

Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church

Southbridge, Massachusetts
www.stmichaelorthodox.com

January 2021



LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Saturday

9:00am Divine Liturgy
10:00am Memorial Service
5pm Vespers

Sunday

9:00am Matins
10:00am Divine Liturgy

Wednesday

6:00pm Paraklesis

FEAST DAYS

Jan. 1st – Circumcision of Our Lord and St. Basil the Great

Jan. 2nd – St. Seraphim of Sarov and St. Sylvester

Jan. 6th – Epiphany

Jan. 7th – Synaxis of St. John the Baptist

Jan. 10th – St. Gregory of Nyssa

Jan. 17th – St. Anthony the Great

Jan. 18th – Sts. Athanasios and Cyril

Jan. 19th – St. Macarius the Great

Jan. 21st – St. Maximus the Confessor

Jan. 24th – St. Xenia

Jan. 25th – St. Gregory the Theologian

Jan. 28th – St. Ephraim the Syrian

Jan. 30th – Holy Three Hierarchs

Epiphany

The sixth of January is the feast of the Epiphany. Originally it was the one Christian feast of the “shining forth” of God to the world in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth. It included the celebration of Christ’s birth, the adoration of the Wisemen, and all of the childhood events of Christ such as His circumcision and presentation to the temple as well as His baptism by John in the Jordan. There seems to be little doubt that this feast, like Easter and Pentecost, was understood as the fulfillment of a previous Jewish festival, in this case the Feast of Lights.

Epiphany means shining forth or manifestation. The feast is often called, as it is in the Orthodox service books, Theophany, which means the shining forth and manifestation of God. The emphasis in the present-day celebration is on the appearance of Jesus as the human Messiah of Israel and the divine Son of God, One of the Holy Trinity with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Thus, in the baptism by John in the Jordan, Jesus identifies Himself with sinners as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1.29), the “Beloved” of the Father whose messianic task it is to redeem men from their sins (Lk 3.21, Mk 1.35). And he is revealed as well as One of the Divine Trinity, testified to by the voice of the Father, and by the Spirit in the form of a dove. This is the central epiphany glorified in the main hymns of the feast:

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan the worship of the Trinity was made manifest! For the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, calling Thee his Beloved Son. And the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of his Word. O Christ our God, who hast revealed Thyself and hast enlightened the world, glory to Thee (Troparion).

Today Thou hast appeared to the universe, and Thy Light, O Lord, has shone on us, who with understanding praise Thee: Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, O Light Unapproachable! (Kontakion).

The prophecies of Epiphany repeat “the God is with us” from Isaiah and stress the foretelling of the Messiah as well as the coming of His forerunner, John the Baptist:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His path straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Is 40.3–5; Lk 3.4–6).

Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church
16 Romanian Avenue, Southbridge Massachusetts 01550
Telephone: (508) 765-5276
Website: www.StmichaelOrthodox.com
Email: stmichaelromanianorthodox@gmail.com
Facebook: St. Michael Orthodox Christian Church

2020 Parish Council

President: Luke Yanka
Vice President: Spiro Thomo
Secretary: Debby Thomo
Treasury: Paul Yanka

2020 Ladies Society Committee

President: Alexandra Nasto
Vice President: Louise Boilard
Secretary: Debbie Thomo
Treasurer: Mary Andreea

Clergy

Fr. John Downie fr.john_downie71@yahoo.com

Parish News & Events

Volunteers for Cleaning the Church

We need volunteers to help clean the church each week after the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. Please see the sign-up sheet in the hall. Please try to sign up at least once every one or two months.

Happy Birthday!! God Grant You Many More Years!!

January 4th – George Rapsomanikis
January 13th – Jenny Boilard
January 25th – Symeon Downie
January 29th – Mary Andrea, Mary Haddad, & Kristina Alexander
January 31th – Natalie Collazo

Happy Name Day

Jan. 1st & 30th – St. Basil – Vasilica Tanko & Vasilios Nahn
Jan. 7th & 30th – St. John the Baptist and St. John Chrysostom – Fr. John Downie, John DeAngeli, Yannis Mironidis, Yannis Pena, Jon Mitaras, & Ioanna Pitsillides
Jan. 16th – St. Peter – Peter Boilard
Jan. 17th – St. Anthony – Anthony Rapsomanikis
Jan. 21st – St. Maximus the Confessor – Maxim Yanka
Jan. 25th & 30th – St. Gregory – Gregory Downie

Schedule a Time for a House Blessing

It is important that our homes receive the blessing of Holy Water. You can contact Father by telephone, e-mail, or in person to arrange a time that is best for your family.



