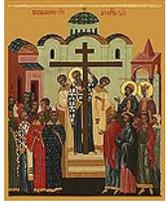


✠Bulletin✠

Week of December 14th to December 20th



Holy Cross Orthodox Church

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27th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST — Tone 2
Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

Sunday of the Forefathers

Martyrs Thyrsos, Leukios, and Kallinikos (249-51). Martyrs Philemon, Apollonios, Arrian, and Theonas of Alexandria (305).

Weekly Liturgical Service Schedule

Sunday December 14th

9:15 am - Hours

9:30 am - Divine Liturgy

Weekly Schedule

Sunday December 14th

- Choir Practice
- Inquirers & Catechism classes following Liturgy

Wednesday December 17th

- 5:30 pm Choir Practice at the church

Preparing to Appear with Christ in Glory:

Homily for the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers in the Orthodox Church
By Fr. Philip LeMasters 12/27/2015

In our time of so many distractions and worries, it is easy to forget why Christ was born, why He came among us a helpless baby, in a cave used for a barn, with an animal's feeding trough for His crib. As St. Paul wrote in today's epistle lesson, He appears so that we may appear with Him in glory. Both the first coming of His birth and the second coming of His return are so that we may share in His salvation. But to encounter Christ at either of His appearances is also to undergo a kind of judgment, for the truth about ourselves becomes evident when we enter into His presence. How we respond to Him reflects the state of our souls. The same is true of how we prepare to receive Him during this blessed season of Advent, of the Nativity Fast.

Throughout the history of the Old Testament, there were those who ignored both the Law and the Prophets, who did not prepare and were not ready for the coming of the Messiah. That was also true at the time of the Savior's birth when the wicked Herod tried to kill Him. On this Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, **we commemorate those who did prepare**, all those in the Old Testament who foretold or prefigured the coming of Christ. The first coming of our Lord at His Incarnation did not simply occur one day as a random event but was the fulfillment of God's plan to bring us into His divine life, which took many generations to fulfill. No one was forced to get ready for Him, and today we honor those who accepted the invitation to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. We want to use this season of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and reconciliation to become more like them.

That is difficult because we constantly face temptations to focus on other things. Like the guests invited to the great feast in today's gospel, we often think that we have more appealing things to do. They turned down the invitation because they had land to inspect, oxen to test, or family responsibilities. In other words, they were normal human beings with everyday obligations. So, their places at the banquet were taken by the most unlikely guests: the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the strangers from the highways and hedges came to the celebration, but none of those who were originally invited bothered to show up.

The Lord often used the image of a great feast for the Kingdom of God and this parable reminds us that many of the Jews were not prepared to accept

Him as the Messiah, while many disreputable people—such as tax collectors and others of low standing, even Gentiles—did receive Him. Whether they did so or not, judged them in a sense, for it revealed the state of their souls.

Unfortunately, **we** often act like those who refused to attend the great banquet in the parable because **we** use the common concerns of life as excuses not to appear with the Lord in glory, not to participate in the healing and blessing that He comes to give to all those created in His image and likeness. Instead, of making everything from our daily work and family relationships to our health or sickness opportunities to find greater healing for our souls, **we** so often make them false gods in ways that judge us, that make clear the weak state of our spiritual lives. That is how **we** shut ourselves out of the great banquet and turn away from the glory that is ours in Christ Jesus.

St. Paul told the Colossians to prepare to encounter Christ by putting their sins to death, for they are all forms of idolatry that exclude us from the holy joy of the Kingdom. Everything from anger and slander to sexual immorality and covetousness are symptoms of the “old nature” that He came to heal as the Second Adam. The weeks of Advent call us to prepare intentionally to welcome the Savior at His birth, for if we do not, we risk being so distracted and weakened by our sins that we will have as little interest in being in His presence as did those guests originally invited to the banquet.

It is very easy to fall prey to such temptations because there is much in us that does not want the truth about our souls to be revealed by encountering Christ. Unlike the guests in the parable, we should know that the cares of life in no way hide the state of our souls from God. The more **we** make false gods out of other people, our daily responsibilities, and whatever life circumstances we happen to face, the more that we turn away from the salvation that Christ was born to bring. The more **we** embrace pride, anger, lust, greed, and other temptations, the more **we** will actually believe that satisfying our desires is more important than loving and serving God and neighbor. We do not have to appear spectacularly sinful before others in order for this to happen, as there is much in our culture that encourages us to worship our work, our problems, our pastimes, and whatever gives us momentary pleasure. It is so easy and alluring to become like the people in today’s parable who really believed that they had better things to do than to share in the great joy of the Lord’s banquet. But to live that way is to shut ourselves out of the glory that Christ came to share with all He created in His image and likeness. It is to sentence ourselves to misery and decay that are

not fitting for those who dare to call God their Father.

