

St Matthew Orthodox Church
Orthodox Church in America - Diocese of the Midwest
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From the Desk of Fr John:

As we begin Great Lent, preparing for the Resurrection, I would like to share the following excerpt from Fr Stephen Freeman's blog "Glory to God for all Things" on Ancient Faith ministries. which reminds us of what Pascha (Easter) is all about.

"KNOCKING DOWN THE GATES OF HELL:
The Swedish Lutheran theologian, Gustav Aulen, published a seminal work on the types of atonement theory in 1930 (Christus Victor). Though time and critical studies have suggested many subtler treatments of the question, no one has really improved on his insight. Especially valuable was his description of the "Classic View" of the atonement. This imagery, very dominant in the writings of the early Fathers and in the liturgical life of the Eastern Church, focused on the atonement as an act of invasion, the smashing of gates and bonds, and the setting free of those bound in hell. Aulen clearly preferred this imagery and is greatly responsible for its growing popularity in some segments of Western Christendom.... In Orthodoxy, this imagery is in the hymns surrounding Pascha:

'... Thou hast destroyed the palaces of hell by Thy Burial, O Christ. Thou hast trampled death down by thy death, O Lord, And redeemed earth's children from corruption.

Though thou art buried in a grave, O Christ, Though Thou goest down to hell, O Savior, Thou hast stripped hell naked, emptying its graves....'

...Orthodox Holy Week and Pascha has many ways of acting out this theology. Lights go up at the hint of victory, particularly as we sing the Song of Moses

celebrating the drowning of Pharaoh's army. In some parishes, bay leaves are tossed in the air by the priest in a fairly violent and joyous celebration of the victory. In yet others, at certain points during the Vespers Liturgy of Pascha, loud noises such as the banging of pots and pans are heard as the liturgy describes the smashing of hell's gates. In Greece, fireworks are even set off for the Paschal celebration. Such antics completely puzzle the non-Orthodox and even seem comical. The Paschal celebration in Orthodoxy is far more akin to the wild street scenes in American cities when the end of World War II was announced – and for the same reason!

All of this also explains why many Orthodox are very reluctant to engage in "who's going to hell" discussions with other Christians (though some Orthodox sadly seem to relish the topic). The services of Holy Week, as illustrated in these verses, are filled with references to hell. I daresay that no services elsewhere in all of Christendom make such frequent mention of hell. But the language is just as illustrated above. It's all about smashing, destruction and freedom. It is the grammar of Pascha. It is the grammar of Christianity itself: Hell is real. Jesus has come to smash it. It is the Lord's Pascha. It is time to sing and dance."





From the Parish Council President

The Orthodox Church is full of many wonderful traditions and practices. The Pascha Basket is one of those traditions that I want to highlight in this month's message. We have been blessed with many new parishioners and wanted to explain the Pascha Basket tradition at SMOC. After the Paschal Vigil and Divine Liturgy, our Pascha baskets (the origin of the "easter" basket) are blessed in Herrick Hall by Father John. Once blessed we all stay for a joyful feast ! These baskets are filled with the things we have fasted from for the last 40 days. These baskets have been carefully prepared and include several foods with a traditionally symbolic significance.



Father John blesses Pascha baskets, 2022

- Sweet bread is always included, leavened with yeast. This is a symbol of the New Covenant; the Jews made unleavened bread, and we, the Children of the New Covenant, make leavened bread. The braided form of this bread is a display of the Trinity.
- Pascha Cheese is a figure of all the sweetness of the Kingdom, and remind us of the earthly gifts that come from God. Pascha cheese is normally included, and there are many good recipes for it in the parish. If you don't have one, ask someone.

