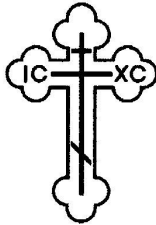


St. Mark Evangelizer

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Saint Mark Church is a parish of the Orthodox Church in America, Archdiocese of Washington DC, under the omaphor of His Beatitude, Metropolitan, Tikhon.

Divine Liturgy: Sunday 9:30AM
Weekday Feasts 10:00AM
Confession: Saturday 5:00PM
Vespers: Saturday 5:30PM
Church School: Following Sunday
Divine Liturgy (September - May)
Rector: Archpriest, Gregory Safchuk
Telephone: (301) 229-6300
www.saintmarkoca.org

Being Meek and Being Blessed

A proud person is never satisfied; everything bothers him, and he follows his own will. We must be obedient to the will of God in order to learn humility and meekness while we are still in this life, while there is still time. A heart that is full of love thinks not of itself, but of others. It prays for all living things and for the whole world.”

(Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica, Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives, p 89)

A Cause Worthy of a Blessing

This phrase comes from the Divine Liturgy during the Great Entrance when we pray for those who are not there. More specifically in our local practice at St. Mark, we use the words: “Those who are absent for a cause worthy of a blessing, may our Good Lord remember in His Kingdom...” This is a wonderful practice that underscores just how universal and inclusive our liturgical prayer is. After praying for the hierarchs and faithful, the president, civil authorities and armed forces, the sick, suffering and those persecuted throughout the world, as well as for the departed; we pray simply for those who are

not there - understanding of course that this refers to those who are normally there and should be there, but are not. The supposition is that there is some good and blessable reason that prevents them from being there.

But what IS a cause worthy of a blessing? I ask this not because I know the answer, but just to offer it for consideration. What about work? Not everyone works Monday - Friday 9-5 anymore. The project that has to be done by Monday morning or that business trip involving the weekend can keep one from being in church. Some may have no choice but to work on the weekends, and depending on what they do, we may even be grateful for it - doctors, nurses, firefighters, police, paramedics, etc.

Is travel such a cause? If so, all travel?

anywhere? for any reason? Perhaps the travelers are attending the Divine Liturgy at another church. If so, then we understand that they participate in the same liturgy in the larger Church universal, which we know extends beyond the walls of any one parish.

The list of reasons that may prevent a person from going to church can be lengthy, and may be populated by both the blessable

and the non-blessable. But what we can be fairly sure of is that a cause not worthy of a blessing is a lack of desire. It means that we have more desire for something other than to worship and com-

mune with God in whose image we are created. But if we find ourselves straying from God, we then have “to want to want” to do the right thing. We should “desire to desire” to worship and commune with God. We should come anyway and hope and pray that God would warm our hearts and kindle this desire within us. We should apply at least the same standard of discipline in this that we would if our child were to awake one morning and simply declare that they didn’t want to go to school that day so that they could stay home and play, or if other drivers would simply disregard traffic laws because they didn’t “feel” like observing them.

Life is choices. By the choices we make, our true priorities are revealed.

- Fr. Gregory



WHICH AM I?

Submitted by: Matushka Alexandra Safchuk

The scripture readings of Holy Week are quite familiar to us. Some of them have become the basis for films and books and songs. And yet hearing these readings year after year we can become numb to them, detached from their meaning for our life, and most especially for our inner life.

One such reading concerns two criminals/thieves who were hung alongside Christ. It is in the writing of St. Luke, the physician, that we find the most detailed account of this encounter with the two who were crucified with Christ.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into[a] your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (23:39-43)

Excruciatingly beautiful, hauntingly luminous, *The Wise Thief* is the Exapostilarion of the Matins of Holy Friday and recounts this event. Sung between the Gospels on Thursday evening (Holy Week challenges both our concept of time and our comfort zone), this hymn is so popular that in some places people call ahead to find out what time it will be sung (Answer: during the service).

The Wise Thief didst Thou make worthy of Paradise, in a single moment, O Lord. By the wood of thy Cross illumine me as well, and save me.

This thief, himself struggling for breath and dying on a cross, offers us all a chance and a choice. We too hang on the cross of our lives, making our way toward a certain death. No matter how small or large our cross it, it is ours. Uniquely and carefully fashioned for us. And on it we struggle.

