

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF SAINT ELIZABETH THE NEW-MARTYR

Volume XIX

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25 December 2017 / 7 January 2018
**THE NATIVITY, ACCORDING TO THE FLESH,
OF OUR LORD, GOD, & SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST**

SERVICES THIS WEEK

NATIVITY OF THE LORD

Saturday, 6 January (24 December, o.s.)

6:00 PM Vigil Service;
Confessions

Sunday, 7 January (25 December, o.s.)

9:10 AM Third and Sixth Hours
9:30 AM Divine Liturgy;
Festal Trapeza (coffee hour)

SUNDAY BEFORE THEOPHANY

CIRCUMCISION OF THE LORD; St Basil

Saturday, 13 January (31 December, o.s.)

6:00 PM Vigil Service;
Confessions

Sunday, 14 January (1 January, o.s.)

9:10 AM Third and Sixth Hours
9:30 AM Divine Liturgy;
Annual Parish Christmas Party
At the Morrows' Home

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Week of 7 January

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| <i>Su</i> | NATIVITY OF THE LORD | |
| | <i>Matins Gospel:</i> Matt. §2 (1:18-25) | |
| | Gal. §209 (4:4-7) | Matt. §3 (2:1-12) |
| 32ND WEEK after PENTECOST | | |
| <i>M</i> | Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos | |
| | Heb. §306 (2:11-18) | Matt. §4 (2:13-23) |
| <i>M</i> | James §53 (2:14-26) | Mark §48 (10:46-52) |
| <i>Tu</i> | James §54 (3:1-10) | Mark §50 (11:11-23) |
| <i>W</i> | James §55 (3:11-4:6) | Mark §51 (11:22b-26) |
| <i>Th</i> | James §56 (4:7-5:9) | Mark §52 (11:27-33) |
| <i>F</i> | 1 Pet. §58 (1:1-2, 10-12, 2:6-10) | Mark §53 (12:1-12) |
| <i>Sa</i> | Saturday after the Nativity of the Lord | |
| | 1 Tim. §288 (6:11b-16) | Matt. §46a (12:15-21) |
| <i>Su</i> | Sunday before Theophany | |
| | 2 Tim. §298 (4:5-8) | Mark §1 (1:1-8) |
| <i>Su</i> | CIRCUMCISION OF THE LORD; St Basil the Great | |
| | <i>Vespers Paramia:</i> (1) Genesis 17:1-7, 9-12, 14 • (2) Proverbs 8:22-30 • (3) Proverbs 10:31-11:12 | |
| | <i>Matins Gospel:</i> John §36 (10:9-16) | |
| | Col. §254 (2:8-12) | Luke §6 (2:20-21, 40-52) |
| | Heb. §318 (7:26-8:2) | Luke §24 (6:17-23a) |

THIS WEEK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Feast of the Nativity of the Christ is celebrated for seven days, from the Feast Day itself through the *Apodosis* (Leave-taking) of the Feast on 13 January (n.s.). The festal period of this Feast is just short of the usual eight days, because the Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord is celebrated on the eighth day after Christmas. The troparion and kontakion of the Nativity are chanted or read at all the services of the Church on each of the seven days. To celebrate the Feast at home, the troparion of the Feast (*'Thy nativity, O Christ our God ...'*) can be sung instead of the 'Our Father' before meals, while the kontakion of the Feast (*'Today the Virgin ...'*) can be sung instead of the usual thanksgiving troparion after each meal. It would also be most appropriate to sing the troparion and kontakion of the Feast at the end of our morning and evening prayers at home.

There is no fasting, nor prostrations or kneeling in prayer, from 7 January through 17 January (n.s.), even on Wednesdays and Fridays. This is because we joyfully celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord not just for one day, but throughout this period.

Many thanks to those who donated for flowers for the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord. We also thank those who cleaned the church in preparation for the Feast, to those who picked up the Christmas flowers, and to those who decorated the church for the Feast. The church is very beautiful!

Many thanks to all those who made the services for Christmas so splendid: *Claudia Maxey*, who arranged the music and choir rehearsals for Christmas; *Reader Gregory*, who directed the choir on the services for the Nativity; *the Members of the Choir*, who attended rehearsals and those who sang at the festal services; *Fr Deacon Seraphim*, *Fr Deacon Steven*, *Fr Deacon Stephanos*, *our Sub deacons*, *Readers*, and *Servers* who assisted at the Christmas services.