Christmas, of course, is a banquet, a great feast. It is a celebration of our salvation in the God-Man Jesus Christ, Who in Himself united humanity with divinity, Who brings us from mortality to immortality. No matter whether we have observed the Nativity Fast so far, we all have the ability to use the next several days to prepare to enter more fully into the great glory of our salvation. Our preparation is not about legalism, but about opening ourselves to the healing mercy of Christ as we prepare to encounter Him at His birth. For how we receive Him will reveal the true state of our souls.

Because **we** all weaken ourselves by sinning, **we** all need to confess our sins and repent in the Sacrament of Confession. Because we encounter the Lord in our suffering neighbors, we all need to give generously of our resources, time, and attention to those in various kinds of need. Because we are all enslaved to self-centered desires in one way or another, we all need to fast or practice self-denial in a way appropriate to our strength and life circumstances. Because we are all shaped by what we give our attention to, we all need to focus our hearts, souls, and minds on God—deliberately and regularly—in prayer. Because we are all so easily distracted, we all need to be mindful, keeping a close watch over our words, thoughts, and deeds.

During these weeks of Advent, we may accept the invitation to the great banquet of the Lord by embracing these spiritual disciplines. As difficult as we probably find them to be and as bad as we are in doing them, they are powerful means of opening our souls to the glory that He has brought to the world through His appearance at Bethlehem. They are how we humble ourselves before Him, fighting our passions, resisting our temptations, and doing what we can to prepare to welcome Him at Christmas for our salvation. They are what Advent is all about.

Christmas will be here soon, and how we respond to the Lord at His birth will make clear the state of our souls. Will we be ready to welcome Christ into our lives at His birth? Will we be ready to accept the invitation to the feast? I certainly hope so, for the good news of Christmas is that in our Lord the fulfillment of all God’s promises is extended to people like us, those poor, blind, and lame with sin, who suffer from the pain, weakness, and corruption of life in the world as we know it, and who are nowhere near perfect. The good news is that, in the Babe of Bethlehem, even unlikely people like you and me are invited to take our place with the Holy Forefathers and Foremothers of Christ in the heavenly banquet and to shine with the light of heaven, to appear with Him in glory. That is why our Savior was born.

Schedule of Weekly Services

Wednesday December 24th

3:00 pm - Vespers with Litya

Feast of the Nativity of Christ (Strict Fast)

Thursday December 25th

8:50 am - Hours

9:00 am – Divine Liturgy

Feast of the Nativity of Christ

Thursday January 1, 2026

9:00 am – Divine Liturgy

Circumcision of Christ & St. Basil the Great

Monday January 5th

5:30 pm - Vespers

Feast of Theophany with the Great Blessing of Water (Strict Fast)

Tuesday January 6th

8:50 am – Hours

9:00 am - Divine Liturgy

Feast of Theophany

Saturday January 17th

4:30 pm - Great Vespers

Saturday January 24th

4:30 pm - Great Vespers

Friday January 30th

8:50 am – Hours

9:00 am – Divine Liturgy

Synaxis of the Ecumenical Teachers and Hierarchs: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom.

Annual Parrish Meeting – January 18, 2026

Holy Cross annual parish meeting is scheduled for Sunday January 18, 2026 following Divine Liturgy.

Per the Diocese of the South, Orthodox Church in America, Uniform Parish By-laws, Article IV, Section 1:

The Parish Meeting is the highest authority of the Parish as a civil corporation. All members of the Parish as defined in Article III, Section 1 which are those persons who have been baptized and chrismated, or otherwise canonically received, into the Church and who consciously uphold and profess the Orthodox Faith, who have been

members for a period of six months and are at least eighteen years old may attend and vote at the Parish Meeting.

Prayer Requests

James Clark – Parishioner of St. Herman's

Nicholas Kowalski

Carolyn – Robert & Debra's Forster's daughter

Anne and Scott Peatross

Robert (John) Forster

Robert Kozera

Megan – David & Phyllis Bartos' daughter

Rosemary – Friend of David & Phyllis Bartos

Please pray for our families in Ukraine

Leonid, Nadiia, Andrii, Halyna,

Volodymyr, Maryna, Dmytro, Bohdan,

Nadiia, Oleksandr, Tetiana,

Roman, Mykola

Anatoly, Olga, Maria, Andrei

Please let us know of anyone you would like to add to the Prayer Lists.

Inquirers & Catechism Class

Classes will be on Sundays following Divine Liturgy. For those new to understanding Orthodoxy or for those who want to expand your foundation, please join us for our classes. Please check the schedule for changes.