2021 Calendars are Available in the Church.

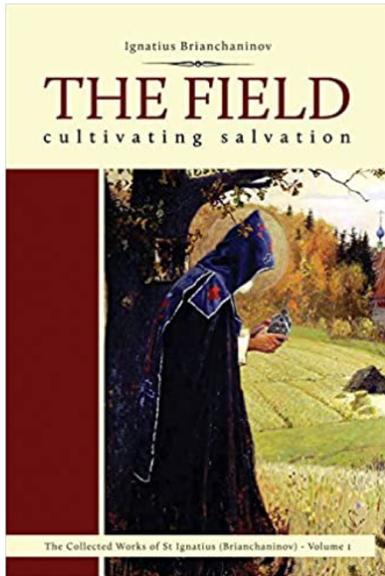
Congratulations to Tom Riley for his baptism on January 9! Many years!

School Snack Drive

Please bring individually-wrapped snacks for our local schools.

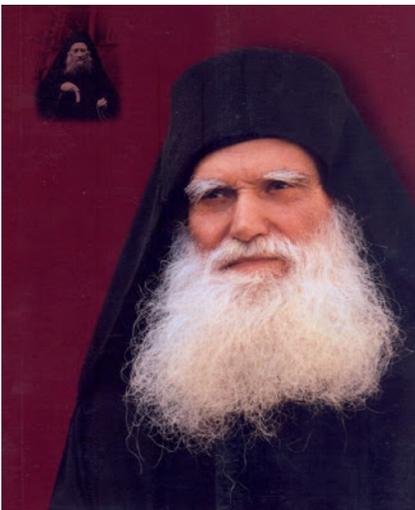


~ Book Corner ~



Book: *The Field: Cultivating Salvation*

Many people today are uncertain about what they believe and how they should live. They seek for a tradition that demonstrates antiquity and possesses authenticity. This newly translated volume of the writings of the Orthodox spiritual teacher Ignatius Brianchaninov offers a vision of a life that flows from following Christ. The field is both a place of spiritual struggle and a garden in which to cultivate virtues. But are we willing to respond to the challenge of a life lived in accordance with the Christian Gospel? St Ignatius' writing is the Christian tradition at its deepest, intensely practical but also transcendent and mystical.



Book: *Obedience is Life*

Christ glorifies His saints, and they glorify His Body the Church as His genuine members. One of these godly men is the Athonite Elder Ephraim of Katounakia, who reposed in 1998. He lived 65 years of strict ascetism on the Holy Mountain (42 of which were as a monk in obedience), far from the world, poor according to the world, but rich in the divine charismata of the Holy Spirit that he had acquired, and was shown to be an obedient disciple filled with spiritual gifts.

Parish Life

Christmas and Theophany



Do you know the difference between Lesser Holy Water and Great Holy Water?

The Lesser Blessing of Holy Water is celebrated at the beginning of each month, as well as on any other occasion, whenever the faithful request it. Both are equal and sacred as they are sanctified by the same Holy Spirit.

The Great Blessing of Holy Water is celebrated on the eve of Theophany and/or on the day of Theophany - January 6.

It is a tradition starting January 6th until January 14th to drink Great Holy Water in the morning on an empty stomach. During the rest of the year Great Holy Water is only taken in times of illness or after a strict fast until noon.

The Great Blessing of Waters under no circumstances replaces Holy Communion, but is offered as comfort to people who cannot receive Holy Communion, to strengthen them in their spiritual struggle for true repentance.

The Great Blessing of Waters is kept throughout the year at the homes of Christians for their sanctification by sprinkling and partaking of it, as well as for the sanctification of their homes, gardens, businesses, crops, animals, cars, etc. It is used also for our protection from all evil and satanic forces. At home, we keep it at the Iconostasion (icon corner), with a lit oil lamp. This reminds us that we should avoid any type of sin, which alienates us from the Divine Grace.

From God, We Should Expect Nothing Less than the Impossible

Fr. Rafael Noica

From Familia Ortodoxă

I have received many letters to which I can never respond, I have spoken with many, and I have seen that every person today is a tragedy; every person is loaded with pain and despair. But listen to what Saint Paul says: “God has illumined our hearts to shine the knowledge of His glory towards Christ. This treasure we have in earthen vessels,” I am paraphrasing a little, “in order to understand that the excellency of the power is not of man, it does not come from us, but is from God.”

