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Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Sunday after the Nativity of our Lord in the Flesh

December 30, 2012

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel
J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors

Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ Tuesday is the simple dual feast of the Circumcision of our Lord and St. Basil. The Divine Liturgy will be celebrated Tuesday evening at 7: 30 PM. Please come and join us in prayer and praise.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Anna, Ryan, Betty, Mary, Beth, Debra and Michael.

+++ We do thank the special parish children who so devotedly set up and decorated the Jesse Tree prior to the Nativity holyday. Our blessings are upon you, faithful children!

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received this past week: Tithing Offering, \$492.00; Candles, \$23.00; Holyday \$45.00; Kitchen, \$304.00; Food Coupons, \$200.00; In Blessed Memory of +Steve Shwahla by wife Theresa, \$100.00; Flowers, \$5.00, for a total of \$1169.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offer their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls! The attendance was 44 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Pani Lucas, Eleni Pallas, Anna Zacharyczuk, Marilyn Korba, Eleanor Korba, Michael George, Maria Garcia and Pani Buletza.

+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of **\$1694.00** from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ Please be certain to see a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$5550.00 on this project to date!

+++ **The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.**

+++ **Please pray the Lord our God grants us an enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.**

+++ May all glory, adoration and worship be accorded our God in the Holy Trinity by all the faithful of our parish with one mind, one soul and one heart each day of the week!

+++ **Next Sunday is the solemn feast of Theophany, the Baptism of our Lord and the manifestation of the Holy Trinity. Water will be solemnly blessed and distributed after the Divine Liturgy. Those who would like their homes blessed are asked to advise Father as soon as possible.**

LORD



TEACH
US

The Elderly

O God, you have taught me from my youth and until the present I proclaim your wondrous deeds. And now that I am old and gray, O God, forsake me not until I proclaim your strength to every generation that is to come Psalms 71: 17, 18.

With length of days I will gratify him and will show him my salvation Psalms 91: 16.

Even to your old age I am the same, even when your hair is gray I will hear you; it is I who have done this, I who will continue and I who will carry you to safety Isaiah 46: 4.

Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by virtuous living Proverbs 16: 31.

They shall bear fruit even in old age; vigorous and sturdy shall they be Psalms 92: 14.

The glory of young men is their strength and the dignity of old men is gray hair Proverbs 20: 29.

For many days and years of life and peace will they bring you. Long life is in her right hand, in her left are riches and honor Proverbs 3: 2, 16.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come Psalms 23: 6.

Neither in my youth nor now that I am old, have I seen a just man forsaken nor his descendants begging for bread Psalms 37: 25.

Do not love money but be content with what you have, for God has said, 'I will never desert you nor will I forsake you' Hebrews 13: 5.

The Birth of Jesus

The Birth of Jesus

at Bethlehem is not an event which can be consigned to the past.
The whole of human history in fact stands in reference to him;
Our own time and the future of the world are illumined by his presence.

He is the "the Living One" Revelation 1: 18,
"Who is, Who was and Who is to come" Revelation 1: 4.

Our Lord is hidden there, waiting for us to come
and visit him and ask him what we want.
He is there, in the sacramental Mystery of his love,
sighing and interceding unceasingly for sinners before
God the Father.

He is there to console us...See how good He is!
He adapts himself to our weakness...
In heaven where we shall be triumphant and glorious,
we shall see him in all his glory.

If he appeared before us now in glory,
we should not have dared approach him.
But He hides himself like one in prison, saying to us,
"You do not see me, but that does not matter;
ask me for all you need and I will grant it."

Mysterious Visitors

In the Orthodox East, the magi were always understood to be not three kings, but members of the noble class of priests of the Zoroastrian religion of Persia. Exemplifying some of the best qualities of their people, such as uprightness and courage, the magi were also heirs to the millennia-old learning of Babylon which included being aware of the particular insights of Jewish messianic understanding and promise. They were very aware of the claims of faithful Jews and their prophets through the preceding centuries to be chosen people with a special salvific message for all the world. They simply had to pursue what had become obvious to them over the years. How could such an opportunity be bypassed?

