

*Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshipers.*

*Fr. Nikolay Khalimonov. Priest-in-Charge, 323-851-7898
Fr. Alexy Karlgut, Dean/Administrator, 607-759-1833*

Please join us for prayer and fellowship.

Upcoming Services:
Saturday, November 12, 19
Great Vespers: 5pm

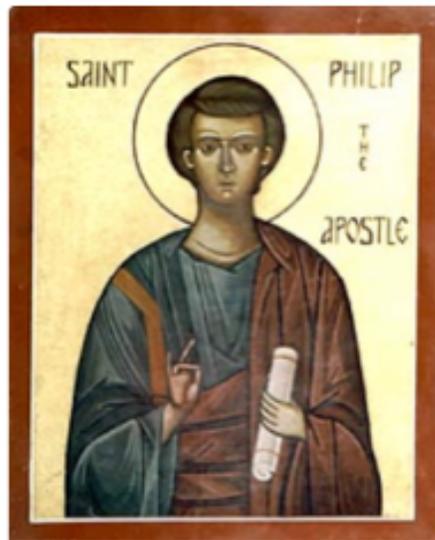
Sunday, November 13, 20
Divine Liturgy: 10am

**Coffee and fellowship will
follow the service**

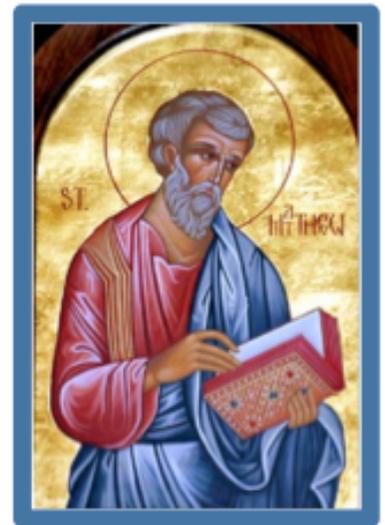
*The above services are at St.
Olympia Church
34 North Main Street
Norwood, NY, 13668*

*Mailing Address
St. Olympia Orthodox Church
PO Box 122 Canton, NY13617*

**Holy Apostle Philip
November 14**



**Holy Apostle Matthew
November 16**



Philip, Your disciple and friend, the emulator of Your sufferings, who spoke with God, proclaimed You as God to all the world. By his supplications, and through the intercession of the Theotokos, preserve Your Church, and every city, O most merciful One.

Kontakion of the Apostle Philip

With zeal, you followed Christ the Master, who in His goodness, appeared on earth to mankind. Summoning you from the custom house, He revealed you as a chosen apostle: the proclaimer of the Gospel to the whole world! Therefore, divinely eloquent Matthew, we honor your precious memory! Entreat merciful God that He may grant our souls remission of transgressions.

Troparion of the Apostle Matthew

Preparing for Christ's Nativity: The Virgin Mary in Prophecy and Christian Tradition Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas and the South

Posted November 19, 2018 on the OCA website in "Reflections in Christ"

(Archbishop Dmitri [Royster] served as ruling bishop of the Orthodox Church in America's Diocese of the South from 1978 until his retirement in 2009. He fell asleep in the Lord on August 28, 2011.)

On November 15, the Church entered the period of the Christian year known as the Nativity Fast (Advent). For forty days our attention will be directed toward the Nativity of Christ, both in the proper parts of the services and in the scriptural readings.

As part of the lenten effort several days in December are dedicated to the memory of Old Testament prophets, persons with an extraordinary call to proclaim God's will and announce beforehand the Savior's coming into the world. On December 1 we commemorate the prophet Nahum; December 2, Habakkuk; December 3, Zephaniah; December 16, Haggai; and on December 17, Daniel and the Three Youths. In addition, on the two Sundays preceding Christmas the entire assembly of Old Covenant prophets are among those many people commemorated who prepared the way for Christ's advent.

Of particular significance is the feast day which occurs in the midst of the Fast, on November 21: The Presentation (or Entrance) of the Theotokos into the Temple. According to Tradition as old as the Church itself, the parents of the Theotokos were Joachim and Anna. Being elderly and having no children, they prayed that God would grant them a child, even in their old age. God answered their prayer by giving to them a daughter. Everything surrounding her birth and infancy was extraordinary. First, her birth was announced by an angel. Second, she was born of a very old and barren mother. Third, when according to custom she was presented in the temple forty days after her birth, the priest Zacharias, father of the Forerunner John the Baptist, received her with unusual joy, taking her into the Holy of Holies, a place reserved only for the priest to enter once a year. Finally, from an early age until her betrothal, the blessed handmaiden was raised in the temple. Her being brought to the temple at the age of three, escorted by young girls carrying candles or lamps in their hands, constitutes the fundamental event commemorated on November 21.

