

*From Father Alexander Schmemmann:* A marriage which does not constantly crucify its own selfishness and self-sufficiency, which does not “die to itself” that it may point beyond itself, is not a Christian marriage. The real sin of marriage today is not adultery or lack of “adjustment” or “mental cruelty.” It is the idolization of the family itself [or the relationship of the spouses], the refusal to understand marriage as directed toward the Kingdom of God. This is expressed in the sentiment that one would “do anything” for his family, even steal. The family has here ceased to be for the glory of God; it has ceased to be a sacramental entrance into his presence. It is not the lack of respect for the family, it is the idolization of the family that breaks the modern family so easily, making divorce its almost natural shadow. It is the identification of marriage with happiness and the refusal to accept the cross in it. In a Christian marriage, in fact, three are married; and the united loyalty of the two toward the third, who is God, keeps the two in an active unity with each other as well as with God. ...It is the cross of Christ that brings the self-sufficiency of nature to its end. But “by the cross, joy entered the whole world” (*Hymn of matins*). Its presence is thus the real joy of marriage. It is the joyful certitude that the marriage vow, in the perspective of the eternal Kingdom, is not taken “until death parts,” but until death unites us completely. —Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*

*From Elder Moses of Mount Athos:* We honor martyrs and saints, but we ourselves do not want to suffer any hardships, any postponements, any difficulties. Fasting is too difficult a task to accomplish; we feel resentful during an illness; we cannot tolerate any harsh words, not even when we are to blame, therefore how could we possibly tolerate injustice, slander, persecution and exile, the way our saints did? It is an indisputable fact that the contemporary, secular spirit of convenience, leisure and excessive consumerism has greatly affected the measure of spiritual living. Generally speaking, we demand a non-ascetic Christianity... Orthodoxy however has the ascetic Gospel as its basis.

• CHRISTMAS PLAY:

Our parish children are rehearsing their annual Christmas play, scheduled for Sunday, December 16. Festivities start with *St. Romanos' Kontakion* of the Nativity at 5 PM in the Protection Church, then the play, dinner, and a visit by St. Nicholas and Christmas Carols.

# ST. SERAPHIM CATHEDRAL

## PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN ORTHODOX CHURCH



**December 9, 2018**

Conception of the Theotokos



• TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION, Tone Three:

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; for the Lord hath shown strength with His arm; He hath trampled down death by death; He hath become the first-born of the dead. He hath delivered us from the depths of hell, and hath granted the world great mercy.

• TROPARION OF ST. ANNA, Tone Four:

Today the bonds of childlessness are loosed. For God hearkened unto Joachim and Anna, And though it was beyond hope, He clearly promised them that they should bear a divine child, from whom was born the Uncircumscribable One Himself Who became mortal, and through an Angel commanded them to cry unto her: Rejoice, thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

• KONTAKION OF THE RESURRECTION, Tone Three:

On this day Thou didst rise from the tomb, O Merciful One, leading us from the gates of death. On this day Adam exults as Eve rejoices; with the

prophets and patriarchs they unceasingly praise the divine majesty of Thy power.

- KONTAKION OF ST. ANNA, Tone Four:

All the world doth celebrate Anna's conception on this day with festive joy, because it came to pass through God; for by divine grace she hath conceived her that beyond words conceiveth the Word of God.

## ACTIVITIES & EVENTS THIS WEEK

- Saturday, Dec. 8  
2:30 PM, Children's Play Practice  
3:30 PM, Catechism, *On Repentance and Faith*  
5 PM, Great Vespers and Confessions
- Sunday, Dec. 9:  
8:40 AM, Matins  
10 AM, Divine Liturgy  
11:45 AM, Church School  
Noon, Agape Meal
- Wednesday, Dec. 12:  
5 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank  
6 PM, Vigil for St. Herman of Alaska
- Thursday, Dec. 13:  
9 AM, Divine Liturgy, St. Herman of Alaska  
Noon, Senior and Retired Luncheon
- Saturday, Dec. 15:  
3:30 PM, Catechism *On the Holy Spirit*  
5 PM, Great Vespers and Confessions

- TIME FOR SPIRITUAL PREPARATION:

Please prepare yourself in every spiritual way for the Feast of the Birth of Christ. It is appropriate and proper for us—priests and people together—to make a Confession prior to receiving Holy Communion on all feast days, but especially before Christmas. *It is not appropriate for anyone over seven years of age to receive Holy Communion without a recent Confession.* Our bishops teach that if we receive Holy Communion frequently, **and we should each week**, we should be confessing no less than once a month. We should all make our Confession prior to Christmas Day, so that we may receive Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy on Christmas Eve and Day. Please do not delay. Any person, age 7 and up, who wishes to receive Holy Communion on Nativity Eve or Nativity, should make a confession before Christmas (times below). I especially appeal to the parents of our children to make a confession

soon. **Times to make a Confession:** before, during or after Vespers on Saturday evening (try to avoid a Sunday morning Confession, please); Any time on Thursday and Friday, Dec. 20 and 21. The Calendar indicates 4–6 PM, but I will be available all day, both days, as well as all day on Saturday, Dec. 22.

- RECEPTION OF CATECHUMENS:

God willing, several of our inquirers who have been attending Church here for many months will be received as Catechumens on Sunday, December 23 at 9:30 AM. We will abbreviate Matins that day to allow for this Service.

- EXCERPT FROM A SERMON:

We are now in the Nativity Fast, the 40-day period of abstaining from the richest and most satisfying foods as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior at Christmas. The weeks of Advent are also a time for confessing and repenting of our sins, generosity to the needy, and intensified prayer. This season warns us that the Messiah is coming and we must be ready to receive Him.... There is no greater threat to the peace of our souls or of our relationships with others than self-centeredness rooted in pride. Even as we fast this Advent from rich food, let us fast from serving our own selfish desires, as we take steps to put the needs of others before our own preferences. Let us confess and turn away from habits of word, thought, or deed that only strengthen the illusion that our lives are our own, and especially those that keep us from truly loving our neighbors. Let us give generously of our time, energy, and resources to help those who will not help us achieve any of our goals in this world, but in whom we encounter and serve our Savior. Instead of sacrificing everything to serve our own sovereign will, let us offer ourselves to the Lord for the accomplishment of His gracious purposes for our lives and for our neighbors. The Nativity Fast calls us to become rich toward God as we prepare to receive Christ at His birth. We should all use these weeks to invest ourselves in Him, for He alone brings fulfillment to those who bear His image and likeness. We would be fools to give our lives to anyone or anything else, including ourselves. —Fr. Philip LeMasters

- CONCEPTION OF THE THEOTOKOS BY ST. ANNA:

On December 9 the Church celebrates the day of the conception by St. Anna of the Virgin Mary. St. Anna and her husband, St. Joachim, are examples for us of humility, patience, purity of marital love, and faithfulness to the vow they made to God. Two short meditations follow: