

THE LADDER ^{of} **Divine** ⁺ **Ascent**

Volume 10, Issue 4

The Newsletter of St John of the Ladder Orthodox Church

December 2008

Nativity Services

The services of the Nativity will begin with the Prefeast Vespers and Compline Canons (these are the services that parallel the services of Holy Week, and thus help to form a 'Nativity Holy Week') on Friday, Dec 19th at 6 pm and continuing through Tuesday. On Wednesday, Dec 24th, at 1 pm we will celebrate the Royal Hours of Nativity followed immediately by the Vespereal Liturgy of Nativity (approx 2:30 pm). Our annual Holy Supper in the Parish Hall, with the singing of Traditional Christmas Carols, will immediately follow the Vespereal Liturgy (approx 4:00 pm). The Vigil of Nativity will be celebrated that same evening at 6:00 pm and the Nativity Divine Liturgy on Christmas morning at 9:30 am. Please also note on the calendar the choir rehearsal times for preparing the Nativity music.

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Notice of Annual Parish Meeting

Our annual parish meeting will take place on Sunday, January 25th, 2008 following Divine Liturgy and a brief Coffee Hour.



The Virgin of the Sign

During the Prefeast of the Nativity when you enter the church you will find the Icon of the Virgin of the Sign on the central analogion (the 'icon stand'). This icon takes its name from the prophecy of Isaiah: 'Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman'u-el, which means "God is with us"' (7.14). This is the mystery which the feast of the Nativity of Christ celebrates, the mystery of God made flesh. The Virgin of the Sign reveals some of the implications of this 'mystery hidden from ages and generations' (Col 1.26). In this icon Jesus is depicted as the Christ Child. He is clearly identified by His name, abbreviated in the Greek as IC XC, Jesus Christ. He is also surrounded by a *mandorla*, which by the way it encloses the rays of light emanating from Him, shows Christ as the 'Light of the World' (Jn 8.12). In the *nimbus* which surrounds His head is depicted the Cross on which is inscribed the Divine Name, the ο ων. This was the name which God Himself revealed to Moses on Mt Horeb when He spoke to him from the burning bush (Ex 3.14). Christ is always as St Paul insists, 'the crucified One' (cf 1 Cor 2.2), so the cross reminds us that this child born of Mary is born to die. The face of the Child is that of an adult and His forehead is large, signifying wisdom. In this face for the first time is revealed the face of God Himself. We now understand the Old Covenant prohibition against false images: it was safeguarding and preparing us for the revelation of the true Image of God, Jesus Christ (Ex 20.4, Ex 33.17-23, and Col 1.15). In His hand He holds a scroll containing the scriptures and with His right hand He gives a blessing. Also, Christ is being supported by the seraphim, the mysterious, six-winged, fiery guardians of the throne of God (Is 6.2ff). Behind Christ, with her hands raised in worship, stands Mary who is clearly identified by the Greek abbreviation, MP ΘY, or Mother of God. Thus is depicted iconographically the mystery of which one of the hymns of the Prefeast of the Nativity refers: 'In your womb you contained God who cannot be contained'. Mary contained in her womb the eternal Son of God. The One to whom she gave birth is God Himself. Thus in order to rightly name the One born of her, we must call Mary both *Theotokos* ('bearer of God') and Mother of God. But the One born of Mary, Imman'u-el, "God is with us", is *both* God and man, and here we come to a further significance of this icon. Jesus Christ is not only the true image of the Father, He is also the true image after whose image man is created (Gen 1.27 and 1 Cor 15.49). In Christ we see for the first time the first True Man. Man himself is to be the image of God. Through Christ's coming in the flesh the Christian himself is enabled to become a living icon, an image of the Father, radiating the presence of Christ to others until Christ's 'second and glorious coming'. ✨



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St John of the Ladder Orthodox Church



~ ~ ~ Schedule of Services ~ ~ ~ December 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	01 <i>OCF at Furman University 6:00 pm</i>	02 <i>Wine & Oil</i> Daily Matins 7:00 am	03 Prophet Zephaniah <i>Confessions</i> 5:00 pm Daily Vespers 6:00 pm	04 <i>Wine & Oil</i>	05 <i>Confessions</i> 5:00 pm Great Vespers 6:00 pm	06 Divine Liturgy 8:00 am St Nicholas, the Wonderworker <i>Confessions</i> Great Vespers 6:00 pm
07 25th Sunday after Pentecost St Ambrose of Milan Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Slavonic Molieben 12:30 pm	08 <i>OCF at Furman University 6:00 pm</i>	09 <i>Wine & Oil</i> Daily Matins 7:00 am	10 <i>Confessions</i> 5:00 pm Daily Vespers 6:00 pm	11 <i>Wine & Oil</i> Adult Class <i>'Epistle to the Romans'</i> 7:00 pm	12 <i>Confessions</i> 5:00 pm Great Vespers 6:00 pm	13 Divine Liturgy 8:00 am St Herman of Alaska <i>Confessions</i> Great Vespers 6:00 pm
14 26th Sunday after Pentecost Sunday of the Forefathers Alms Sunday Charity Brunch Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	15 <i>Parish Council Meeting</i> 5:30 pm	16 <i>Wine & Oil</i> Daily Matins 7:00 am	17 Prophet Daniel Three Holy Youths <i>Confessions</i> 5:00 pm Daily Vespers 6:00 pm	18 <i>Wine & Oil</i>	19 <i>Confessions</i> 5:00 pm Vespers and Compline 6:00 pm	20 <i>Choir Rehearsal</i> 4:30 pm <i>Confessions</i> Great Vespers 6:00 pm
21 Sunday Before Nativity Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Vespers and Compline ~ 12:30 pm	22 Pre Feast of Nativity <i>Choir Rehearsal</i> 5:00 pm Vespers and Compline 6:00 pm	23 <i>Wine & Oil</i> Pre Feast of Nativity <i>Choir Rehearsal</i> 5:00 pm Vespers and Compline 6:00 pm	24 <i>Strict Fast</i> Eve of Nativity Royal Hours 1:00 pm Vesperal Liturgy 2:30 pm Vigil of Nativity 6:00 pm	25 Nativity of the Lord Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	26 <i>No Fast</i> Synaxis of the Theotokos	27 Protomartyr Stephen Great Vespers 6:00 pm
28 Sunday After Nativity Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	29	30 Holy Supper 4:00 pm	31 <i>No Fast</i> Leavetaking of the Nativity	A Word From the Desert "Neither repentance avails without grace, nor grace without repentance; for repentance must first condemn sin, that grace may blot it out. So then, John, who was a type of the law, came baptizing for repentance, while Christ came to offer grace."		

Fellowship and Coffee Hour: Sundays immediately following Divine Liturgy

Church School: Sundays at 9:00 am (before Divine Liturgy). No Church School Dec 21st or 28th!

Choir Rehearsal: Saturday Dec 13th and 23rd, see times above, and Tuesday Dec 19th.

Confessions: Wed at 5 pm and Sat following Vespers, as scheduled above, and by appointment

We are serving Matins at 7:00 am on the Tuesday mornings of the remainder of the Nativity Fast.

Parish Council Meeting, Dec 15th @ 5:30 pm

Holy Supper and Singing of Traditional Carols, Dec 24th, at 4:00 pm



Christos Gennatai! Doxasate! Christ is born! Glorify Him! Kristos rozhdaetsya!



Slav'te ego! Blessed Nativity! Craciun Fericit

The Nativity Sermon of St. John Chrysostom

"I behold a new and wondrous mystery!

My ears resound to the shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but loudly chanting a heavenly hymn!
The angels sing! The archangels blend their voices in harmony! The cherubim resound their joyful praise!
The Seraphim exalt His glory!

All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead herein... on earth and man in heaven. He who is above now, for our salvation, dwells here below; and we, who were lowly, are exalted by divine mercy!
Today Bethlehem resembles heaven, hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices and, in place of the sun, witnessing the rising of the Sun of Justice!

Ask not how this is accomplished, for where God wills, the order of nature is overturned. For He willed. He had the powers. He descended. He saved. All things move in obedience to God.

Today 'He Who Is', is born! And 'He Who Is' becomes what He was not! For when He was God, He became man-while not relinquishing the Godhead that is His...

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him angels, nor archangels, nor thrones, nor dominions, nor powers, nor principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Yet He has not forsaken His angels, nor left them deprived of His care, nor because of His incarnation has He ceased being God. And behold kings have come, that they might serve the Leader of the Hosts of Heaven;
Women, that they might adore Him Who was born of a woman, so that He might change the pains of childbirth into joy; Virgins, to the Son of the Virgin...