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- Butter – shaped into a figure of a lamb, or small cross. Like the Pascha Cheese, it represents the bountiful blessings poured out on us because of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.
- Bitter herbs, usually horseradish, represents bondage, a reminder of the first Passover (horseradish is eaten as a traditional part of the original Passover meal) and of the bitter sufferings which Christ endured for our sake. Sometimes the herb is colored red with beets, symbolizing the Blood of Christ.
- Meat represents the bounty of God, and by it we remember that Christ, the Lamb of God, the New Passover has superseded the sacrifice of the Old Testament Passover. Lamb, veal, bacon and ham are favorites, as well as spicy sausage, loaded with garlic. These are usually cooked in advance so that during the festivity of the day, no one will be burdened with preparation. Meat, after our 40 day fast, reminds us of God’s great generosity.
- Red eggs are likened to the tomb from which Christ arose. This is because of the miracle of new life which comes from the egg, just as Christ miraculously came forth from the tomb. Traditionally decorated “pysanki” eggs are sometimes included. (Continued on page 4)
- Wine symbolizes spiritual knowledge, and, for us, the knowledge of the Holy Resurrection of Christ our God!
- Salt serves as a reminder to us that we are “the salt of the earth.” This feast does not end, but is completed as we share the joy of the Resurrection with the world, and all who will hear it. Salt reminds us of our duty to others, and in preaching the Gospel and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ!
- An Icon or icon card is frequently included in the basket. Usually an icon of the Resurrection or some other icon of Christ is used. After all, we are the true witnesses to His Resurrection!
- A Candle reminding us that Christ is the light of the world, and we must bear His light with joy, especially during this “Bright” season. This candle is lit at the end of the Paschal Vigil, just prior to the blessing of baskets.

The Basket is now decorated with ribbons, usually white or festive, in honor of the Bright Feast of the Resurrection, and left open, so that during the blessing, each item in the basket may come in contact with the Holy Water. Each of the foods in the Pascha basket have a rich meaning, as does everything in Orthodox Christianity. Preparing the Pascha basket is a family affair. Take the time to prepare them together. I hope you and your families have a joyous Pascha.

—Paul Novak



God grant you many years!

Birthdays

February

1 Camber Pfitzinger
6 Katherine Wieland
8 Misha Mykhaylyuk
12 Gregory Gudumac
13 Dorothy Olson
17 Casimir Massopust
21 Dale Petersen
22 Cynan Pfitzinger
25 Doug Bisbee
27 Aaron Valverde
28 Owen Jeffers
29 Sarah Tomac

March

4 Nathaniel Elsinger
5 Tom Julian
7 Clint Squires
9 Mila Jeffers
11 Paul Greenlaw
12 Ann Kaseno
12 Melissa McNeil
16 Keely Sarsama
19 Peggy Roman
22 Sophia Mykhaylyuk
28 Jason Heid
29 Greg Kaseno
30 Owain Pfitzinger

April

2 Eve Pfitzinger
2 Brandon Seefeld
11 Liam Taillon
13 Linda Bisbee
13 Nicholas Greenlaw
14 Bernie Olson
15 Joseph Roegner
16 Alaric Pfitzinger
17 Whitney Massopust
17 Vivian Parry
18 Mary Morgan
18 Matushka Katherine Thetford
18 Sophia Tomac
30 Mitchell Phillips

Anniversaries

February

12 Dennis & Suzanne Petrick
16 Mark & Alicia White

March

10 Misha & Svitlana
Mykhaylyuk

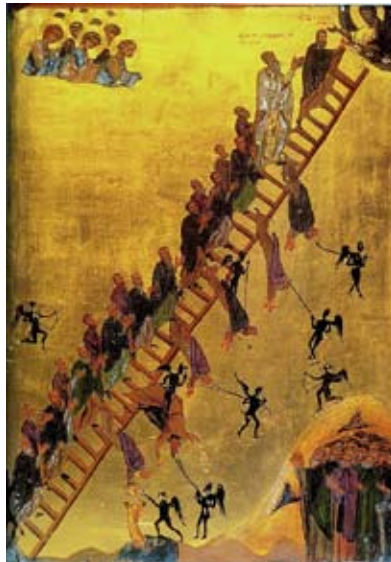
April

14 Denis & Tanya Pitkevich
18 Jonathan & Ariadne Jeffers
23 Frank & Andrea Hurst
25 Dr. Paul Holzman & Dr. Bar-

The Ladder of Divine Ascent

The Ladder of Divine Ascent is widely regarded as the most important ascetical work to come to us from the Church Fathers. After the Holy Scriptures, it is the most widely copied text in the Christian East, and it very well may be the most widely cited work of the Byzantine world. St John, an abbot, wrote the book after being asked to do so by the abbot of another monastery. Acknowledging St John as greatly advanced in his ascetical labors, the abbot asked him to share a description of what St John had seen in his visions of God, just as Moses shared the Law with the people of Israel. St John then wrote *the Ladder*, a book by a monastic elder written for monastics—but a monastic text which has also held the interest of non-monastic clergy and laypeople alike for centuries. In a monastic setting, *the Ladder* is appointed to be read daily during Great Lent. Some laypeople also approach this text, with the guidance of their spiritual father, during this season—though many quickly realize the difficulties of applying a work about solitude and strict monastic behavior while living in the world, being part of a family, and having obligations such as work. Appropriately enough, St John addressed the concerns of laymen such as these only a few pages into his work before returning to address monastic considerations. He wrote:

Some people living without concern in the world have asked me: “We have wives and are beset with social cares, and how can we lead the solitary life?” I replied to them: “Do all the good you can; do not speak evil of anyone; do not steal from anyone; do not lie to anyone; do not be arrogant towards anyone; do not hate anyone; do not be absent from the divine services; be compassionate to the needy; do not offend anyone; do not wreck another man’s domestic happiness, and be content with what your own wives can give you. If you behave in this way, you will not be far from the Kingdom of Heaven.



Saturday Vespers

| | |
|--------|-----------------|
| 4-Mar | Tom |
| 11-Mar | Noah |
| 18-Mar | Doug |
| 25-Mar | Pedro |
| 1-Apr | Paul |
| 8-Apr | Matt |
| 15-Apr | (Holy Saturday) |
| 22-Apr | Melissa |
| 29-Apr | Will |

Reader's Schedule

Sunday Matins & Liturgy

| | |
|--------|---------------|
| 5-Mar | Pedro |
| 12-Mar | Matt |
| 19-Mar | Tom |
| 26-Mar | Matthew |
| 2-Apr | Doug |
| 9-Apr | Elaine |
| 16-Apr | Will (Pascha) |
| 23-Apr | Paul |
| 30-Apr | Noah |

“When Thou, O Lord, Wast Baptized In the Jordan”

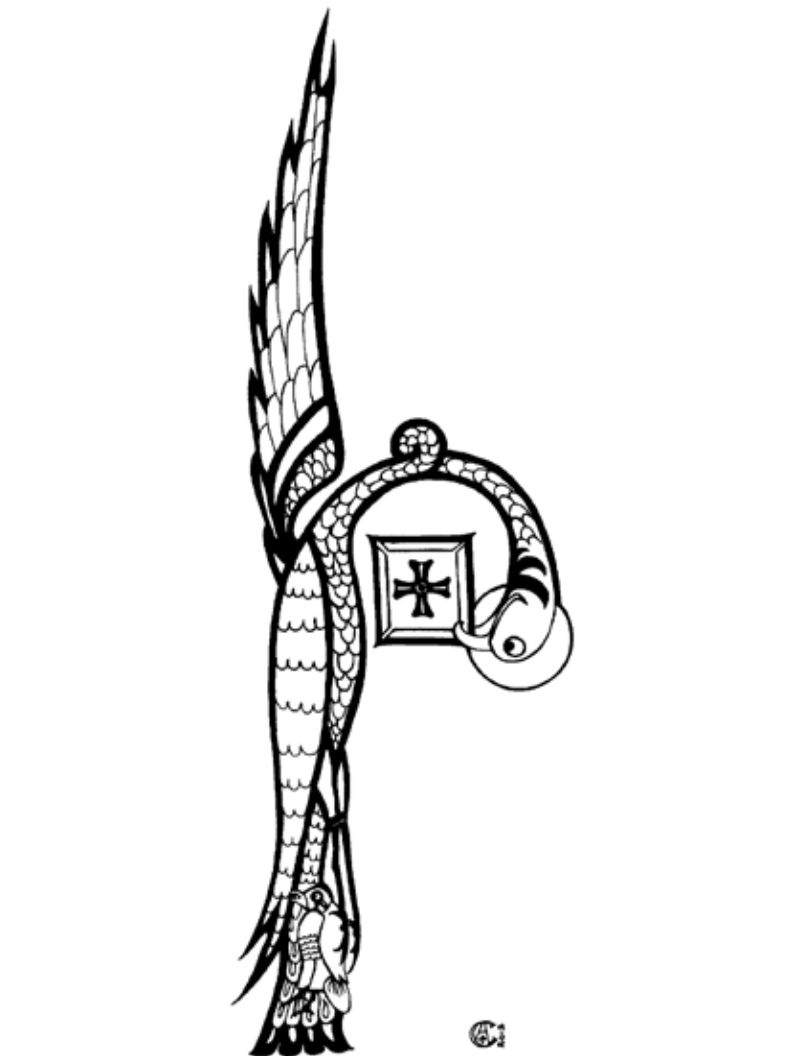
The Great Blessing of Waters at the Fox River



Father John reaches into the partially frozen water to bless the river

In the season of Theophany, many Orthodox communities gather to bless nearby bodies of water, sanctifying all of Creation—just as Christ’s baptism purified the waters of the world rather than cleaning our Lord. On Sunday, January 15th, our parish gathered at Voyageur Park to celebrate this mystery of the Great Blessing of Waters. Father John blessed the Fox River and, through its tributaries and connecting waters, all the Great Lakes. Despite the slight chill, it was a beautiful day for our community to come together and participate in a tradition that proclaims Christ’s saving work in all the cosmos.