When Scripture was translated into the Church Slavonic language at the time of learned SS. Cyril & Methodius in the ninth century, the Greek word *magoi* became *volsvi*, meaning a pagan seer, one possessed of mystical powers of understanding the signs and interpreting omens of nature and peering into the future. In corresponding contrast, the Greek word *basileus*, for king was rightly translated into *car'* in the Old Slavonic, emphasizing different values and separate distinct meanings. Orthodoxy has never been pre-occupied with being "with it," or attempting to provide additional and different insights into revelation when there was no necessity for creativeness.

The West, in contrast, particularly the Romans appreciated the concept of being different, of initiating change simply for its own sake, particularly when they could ascribe it to overwhelming papal power with its unique insights which also viewed itself for a long period as an earthly kingdom and looked for precedents to enhance this claim. There oftentimes was a distinct reluctance to accept what ancient Orthodoxy advanced as Christianity grew and developed. Unfortunately, Protestantism, with its superficial history and even lighter veined theology accepted and also promoted such nonsensical translation.

Thus for true believers, for Orthodox Christians, there came from the East men truly wise, inspired by God and guided by nature, to offer gifts of gold, as befitting the only King of Kings; of frankincense, as befitting the Eternal High Priest; and of myrrh, as befits the burial of him who would lay down and sacrifice his earthly life for the salvation of the world. Since

it was for all humanity the Saviour entered the world, the Providence of God decrees that all of mankind, believers and non-believers, are invited to participate in the grace of his freely offered salvation. All that was required was the honest good will of an observant heart and soul. Common sense does reign in the heart of a willing believer.

They provide evidence that man and nature become one in worshipping true goodness and reality who is the all-encompassing Christ. This unity in creation brings about a heavenly joy that totally suffuses the feast of Christ's Nativity in the flesh.

These wise men foreshadow all the many tribes and people, who, delivered from error, will one day come to worship the Sun of Righteousness. They prove that the power of the Holy Spirit to inspire is without limitation This joy unites families and restores the youthfulness of man's spirit. It brings about healing and reconciliation, peace and good will to all people everywhere.

Nevertheless, the gospel of St. Matthew also witnesses the shadow cast over the world by diabolic evil. The light of their guiding star becomes hidden for the magi as they approach Herod's Jerusalem. Their message does not evoke joy, but only fear and foreboding in the pagan king and chief priests and leaders of the people. The chief priests certainly know where the prophecy is to be fulfilled, but they do not eagerly go there with the magi. It becomes obvious it is not simply out of fear in offending a pagan local ruler that they do not arise from deep-seated lethargy of soul. Instead, they commiserate with Herod and plot against the newly born Christ, as if it were possible for man to thwart God's provisional will.

The magi, on the contrary, achieve their quest, but they are warned to return to their homeland by another route. So also with the treasured gospel message; it will have to go forth into the world by another way, not surprisingly, much as the Body of Christ, the Church, likewise at so many junctures in history, when encountering inexplicable obdurate spiritual blindness and malice, must travel by another, distinctly steeper way to reach the soul of mankind.

Yet, for those who seek after truth, for souls of good will, the brilliant star the magi followed to Bethlehem continues to shine, guiding to the One who is mankind's only hope, only Saviour and only fulfillment: the divine Life-giver himself, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of the eternal Father.

Flight into Egypt

Joseph, the foster father of the Lord and husband of the ever-Virgin is something of an unsung hero. Scripture tells us little about him and we may tend to think he was unimportant. The righteous tradition of the Church has him an older man, widowed from a previous marriage and a man of modest means. In the West, imagination has conjured up a young innocent like his wife, in love and in jeopardy, but full of courage. However he was obedient; he was trusting. Joseph was a husband and a father whose life, through unknown to us, was in influence on the child who became the young man Jesus.

Like all young men, Jesus looked around for models of spiritually faithful manhood. He found one in his earthly foster father. Perhaps Joseph's example reinforced Jesus in identifying his – and our – relationship to God as one of a devoted father and loving child. Fidelity to the eternal Father was easily recognized by the child Jesus in the behavior of St. Joseph. His example was not difficult to follow. Unquestionably, the example of Joseph reinforced Jesus in identifying his – and our – relationship to our heavenly Father as one of father and child.