Choir Practice

The church choir will meet for practice at the church on Wednesday December 17th at 5:30 pm.

tithe.ly.com

Another way to "donate". This app can be downloaded to your phone and Holy Cross can be accessed via this app. Also, [tithe.ly](https://tithe.ly.com) can be accessed through the church website www.HolyCrossFtMyers.org

The Divine Liturgy

Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
Variable Hymns and Readings

Tone 2 Troparion (Resurrection)

When Thou didst descend to death, O Life immortal,
Thou didst slay hell with the splendor of Thy Godhead.
And when from the depths Thou didst raise the dead,
all the powers of heaven cried out://
“O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to Thee!”

Tone 2 Troparion (Forefathers)

Through faith Thou didst justify the Forefathers,
betrothing through them the Church of the gentiles.
These saints exult in glory,
for from their seed came forth a glorious fruit:
she who bore Thee without seed.//
So by their prayers, O Christ God, have mercy on us!

Tone 6 Kontakion (Forefathers)

You did not worship the graven image,
O thrice-blessed ones,
but armed with the immaterial Essence of God,
you were glorified in a trial by fire.
From the midst of unbearable flames you called on God, crying:
“Hasten, O compassionate One!
Speedily come to our aid,//
for Thou art merciful and able to do as Thou dost will!”

Tone 4 Prokeimenon (Forefathers)

Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers, / and praised and glorified is
Thy Name forever! *(Song of the Three Holy Children, v. 3)*

V. For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us! (v. 4)

Colossians 3:4-11 (Epistle)

Brethren: When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Tone 4

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

V. Moses and Aaron were among His priests; Samuel also was among those who called on His Name. (Ps. 98:6)

V. They called to the Lord and He answered them. (Ps. 98:6)

Luke 14:16-24 (Gospel)

Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.’ For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.”

Explanation of Today's Gospel Reading Luke 14:16-24

By Blessed Theophylact
Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria

16-17. Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' By a certain man the Lord means His Father, the Lover of man. Whenever Scripture alludes to God's power to punish, He is called a panther, a leopard, or a bear. (Hos 13:7-8) But whenever it alludes to God's love for man, He is presented as a man, as is the case here. Since the parable treats of God's extreme love for man and the divine economy of the Incarnation which He worked in us, making us sharers of the Flesh of His Son, the parable calls God *a man* and this divine economy *a great supper*. It is a *supper* because the Lord came in the last days, as it were at the evening of this age. And this supper is *great* because great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our salvation. (See 1 Tim 3:16) *And he sent his servant at supper time*. Who is this servant? The Son of God, Who assumed the form a servant and became man, and as a man is said to have been sent forth. Notice how He did not say "a servant," but instead, *the servant [of his]*. Christ is the One and only Servant Who in His human nature was perfectly obedient and pleasing to God. For Christ is pleasing to the Father not only as Son and God, but also as Man. He is the only Sinless One Who carried out all the counsels and commandments of the Father and fulfilled all righteousness, and in this sense is said to serve God the Father. He alone can be called the true Servant of God. He was sent *at supper time*, that is, at the appointed and proper time. For there was no other time more opportune for our salvation than the reign of Caesar Augustus, when iniquity had reached its peak and it was critical that it be cleansed. Just as physicians allow a festering and malignant boil to burst and release all its foul pus, and only then apply the medication, so too it was necessary that sin first display all its forms, and then the Great Physician applied His medicine. For this very reason the Lord waited for the devil to fill the full measure of iniquity, and then the Son of God took flesh and healed every form of iniquity by every aspect of His holy life. Therefore, He was sent at that hour, that is, at that comely and opportune season of which David says, *Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Mighty One, in Thy comeliness*¹. (Psalm 44:3) Certainly the "sword" here signifies the Word of God, (See Heb 4:12) while the words "upon Thy thigh" indicate His Nativity in the flesh which was "in comeliness"¹, that is, when the time was right and seemly. He was sent to speak to those who had been called. Who are those *that were called*? Perhaps this refers to all men. For God has called all to the knowledge of Him, by means of the order and harmony of visible creation,

and by means of the natural law. But those *that were called* are also, more specifically, the children of Israel, who were called through the law and the prophets. In the first place, then, the Lord was sent to the sheep of the house of Israel. (Matt 15:24)

¹Ps. 44:3. The Greek word *oraiotetos*, rendered here as *comeliness*, derives from the adjective *{Jraios*, which in turn derives from the noun *ora*, which means "hour". This Greek word for "beautiful," *oraios*, has a broad range of meanings including "coming at the right season [*ora*], seasonable, timely, ripe, at the bloom of youth, beautiful."

