

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF SAINT ELIZABETH THE NEW-MARTYR

Volume XIX

Number 18

1 / 14 January 2018

SUNDAY BEFORE THEOPHANY

THE CIRCUMCISION IN THE FLESH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST
Commemoration of our Father Among the Saints, Basil the Great

SERVICES THIS WEEK

SUNDAY BEFORE THEOPHANY (Tone 7)

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

Eve of Theophany

Thursday, 18 January (5 January, o.s.)

9:00 AM Royal Hours of Theophany
10:30 AM Vespers of St Basil;
Great Blessing of Water

HOLY THEOPHANY

Thursday, 18 January (5 January, o.s.)

6:00 PM Vigil Service;
Confessions

Friday, 19 January (6 January, o.s.)

9:10 AM Third and Sixth Hours
9:30 AM Divine Liturgy;
Great Blessing of Water

SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY (Tone 8)

St George the Chozebite; Afterfeast of the Theophany

Saturday, 20 January (7 January, o.s.)

6:00 PM Vigil Service;
Confessions

Sunday, 21 January (8 January, o.s.)

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Week of 14 January

<i>Su</i>	SUNDAY BEFORE THEOPHANY	
	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>10th Resurrectional Matins Gospel:</i> John §66 (21:1-14)	
	2 Tim. §298 (4:5-8)	Mark §1 (1:1-8)
	Col. §254 (2:8-12)	Luke §6 (2:20-21, 40-52)
	Heb. §318 (7:26-8:2)	Luke §24 (6:17-23a)
	33RD WEEK after PENTECOST	
<i>M</i>	1 Pet. §59 (2:21b-3:9)	Mark §54 (12:13-17)
<i>Tu</i>	1 Pet. §60 (3:10-22)	Mark §55 (12:18-27)
<i>W</i>	1 Pet. §61 (4:1-11)	Mark §56 (12:28-37)
<i>Th</i>	Eve of Theophany of the Lord: Royal Hours	
	<i>1st Hour:</i> Isaiah 35:1-10 • Acts §33 (13:25-33a) • Matt. §5 (3:1-11)	
	<i>3rd Hour:</i> Isaiah 1:16-20 • Acts §42 (19:1-8) • Mark §1 (1:1-8)	
	<i>6th Hour:</i> Isaiah 12:3-6 • Rom. §91 (6:3-11) • Mark §2 (1:9-15)	
	<i>9yj Hour:</i> Isaiah 49:8-15 • Titus §302 (2:11-14; 3:4-7) • Matt. §6 (3:13-17)	
<i>Th</i>	Eve of Theophany of the Lord: Vespers Liturgy	
	<i>Vespers Paramia:</i> (1) Genesis 1:1-13 • (2) Exodus 14:15-18, 21-23, 27-29a • (3) Exodus 15:22-16:1a • (4) Joshua 3:7-8, 15-17 • (5) IV [II] Kings 2:6-14 • (6) IV [III] Kings 5:9-14 • (7) Isaiah 1:16-20 • (8) Genesis 32:1-10a • (9) Exodus 2:5-10 • (10) Judges 6:36-40 • (11) III [I] Kings 18:30-39 • (12) IV [III] Kings 2:19-22 • (13) Isaiah 49:8-15	
	1 Cor. §143 (9:19-27)	Luke §9 (3:1-18)
<i>F</i>	THEOPHANY: BAPTISM OF THE LORD	
	<i>Matins Gospel:</i> Mark §2 (1:9-11)	
	Titus §302 (2:11-14; 3:4-7)	Matt. §6 (3:13-17)
<i>Sa</i>	Saturday after Theophany	
	Synaxis of the Forerunner	
	Eph. §233 (6:10-17)	Matt. §7 (4:1-11)
	Acts §42 (19:1-8)	John §3 (1:29-34)
<i>Su</i>	SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY	
	31st Sunday after Pentecost (Zacchaeus Sunday)	
	<i>11th Resurrectional Matins Gospel:</i> John §67 (21:15-25)	
	1 Tim. §280a (1:15-17)	Luke §93 (18:35-43)
	Eph. §224a (4:7-13)	Matt. §8 (4:12-17)

FASTING DAYS THIS WEEK

Week of 14 January

Day	Date	Commemoration & Type of Fast
<i>Thursday</i>	18 January (5 Jan, o.s.)	Eve of Theophany Strict Fast: wine, & oil permitted



THIS WEEK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

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.

