

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church  
1433 13th Avenue  
Altoona PA 16601

**What we are is God's gift to us.  
What we become is our gift to God!**

**Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church**  
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# Glad Tidings



*“Proceed, O angelic powers!  
Go to Bethlehem;  
Prepare the manger,  
For the Word comes to be born.  
Wisdom proceeds from the  
mouth of the Most High!  
Receive, O Church of God, the  
announcement of salvation;  
Enter into the joy of the  
Theotokos!  
Let us sing with gladness,  
O people:  
Blessed is He Who comes: O our  
God, glory to You!”*

We welcome you to Divine Liturgy today. Whether you are an Orthodox Christian, or this is your first visit to an Orthodox Church, we are pleased to have you with us. Although **Holy Communion** is reserved for baptized and chrismated (confirmed) Orthodox Christians, all are invited to receive the **“antidoron”** which is not a sacrament, but is a reminder of the “agape feast” that followed worship in the early Church. **After the Divine Liturgy this morning, please join us in the Church Hall for fellowship and refreshments.**

We hope you will return often to worship with us,  
to grow in Christ and in our Orthodox Faith.

# Schedule of Divine Services



<u>SUNDAY – JANUARY 1</u>	<b><u>NO DIVINE LITURGY</u></b> Feast of Circumcision in the Flesh of our Lord/ Feast of St. Basil
<u>SUNDAY JANUARY 8</u>	10:30AM Post-Theophany ~ Cutting of St. Basil’s Bread Blessing of Water for Theophany 40-day Memorial/ +Fr. George Papadeas
<u>SUNDAY JANUARY 15</u>	10:30AM Righteous Paul the Hermit of Thebes in Egypt
<u>SUNDAY JANUARY 22</u>	10:30AM The Apostle Timothy of the 70 Apostles
<u>SUNDAY JANUARY 29</u>	10:30AM Relocation of Relics of Holymartyr Ignatius the “God-mantelled” (Theophoros)

**DURING HOLY COMMUNION**, we ask that everyone stand quietly in the pews for it is disrespectful to talk during this Holy Sacrament. WHEN RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION, please make sure you state your baptized name after Fr. John states “The servant (or handmaiden) of God...” We also ask that you hold the red cloth underneath your chin in case an accident should happen. As always, we ask that children come first to receive Holy Communion, then the adults.

**IF YOU ARE IN DOUBT** if we have any Divine Liturgy on a Sunday during the winter months, please refer to our website ([www.holytrinityaltoona.org](http://www.holytrinityaltoona.org)), our answering machine at the church, or a church officer will call you by Saturday afternoon to inform you that church is cancelled.

**OUR MISSION IS TO GLORIFY OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST  
THROUGH OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS, ACCORDING TO THE HOLY TRADITIONS  
AND SACRED TEACHINGS OF OUR ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN FAITH!**

## **THEOPHANIA (THEOPHANY): THE FEAST OF LIGHTS (TON PHOTON)**

On January 6 the faithful in most parishes attend a Divine Liturgy and the Great Blessing of the Water Service to celebrate Theophany. The service commemorates the baptism of Christ and the manifestation of God in Three Persons as the Orthodox Church teaches.

Large numbers of people attend church to be blessed and to receive holy water which they take home in small bottles provided by the church. Some parishioners bring their own bottles often made specifically for holy water. In most churches in America the blessing is held indoors, and the water is contained in a large urn.

According to Orthodox doctrine, holy water has the power to sanctify and heal. The holy water that is blessed is taken home and put in your home icon corner or ikonostasi for future use; times of adversity, before starting a new venture or trip, to give thanks, or when someone is ill. You may drink it and/or put it on an afflicted part of the body. To rid the house of evil spirits, it should be sprinkled in the four corners of each room, so no one will step on it. In rural Greece the holy water is sprinkled in the fields and on the animals.

It is customary to invite your priest to bless your home with holy water within a few weeks following Theophany. Prepare by cleaning the house, opening and lighting all the rooms. Place a clean bowl of water, a candle, an icon and even an incense burner on a small table. The priest will bless the water by dipping a cross in it and repeating a blessing. Using a basil or evergreen spring dipped in water as a sprinkler, he will go to each room and sprinkle it in the four corners, exorcising evil spirits. Save some of the holy water in a bottle in your icon corner and pour the remainder on plants.

### **GREAT BLESSING OF WATER**

ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 8<sup>TH</sup>, we will celebrate the “Great Blessing of Water” at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast of Theophany. During the service, the Holy Spirit is invoked to sanctify the water (agiasmos), and the cross is dipped into it three times, symbolic of Christ’s own immersion into the Jordan River. Please feel free to bring your containers to take this holy water to your homes.

Also, blessing of homes will take place by Fr. John. Those of you who wish to have your homes blessed, please use the attached form and hand it in to Fr. John or place it in the tray on our candle table. Weather permitting and Fr. John’s schedule, he will begin the following week to bless your homes. He will call a few days beforehand to give ample notice of his arrival. **YOU MUST HAND IN THIS FORM TO HAVE YOUR HOME BLESSED.** If you do not receive a call, even though you know Fr. John is in your area, please do not expect him.

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#### **I WISH TO HAVE MY HOME BLESSED AFTER THEOPHANY**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

### **CHRISTMAS CARD 2011**

Thanks to Karen Pappas for taking charge of this year's Parish Christmas Card and fundraiser! Solicitations were mailed out in November and again this year, the Church was blessed to have received many responses from near and far.

Although some responses were received after the deadline, it is worth noting that the Joy of the Nativity lasts far beyond calendar dates. In this spirit, the following families and parishioners from both near and far, although not listed on the card this year, are noted for their generosity to the Church and wishes to the Holy Trinity Parish for a Blessed Nativity season:

Nick Klaras  
Jim, Tina, Stephen, Anna & Sophia Scourtis  
James & Christine Vrentas  
Charles & Kathy Rallis

### **EVEN THOUGH IT IS THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST**

, there still are many interesting books in our church library. Why not take one out and see the wealth of spirituality that might be missing from your life. Please see Alice Kotala to take that certain book out, but we ask that you please return them on the specified date so that others may enjoy it also.

**OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM** is still continuing through the year. Please make sure you bring your children for these special classes so that they can learn that God and His Church should be the most important priorities in our lives. Our example also shows them the importance of the Infant Messiah in our lives.

**A FAST FREE SEASON IS OBSERVED** in the Orthodox Church from the Nativity of Christ (Dec. 25) to January 5<sup>th</sup> (which is a STRICT FAST DAY). Orthodox Christians are permitted to eat meat products between these two dates because of the glorious Nativity of the Infant Messiah.

**FEEL FREE TO BAKE SOMETHING** and bring it to our coffee hour. It seems that when a list is posted, very few sign-up but people do end up bringing baked goods for all of us to share in our church hall.

**PROSFORA (HOLY BREAD)** makers are needed for upcoming Sundays. Please see Fr. John when you will be making these breads. A pamphlet describing how to make these breads is located on our back window pamphlet rack. May the Infant Messiah bless you for this valuable service in the ministry of our parish.

### **SPECIAL THANKS TO:**

Those who have been baking the holy breads (prosfora) throughout this past year.

Connie Russo, for printing out our monthly church bulletins for us to send out to parishioners, so that they may enjoy the ministry of our parish.

Alice Kotala, for printing up our Epistle/Gospel sheets for the past year so that we may gain a more personal insight into Holy Scriptures during the Divine Liturgy and also for being our "librarian" after church.

Those who have brought in baked goods to share with us in our fellowship hour after church services this past year.

Those who participated in our church Christmas card, to extend their blessings of our Lord's Nativity to all of our parishioners here in the Altoona area and those who have moved away.

Those Sunday School teachers who help teach our younger ones the love, and peace and joy of Christ.

### **THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST: GOD BECOMES HUMAN TO SHOW US THE WAY**

*"What shall we offer You, O Christ? Who for our sake appeared on earth as a human? Every creature made by You offers You thanksgiving. The angels offer You a hymn, the heavens, a star, the magi, gifts, the shepherds their wonder, the earth, its cave, the wilderness, a manger, and we offer to You, a Virgin Mother."*

~ Orthodox Christian Vesperal Hymn

The simplicity of the story of Christ's birth reveals the depth of God's love and the mystery of His actions in our life. As we celebrate Christmas anew this year, once again Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and wise men, the angels and animals direct our attention to the Lord Jesus. He who is truly the "way, the truth and the life" (John 14:1) who reveals Himself in the humble circumstances of a cave in Bethlehem. All of time is centered upon his coming. All of creation surrounds Him who fashioned the creation!