Thus, the Apostle says, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in

despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus . . .” Why? “. . . that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6-10).

If Saint Paul would not have lived the love of God for man, oppressed on all sides, he would have been distressed; in confusion, he would have despaired; being persecuted, he would have felt forsaken – how many among us today feel forsaken by God; being cast down, he would have also been destroyed, as many which despair today – God forbid – cast themselves down, and it is difficult for them, or maybe even impossible, to rise again.

We should not forget that God loves man, and the love of God cannot abandon him. And whatever would happen to man,

even if he no longer sees a way of escape, there is one thing left – the word of Saint Silouan, which is more relevant today than ever before: “Keep your mind in hell and do not despair.” Behold how Saint Paul, like him, keeps his mind in hell, as our Father told us. He sees himself oppressed, he sees himself in great perplexities, he sees himself cast down, he sees himself persecuted, but in none of these cases does he despair. What does it mean to not despair? It doesn't mean that

you don't feel any despair, even to the limit sometimes, to when you no longer know what else to do. At the moment when you no longer know

what to do, however, you find for yourself a random consolation, whatever is at hand, knowing that although you don't feel it now, God loves you.

As I said to several people last year, to youths from abroad: when you feel that it is too difficult to reach any measure of godly virtue, you should know that it is not difficult, it is impossible. Your own nature witnesses to you, it gives testimony from within that this word is impossible, but from our God we should expect nothing less than the impossible! Nothing less than impossible since if God is our God, well then the impossible is that which we expect from Him and that which only He can do – for Him nothing is impossible. And the thing which is impossible, for the love and the power of God you will see working in you. I pray to God to receive this word and to

“Therefore, in all of our despair, we should have a safety net, as circus acrobats put underneath them when they perform dangerous acts. The safety net is: do not despair.”

strengthen your faith, which is both a prayer for me and for you.

The commandment of God is a divine revelation to intoxicate us, to sweeten us with the beauty of His Image, and to draw us towards His Kingdom. But this thing is not possible, and that which is impossible, for the love of God and for His almighty power, we expect to see working in us.

THERE IS NO NEED TO DESPAIR

Why were we told not to despair? Saint Paul tells us that in the strength of this divine love – which, if it tells us to love God from all of our soul, heart, mind, and from all of our strength, in His own divine way, God also loves creation, which He Himself fashioned. That is how God loved Adam. That is to say, from all of His Being, from all that He was and all that He had, He gave everything on the Cross. He sacrificed even to the last drop of blood out of fellowship with this person who sinned against Him since He was the only One Who was able to pass through hell and to resurrect from the dead and forge a new path towards life, to which life Adam had not reached, that is, the sitting at the right hand of the Father.

Therefore, in all of our despair, we should have a safety net, as circus acrobats put underneath them when they perform dangerous acts. The safety net is: do not despair. When He says “Do not despair”, God does not forbid despair, but He is saying that we do not need to despair. In this way we can live our despair, face it and say “Yes, this is how things might be, but for the sake of God I

refuse to believe in despair!”, and continue our life as we are able. “Waiting I waited patiently for the Lord,” says a psalm, “and He was attentive unto me” (cf. Ps. 39:1) – until the Lord descends and attends unto us. And truly He will come!

Despair – those innermost depths of despair – are a threshold through which we must pass, which in the hands of God are nothing but a premise for our resurrection from that state, for salvation.

The Apostle also says that “we the living are continually given over to death for Jesus.” Why? “So that the life of Jesus should be shown in our bodies of death” (2 Cor. 4:11). It is difficult for man to believe in the moment of despair that God gives to him this pain – or rather that He allows it since God gives nothing bad but only



allows it. It is difficult for us to believe that this pain which is allowed to us to experience is given in order for us to also see the Resurrection of Jesus. Because if we, as Saint Paul says elsewhere, with the baptism of Jesus – baptism in Greek means submersion – are submerged with Christ into the death of Christ, it is only so that we can also know the Resurrection of Christ (cf. Rom. 6:4-5) as also the life of Christ may be in us, and the life of Christ is eternal life. Therefore, even in our animal and biological nature which we now live – and I say this without insulting but as the reality of our life – yet from our present state, still God wants to give us to know the conditions of resurrection, which after what we call

death will be able to be seen with more strength, especially after the General Resurrection.

