

THE PARISH NEWSLETTER MAY 2017

The Nativity of the Mother of God Russian Orthodox Church
617 Sand Creek Road, Albany NY (518) 869-3932

A parish of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad www.albanyrocor.org

Rector: Protopriest Alexis Duncan ; Protopriest Michael Fritz

Protodeacon: Fr. Michael Soloviev

CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!

MAY NAMESDAYS

1	Victor Turaev	21	Emilia Welsh
5	Fr. Wsevolod Drobot		Amelia Parella
6	Alexandra McClure		Emilia Scott
	Alika Wolkow		Amelia Fitzpatrick
	Urij Tabuntschikow		John Henry
	George Shehata		Yaroslav (Russ) Patrician
8	Subdeacon Marcus Hauf	22	Kristofer Kinnear
11	Jason Baker		Christopher McClure
14	Jeremiah Henry		Christopher O'Keefe
	Tamara Stanyakova	23	Mat. Constance Fritz
16	Brendan Henry		Taisia Fedorov
17	Junia Dragon	26	Reader John (Rick) Schuler
18	Irina Krykhtina	31	Alexandra Sinkevich
	Irina Jess		Christina Bushinow
	Irina Ermolenko		Julie Mazzaferro

MNOGAYA LETA! MANY YEARS to all of our Parishioners celebrating their Namesday in the month of MAY.

IMPORTANT DATES FOR UPCOMING WEEKS

The **Feast of Ascension** will be on Thursday, May 25th. Vigil on Wednesday evening at 6:30pm, Liturgy on Thursday, May 25th at 8:30am.

We will have Coffee Hour on May 7th and May 21st (the last Coffee Hour before Summer Break). Coffee Hours will resume in September. There will be NO Coffee Hour on May 14th (Mothers Day).

**Holy Unction - The Mystery of Anointing
HOLY UNCTION
was held on Sunday, April 2nd**

Thank you to all of the visiting clergy who made the service of Holy Unction possible and to all of the parishioners who attended this service and meal provided after the service.

FLOWERS FOR GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY



Thank you to Matushka Anna and the flower committee for the beautiful flowers that adorned the plaschanitsa on Holy Friday and throughout the Pascha season. Also thank you to all of the parishioners who brought potted plants and cut flowers to Church. Thank you to the Turaevs for providing the beautiful palms that adorn the church throughout the year. This year the flowers were beautiful and abundant.

PASCHA CHURCH CLEANING - Saturday, APRIL 8th

Thank you to everyone who came to the General Church cleaning on Lazarus Saturday, who cleaned the church, prepared the towels for the irons, laundered vestments, polished silver, cleaned lampadas and censors, and did some outdoor gardening to prepare the Church for Pascha. The work went smoothly and quickly since we had a lot of help. The Church looked beautiful and smelled fresh and clean. Thank you to everyone who helped with keeping the church clean during Holy Week and after Pascha.

SYNODAL YOUTH CHOIR WEEKEND - Fri. April 21st - Sun. 23rd

We were blessed to have the Kursk Root Icon of the Sign, Bishop Nicholas and the Synodal Youth choir at our church on this weekend. The choir sang beautifully at Vigil on Friday night and Liturgy on Saturday morning. Following the Liturgy a luncheon was held at the church hall and we were able to raise money to help with the continuation of Youth activities in our Church and the Diocese. Thank you to Anastasia (RaeLynn) Gonyea and Tasia Fedorov for preparing the meal. The concert was held at the Community Reformed Church (just down the street). We would like to thank Pastor Bruce Cornwell for their generosity in letting us use their Church free of charge. There were approximately 100 people at the concert (which was FREE). It was a little discouraging that more of our own parishioners were not in attendance. Thank you to all of our parishioners and guests who did attend and supported the Youth Choir.

CHURCH SCHOOL CLASSES

As Fr. Alexis mentioned at the Annual Parish Meeting, we are seeking a Church School Director - a professionally trained educator who would organize and plan curriculum for the Parish Church School. If anyone is qualified and interested in taking on this responsibility, they are requested to contact Fr. Alexis.

Our parish is blessed with many children, and it is our responsibility to educate them with the basics of church doctrine to give them the foundation that they need to understand their faith.

The children cannot “Drive Themselves” to Church school and this is where their parents must step up to the plate to ensure that their children are in attendance. The Church School teachers spend a good deal of time, preparing the lessons to make the children’s church school experience fun and educational. It is discouraging when only a handful of children attend the lessons. We hope that over the summer break, strides will be made to increase attendance in Church School and that more parents will become involved as either teachers or substitute teachers. The present teachers have been dedicated to teach EVERY Sunday, but some help would be greatly appreciated.