And it may seem as if the Wise Thief lucked out. After a life of crime he recognizes the Rabbi who healed the sick and asks for remembrance at the last minute. What a deal. To be able to sin, sin, sin and then "make the switch." Or not. The Wise Thief is more than just a cunning criminal, hedging his bets for the afterlife. He sees his sin and recognizes the innocence of Christ.

The Wise Thief is truly wise. He is able to see beyond the here and now. He is looking toward the Kingdom. But in order to be at that place, to be able to seek the Kingdom, he had to be willing to be available to God. And so we can ask ourselves: Which of these two do I emulate? Am I looking for God to "make it all better," take me down from the Cross so that I can continue the life I have always known? Am I asking God to work for me? Or, no matter what has come before, am I seeking the Kingdom, in whatever broken and wounded way that I can? Am I open to God, wanting Him to act in my life and trusting that although things may be difficult and dark, He is my refuge? That is not the wisdom of this world, it is not the conventional path of safety and security, but it is wisdom indeed.

A Blessed Pascha. Our choir will brilliantly sing *The Wise Thief* on Thursday evening, April 9th, during the service. Come and hear.

Something new for this and upcoming Evangelizers - a section for parishioners to share their stories about their journey to God or their journey to Orthodoxy (if converts). Here is the first of such stories!

MY JOURNEY TO GOD... MY JOURNEY TO ORTHODOXY

Submitted by: Matushka Gemma Phelps

I was born in Quezon City (Metro Manila), Philippines and raised Roman Catholic. About 90% of Filipinos are Christian. About 80% are Roman Catholic and 10% belong to various Protestant denominations. Orthodox Christians are an extremely small minority. In fact, there are only 560 of them today.

My parents had 11 children. I was the 8th. My family was what you would call good Catholics. We were all baptized Roman Catholic, attended catechisms, and had our first communions and confirmations in the Catholic Church. When I was very young, we used to go to our community Church called St. Joseph's together as a family and we used to have family prayers every night. But one day we just stopped going to church as a family and we stopped praying together. I didn't ask any questions. I was actually secretly happy because I found church to be very boring. It was very difficult to keep still, pretend I was paying attention and know what was going on. However, even after our tradition of going to church together and family prayers stopped, my parents never ceased to remind us of God and of Heaven and Hell and wanted us to continue going to church on our own. We were also reminded every year during Holy Week of God's love for us and how He sent His own Son to die for our sins. In the Philippines, Holy Week is observed by pretty much the entire country. Most businesses including the Philippine government are closed from Maundy (Holy) Thursday through Easter Sunday. Regular TV programming stops for an entire week! TV stations only show movies and programs about Jesus. Kids were not allowed to be boisterous and play hard. We were not supposed to laugh and be joyful. Nobody went shopping for pleasure. We did not indulge in delicious food. Many neighborhoods within a 1-mile radius organized chanting marathons. These marathons might start as early as Holy Monday and end on the morning of Good Friday. People in groups took turns reading about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The chanting was done with a microphone so everyone in the neighborhood could hear even while inside their homes. Some communities went even beyond that by reenacting Christ's passion.

When I reached adolescence, life became very complicated and lonely. I hardly saw my older siblings anymore. The oldest ones were already working and had moved out. The remaining older ones were busy with college, friends, and other activities. I missed them and was jealous that they got to escape home for long periods of time. My father was an alcoholic you see. When he was sober he was the best father ever, but when he was not, it was as if we didn't have a father, which was the majority of the time. My parents fought a lot as a result, which made it very hard on all of us. To get away from this, I thought about running away, but I had nowhere to go. I was too shy to ask to live with relatives and I wasn't brave enough to take my chances out there in the unknown. I also contemplated ending my life by taking some expired pills I found in the medicine cabinet, but the Biblical Hell is not where I wanted to be either. So I decided to stay and endure it all. During these hard times, I started reading the Bible and took comfort from it. At the same time, I trembled as I read through the parables and saw my own sinfulness. Contrary to what some people think, I was no angel. As a teenager, I didn't get into real trouble like sex, drugs, or alcohol, but my parents were called to the principal's office often enough to qualify me as a troubled teenager.