This season of the year gives us a glimpse of that man, so real and so faithful and devoted to both wife and child. And the Sunday after the Nativity of our Lord encapsulates the values we can easily learn if we are but willing. The Evangelist Matthew tells us he got up immediately from the dream message of warning and fled to Egypt with Mary and Jesus. We can readily detect fear of the threatening world and its reality into his portrait, yet persistent assurance directed toward Mary and Jesus. The haste of their flight is shown in the movement of their bodies which Scripture paints for us, even as Joseph by his response to God's directive, assures her of ongoing safety. Just as realistically as Mary gives the Son of God earthly life in the flesh, Joseph saved that life with his faith and his response to God's direction.

Are there unsung heroes in your life? These people may seem unimportant to those outside the relationship, but you know they have acted and believed in a way that "saved" your life in some real and vital sense. As we have turned in the direction of a new unfolding year, let us also begin a flight into a new prayer direction of on-going gratitude for all the people from whose example and goodness we benefit. If we are called upon by the Lord to love and pray for our enemies, it is altogether even more important to intercede before the throne of God for those who knowingly and unknowingly assist us in our own life journey.

Longing For God

The Psalms are filled with images of those who hunger for holiness, for righteousness, for the presence of God in their lives. They recognize He is their only completion and fulfillment. "O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water" Psalms 63: 2. "Behold, I long for your precepts...I gasp with open mouth in my yearning for your commandments...I long for your salvation O Lord, and your law is my delight" Psalms 119: 40, 131, 174.

These words vividly and dramatically capture the torment of the restless soul. There is no peace without God, only endless nights and long days. The perceived absence of God robs one of strength and provides nothing but tears for sustenance. Only the memory of God's presence makes the quest endurable.

Every believer experiences this intense longing for God. At times it is sharply present, clearly in focus. At others, particularly when our days are frantic, the longing becomes a dull, nameless ache, a feeling that something is out of harmony in our lives. When we recognize the source of our discontent, we understand why we literally *hunger* and *thirst*. This sense of deprivation, self inflicted, propels us to the Lord's Table. We confess our sins in repentance, recognizing they separate us from our Life. There, at the altar table, in eating and drinking, we acknowledge that which is missing in our lives; there at the messianic banquet, we pledge to continue our noble quest, until that time when we are all with our Father in heaven.

It is precisely for this reason we become upset when someone is not with us for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and holy days. They attempt to function while starving themselves of spiritual sustenance and try to make it on their own. They succeed on the earthy, carnal, fleshy, bodily, temporal level, only. They are spiritually emaciated and thirst after the Blood of the Lord, but will not look to Christ, nor seek Him out for sustenance of soul. They can do without Him even if for a brief moment in their lives!

They give ample proof the Lord is not paramount, not vitally important in life. He may just be a passing and convenient fancy. It causes spiritual anguish in our hearts and souls when we encounter such as these among us because we are called to be His chosen ones, His favorites, His friends, those for whom He is Saviour. If the Lord is not the most significant and meaningful Person in our lives, the most important above all else, what kind of hope can we have? If He is not worthy of all sacrifices, what then is the worthwhile quality of sacrifice we make for spouses, our children, our loved ones?

This hungering, this thirsting for the Lord must characterize us as Orthodox believers. It has to be our hallmark. When we permit ourselves to be vitalized by so many other unworthy things, we lose the value of Christ's grace in our lives. And of course, the Byzantine Fathers of the Church all agree that if we can come to the Divine Liturgy and not be prepared to receive worthily the Saviour as our daily food and drink, we lose our humanity.

On the Mount of Beatitudes, our Lord insistently taught: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after holiness; they shall have their fill" Matthew 5: 6. If we are not thirsty or hungry for the Lord, how shall we sustain ourselves? We very well know the person who goes without eating, who continually skips meals, is known to become ill and ultimately physically die of starvation if the condition persists. But how many do we have among the apparently living, but spiritually dead in our midst?

