

THE LADDER

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Ascent

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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 Saturday, Dec 19th at 6 pm and continuing through Wednesday. On Thursday, Dec 24th, at 1 pm we will celebrate the Royal Hours of Nativity followed immediately by the Vespers 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 Vespers Liturgy (approx 4:30 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!

The Icon of the Nativity of Christ

The Icon of the Nativity reproduced here is in sharp contrast to the sentimental imagery often used to depict the birth of Christ. In this image we see no charming Bethlehem bathed in the light of the Nativity star, but rather a rugged mountain with only a few sparse plants. The austere setting suggests a harsh, unwelcoming world -- the world since Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise --- in which the creation "groans in travail" (*Rm* 8.22), awaiting the coming of its Savior.

At the very center of the icon the baby Jesus is wrapped not in the swaddling clothes many have come to expect, but already in the winding cloth of His burial, foreshadowing the truth that He is the One who has come to die for man's salvation. In the same way the stable is depicted as a cave or tomb, and the manger resembles an altar of sacrifice. In this manner the icon links the birth of Christ with His death on the Cross and three-day burial in the Tomb. In the cave itself, the animals bespeak the rejection of Christ by Israel prophesied by Isaiah: "The ox knows its owner and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand" (*1.3*).

The largest figure in the icon, that of Mary --- whom Orthodox Christians call the *Theotokos*, "the one who gave birth to God" --- is presented prominently as the one who according to St Luke responded to the angel with "Let it be to me according to your word" (*1.38*), yet "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (*2.19*). Through her quiet but wholehearted assent to the invitation brought to her by the Archangel Gabriel, He who created her has become incarnate: first filling her body at the Annunciation, now visible in the flesh in His own creation at His birth.

The figures of Mary and Christ are at the heart of the icon. Mary, giving her assent to God, fulfills Eve's destiny and becomes the mother of those redeemed in Jesus Christ. Christ, by entering His own creation, emptying Himself, taking on the form a servant, and humbling Himself through His death on the Cross, is revealed to be the Lord, Savior, and Redeemer of the World.

The original icon depicted on this page was hand-painted by Fr. Andrew Tregubov and is one of the many icons at St. John of the Ladder Orthodox Church. Christmas cards with this icon are available on the church 'bookshelf' bookstore.



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St John of the Ladder Orthodox Church

Schedule of Services

December 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<i>Christ is Born!</i>		01 Wine & Oil Jesus Prayer 6:30 am Daily Matins 7:00 am	02 Prophet Habbakuk Confessions 5:00 pm Daily Vespers 6:00 pm	03 Wine & Oil Prophet Zephaniah	04 Greatmartyr <u>Barbara</u> New Hieromartyr Alexander	05 Inquirer's Class 4:30 pm Great Vespers 6:00 pm
06 26 th Sunday after Pentecost St Nicholas, the Wonderworker Divine Liturgy 9:30 am SlavonicMolieben 12:30 pm	07 St Ambrose of Milan OCF at Furman University 7:45 pm	08 Wine & Oil Jesus Prayer 6:30 am Daily Matins 7:00 am	09 Conception of the Theotokos Confessions 5:00 pm Daily Vespers 6:00 pm	10 Wine & Oil <u>Adult Class</u> A 2 nd Look at the 2 nd Coming 7:00 pm	11	12 Inquirer's Class 4:30 pm Confessions Great Vespers 6:00 pm
13 26 th Sunday after Pentecost Sunday of the <u>Forefathers</u> St Herman of Alaska Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	14 OCF at Furman University 7:45 pm	15 Wine & Oil Jesus Prayer 6:30 am Daily Matins 7:00 am	16 Confessions 5:00 pm Daily Vespers 6:00 pm	17 Wine & Oil Prophet Daniel Three Holy Youths	18 Spartanburg Fellowship 7:00 pm	19 Choir Rehearsal 4:30 pm Confessions Great Vespers [Compline Canon] 6:00 pm
20 Sunday <u>Before Nativity</u> St Ignatius Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Vespers and Compline ~ 12:30 pm	21 Pre Feast of Nativity Choir Rehearsal 5:00 pm Vespers and Compline 6:00 pm	22 Wine & Oil Pre Feast of Nativity Choir Rehearsal 5:00 pm Vespers and Compline 6:00 pm	23 Wine & Oil Pre Feast <u>Memorial Service</u> Loyce Dees 5:15 pm Vespers and Compline 6:00 pm	24 <u>Strict Fast</u> 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 Synaxis of the Theotokos Great Vespers 6:00 pm
27 Sunday <u>After Nativity</u> Protomartyr Stephen Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	28	29	30 Holy Supper 4:30 pm	31 No Fast Leavetaking of the Nativity	A Word From the Desert Someone asked an old man, How is it that some say, 'We see visions of angels?' And he replied, "Blessed is he who always sees his sins."	