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MY JOURNEY TO GOD... MY JOURNEY TO ORTHODOXY

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Soon after the final exams of my senior year in High School, my parents were called to the principal's office one last time. This time they were told I wasn't going to graduate because I missed the final exams and didn't turn in projects. My parents of course did not know all this. My mother begged the principal to give me another chance, and another chance I got. I took the tests right there and then and received a final grade of 75%, which was only one point shy from failing. My parents weren't very happy of course. Forget about Dentistry. Forget about universities. I'd be very lucky if we could even find an accredited college that would accept me. When everyone else already knew which universities/colleges they'd be attending, I was just making my first trip to apply. We went to a business college not too far from where we lived called NCBA. My mother thought I should perhaps study accounting. I didn't protest. She was an Accountant and I just wanted to go to college. NCBA was happy to accept me because of my pretty good NCEE (equivalent of SAT) test score so they didn't care much about my grades. My mother believed God had something to do with it. I agreed.

It was when I was at NCBA that I got closer to God. I was introduced to the words 'Evangelical' and 'Non-denominational' through the campus crusade ministry that was active in the school. I was told many things that were wrong about my faith and I believed every single one of them. They baptized me with the Holy Spirit and I became 'Born Again'. I then stopped going to the Catholic Church completely. I upset many elders in our neighborhood Catholic prayer group because I basically told them, including a visiting Seminarian, that they were all dummies (looking back later I felt very stupid for the way I behaved and wished I had an opportunity to apologize to them). I started visiting different non-denominational churches with my childhood best friend. After about a year of being evangelical, I felt stressed. In spite of all the good feelings, there were some crucial things about it that bothered me. For one thing, there was a very strong emphasis on and pressure to achieve the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of speaking in tongues. It seemed like almost everyone in the congregation spoke some form of tongue twisting language. Every time they would start the ritual, I always felt that I wasn't growing and that something was terribly wrong with me since I didn't have the gift. God must not like me. Shortly thereafter, I don't remember exactly how it happened, but I found myself back at St. Joseph's. This time though, I didn't go to church because somebody asked me or told me to, but I went because I wanted to. I started paying close attention to every component of the mass. I responded, I prayed, I sang, I took communion, and even listened to the sermons. Even though I still believed what the Evangelicals had told me about the Catholic Church, it was actually when I went back to the Catholic Church that I began to grow spiritually. But I asked myself, what am I? Am I Catholic or Evangelical?

In the early 80s my grandfather (my father's father) who lived in America, was getting really old and sickly. My father is the oldest of his seven children and was the only one that was not in the United States. Lolo (grandfather) wanted to see my father before he died. So my father left for the US and lived with my oldest sister Grace who was working for World Bank in DC. While he was in the US, he missed his family terribly. He sent us many long letters lovingly written asking for forgiveness. He stopped drinking and wanted us to join him in the US. My mother thought it was the right thing to do, so she agreed. So a document that had been kept in a safe place since it was given to him by the US government was dug out. The document stated that he could become a US citizen for fighting with the US against the Japanese.

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You see, my father bravely fought the Japanese as a guerilla from behind enemy lines throughout their occupation of the Philippines when he was just a teenager. The problem was that when he took this document to the US Immigration Office he was told he should have used it right after the war and that basically the document was not good anymore. With some legal help, the US Immigration Office gave him another chance. If he could give them more proof that he really fought against the Japanese, they would grant him citizenship. That meant scouring the world for old guerilla comrades who fought with him that might still be alive and could write testimonies that he was who he claimed to be. So many things happened along the way, difficulties encountered, and many, many prayers said, but in less than two years he was granted US citizenship. My parents felt very strongly that God made it all possible.

My youngest sister Joy and I were the first ones to come to the US through his petition. We arrived in DC on June 25, 1985. My mother and my two younger brothers came soon thereafter and so on and so forth until everyone except two of my siblings and their families emigrated. They finally joined us about 10 years ago. We were all so pumped up by God's grace and the great blessings He had given us. We were once again one family, reunited with my father and oldest siblings living under one roof (at least for the first few years), going to church and praying together. More importantly, my Father remained sober. In spite of this, there was a feeling inside of me that I should be somewhere else as far as church goes. I was in limbo and remained in limbo until February 14, 1993.

David asked me to visit a church for the very first time that day. It was a quaint, historic Episcopal Church in Alexandria, VA. David was raised in the Episcopal Church. We had been dating for quite some time, but had never attended church together. At that time, he was not a regular church goer. Since we started dating, I prayed for him. God worked His wonders in His own time. I went to an Episcopal (Anglican) High School in the Philippines but other than that I knew nothing about the faith. Nevertheless, it was a Christian church and I was just ecstatic that David was going to church with me! After the service David surprised me yet again by asking me to marry him. As you can see I said yes, and we haven't stopped going to church ever since. We were married 5 months later. It was wonderful to be going to church together and united in our faith. God truly works in mysterious ways!