A special collection for the Haiti Mission of ROCOR will be taken at St Elizabeth's during the Sundays of January. Each year our parish had been sponsoring a

Reader and a parochial school teacher with a small stipend of \$200 a month each (i.e. \$4800 per year) total. In the past, we have raised this large sum of money through matching donations from a generous donor family, so half the total has been given by the parishioners at large and half from the donor family. As you know, Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and our Haitian Orthodox brethren are too poor to fully support the needs of their young church. They need the help of those of us who have more than enough. Please give generously.

LOOKING AHEAD

St Elizabeth's Annual Christmas Party will take place next Sunday (the Sunday after the Nativity), after the Divine Liturgy at the home of the Morrow Family at 90 Somerville Road; Basking Ridge, New Jersey 07920. All parishioners are urged to attend and bring dishes of food to share. We thank John and Tanya for opening their home to our Parish for the last several years.

January 14th on our secular calendar is January 1st on the Julian calendar. As such, it is often referred to as 'Russian New Year', because in pre-revolutionary Russia, from the time of Tsar Peter the Great, the Western European custom of observing the New Year on 1 January was adopted. The Russian Orthodox Church, however, continued the ancient custom of celebrating the Church New Year in September, not January. For the Church, 1 / 14 January is the double Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord and St Basil the Great. On this day, which is eight days after Christmas, the Lord Jesus Christ, in obedience to the Law of Moses, was brought by his parents to be circumcised. On this day also, one of the preeminent Fathers of the Church, Basil the Great, fell asleep in the Lord. This Feast is of a rank just below that of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Church.

The Church began to celebrate the memory of Saint Basil the Great almost at once after his death. In a homily on his death, Saint Amphilochius, the Bishop of Iconium, said: 'Not without reason and not by accident was the divine Basil released from the body and translated from earth to God on the day of the Circumcision of Jesus, which is celebrated between the days of the Nativity and Baptism of Christ. Therefore, this most blessed one, in preaching and praising the Nativity and Baptism of Christ, extolled the spiritual circumcision, and himself, having put off the body, was deemed worthy of ascending to Christ precisely on the sacred day of the commemoration of Christ's Circumcision. For this cause, it has been enacted to honor the memory of Basil the Great on this present day annually with celebration and solemnity.'

The tradition of baking and cutting a special 'pita' (which can mean a loaf of bread or a cake) each year on 1 / 14 January is observed in many Orthodox cultures in honour of our Holy Father Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. The word *Vasilopita* is a compound Greek word that means the sweet 'bread of Basil'. This age-old tradition is observed in both parish churches and in the homes of the faithful. This custom began in the fourth century, when Saint Basil the Great, who was a bishop, wanted to distribute money to the poor in his Diocese. He commissioned some women to bake sweetened bread, in which he arranged to place gold coins. Thus, the families in cutting the bread to nourish themselves, were pleasantly surprised to find the coins. In remembrance of St Basil's love and defense of his people, Orthodox Christians have observed the tradition of the *Vasilopita* each year on 1 / 14 January, the date on which St Basil reposed in the Lord in the year 379. In some places, the *Vasilopita* is prepared as a loaf of rich bread (like that used for *Artoklasia*), while in other places it takes the form of a spicy sheet cake (without frosting). But no matter what form a *Vasilopita* may take, they all have one thing in common: each contains a single coin. After placing the bread dough or batter in the proper baking pan, the baker makes with the foil wrapped coin the sign of the Cross over it, closes his/her eyes, and then secretly places it into the unbaked *Vasilopita*. After the *Vasilopita* is baked and cooled, it is blessed and cut following Divine Liturgy for the feast of St Basil on January 1. At churches it is blessed and cut in the by the bishop or priest (often parish fellowship hall), and in homes it is blessed and cut by the head of the household.

At St Elizabeth's, we observe the beautiful custom of blessing and distributing 'St Basil's Bread' (called in Greek *Vasilopita*) at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. Because the Feast falls on a Sunday this year, we will bless three *Vasilopita* and three people will therefore receive a blessing from the Saint in the form of a blessed coin!

Concerning Confession and Holy Communion: Those who have been to Confession in the past two weeks may receive Holy Communion at the Liturgy on St Basil's Day (14 January, n.s.), provided that no serious sin has been committed which would require another Confession and that the other usual preparations for Holy Communion are observed (i.e. attendance of the Services the evening before Holy Communion, reading the Pre-Communion Prayers, and the forgiveness of others). Likewise, those who have been to Confession for the Feast of St Basil may receive Holy Communion at the Liturgy the following two weeks under the same conditions.