Men's Group

The Men's Group was inactive in the Fall and Winter months due to the parish's siding project taking up several Saturdays for many of our men. We do, however, plan on having a Men's Group meeting in the weeks after Pascha!



The Upper Room

As we move into Great Lent, the Upper Room young adult group is winding down its discussion of the mysteries (sacraments) of the Church. Following this series, the group plans to discuss Lenten and Holy Week/Paschal themes. This summer or early fall we are hoping to make a pilgrimage to St. John Chrysostomos Greek Orthodox Monastery (women's) in Pleasant Prairie, WI. The Upper Room is open to high school and college age youth (14+). It meets after Divine Liturgy and fellowship hour, primarily on non-choir practice weeks. Please do not hesitate to contact Will or Pedro if you have any questions.

Choir Practice

Children's Singing: March 26

Regular Choir Practice: March 5 & 12

Cleaning Schedule

SCHAHCZENSKI (week of) 3/5/23 for 3/12/23
JULIAN (week of) 3/12/23 for 3/19/23
TOMAC (week of) 3/19/23 for 3/26/23
WIELAND (week of) 3/26/23 for 4/2/23
SARSAMA (week of) 4/2/23 for 4/9/23
MYKHAYLYUK (week of) 4/9/23 for 4/16/23
MCGRAW (week of) 4/16/23 for 4/23/23
BISBEE (week of) 4/23/23 for 4/30/23

Byzantine Chant

The most ancient vocal music that is still used in living continuity with its oldest forms, the church music of the Eastern Roman Empire (what we now call "Byzantine Chant") is not only present as contemporary Byzantine church singing, but is also the roots of the Slavic choral music we sing in our parish, the Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian chants of our sister churches, and even the Roman chant of the Catholic Church. At our parish, we have a small Byzantine choir that has been practicing in preparation to sing the upcoming festal Vespers for the Annunciation and in services after Pascha. If you are interested in learning more about this sacred art, please reach out to Sdn Constantine (Pedro) Sarsama for more information—all interested people are welcome to join us regardless of experience and training.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Icon Procession for Sunday of Orthodoxy, March 5: On Sunday, March 5, we will celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ has become one of us by depicting Him, His Mother, and all the Saints in Holy Images (Icons), on what is called Sunday of Orthodoxy. Please bring a favorite icon to church for our icon procession after Liturgy next Sunday.

Scheduling Confession: Now is a good time to schedule Confession, especially if you are someone who has not been to Confession for some time. You will not regret it! Confession allows us to “start anew” and to understand ourselves better as we continue to work on ourselves and strive to live up to what Jesus Christ has done for us. As a reminder, if you come to Saturday Great Vespers, you can come to Confession afterward without scheduling it in advance. If you want to schedule in advance at some other time during the week, Fr John is generally available Tuesdays - Saturdays and can work with your schedule and availability.

- Lenten Retreat at SMOC with Fr. Paul Jannakos, March 10 and 11, including Choir Workshop: Mark your calendars for the evening of Friday, March 10, and the morning of Saturday, March 11, for a Lenten retreat at St. Matthew's! Our diocesan chancellor, Fr. Paul Jannakos, who has close to 40 years of experience as an Orthodox priest, will be coming to St. Matthew's to give a retreat consisting of a series of talks and discussion on the theme of “Prayer and the Virtues.” Fr Paul's wife, Protinica Michelle, is an experienced choir director who will also give a choir workshop to our choir on Saturday March 11.

The full schedule will be as follows:

--Friday 3/10

---- Fr Paul gives his main talk and discussion Friday night at 6:30 pm

--Saturday 3/11

--- 9:10 Hours 9:30 Divine Liturgy (2nd Saturday of Lent - Liturgy for the Departed)

--- Lenten Potluck Coffee Fellowship

---Fr Paul gives a second talk (12 - 12:45)

--- Pr. Michelle holds a choir workshop (12:45 - 2:15) while non-choir people can stay for discussion with Fr Paul

--- End the day with Saturday Vespers early at 2:30 pm.