The soul of man cannot be satisfied or fulfilled unless it find its totality and completeness and fulfillment in Christ. We cannot be satisfied with second best. If we live a pattern accepting the second best now, we will find we have inherited it for ourselves for all eternity. Hell is always second best and hell is permanent!

The primary reason we are asked to fast prior to receiving the Body and Blood of Christ is that we hunger and long for the Saviour. It makes us personally experience how vital and important spiritual nourishment for the soul should be.

If we do not long for God, if we do not hunger for His sustenance, if we think we can get along without it, let us ask His Holy Spirit to place that longing in our hearts and souls. Let us act and live as if we long for Him and in seeing our sincerity, He will respond by instilling a genuine yearning in the depth of our being.

Let us live like the disciples we have been called to be. Let us equally care for our physical and spiritual nourishment. Let us seek and take our spiritual sustenance and nourishment at His banquet table, else He may issue the invitation to someone worthier. Let us long for the Lord that He become our Reality!

Holiness is our vocation as Orthodox believers. Let us pursue it seriously, sincerely, ardently and eagerly!

Let us prayerfully develop a spiritual taste for soulful sustenance in the life of the Body of Christ in His Word, in worship and by being fed on the Body and Blood of our God!

Remember?

...and a later generation arose that did not know the Lord or what he had done for Israel
Judges 2: 10.

Joshua was a great leader, chosen by our heavenly Father to succeed Moses and lead the people into the Promised Land. Following the death of Moses, he had the dignity of fulfilling the promise God had made to their ancestors. Together, Joshua and the people witnessed the Jordan River stop flowing so they could walk into Canaan on dry ground. History was repeating itself. They saw the walls of Jericho fall down. They were alive the day the sun stood still.

And yet, after Joshua and his generation died, their descendants stopped worshipping the Lord our God. And when this happened, God's work with their ancestors was erased from their memories. They began to worship idols of the gods of nearby nations. They forgot who they were! Expunged from the value of their souls was the reality and truth of how they were miraculously cared for and led into not so much a new land, but a new way of living!

It is very easy for us as followers of Christ to forget who we are. It happens very easily when we become enamored of the "idols" of our secular society in which we live. We can equate the values of godlessness and confuse them with the truth of Christ. It happens when we neglect and choose for ourselves and neglect to worship the Lord with other believers or to think worldly values are more important than the insights Christ provides for us to pursue. It very easily happens when we forget what our God has done for us in the past. It can happen when we do not make ourselves familiar with God's values and his expectations for human life. It does happen when we reduce ourselves to a far lower dignity than destined for eternal life. It does happen when we do not recall, when we do not speak of our destiny as created in the image of God. As we slowly depart into our own imagined direction away from the source of living, those who come after us will forget who we are and pursue their own agenda which leads to perdition.

Unless we have become experienced in acting and living according to the principles of Christ, we are in danger of sliding into the pattern of mindless living, filled with hedonistic pleasure because of the vacuum the absence of grace leaves in our lives. Altering reality is easy if we believe in nothing because then we fall for everything. Let us always recall memories of ways to enrich our spiritual lives and participate in the mystical life of the Body of Christ!

Blessed New Year

Prayer for the New Year

Dear Lord, at the beginning of this New Year,
I remember that you are a God of beginnings and endings.

You created the world, with all its eternal patterns.

Winter begins in frost, and ends in Spring's thaw.

Spring begins in new, green life, ending in Summer's heat.

Summer begins in sunshine, and ends in Autumn's breezes.

And Autumn's color leads to the white of Winter again.

As another year ends and begins in our lives, help us to remember
that you have made a world of cycles.

When fortune turns to trials, or hardship turns to joy,
help me take delight in the life I've received from you.

Remind me that I will one day pass from this world
and enter a new life like those who've gone before me.

Amen.

**Pray
for the
New Year**



Do Not Fear

You have nothing to fear. I come to proclaim good news to you, tidings of great joy to be shared by all the people

Luke 2: 10.

