



**St. Nicholas**

MAIN STREET  
JACOBS CREEK, PA.

**Orthodox Church**

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**January 7, 2018**

*Mon - Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ*

*IC - Afterfeast of Epiphany – Commemoration of St. John the Baptist*

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***Epiphany Blessing of Homes*** in Jacobs Creek will be next Saturday beginning at 12:30.

...in Monongahela, the Blessing of Homes will be on January 20-21.

Please sign the list on the bulletin board if you would like Father to visit your home.

***Open House*** at the home of Father Ed, Kathy and Irene is next Sunday. All are welcome and expected!

## Orthodox Spirituality: The First Step

In 1992 I was privileged to be part of a group of healthcare professionals touring hospitals and healthcare facilities in Russia. One day as I was walking alone down a St. Petersburg street, I saw a large, onion-domed church up ahead. As I drew closer I noticed something different: there were no crosses on the domes, there were no stained glass windows, only plain, clear glass. I could see inside and I noticed that this church had fluorescent lights and desks. It had been converted into an office building.



This startling sight made me question: how did a Faith which was such a part of the culture, in a few decades became so persecuted that in a few short decades Russia become one of the first atheistic states in the world? The Orthodox Faith was taught in all the public schools, how was it that these same people destroyed churches, burnt icons, and shot priests and bishops in the 1920s and 1930s?

Metropolitan Hilarion, one of today's leading Russian bishops, explains what

happened: *"It was not an accident, the seizure of power by a small group of villains".* He said the Communist Revolution was the result of a spiritual sickness that had infected the Church; there was a spiritual emptiness in the Russian people:

*"Many ordinary Christians, if not the majority, had no faith at all, and it was they who turned against the Church as soon as membership in it stopped being encouraged. The Church at once lost the great majority of its members and remained a small flock of those prepared to die for Christ. "*

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russia had churches, monasteries, books, educational materials, magnificent choirs and services, but also an inner emptiness among many of its members: it somehow didn't connect with the lives of the people. The same inner emptiness continues among many Orthodox Christians of Russia today. Metropolitan Hilarion continues:

*I remember asking one teenager who came, together with her mother, to be baptized. 'Do you believe in God?' 'No', was her answer. 'Then why do you want to be baptized?' She replied, 'Well, everybody gets baptized nowadays'. Our people are inwardly atheists, but become outwardly Orthodox. Russian atheism may well one day die, but this will happen when the country has not only been baptized, but has been enlightened and born again.*

The problem that Metropolitan Hilarion points out about Russia is the same problem of the Orthodox Churches in America today. Our problem is not lack of

church attendance, lack of members, lack of interest in Bible studies or retreats....these are only symptoms of a deeper, inner problem. The Metropolitan said the greatest need in Russia is for an inner conversion of her people. American Orthodox theologian Dr. Bradley Nassif says much the same thing:

*The most urgent need in world Orthodoxy at this time is the need for an aggressive internal mission of rededicating or converting our priests and people to Jesus Christ.*

In my many years as a parish priest I have found this to be true: we all need a re-conversion to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. There is a significant difference between practicing a religion and having a relationship with our Lord.

The vast majority of Orthodox Christians do not understand the simple message of the Gospel. The common understanding of the Faith is this: *"If you're good you go to heaven, if you're bad you go to hell...the Church is there to teach us and to help us to be good."* The next step is logical: *"I'm a good person; I lead a good life, that's all that matters"*. Our Orthodox people are not to blame, we clergy are responsible for not clearly teaching and preaching the Gospel message. As a cradle-born Orthodox Christian this was my understanding of the Gospel throughout much of my life: *be good and I'll go to heaven*. We cannot assume that Orthodox Christians who have been baptized and fed in the Holy Eucharist understand the good news of Jesus and that they are committed disciples in a relationship with Him. We must clearly and

simply present the Gospel message in a way understandable to all.

## **THE SIMPLE GOSPEL MESSAGE**

If you and I are going to be saved and inherit eternal life, if we are going to move beyond simply being a church member to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, we must know, believe and live these 4 points:

### **1.) No matter how good I am, I am separated from God by my sin.**

*"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23)

It does not matter if I believe that I am a good, decent person. It does not matter if I devote my entire life to serving the poor and needy or becoming a priest. In God's eyes I am a sinner separated from Him. He is absolutely holy and only those who are absolutely holy may approach Him.