ANNUAL CHURCH PICNIC

SAVE THE DATE: The annual Church Picnic will be held on **SUNDAY JULY 23rd** at Cook Park in Albany. This is a fun day had by all and we hope that ALL of our parishioners will be in attendance. Good food, volleyball, soccer, bocci ball, playgrounds, other games. Mark your calendars and save the date.

CHURCH PLAYGROUND

The plans for the Church Playground have been approved by the Town of Colonie. We will need the help of our Parishioners, especially all of our strong able bodied young men, to prepare the grounds and erect the new playground. As soon as a date is scheduled an e-mail will be sent to ALL parishioners. Thank you to everyone who made the playground a reality, especially Natasha Smelova who attended meetings, dealt with the town and was a driving force in the fundraising for the playground.

ST. JOHN OF KRONSTADT MEMORIAL FUND

When Fr. Deacon Joseph Jarostchuk was here for the Choir Weekend, he mentioned that the St. John of Kronstadt Memorial Fund is in dire need of donations. For those of you who do not know the purpose of the Fund, please read the paragraph below which is taken from their website. We hope that our parishioners will be generous to the Fund which provides much needed support to parishes and monasteries.

The St. John of Kronstadt Memorial Fund was established in 1954 by Archpriest George Pavlusik and the St. John of Kronstadt parish, and it continues its great benevolent work to this day by collecting donations and sending financial aid to needy parishes, monasteries, institutions and individuals in dire circumstances worldwide. In recent years, financial aid has been sent to some orphanages in Russia. The Memorial Fund's first president was Archbishop Averky of Syracuse and Holy Trinity Monastery from 1954 to 1976, then from 1977 to 2008, Metropolitan Laurus of blessed memory, and currently His Grace, Bishop Peter of Cleveland is the memorial fund's president. Many, clergy and laity, have labored for the Memorial Fund over the fifty-four years of its existence, in imitation of St. John of Kronstadt, who brought help and relief to hundreds of thousands of his contemporaries. The fund continues this great legacy of love, being a source of help and relief to many of the faithful in parishes, monasteries and institutions around the world. Everyone is invited to join in this vital work began by our beloved patron saint, our Holy Righteous John of Kronstadt. You, too, can help by becoming a member of the Memorial Fund and/or by sending donations to the St. John of Kronstadt Memorial Fund in Utica, New York, and thereby continue the great work of almsgiving as was practiced by St. John. Please join us in this vital labor of love.

Make checks or money orders payable to:

St. John of Kronstadt Memorial Fund, Inc., P.O. Box 56, Utica, NY 13503-0056

ASCENSION OF CHRIST. - QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

taken from: www.orthodox.net

QUESTION 1. What significance does the event of the Ascension of Jesus Christ have for the Christian? We should understand why we celebrate any feast, and its inner meaning.

ANSWER Christ ascended to Heaven as man and as God. Once he became a man, being at the same time, as always, perfect God, he never put off His manhood, but deified it, and made it and us capable of apprehending heavenly things.

The Ascension is a prophecy of things to come for those who love God and believe in Him in an Orthodox manner. Those who believe and live according to this belief will be in the heavens, in the flesh, with Him, just as He now abides in the Heavens in the flesh. Our flesh and souls will be saved, because Christ made human flesh capable of deification.

We also call to mind the promise of the Holy Spirit, since Christ mentions this promise He had

made before to them, and its advent is tied to His ascension thusly:

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. {8} And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: {9} Of sin, because they believe not on me; {10} Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; {11} Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." (John 16:7-11)
What Christ has done for human flesh and our souls is impossible to understand, but the church, with sweet melody, meditates with fervor and thanksgiving and precise theology in her services.

"O Christ, having taken upon thy shoulders our nature, which had gone astray, thou didst ascend and bring it unto God the Father" (Matins canon for the Ascension, Ode 7)

"Having raised our nature, which was deadened by sin, Thou didst bring it unto Thine own Father, O Savior" (ibid.)

"Unto Him Who by His descent destroyed the adversary, and Who by His ascent raised up man, give praise O ye priests, and supremely exalt Him, O ye people, unto all the ages."
(Matins canon for the Ascension, Ode 8)

Since the disciples were "filled with great joy", we who are Orthodox in belief and way of life should naturally be this way also, and should hasten to the temple. There we can meditate upon the magnificent truths and promises in the ascension by listening carefully to the divinely inspired theology, sung in sweet melody. If we pray with care, and expectation, having valued divine worship above our worldly cares, surely God will enlighten us and noetically teach us the true meaning of Christ's Ascension.

QUESTION 2. There is an important account of the Ascension in the scriptures that is not in the Gospels. Where is it? The story involves angels. How? Describe how a cloud was involved.