The story of the birth of Christ is a vivid reminder of the depth of God's love for us. He loves us so much that he has entered into life in this world in the person of Christ. The infinite God mysteriously accepted the limitations of our humanity. It was not enough for God to act through signs and wonders of the physical world. It was not enough for God to guide us through the prophets and teachers of old. No, this was not enough for our God. To express His boundless love for us, the Living God appeared among us in the person of Christ Our Lord. By fully identifying Himself with us, Christ has come to teach us, to heal us and to lead us back to the Father. He has come to remind us that we are the Father's precious daughters and sons. As St. John the Evangelist says: "God so loved the world that He sent His Only begotten Son so

that all who believe in Him will not be lost but will have eternal life" (John 3:16).

May years before the Beatitudes were taught and many years before His glorious Resurrection, Christ revealed God's love for us through the simple events of His birth. The Lord of Glory demonstrated His love for us simply by entering into our life and by sharing in all that is truly human. St. Basil the great reminds us of this saying: "Every act and every word of our Savior is a guide for holiness and virtue. For this reason He became human, so that in images He may depict both holiness and virtue for us...For this reason He bears a body so that we may imitate His life" (Ascetical Principles, 1).

Through His birth in Bethlehem, Our Lord reveals to us the breath and depth of God's love for us. Whether we see Him as the child in Bethlehem, the teacher in Galilee, or the Risen Lord in Jerusalem; Christ is truly the greatest gift of the Father "for us and for our salvation."

The story of Christ's birth speaks to us about the mysterious ways of God. The Triune God acts in ways that we do not always expect! His ways are truly wonder-filled. For centuries, the Ancient Israelites had expected the Messiah. The prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah, called the people to readiness and openness to God's actions. Their message provided the people with indications about the coming Messiah.

Yet, when the "the fullness of time had come" (Gal. 4:4), the Messiah did not arrive as a conquering hero in a golden chariot with pomp and splendor. He was not robed in expensive clothing. He did not appear in the capital city. Throngs of adoring followers did not accompany Him.

(continued — next page)

*(Nativity of Christ continued)*

When the Messiah finally arrived, He came first as a baby. He was born to a young girl who was not formally married. The event occurred in the simple village of Bethlehem. He was sheltered in a place reserved for animals because the inn was full. There, in such simple circumstances, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth..." (John 1:14). This is the mysterious way of God!

Through the Christmas story, Our Lord reveals that God acts in ways that we do not always expect. We cannot shape the mighty acts of God to our limited understanding. The Triune God is great than our limited perceptions of Him. He acts in mysterious and wondrous ways to draw us to Him and to one another in love.

The persons who are involved in the story of Christ's birth were all quite different. Mary and Joseph were humble travelers seeking a place of shelter. The shepherds were simple men of the land tending their flocks. The wise men were wealthy and aristocratic foreigners wandering in a strange land.

Yet, each of them shared a common characteristic. They opened their ears to the actions of the Lord who mysteriously led them to the village of Bethlehem. Each of them permitted God to act in their lives.

Mary and Joseph were willing to change their whole life to nurture and protect the Child Jesus. The shepherds were willing to hear the words of the angels. The wise men were willing to follow the star. We remember them to this day because they opened their hearts and trusted in the Lord.

Through His birth in Bethlehem, Jesus reveals that we too must open our hearts to His presence and actions. God wants us to share in His work of reconciliation. Like the participants in the

first Christmas, we too are called to be persons whose hearts are open to the divine presence and actions.

The story of the birth of Christ and its true significance is often clouded by the commercialism of the season. There is a very frenzied pace to these days which can so easily depersonalize us and dampen the true joy of the season. The stores tempt us for weeks on end to buy this thing or buy that thing. Some of us prefer to speak of the "Holiday Season" rather than of Christmas. Many schools have forbidden the remembrance of Christ's birth in the classroom. Yes, throughout our society, many fail to remember that the coming of Christ is truly at the heart of the Christmas celebrations.

