS COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The Parish's annual Christmas Outreach party will be held on Saturday December 9th starting at 10 am. All parishioners are encouraged to attend. We expect to deliver gifts to 29 children from the neighborhood apartments, and will have 14 food boxes for each family that attends. This year our Parish continued to show strong generosity, contributing over 40% more than last year. Additionally, parishioners directly purchased gifts for 18 of the children compared to 10 last year. The TYAL will do the shopping and gift wrapping for the remaining children.

CHURCH DECORATING

Please mark your calendars and plan on joining in decorating our church on Friday, December 22, at 10:00 a.m. This year's decorating will take place after we pray the service of Royal Hours, a special service of psalms, hymns, and scripture readings. Plan on being a part of the joy as we come together to adorn the church for our celebration of the Lord's Birth. The more, the merrier!

CONFESSIONS

Everyone seems to be busy at this time of the year: busy traveling, busy working, busy getting ready for Christmas, busy making or purchasing gifts. As the Feast of the Lord's Nativity draws near, do not forget to also prepare yourself spiritually before receiving the Holy Gifts on Christmas morning. An essential part of our spiritual preparation is the confession of our sins and receiving the Lord's forgiveness. Confessions are heard before the Divine Services or by arrangements with Bishop DANIEL or Father David.

MBAS

The MBAS meeting will be held this Sunday, December 3, 2017.

The MBAS would like to thank everyone that helped with our annual roll bake. We would not be able to accomplish what we do without the support and help from our parishioners. As a reminder, rolls need to be picked up by December 10th.

PARISH CHRISTMAS CARD

To have your name included in the Parish Christmas Card, please fill out a form available in the vestibule of the church or at the bookstore counter. Deadline is December 17th.

BOOKSTORE

Listen to the sounds of an Orthodox Nativity service on CD available at the bookstore, \$18. We also have just a couple of packets of Christmas cards left for purchase, \$12. They went quick this year! Have a blessed Nativity!

CHRISTMAS FLOWER DONATION

Please donate toward the Christmas Flower fund in order to help beautify our church for the bright and festive celebration of Christ's Birth.



NEW YEAR'S DAY

We begin the New Year by invoking God's blessing upon our families, our parish, the Church, and the world. Join us at the Divine Liturgy (Feast of the Circumcision of Christ and Commemoration of Saint Basil the Great) at 9:00 a.m.

HOLY SUPPER

In many Slavic cultures, it is traditional for families to gather for a special meal on the Eve of the Nativity of Christ. This meal has come to be known as the "Holy Supper" or "Vigilia." Traditional symbolic foods are shared as part of the Christmas celebration. Our parish family also observes this traditional Christmas Eve observance every year. This year's Holy Supper will take place in the Parish Cultural Hall on December 24th following Compline at 5:00 p.m. Please contact Marty Gala to confirm that you will attend this special celebration of Our Lord's Nativity and let her know what you would like to contribute to the dinner.

December 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
 Christmas Raffle  <p>The Myrrh Bearers will hold their annual Christmas Raffle on Sunday, December 17, 2017. Please see Jane Evans or Rita Mudrenko to purchase tickets or donate items.</p>						
						5:00pm Vespers
3 8:30am Hours 9:00am Divine Liturgy Church School MBAS Meeting	4	5	6 St. Nicholas the Wonderworker	7	8	9 Icon "Unexpected Joy" 10:00am Neighborhood Christmas Outreach 5:00pm Vespers
 HOLY SUPPER Sunday, December 24, 2017 following Compline at 5:00 pm. See Marty Gala to sign up!						
10 8:30am Hours 9:00am Divine Liturgy Church School Visit from St. Nicholas	11	12 6:00pm Council Meeting	13 Ven. Herman of Alaska 9:00am Divine Liturgy	14	15	16 5:00pm Vespers
17 Holy Forefathers 8:30am Hours 9:00am Divine Liturgy MBAS Christmas Raffle/Bake Sale	18	19	20 Forefeast of the Nativity	21	22 8:30am Royal Hours 10:00am Church Decorating	23 Sat. Before Nativity 5:00pm Vespers
 Christmas Bake Sale The Myrrh Bearers will host their annual Christmas Bake Sale on Sunday, December 17, 2017 following Divine Liturgy.						
24 Sunday Before Nativity Eve of the Nativity 8:30am Hours 9:00am Divine Liturgy 5:00pm Compline Followed by HOLY SUPPER	25 NATIVITY OF OUR LORD 8:30am Hours 9:00am Divine Liturgy CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!	26 Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos	27	28	29	30 Sat. After Nativity Sat. Before Theophany 5:00pm Vespers
 We welcome all of our guests and visitors. Please join us in the Cultural Center for Fellowship Hour following Divine Liturgy each Sunday.						
31 Sunday After Nativity Leavetaking Nativity 8:30am Hours 9:00am Divine Liturgy	1 Circumcision of Christ St. Basil the Great 9:00am Divine Liturgy	2 Repose of St. Seraphim of Sarov 9:00am Divine Liturgy	3	4	5 Eve of Theophany 6:00pm Compline and Litya	6 Theophany 9:00am Divine Liturgy Great Blessing of Water 5:00pm Vespers