Fellowship and Goffee Hour: Sundays immediately following Divine Liturgy
Church School: Sundays at 9:00 am (before Divine Liturgy). No Church School Dec 27th or Jan 3rd!!!
Choir Rehearsal: Saturday Dec 19th, see times above, and Monday and Tuesday Dec 21st and 22nd.
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.
Holy Supper and Singing of Traditional Carols, Dec 24th at 4:30 pm

Christos Gennatai! Doxasate! Christ is born! Glorify Him! Kristus rozhdaetsya! Slav'te ego! Blessed Nativity! Graciun Fericit

The Nativity Sermon of St. Gregory the Theologian (AD 380)

Christ is born, glorify Him. Christ from heaven, go out to meet Him.
Christ on earth, be exalted.
Sing to the Lord all the whole earth; and that I may join both in one word,
let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad,
for Him who is of heaven and then of earth.
Christ in the flesh, rejoice with trembling and with joy;
with trembling because of your sins, with joy because of your hope.

Again, the darkness is past; again Light is made; again Egypt is punished with darkness; again Israel is enlightened by a pillar. The people who sat in the darkness of ignorance, let them see the great Light full of knowledge. Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new. The letter gives way, the Spirit comes to the front. The shadows flee away, the truth comes in on them. Melchizedek is concluded. He who was without Mother becomes without Father (without mother of His former state, without father of His second). The laws of nature are upset; the world above must be filled. Christ commands it, let us not set ourselves against Him.

O clap your hands together all you people, because unto us a Child is born, and a Son given unto us, whose government is upon His shoulder (for with the cross it is raised up), and His name is called The Angel of the Great Counsel of the Father. Let John cry, prepare the way of the Lord; I too will cry the power of this Day. He who is not carnal is Incarnate; the Son of God becomes the Son of Man, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Let the Jews be offended, let the Greeks deride; let heretics talk until their tongues ache. Then shall they believe, when they see Him ascending into heaven; and if not then, yet when they see Him coming out of heaven and sitting as Judge.

This is our present Festival; it is this which we are celebrating today, the Coming of God to Man, that we might go forth, or rather (for this is the more proper expression) that we might go back to God - that putting off of the old man, we might put on the new; and that as we died in Adam, so we might live in Christ, being born with Christ and crucified with Him and buried with Him and rising with Him. For I must undergo the beautiful conversion, and as the painful succeeded the more blissful, so must the more blissful come out of the painful. For where sin abounded grace did much more abound; and if a taste condemned us, how much more does the passion of Christ justify us?

Therefore let us keep the Feast, not after the manner of a heathen festival, but after a godly sort; not after the way of the world, but in a fashion above the world; not as our own, but as belonging to Him who is ours, or rather as our master's; not as of weakness, but as of healing; not as of creation, but of re-creation.

2009 Financial Snapshot

	Income	Expenses
YTD (thru Oct)	\$110,526	\$118,819
September	\$8,335	\$11,249
YTD Alms Fund	\$11,104	\$12,600

FOR UNTO YOU IS
BORN THIS DAY
IN THE CITY OF
DAVID A SAVIOUR,
WHICH IS CHRIST
THE LORD.

LUKE 2:11

A Word from the Desert

Accepting the task of hospitality, the patriarch (Abraham) used to sit at the entrance of his tent (Gen. 18:1), inviting all who passed by, and his table was laden for all comers, including the impious and barbarians, without distinction. Hence he was found worthy of that wonderful banquet when he received angels and the Master of all as his guests. We too, then, should actively and eagerly cultivate hospitality, so that we may receive not only angels, but also God Himself. "For inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these my brethren you have done it to me" (Matt. 25:40). It is good to be generous to all, especially to those who cannot repay you.

Theodoros the Great Ascetic, 9th century