ANSWER St. Luke, who wrote an account of the Ascension in his Gospel, also wrote a slightly different account in his Acts of the Apostles. In this account, he describes two angels who speak to the Apostles as they are gazing at Christ going up into the sky:

"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10-11)

St Luke also mentions a cloud in his account in the Acts:

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." (Acts 1:9)

"Thou Who art immortal by nature didst arise on the third day, and didst appear unto the eleven and all the disciples, and riding upon a cloud, didst hasten back unto the Father, O Thou creator of all." (Matins canon for the Ascension, 1st Ode, Irmos)

QUESTION 3. In the gospel reading for liturgy on the Ascension, two gifts are mentioned by Christ. One is given and one is promised. What are they? Comment on their importance and meaning for a Christian.

ANSWER When Christ saw his disciples in the upper room, he told them:

"Peace be unto you." (Luke 24:36).

This peace is not a worldly peace, but is the gift of God, and the attainment of it is the purpose of our life. The only way to understand this peace is to live the Christian life and be changed. It is freely given, but not freely received - not until a man is purified by intense effort, war against his passions, and desire to fulfill the will of God.

Shortly after this, Christ promised: "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49). This, of course, is the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, to be given only ten days later, on Pentecost.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is so profound, it cannot be described adequately. He convicts concerning sin and righteousness, He gives strength, He gives wisdom, and the words to say when being persecuted. Ignorant and weak fisherman and all those who make an abode for Him wax bold in their witness of the gospel. He guides the church, and enlightens every man concerning the truth. Without Him, the Christian life cannot be lived.

QUESTION 4. What mountain did Christ ascend from? How will this mountain be involved in another, cataclysmic event?

ANSWER 4 Christ ascended by the Mount of Olives. "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey." (Luke 1:12). Holy tradition understands that Christ will come to judge the world at the culmination of all things "from the East" over this very same mountain.

"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; {11} Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10-11)

QUESTION 5. There is a significant occurrence in the Ascension story that can only be understood in the context of the church, and the absolute need for apostolic succession of bishops and priests. This occurrence, properly understood, should cause everyone who trusts his own interpretation of the bible outside of the context of a visible, authoritative and dogmatic church to flee from his false, individual understanding and seek out the church. What is this occurrence? Comment on it, and try to specify other scriptures which point out or support this critical Christian teaching.

ANSWER It is clear that the scriptures are a dark book, unless God gives illumination. The Jews did not understand the book they gave appearances to love, and Jesus corrected their misunderstandings numerous times. The Holy apostles themselves had to be taught in numerous private sessions with their Lord, an important one which is described in the Ascension story:

"Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, {46} And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: {47} And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. {48} And ye are witnesses of these things. {49} And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:45-49)

There much that the apostles were taught that was not written in the scriptures, and which has become part of the mind of the church, through the teaching of the apostles, and all their successors, who remained true to their teachers as the apostles had to one great teacher. St. John alludes to this hidden wisdom, held so closely to the bosom of the church, when he says:

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen." (John 21:25) St. Peter admonishes us and reminds us of our own frailty and the sure reliability of the church when he tells us: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." (2 Peter 1:20)

QUESTION 6. When is Ascension celebrated?

ANSWER Ascension is always on a Thursday, exactly forty days after Pascha, just like it occurred in the Scriptures. The Jewish (and Orthodox) way of reckoning days is to count the first and last days. So, Pascha is the first day, and Ascension Thursday, in the 6th week after Pascha, is the Fortieth day.

In the same way, Christ was in the tomb three days, although not even one and a half days in terms of hours. Good Friday, the first day, He was buried in the late afternoon. The second day, Saturday, His body lay in the tomb the entire day, then at some point in the very early hours of the third day, He rose from the dead.

QUESTION 7. What commemoration is the day before Ascension? Explain.

ANSWER The Apodosis of Pascha is celebrated on the Wednesday before Ascension Thursday (according to the Russian Typicon).

All Great Orthodox feasts, according to the Jewish model, have three phases.

There is a preparation phase, which may be very long. The preparation for Pascha is the whole of Great Lent, and especially Holy Week. Great Feasts such as Theophany and Nativity have pre-festal Vespersal divine liturgies served the day before. Many feasts are preceded with certain hymns, such as the katavasia of the matins canon, sung for a period before a feast.

The feast itself is the ultimate celebration, and then there is a post-festal period, where the truths of the celebration are meditated upon at length in the services.

For Pascha, this period is forty days, and ends on the "Apodosis", or "leave-taking" of the feast, on the Wednesday before Ascension.

QUESTION 8. How long is the feast of the Ascension?