WHEN CONDITIONS ARE SO TRAGIC, THE POWER OF GOD ALSO MANIFESTS ITSELF

God always has salvation, and as long as salvation is possible, from now on you should know that it is paradoxical. There is no need to despair. “God,” I once said to someone, “will not conquer the world.” And when he began to panic, I added, “He has conquered it already; He no longer needs to conquer it again!” But there are paradoxical forms – the glorious things which God does in our world, perhaps more grand than ever before. When conditions become so tragic, when there is only one thing left to do and with a desperate hope that maybe Someone up there hears you, then the power of God begins to manifest itself.

An Orthodox nun from Beirut was telling me that on the night of Pascha they were deep in war in Beirut, and they didn’t know if they were going to be able to celebrate the Paschal services or not – yet the Orthodox decided to serve anyway. She told me that at any given moment a bomb, a grenade, a mortar shell, or who knows what could have fallen from anywhere. But nothing fell, and they served on the night of Pascha in the hope of the Resurrection and in the fear of bombardment. She said, “Never have I felt such a feeling of the Resurrection as on that night!” Again I say that during the most terrible moments is when you begin to live more perfectly the presence of this God, Who otherwise seems to not exist.

Brothers and sisters, these things which I am sharing with you not from theory but from painful experience, I am sharing with trust. May God do the rest, may He put into your hearts patience and trust. And you should know that man is powerless, but this does not mean that your life is compromised. For the days which are coming, man is more and more alone, and I do not know where this loneliness will end up. But if you remain alone in the whole world, do not forget that Christ was alone in the whole world, slandered by all, and those who loved Him were far from Him. Remaining alone, weak, and apparently abandoned by all, you are likened to Christ Who also was slandered – if you want a reason to not despair. We continue in those states, and coming God will come and will have mercy upon us. May God do this for you, and as Father Cleopa used to say, may we all meet each other at the gates of Paradise!



**The Antichrist: An Orthodox Perspective
from the Church Fathers (Part 6)
Fr. Andrew J. Anderson**

**No “pre-Tribulation” rapture into
Heaven for End-Time Christians**

The Three Holy Youths are seen by St. Irenaeus as a prefigurement of the Church in the End-Times that shall be persecuted severely by the Antichrist for its refusal to worship him or his image. Believers must remain strong at that time. Endurance is needed. Patience is needed (Rev. 13:10). There will be no “pre-tribulation” rapture (rapture means: “caught up”) as a miraculous escape route into Heaven to avoid End-Times persecution. This concept of escaping the Antichrist’s final persecution by a divine rapture up into Heaven is a modern-day false teaching that only a certain percentage of Protestants believe. It was invented in Scotland in 1830 by Margaret Macdonald and promoted widely by Englishman John Nelson Darby (whom some credit as its originator.)²⁷ Before these two people lived, no Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox Christian ever heard of or believed such an idea. Rather, the historic Christian view has always been to follow the Lord Jesus’ exhortation of believers to endurance, saying: “He who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

Orthodoxy rejects and has never taught the innovative and recently developed modern-day theory of an escape “rapture” that will gather Christians into heaven ahead of time so that they will not have to see the Antichrist nor be persecuted by him nor undergo a period of persecution,

trial, and tribulation. If there was such a rapture into Heaven ahead of the Antichrist’s persecution, then all of Jesus’ warnings to believers to watch out and not be deceived by the false christ would be useless warnings (see Matthew 24:23-27). Rather, Scripture teaches that “it was given unto him [to Antichrist—the Beast] to make war with the saints, and to overcome them” (Rev.13:7). Obviously, the Christians will be still on the planet if

“Orthodoxy rejects and has never taught the innovative and recently developed modern-day theory of an escape ‘rapture’...”

the Antichrist is going to be fighting and persecuting them. If the “saints”—the believers—

had been previously raptured (caught up) into heaven prior to the Antichrist’s persecution of them, then this Scripture (Rev. 13:7) would mean nothing. Rather, St. Paul explains that the real “rapture” of believers being “caught up” into the sky is simply the gathering of the believers who are still alive on the earth (and enduring to the End) to meet the Lord Jesus in the air when He finally returns on the clouds of glory at His Second Coming—which takes place after the Antichrist’s persecution.