18-20. But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' The Lord was saying to all the Jews, *Come, for all things are now ready*, when He proclaimed the good tidings that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*, (Matt 4:17) *and among you*. (Luke 17:21) *And they all with one accord began to make excuse*, that is, as if at a signal. For all the leaders of the Jews refused to have Jesus as their King, and thus were found unworthy of the supper, one because of his love of wealth, and another because of his love of pleasure. The man who bought a piece of ground and the man who bought the five yoke of oxen signify those who love wealth, while the man who married a wife signifies those who love pleasure. Furthermore, the man who bought a piece of ground signifies the man who cannot accept the mystery of faith because he is governed by the wisdom of this world. The piece of ground represents the world and, in general, nature, and the man who must *go and see his piece of ground* is he who sees only nature and cannot accept what is beyond nature. Therefore, the Pharisee, for example, "sees his piece of ground," that is, he looks only at the laws of nature and cannot accept that a Virgin gave birth to God, because that is beyond nature. Because they are examining this "piece of ground," that is, nature, none of those who boast in external wisdom have recognized Jesus Who made nature new. The man who bought five yoke of oxen, and tested them, also represents a man who loves the material world. He has yoked the five senses of the soul to the five senses of the body and has made the soul into flesh. For this reason, he is concerned only with the earth and does not desire to commune of the rational Supper, for as Wisdom says, *How can he get wisdom that holdeth the plough?* (Ecclesiasticus – Wisdom of Sirach – 38:25). He who stays behind because of a wife is a lover of pleasure who has devoted himself to the flesh, the mate of the soul. By cleaving to the flesh, he cannot please God. You may also understand these things literally.

We also fall away from God because of fields, because of yokes of oxen, because of marriages, when we become so attached to them that they consume our whole life, and we are carried away even to the point of shedding blood over them. Then there is no divine thought or word that we can practice, or even comprehend.

21-22. So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' The rulers of the Jews were rejected, and not one of them believed in Christ. And they even boasted of their malice, saying, *Have any of the rulers believed on Him?* (John 7:48) Therefore these students of the law and scribes, as the prophet says, became foolish and fell from grace. But the simple from among the Jews are likened to the lame, the blind, and the maimed. It is the foolish of this world, the lowly, who were called. For the multitude marveled at the words of grace which proceeded from the mouth of Jesus, and they rejoiced in His teaching. But after these had come to Him from the sons of Israel, that is, from the chosen whom God foreordained for His glory, such as Peter, and the sons of Zebedee, and the tens of thousands of those Jews who believed, then God's goodness was poured out also upon the Gentiles.

23. Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.' For those who are in *the highways and hedges* mean the Gentiles. The Israelites were within the city, inasmuch as they had received the law giving and inherited a civil and moral way of life. But the Gentiles were strangers to the Covenants and the lawgiving of Christ was foreign to them. They were not fellow citizens of the saints, and did not travel the one true path, but instead followed many highways of lawlessness and coarseness and were *to* be found in the hedges, that is, in sins. For sin is a great hedge and middle wall which separates us from God. By *highways* He signifies the Gentiles' coarse way of life, which led them to so many false beliefs. By *hedges* He signifies their life of sins. The master does not command his servant simply to call all those in the highways and hedges, but to *compel them to come in*, although each man is free whether to believe or not. But He uses the word *compel* to teach us that it is a sign of God's great power that the Gentiles, who were in such ignorance, came to believe. If the power of the preaching and the might of the word of truth had not been so great, how could men who were crazed with idol worship and practiced unspeakable things have been persuaded all at once

to know the true God, and to perfect a spiritual life? He called this "compulsion" to show the miraculousness of their change. One might say that the pagan Greeks did not want to leave their idols and their rich feasting, yet they were compelled to flee from them by the truth of the Gospel. Also, the power of the miracles He worked was a strong force that induced them to be converted to faith in Christ.

24. 'For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.' Every day this Supper is prepared, and we are all invited to the kingdom which God prepared for man even before the foundation of the world. But we are not worthy of this Supper: some of us because of useless philosophical musings, others because of love of material things, and yet others because of pleasures of the flesh. But God in His love for man freely bestows this kingdom upon other sinners, upon the blind who have no spiritual vision to perceive the will of God; or if they can perceive it, upon those who are crippled and unable to take a step to do the will of God. And in short, He grants the kingdom of heaven to all the poor who have fallen away from the glory above, and even to the maimed who cannot show forth in themselves a blameless life. To invite these sinners to the supper, who are wandering astray in the streets and broad avenues of sin, the Father sends His Son Who became a Servant according to the flesh, and Who came not to call the righteous, but sinners. All these He feasts liberally, instead of the clever, the rich, and those who indulge the flesh.

Communion Hymn

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the highest! *(Ps. 148:1)*

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous; praise befits the just! *(Ps. 32:1)*

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!