ANSWER The feast of the Ascension lasts until the Friday before Pentecost, when its Apodosis occurs. This makes perfect sense, as we are waiting for Pentecost, just as the disciples were waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus promised would come to them.

PENTECOST: THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the Old Testament Pentecost was the feast which occurred fifty days after Passover. As the passover feast celebrated the exodus of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt, so Pentecost celebrated God's gift of the ten commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

In the new covenant of the Messiah, the passover event takes on its new meaning as the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection, the "exodus" of men from this sinful world to the Kingdom of God. And in the New Testament as well, the pentecostal feast is fulfilled and made new by the coming of the "new law," the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Christ.

When the day of Pentecost had come they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed as resting upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit . . . (Acts 2.1–4).

The Holy Spirit that Christ had promised to his disciples came on the day of Pentecost (Jn 14.26, 15.26; Lk 24.49; Acts 1.5). The apostles received "the power from on high," and they began to preach and bear witness to Jesus as the risen Christ, the King and the Lord. This moment has traditionally been called the birthday of the Church.

In the liturgical services of the feast of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit is celebrated together with the full revelation of the divine Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The fullness of the Godhead is manifested with the Spirit's coming to man, and the Church hymns celebrate this manifestation as the final act of God's self-disclosure and self-donation to the world of His creation. For this reason Pentecost Sunday is also called Trinity Day in the Orthodox tradition. Often on this day the icon of the Holy Trinity—particularly that of the three angelic figures who appeared to Abraham, the forefather of the Christian faith—is placed in the center of the church. This icon is used with the traditional pentecostal icon which shows the tongues of fire hovering over Mary and the Twelve Apostles, the original prototype of the Church, who are themselves sitting in unity surrounding a symbolic image of "cosmos," the world.

On Pentecost we have the final fulfillment of the mission of Jesus Christ and the first beginning of the messianic age of the Kingdom of God mystically present in this world in the Church of the Messiah. For this reason the fiftieth day stands as the beginning of the era which is beyond the limitations of this world, fifty being that number which stands for eternal and heavenly fulfillment in Jewish and Christian mystical piety: seven times seven, plus one.

Thus, Pentecost is called an apocalyptic day, which means the day of final revelation. It is also called an eschatological day, which means the day of the final and perfect end (in Greek eschaton means the end). For when the Messiah comes and the Lord's Day is at hand, the "last days" are inaugurated in which "God declares: . . . I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.;" This is the ancient prophecy to which the Apostle Peter refers in the first sermon of the Christian Church which was preached on the first Sunday of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1–7; Joel 2: 28–32).

Once again it must be noted that the feast of Pentecost is not simply the celebration of an event which took place centuries ago. It is the celebration of what must happen and does happen to us in the Church today. We all have died and risen with the Messiah-King, and we

all have received his Most Holy Spirit. We are the “temples of the Holy Spirit.” God’s Spirit dwells in us (Rom 8; 1 Cor 2–3, 12; 2 Cor 3; Gal 5; Eph 2–3). We, by our own membership in the Church, have received “the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit” in the sacrament of chrismation. Pentecost has happened to us.

The Divine Liturgy of Pentecost recalls our baptism into Christ with the verse from Galatians again replacing the Thrice-Holy Hymn. Special verses from the psalms also replace the usual antiphonal psalms of the liturgy. The epistle and gospel readings tell of the Spirit’s coming to men. The kontakion sings of the reversal of Babel as God unites the nations into the unity of his Spirit. The troparion proclaims the gathering of the whole universe into God’s net through the work of the inspired apostles. The hymns “O Heavenly King” and “We have seen the True Light” are sung for the first time since Easter, calling the Holy Spirit to “come and abide in us,” and proclaiming that “we have received the heavenly Spirit.” The church building is decorated with flowers and the green leaves of the summer to show that God’s divine Breath comes to renew all creation as the “life-creating Spirit.” In Hebrew the word for Spirit, breath and wind is the same word, ruah.

Blessed art Thou, O Christ our God, who hast revealed the fishermen as most wise by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit: through them Thou didst draw the world into Thy net. O Lover of Man, Glory to Thee (*Troparion*).

When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, he divided the nations. But when he distributed the tongues of fire, he called all to unity. Therefore, with one voice, we glorify the All-Holy Spirit! (*Kontakion*).

The Great Vespers of Pentecost evening features three long prayers at which the faithful kneel for the first time since Easter. The Monday after Pentecost is the feast of the Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Church, and the Sunday after Pentecost is the feast of All Saints. This is the logical liturgical sequence since the coming of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled in men by their becoming saints, and this is the very purpose of the creation and salvation of the world. “Thus says the Lord: Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I your God am holy” (Lev 11.44–45, 1 Pet 1.15–16).

Taken from: www.oca.org