Many Old Testament prophecies which pointed to God's New Covenant with man, had to do with the instrument that He would use to accomplish His purpose. We will recall that the first prophecy about Mary occurred at the very moment of man's fall. God said unto the serpent which had beguiled both Adam and Eve: *"Because thou hast done this... I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"* [Genesis 3: 14-15].

Mary is the new Eve, the one who crushes with her perfection and sinlessness the head of evil. In addition, the burning bush which *"was not consumed"* by fire [Exodus 3:1-6], the uncrossed gate of the temple [Ezekiel 44:1-3], and a host of other Old Testament types or images, tell of this extraordinary creature that was to be the earthly instrument by which God would enter into His own material creation. Psalm 45, recited in part at the Proskomedia prior to the Divine Liturgy, is a prophecy directly related to the feast in question: *"The King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: the virgins, her companions that follow her, shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King's palace"* [Psalm 45: 13-15].

Only from such a person as Mary could God take flesh—the perfect human nature of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We call her sinless, even immaculate. By these words we mean that she committed no personal sin. We reject, however, the idea of an immaculate conception, or any approach to the Theotokos which would distinguish her radically from the entire race of mortals, making her something other than human. We also call her ever-virgin, because in spite of attempts to prove otherwise, it has never been demonstrated that she had children other than Jesus, nor had she sexual relations with any man.

Mary has a place of high honor in Christian Tradition. She is referred to as being "more honorable than the cherubim and more glorious without compare than the seraphim." She is called Theotokos, or God-bearer. She is even known as the Mother of God, for the One to Whom she gave birth is God, but unites perfectly within Himself His own divine nature and our human nature as well, identifying Himself completely with the whole race of mortals. During the feast of the Presentation much is made of the Virgin as the abode of God, the one who enters the Holy of Holies to become herself the Tabernacle of the Righteous One.

The veneration of the Theotokos, the high honor given her in the Church, is a fulfillment of the prophetic words that she herself spoke: *"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior; for He hath*

regarded the low estate of His handmaiden; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed” [Luke 1: 46-48].

The angel Gabriel had addressed her in these words: *“Hail, thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” [Luke 1:28].* The woman who called out from the crowd in the Gospel lesson read at all major feasts of the Theotokos, *“Blessed is the womb that bare thee,”* was answered by our Lord, *“Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it” [Luke 11: 27-28].* Mary is considered to be the person, par excellence, who heard the word of God and kept it.

The consequences of denying the Theotokos her rightful place in the life of Christians are more serious than one may think, unless he considers all its implications. The Church’s theology insists upon the two perfect natures of Christ; He is both fully God and fully Man. The Virgin Mary was the perfect human being from whom Christ’s human nature was taken. Man’s redemption was made possible through the union of God and man in Christ, and it is over the very fundamental question of the personality of Christ that the Church throughout its history has had to wage its bitterest battles. In fact, the main work of the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus 431 AD) was to combat Nestorianism, a heresy which denied Mary the title, Theotokos. At least partially, as a result of this fifth century controversy, the very specific Greek term for Christ’s mother is used untranslated in Orthodox Church services to this day. To this one title is ascribed great importance, because in a very specific way it bears witness to the salvation given to us in Christ.

De-emphasis of the sinlessness of Christ’s mother, insistence upon her having other children by Joseph, and failure to remember her part in the history of the salvation of mankind, have contributed to a general misunderstanding of the Incarnation in all its fullness and power. These are but preliminary steps towards a denial of the virgin birth, and with it the divinity of Christ, the Holy Trinity, and so on.

Thus, this feast of the Presentation (Entrance) of the Theotokos stands at the beginning of the season in which we commemorate the Incarnation, the intervention of God in time and history. We rightly bestow honor, homage and veneration to the one that gave birth to God the Word, for the salvation of the world.

The Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos

Today Anna bequeaths joy to all instead of sorrow by bringing forth her fruit, the only ever-Virgin. In fulfillment of her vow, today with joy she brings to the temple of the Lord the true temple and pure Mother of God the Word.

Troparion of the Forefeast

Today is the prelude of the good will of God, of the preaching of the salvation of mankind. The Virgin appears in the temple of God, in anticipation proclaiming Christ to all. Let us rejoice and sing to her: "Rejoice, O Fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation."