What can we do? Let us remember that the season celebrates the love of God revealed in the coming of Christ. For those with faith, the colored lights, the green trees, the wreaths and the flowers are the symbols of the joy of Christmas. Let us celebrate the joy of Christ's coming!

Let us share the love of God with others. Christ has come to bear witness to the Father's love for us. We too can share this love with others, especially with the poor and less fortunate among us. We can be sensitive to those who cannot easily celebrate because of a loss in their lives. Let us be the ambassadors of God who share His care and philanthropy.

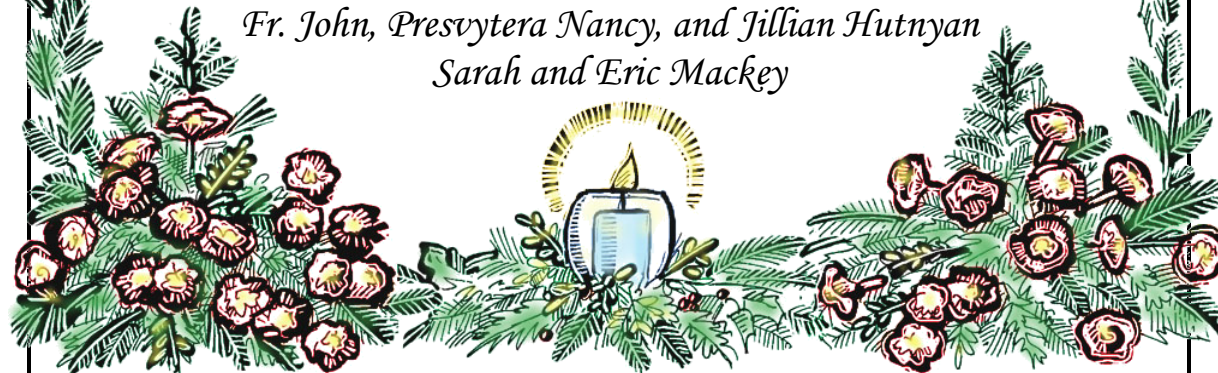
Let us seek the Lord with an open heart as the shepherds and wise men did. This means that we find opportunities for prayer and meditation, for reading the Scriptures related to Christ's coming. This means that we can make Christmas a special day by participating in the Divine Liturgy and by receiving Holy Communion with reverence for God, with faith and with love.

CHRISTOS GENNATE! CHRIST IS BORN! ~ THOZASATE! GLORIFY HIM!

"Come, believers; Run to greet the Creator! He comes to earth, dawning from the Virgin. Let us be illumined in purity; Let us shine with the star of righteousness; Let us make ready with fear and joy, that with purified eyes we may see Christ being born: He makes us mortals divine; He raises us to the heights of godliness."

Kala Christougenna! Chronia polla!  
Have a good Christmas! Many years to you!

*Fr. John, Presvytera Nancy, and Jillian Hutnyan  
Sarah and Eric Mackey*



#### **THE LEGEND OF ST. BASIL'S BREAD (VASILOPITA)**

The vasilopita commemorates a miracle performed by St. Basil (commemorated on January 1<sup>st</sup>) while serving as a bishop. The legend varies as to how St. Basil became the guardian of the gold, silver, and jewelry of the people of Caesarea. Some say thieves had taken the valuables from the village, and they were recovered. Others say it was a tax the government asked St. Basil to collect, but then decided to cancel. In either case, St. Basil became responsible for returning the riches to the people. However, they could not agree on the rightful owners. St. Basil suggested that the women bake the valuables inside a large pita. When he cut the pita, each owner miraculously received the right valuable. Today a single coin is baked inside each loaf to honor this miracle, and the recipient has good luck for the coming year. We will have the cutting of the vasilopita on Sunday, January 8<sup>th</sup> at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy.

#### **HOW OFTEN DO YOU ATTEND CHURCH SERVICES?**

Every Sunday plus special feast days.

Every Sunday.

Almost every Sunday.

Twice a month.

Once a month.

A few times a year.

Not sure, but every time I go there are poinsettias or lilies everywhere!