NOTE: A signup sheet for the retreat is now in Herrick Hall. Please sign up if you are coming so that we may plan accordingly.



Highlights from the 2023 Annual Meeting:

- The 2023 Church budget was reviewed, discussed and approved by the parish members that were in attendance. A copy of the budget can be found on the Herrick Hall bulletin board.
- The Parish Council mentoring program was discussed. This is a program for those that have interest in being on the Parish Council sometime in the future. If you have interest in this program or any questions please see Paul Novak.
- A wall for the Narthex that covers the bathroom door and part of the coat racks was discussed. This wall will improve the appearance of our entry way into the Narthex. After a discussion, the construction of this wall was approved by the parish members that were in attendance. The current plan is to install this after Pascha.
- Phase III of the Iconography was discussed and reviewed. Moving forward with Phase III was approved by the parish members that were in attendance. As such, a fundraising campaign would start in the fall of 2023 with the installation of Phase III in the summertime of 2024.

Liturgical Schedule

Sat, March 4, 9:10 Hours & 9:30 Liturgy with Blessing of Koliva
5:00 PM Great Vespers (St. Theodore “Koliva” Sat)

Sun, March 5, 8:30 Matins, 9:30 Liturgy & Procession with icons (Sun of Orthodoxy)

Wed, March 8, 6:00 PM Presanctified Gifts

Fri, March 10, 6:30 PM Lenten Retreat with Fr. Paul Jannakos at SMOC

Sat, March 11, 9:10 Hours & 9:30 Liturgy (with Lenten Retreat 12:00 - 2:15)
2:30 PM Great Vespers (conclusion of Retreat)

Sun, March 12, 8:30 AM Matins, 9:30 AM Liturgy (2nd Sun of Lent - Palamas)
9:30 Hours & Typika (*Waupaca Outreach*)
Info at <https://smocgb.com/waupaca>

Wed, March 15, 6:00 PM Presanctified Gifts

Sat, March 18, 5:00 PM Great Vespers

Sun, March 19, 8:30 AM Matins, 9:30 AM Liturgy (3rd Sun of Lent - The Cross)

Wed, March 22, 6:00 PM Presanctified Gifts

Fri, March 24, 6:00 PM Great Vespers (Feast of the Annunciation)

Sat, March 25, 9:10 Hours and 9:30 AM Liturgy (Feast of the Annunciation)
5:00 PM Great Vespers

Sun, March 26, 8:30 AM Matins, 9:30 AM Liturgy (4th Sun of Lent - The Ladder)

Wed, March 29, 6:00 PM Presanctified Gifts

Fri, March 31, 9:30 AM Presanctified Gifts (Saint Innocent)

Sat, April 1, 5:00 PM Great Vespers

Sun, April 2, 8:30 Matins, 9:30 AM Liturgy (Mary of Egypt)

Wed, April 5, 6:00 PM Presanctified Gifts

Fri, April 7, 6:00 PM Great Vespers (Lazarus Sat)

April 8, 9:00 AM Baptisms/Chrismations,
10:00 AM Liturgy Lazarus Sat,
5:00 PM Vigil (Palm Sun)

Sun, April 9, 9:10 Hours, 9:30 AM Liturgy (Palm Sun)

Holy Monday, April 10, 6:00 PM Bridegroom Matins

Holy Tuesday, April 11, 8:45 AM Presanctified Gifts
6:00 PM Bridegroom Matins

Holy Wednesday, April 12, 6:00 PM Matins

Holy Thursday, April 13, 10:00 AM Vespereal Liturgy (The Mystical Supper of Holy Thursday)
6:00 PM Matins (The 12 Passion Gospels of Holy Fri)

Holy Friday, April 14, 3:30 PM Vespers (The Entombment)
6:00 PM Matins (Lamentations at the Tomb)

Holy Saturday, April 15, 10:00 AM Vespereal Liturgy (The Empty Tomb)
11:30 PM Paschal Nocturnes, Matins, Liturgy (THE RESURRECTION!)

Easter Sunday, April 16, 3:00 PM Paschal Vespers (Agape Vespers of Pascha)

Bright Wednesday, April 19, 6:00 PM Paschal Daily Vespers (Reader’s Service)