The message of the angels is that we ought not be afraid in the midst of the glory of the Nativity of our Lord feast day. Each time a child comes into this world, it brings with it the good news that our heavenly Father is not discouraged. Our God imparts enough hope to send yet another child into the world to assure us of his enduring love. Jesus, the Infant of Bethlehem comes as a ray of light and hope into the darkness and bleakness of our lives. Our discouraged hearts perk up with the poet's cry and the angel's song: Do not be discouraged. Be not afraid! The One who is come is here for our encouragement.

All the 20,000 children who perished at the order of the Roman governor were martyrs in defense of the Infant Christ. "What was said through Jeremiah the prophet was then fulfilled: 'A cry was heard at Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel bewailing her children, no comfort for her, since they are no more'" Matthew 2: 17, 18. Known as the "Holy Innocents," their feast is celebrated following the Lord's birth in the flesh.

Thus we see Jesus is not the only child sent into the world for its encouragement. We, too, can join the vocation of the Lord and the Holy Innocents because we too are commissioned to help transform the world. The coming of these children and our coming is also reason for remembrance and celebration.



THE LAMENT OF RACHEL



New Year Blessing
Heavenly Father,
in this time of new beginnings,
we recall how the heavens celebrated the birth of Christ.
We think back to the new kingdom he proclaimed,
and remember the new life we gained in our baptism.

In this time of new beginnings,
and at the beginning of this New Year,
may we always act as good examples
of the new life in you that all Christians have
and be the same for others.

Give us the joy that is ours
as adopted members of God's family.

Amen.

Did You Know That ...

- ...in advancing in spiritual life, the example of the Lord is always challenging and never fails?
- ...courage and confidence are what decision-making are all about?
- ...if you teach it, you had better be able to do it yourself?
- ...every man is the architect of his own future?
- ...within your heart, keep one secret spot where all your hopes and aspirations may go?
- ...you should rather be known as being the one who encouraged others rather than the one who inadvertently discouraged those around you?
- ...when you can see the humorous side of a situation that has scared you, you are well on the way to overcoming and transforming that fear?
- ...when you take positive action in spite of fear, you win a victory?
- ...a day dawns, quite like other days; in it a single hour comes, quite like other hours, but in that day and in that hour the chance of a lifetime faces us?
- ...if we truly learn to see, you will know there is no end to the new worlds for our vision?
- ...all the force that is pulling against you can be changed in prayer to lift you?
- ...no one is rich enough to do without a neighbor?
- ...our Baptism empowers us to be Christ-like?
- ...being Christ-like means doing what the Lord expects of us?
- ...unless we invest in heaven here and now, we will not be able to reap dividends or interest in eternity?
- ...the only success in life everyone can achieve is by God's grace, the salvation of our soul?

MOVING "FORWARD" BY "RETREATING"

The whole concept of "retreating" in a military sense is often quite misunderstood. It does not mean that an army is "raising the white flag" and surrendering. It is not an admission of defeat. Much to the contrary, when soldiers retreat, they are falling back to regroup and to reassess their position so that they may be better prepared to continue their battle.

Certainly our Lord understood the value in "getting away from it all." His was a demanding ministry, with throngs of people constantly beseeching Him to perform healings and miracles in their behalf. When the strain of this would become too much for Him, Jesus would "retreat" into the mountains, spending time in prayer, meditation and fasting. When He would return to His Apostles, Christ would be refreshed and energized by His time alone.

In like manner, we often find ourselves overwhelmed by our own struggle to live a good and proper Christian life. The temptations placed before us in our pleasure-driven society can be formidable and the burdens of simply trying to provide for our family can weigh heavily on our shoulders and our hearts. The fast-paced schedule that we find ourselves trying to keep can wear us down physically, mentally and spiritually. It is precisely then that we, too, must recognize the importance of "falling back." We must take the time to be alone with God in prayer — "laying aside all of our earthly cares." We must distance ourselves from everyone and everything, allowing God to "refuel" us with His Grace. Yes, it is only our Heavenly Father Who can refresh us and sustain us through our personal battles and Who can give us the strength to move forward in our service to Him.