For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thess. 4:16-17)

This gathering of the remaining faithful Christians (the “elect”) to Christ at His

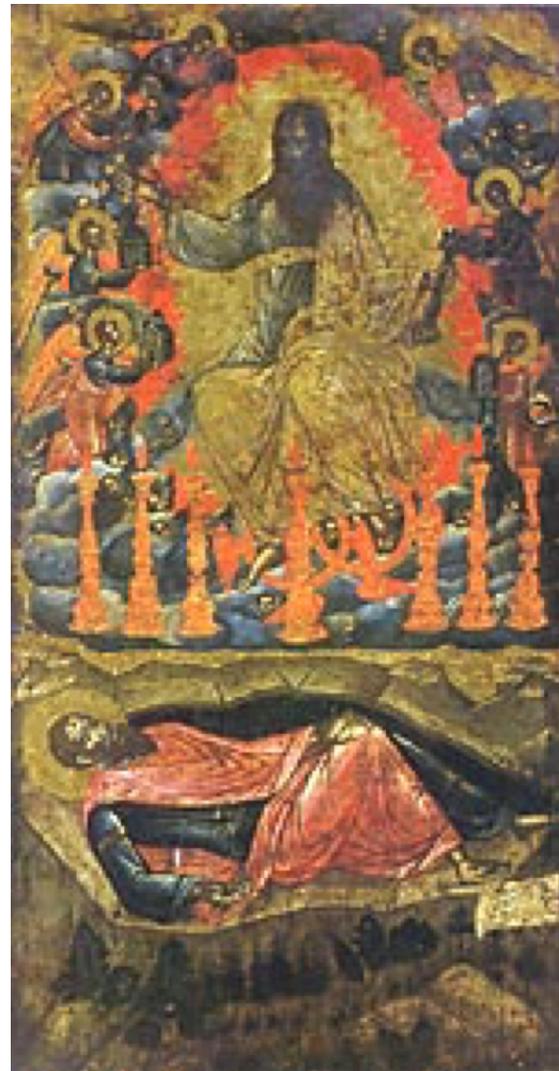
Second Coming will follow the period of great End-Time Tribulation that Jesus Himself described:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days...they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:29,30,31)

The Antichrist's short three and a half year violent reign

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days...” Holy Scripture is very clear that before Christ's Glorious Return in the sky, there will be a terrible time of persecution for believers, with no pre-tribulation escape rapture. True believers must be strong, patient, and trusting in Jesus (Rev. 13:10). Many will be beheaded, becoming martyrs (Rev. 20:4). For a short period of three and a half years (“1260 days”—Rev. 11:3) the Antichrist will have deceived the world, pretending to be nice, so that he could take over political control. But then, after becoming global monarch, for second short period of another three and a half years (“42 months”—Rev. 13:5) he will try to force humanity to worship him. Like ancient King Nebuchadrezzar, the Antichrist will use devious and evil means to do so. He will use coercion to force all people into his spiritual and political camp by controlling the buying and selling of all goods and services. Thus, after a pre-reign period of a first three and a half years of campaigning during which time he fakes kindness in order to gather global

political support, then following his coronation as global king in Jerusalem, the Antichrist will have a short, yet violent reign of another three and a half years. St. Paisios of Mt. Athos took this time frame to be literal.²⁸ Thus, the total is seven years allotted to the Antichrist—from his first appearance on the world scene until his overthrow at Christ Jesus' Second Coming, as described in 2 Thessalonians 2:8.



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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2 St. Seraphim of Sarov Divine Liturgy 10:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 11:00am) Vespers, Litia 5:00pm
3 Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	4	5 Vespers, Litia - Epiphany 6:00 pm	6 Epiphany Matins 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Vespers, Litia – St. John the Baptist 6:00pm	7 St. John the Baptist Divine Liturgy 10:00 am	8	9 Vespers 5:00pm
10 St. Gregory of Nyssa Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	11	12	13 Paraklesis 6:00pm	14	15	16 Divine Liturgy 10:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 11:00am) Vespers 5:00pm
17 St. Anthony the Great Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	18 Sts. Athanasios the Great and Cyril of Alexandria	19 St. Macarius the Great	20	21 St. Maximus the Confessor	22	23 Divine Liturgy 10:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 11:00am) Vespers 5:00pm
24 St. Xenia of St. Petersberg Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	25 St. Gregory the Theologian	26	27	28	29	30 Holy Three Hierarchs Divine Liturgy 10:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 11:00am) Vespers 5:00pm
31 Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am						