### **2.) Because I am separated from God I am facing eternal death and judgment.**

*"For the wages of sin is death..."*  
(Romans 6:23)

*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment..."*  
(Hebrews 9:27)

### **3.) God's desire for me is to have eternal life.**

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:23)

I am a sinner, separated from God, facing death and judgment. But God sent His Son to bear judgment and death for me, in my place. Eternal life is in Jesus. He is the source. If I am going to be saved I must get close to the source.....I must somehow get into the source.....I must join myself to this fountain of eternal life. It's not from "*being a good person*" since no matter how good I am I always fall short of what God expects.



#### **4.) All my life, I must seek to continually join myself to Jesus Christ.**

Since I am only saved if I am joined to Jesus, this is my lifelong focus. The theological term is "*theosis*": I seek to share in the very life of God, to become one with Him. Salvation does not happen in an instant but it is a process: *I am being saved*. In baptism my life is joined to the life of Jesus but I must struggle throughout my life to maintain this union. I struggle against my sinful passions because they separate me from Jesus. I seek to do good in the world not in order to "*gain points for salvation*" but as a means of more fully sharing in the life of Jesus. And receiving the Holy Eucharist is the highest means by which my life is continually joined to the life

of Jesus. My salvation is not only "*from*" something (sin, death, judgment) but also "*for*" something: *theosis*....union with God.

There is no other path to salvation than this. If I can be saved by other means such as living a good life or performing good deeds, why was it necessary for God to send His Son to die on a cross? If I can be saved by my own goodness, why do I even need Jesus at all?

An anonymous Orthodox individual shares his personal story of how he moved from being a church member to a disciple. He tells how his life changed from having a religion to having a relationship with Jesus:

*I was raised in the Orthodox Church. For me that meant attending church on Sunday (but not Sunday School). So I never understood what Jesus did for us, our need for Him, or anything else like that. Around the time of college, I didn't see the point of continuing going to church and by the time I was out of school and throughout my 20s I decided there was no God. With that decision, there was no going to church. It wasn't until I was 29 that I found myself at rock bottom. My life was a mess. At the encouragement of a friend I went back to church and I finally heard the Gospel message. I ended up in tears, realizing Jesus is what I've been missing the whole time.*

- Fr. Edward Pehanich

## **Epiphany Celebration**

We celebrate the Great Feast of Epiphany: the Baptism of our Lord (*also known as Theophany*) on January 19.



In our Orthodox Faith, Epiphany stands equal in importance with Christmas. Our schedule includes:

**Thursday, Jan. 18**

**8:30 a.m.**

Vespers & Divine Liturgy

**6:00 p.m.**

Holy Supper

(bring a dish to share:  
no meat or dairy)

**7:30**

Compline & Great Blessing of Water

**Friday, Jan. 19**

**8:30 a.m.**

Divine Liturgy

**A reminder** ...we should approach for Holy Communion only after a time of preparation. We pray the *Prayers before Holy Communion* from our prayerbook on Saturday evening and prior to the beginning of the Divine Liturgy and the *Prayers after Holy Communion* upon returning to our seat.

**Chili Cookoff** A new tradition begins! Our first chili cookoff will be held in conjunction with our annual parish meeting on Sunday Feb 11.

Bring in your favorite chili. There will be anonymous voting for everyone's favorite and the winner will walk away with the *St. Nicholas Chili Trophy!*

Galatians 4:4-5

In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who are under the law, that we might receive adoptions as sons.

# Special Christmas Gifts



## **Altar Candles**

Joyce Kruppa

*In memory of Stephen & Ann Kruppa*

## **Altar Vigil Candles**

Lilas Soukup

*In memory of Michael & Lilas Sewchok  
In honor Donald & Lilas Soukup*

## **Eternal Light**

Lilas Soukup

## **Incense**

Mary Ann Kelch

*In memory of John & Mary Yarina*

## **Wine & Prosfora**

Evelyn Lloyd

*In memory of Sam & Eva Szedon*

## **Vigil Lights:**

### **Christ**

Lilas Soukup

## **Theotokos**

Mary Dora

*In memory of Michael & Susanna Dora*

## **St. Nicholas**

Evelyn Lloyd

*In memory of Thomas Lloyd*

## **St. John the Baptist**

Mary Ann Kelch

*In memory of Christine Deutsch*

## **Poinsettias:**

Lilas Soukup (2)

*In memory of Michele Soukup*

*In memory of Donna Carman*

Mary Ann Kelch (2)

*In memory of John & Mary Yarina*

*In memory of Christine Deutsch*

Mary Dora (3)

*In memory of Helen Ulich*

*In memory of Mary Ulich*

*In memory of Anne Potesanak*

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**Social Hour** We need sponsors for our Social Hour following the Divine Liturgy for the coming weeks.

**No fasting** is permitted this week for those celebrating the Birth of Christ today.