Troparion of the Feast

UPCOMING EVENTS ON THE DIOCESAN CALENDAR

www.nynjoca.org

Diocesan Council Meeting

Thursday, December 8 at 11:00 AM

Diocesan Chancery, Bronxville NY

Presbyters' Council Meeting

Thursday, December 29 at 11:00 AM

Diocesan Chancery, Bronxville NY

WEEKDAY VESPERS AT THE HERMITAGE OF ST OLYMPIA

Weekdays at 4 PM

For information please contact Mother Sophronia at

mothersophronia@gmail.com

or via Facebook: Nun Sophronia Hofstead

The Meaning of Fasting in the Orthodox Church

By Fr. Milan Savich †

(Excerpted from the end of the article)

... we must take the practice of fasting seriously, if for no other reason, then out of respect for other people, throughout Christian history, who have taken it seriously. We all need to develop the habit of saying no to our carnal passions and desires. What we need is self-discipline and self-control. These are acquired only through regular spiritual exercise — namely through fasting.

Fasting is not at all an act of mortification for mortification's sake. It is not a "little suffering" which is somehow pleasing to God. It is not a punishment which is to be sorrowfully endured in payment for sins. On the contrary, fasting for a Christian, should be a joyful experience, because fasting is a self-discipline which we voluntarily impose upon ourselves in order to become better persons and better Christians...

Fasting is an art fully mastered by the Saints. These holy men and women, who have taken their religion and fasting seriously, can be of great help to us. They offer a number of recommendations for fasting.

[See the full article for explanations of each recommendation]

1. Fasting is essential for us to regain control over our bodies.

2. Fasting simplifies our lives.

3. Fasting "lightens our load" and makes it easier to pray.

4. Fasting restores discipline to our lives.

5. Another aspect of fasting is abstinence.

... "Fasting encourages obedience to God's moral commands by making us centre our lives around His." In other words, our fasting should not be self-willed but obedient. When we fast, says Kallistos Ware, "we should not try to invent special rules for ourselves, but we should follow as faithfully as possible the accepted pattern set before us by Holy Tradition." ...

6. Fasting ultimately brings about purity of heart.

"The saints teach that for us to purify our hearts we must begin with the control of our bodily desires through fasting. As long as the flesh rules purity of heart will not exist." In the words of St. John Chrysostom fasting implies not only abstinence from food, but from sins also. "The fast," he insists, "should be kept not by the mouth alone but also by the eye, the ear, the feet, the hands and all the members of the body: the eye must abstain from impure sights, the ear from malicious gossip, the hands from acts of injustice." It is useless to fast from food, protests St. Basil, and yet to indulge in cruel criticism and slander: "You do not eat meat, but you devour your brother."

The same point is made in the Triodion, especially during the first week of Lent:

As we fast from food, let us abstain also from every passion... Let us observe a fast acceptable and pleasing to the Lord. True fasting is to put away all evil, to control the tongue, to forbear from anger, to abstain from lust, slander, falsehood and perjury. If we renounce these things, then is our fasting true and acceptable to God. Let us keep the Fast not only by refraining from food, but by becoming strangers to all the bodily passions.

7. Fasting returns us to a "Paradise-like" way of life.

8. Finally, fasting is the foundation of and preparation for every spiritual effort.

"Spiritual effort presumes that we are in control of our bodies. Beyond this, fasting is the ideal preparation for spiritual celebration, such as Easter, Christmas, and other Feasts, because when undertaken properly, fasting fills our hearts and minds with the task before us. It concentrates our spiritual energies and makes them more effective." Thus, when Moses fasted on Mount Sinai (Exod. 34:28) and Elijah on Mount Horeb (Kings 19:8-12), the fast was in both cases linked with a Theophany. The same connection between fasting and the vision of God is evident in the case of St. Peter (Acts 10:9-17) He went up to the housetop to pray about the sixth hour, and he became very hungry and wanted to eat; and it was in this state that he fell into a trance and heard the divine voice. Such is always the purpose of ascetic fasting — to enable us, as the Triodion puts it, to "draw near to the mountain of prayer."

Prayer and fasting should in their turn be accompanied by almsgiving, by love for others expressed in practical form, by works of compassion and forgiveness.

As written in the Triodion:

*Knowing the commandments of the Lord,
let this be our way of life:*

Let us feed the hungry, let us give the thirsty drink,

Let us clothe the naked, let us welcome strangers,

Let us visit those in prison and the sick.

Then the Judge of all earth will say even to us:

*Come, ye blessed of My Father,
inherit the Kingdom prepared for you.*