Infants, that they may adore Him who became a little child, so that out of the mouths of infants He might perfect praise; Children, to the Child who raised up martyrs through the rage of Herod; Men, to Him who became man that He might heal the miseries of His servants;

Shepherds, to the Good Shepherd who was laid down His life for His sheep; Priests, to Him who has become a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek;

Servants, to Him who took upon Himself the form of a servant, that He might bless our stewardship with the reward of freedom (Philippians 2:7);

Fishermen, to the Fisher of humanity; Publicans, to Him who from among them named a chosen evangelist;
Sinful women, to Him who exposed His feet to the tears of the repentant woman;

And that I may embrace them all together, all sinners have come, that they may look upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! Since, therefore, all rejoice, I too desire to rejoice! I too wish to share the choral dance, to celebrate the festival! But I take my part, not plucking the harp nor with the music of the pipes nor holding a torch, but holding in my arms the cradle of Christ!

For this is all my hope! This is my life! This is my salvation! This is my pipe, my harp!

And bearing it I come, and having from its power received the gift of speech, I too, with the angels and shepherds, sing:

"Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace to men of good will! "

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS

■ CHARITY SUNDAY

With the poor economic situation United Ministries is in dire need of foodstuffs to support their Emergency Assistance Program. They suggest that the following items in their 'foodbag' can feed a person for 3 days. Please consider bringing these items to be collected (baskets are in the vestibule) and taken to United Ministries. Food for 3 days worth of nutritional meals including: 1 Cereal or Breakfast Item, 2 Powdered/Evaporated Milk, 3 Canned Meats, 6 Cans of Vegetables, 3 Canned Soups, 1 Can of Spaghetti/Ravioli, 1 Bag of Dried Beans, 1 Bag of Rice 1 Macaroni and Cheese, 1 Canned Fruit, 1 Sleeve of Crackers, 1 Jar of Peanut Butter.

■ UPCOMING EVENTS --- FESTIVAL, PARISH MEETING

* Holy Apostles Orthodox Church in W Columbia will hold its annual St Nicholas Festival on Saturday, Dec 6th beginning at 10 am. The festival will include performances by the Holy Apostles Choir, face painting for children, church tours, visits by the 'real Santa Clause', and much more. More information @ www.holyapostles.org.

* The 2008 annual parish meeting will be held following Divine Liturgy and Coffee Hour on Sunday, January 25th.

a reminder ... and a hearty 'thank you!
December Fellowship and Coffee Hour

Dec 7 th	Team 4
Dec 14 th	<i>Charity Sunday (Team 7)</i>
Dec 21 st	Team 5
Dec 28 th	Team 6

Celebrating Birthdays and Anniversaries in December
Herman Middleton (4th), Joe Wozniak (6th), Paul Pelinsky (8th), Ava Levitsky (15th), Presbyteria Catherine (16th), James Riddle (22nd), Sam and Jeanette Hubbard (23rd), Jerry and Peggy Gilmer (24th), Natalya Wickenkamp (25th), Cris Ivan (27th), Tikhon Griffin (30th), Laura Simon (30th), Paul Rusinko (31st)

From the Compline Service of the Eve of the Nativity of the Lord

My son without beginning, I am blessed beyond
Words by Thy strange birth,
For Thou hast delivered me from all travail;
As I behold Thee fleeing from Herod,
The sword of sorrow pierces my heart,
But Thou shalt live, saving those who honor Thee!

St. John of the Ladder



Orthodox Church in America

701 Augusta Arbor Way, Piedmont [Greenville], SC 29673
(864) 299-1140
www.stjohnoftheladder.org

Rev Fr Marcus C Burch, Pastor
Rev Fr Nikolay Miletkov, Assistant

Schedule of Services

Daily Vespers, Wednesday, 6:00 pm
Great Vespers, Saturday, 6:00 pm
Divine Liturgy, Sunday, 9:30 am

**'Pride makes us forget our sins,
for the remembrance of them leads to humility.'**

~~~ St John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 23. ~~~



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Mailing Address  
Street Number and Name  
City, State 98765-4321

**DECEMBER 2008**