Father David and Matsushka Faith, Fr Deacon Seraphim and Matsushka Anna Gail, Fr Deacon Steven and Matsushka Hannah, Fr Dcn Stephanos and Matsushka Juliana, and Reader Gregory and Claudia Maxey would like to thank all the Parishioners who gave cards and very generous gifts to their families on Christmas. The love that this demonstrated was overwhelming. May the Incarnate Lord abundantly bless you for your kindness.

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 Subdeacons*, *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.

St Elizabeth's Annual Christmas Party will take place today 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. 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!

The Eve of Theophany (5 / 18 January) is a fast day on whatever day it falls, even Sunday. By fasting on this day, we prepare to celebrate the Feast of Theophany. We eat no meat, meat products, eggs, dairy products, or fish on this day. In the Russian practice, wine and olive oil are permitted on this day on whatever day it falls. In Greek practice, wine and oil are only permitted on the Eve of Theophany when it falls on Saturday or Sunday.

Fasting is not permitted on the Feast of Theophany (6 / 19 January) when the Feast falls on a Wednesday or Friday. The joy of this great Feast of the Saviour precludes fasting.

The Feast of the Theophany of the Lord Jesus Christ is celebrated on 6 / 19 January. It commemorates the Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan and is one of the most important of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Church. The unique pattern of liturgical services for this Holy Day exactly parallels that of Christmas, underscoring the fact that in the early Church the events that these two Feasts commemorate were originally celebrated on the same day, and that the Feast of Theophany is no less important than the Nativity. In fact, there is one element added to the Feast of Theophany which is not present at Christmas: the Great Blessing of Water. This very special sacramental rite is ordinarily only performed twice each year: on the Eve of Theophany and on the Day of Theophany itself. (On the other days of the year, the Lesser Blessing of Water is performed instead.) The faithful should attend as many of the services as they are able for the Feast.

The Feast of Theophany is celebrated for nine days, from the Feast day itself through the *Apodosis* (Leave-taking) of the Feast on 27 January (n.s.). The festal period of this Feast is one day longer than the usual eight days, underscoring how important this Feast is in our liturgical calendar. The troparion and kontakion of Theophany are chanted or read at all the services of the Church on each of the nine days. To celebrate the Feast at home, the troparion of the Feast (*‘When Thou wast baptized in the Jordan ...’*) can be sung instead of the ‘Our Father’ before meals, while the kontakion of the Feast (*‘Thou hast appeared today unto the whole world...’*) 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.

Father can provide written excuses for absence or lateness for students attending Liturgy for a Great Feast. Just let him know you need it in advance.

The Great Blessing of Water that is performed on the Feast of Theophany is connected to our celebration of

the Baptism of the Lord. In cleansing the sins of humanity in the river Jordan, Christ crushed the heads of the invisible serpents (the demons) in the waters and sanctified the nature of water. In commemoration of this event the Great Blessing of Water is performed on the feast of the Theophany. (In fact, on this day, there are two blessings of water: one is inside the church on the eve of the feast, while on the day itself the second is customarily performed outside, at rivers and wells).

The practice of blessing water on the day of Christ’s Baptism already existed in the Third century. St. John Chrysostom calls this water ‘*agiasma*’ — a holy thing. It has been known from ancient times that the Holy Water of the Theophany does not go bad. This holy water is used to sprinkle and bless icons, liturgical articles, priestly vestments and crosses. It is also used to bless houses, food, automobiles and other articles. When received with faith, it has the power to cure both physical and spiritual infirmities. Although holy water cannot replace Holy Communion, it can be taken instead of Communion by one who is, for one reason or another, deprived of the consolation of the Sacrament. During times of despondency, confusion and spiritual turmoil it offers tranquility and relief. For this reason Christians keep this blessed water in a special place in their homes and partake of it in the morning, before eating any food.

Those who would like Theophany Water should bring bottles with them to church on the Feast or the Sunday following. Holy Water is always available to those who wish it year round. Just give your bottle to one of the clergy or an altar server after any service and they will fill it for you.

All homes in the parish should be blessed at Theophany. Ideally this is done during the Festal Period (19-27 January, n.s.), but in any case the house blessings should be completed before the beginning of the Great Fast (19 February, n.s., this year.) Please arrange a time with Father when he can come and bless your home.

Concerning Confession and Holy Communion: Those who have been to Confession any time since the Eve of the Nativity of the Lord may receive Holy Communion at the Liturgies on the Eve of Theophany (18 January, n.s.) and the Feast of Theophany itself (19 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 Vigil Service 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 the Theophany may receive Holy Communion at the Liturgy the following two Sundays under the same conditions.