We became very active in a small Episcopal Church in the district. We loved the liturgy in Elizabethan English and the hymns. David was asked to be the delegate of our church to the annual Diocesan Assembly. In this assembly, David found out some significant aspects of the Episcopal Church that he didn't know about. We quickly realized this is not the faith we were envisioning for our family.

It was through David's readings about the Church history that he learned about Orthodoxy. Neither of us had ever attended an Orthodox Church. So he started looking for one in the phone book (yes Andrea and children of the internet age, we used the phone book back then). We found one close to where we lived – St. Mary's in Falls Church, VA. The first time I went I was not happy. I thought it was just like the Catholic Church. But David decided very early on that this is where he wanted to be, so I gave it a chance. Though we share some of the fundamental doctrines, it didn't take me very long to realize that Orthodoxy is in fact not like the Catholic Church in many ways. The Orthodox Church does everything so beautifully! No shortcuts, no major compromises. For the first time I felt at home spiritually!

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MY JOURNEY TO GOD... MY JOURNEY TO ORTHODOXY

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It was only my second visit to St. Mary's when the choir director Marie Ficken (memory eternal) invited me to sing with them. I was nervous but quickly got the hang of it. Then I was hooked. I sang every Sunday and I believe this helped me appreciate the Liturgy faster than I otherwise would have. I love to sing and God knew exactly how to get my attention.

Last Christmas marked my and David's 19th year as Orthodox Christians. I feel very blessed and privileged (though I don't deserve it) to be among this minority. I must admit though that there are still some things about Orthodox practices that I have not reconciled to. The biggest thing for me is the calendar differences. I also have not caught up with some traditions that are specific to the Eastern Church. But there is much more I love about Orthodoxy than what I do not, and these are more important. I love the beauty of everything we do in the Liturgy: the worship, the prayers, the music, the chanting, the candles, and the incense. I love the mysticism, the sacraments, the clear disciplines, the icons of the saints all around us, and more. I made a few stops along the way but I am home now. I can't imagine going anywhere else where I could be closer to God than the Orthodox Church.



Photo of me and my sister Joy taken on our first year in the US with our uncle Tom (memory eternal).

He was married to one of my aunts (my father's sister) and played a big role in helping my father get his US citizenship.

CHILDREN'S TOY MAKEOVER

Submitted by: Anelia Rotunda

Greetings in Christ during this Lenten season, brothers and sisters in Christ!

As Christian parents, we want to bring our children to Christ. We bring them to be baptized. They are present with us at the Divine Services (no small task for small people, just ask any parent of young children). They receive communion regularly. They attend Sunday School after Divine Liturgy. We teach them Holy Scripture. We do our best to explain to them the Liturgical calendar and the major feasts of the Church. More than anything, we want them to know and love the Divine Trinity, the Church as a living body of Christ, and to live a life pleasing to God.

But as we leave the spiritual realm of God's house and part with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ every Sunday, we get in our cars and drive home and our children are back playing with plastic toys and things mass produced in a far away land--artificial and unrealistic looking dolls, intimidating looking action figures--things which the big name toy manufacturers try to convince us stimulate their imagination and enhance their development. We have plenty of those in our house, I admit. Here is my question, though: What do these toys do to stimulate our children's faith??? How do they help our kids nourish and nurture the little mustard seed which, by God's grace, we as their parents want to see grow and mature into a tree with roots running deeply grounded in Christ? Where would they turn when they face the cold reality of a fallen world, a world that would break their hearts over and over again, would pull them in directions often leading away from the path God has planned for them, and would try to convince them they need to become better, thinner, blonder, younger (or in my daughter's case older), richer, taller, and in possession of every imaginable gadget there is in order to find happiness? Would fit and muscular Superman fly to their rescue? Would tiny-wasted, long-legged Barbie give them that much-needed makeover when they are faced with their brokenness? Oh, good old Barbie, we have plenty of her in our house and I am constantly struggling with my daughter's desire to be emerged in her world.

Makeovers...don't we all want a makeover (some of us secretly, others not quite so). Makeovers are not all necessarily bad. To have a makeover implies we have to be willing to be made all over again... to scratch the old and build from it something new. First, we were made in God's own image and likeness by the hands of the author of all things living. He breathed life into us and made us His own living legacies bearing His trademark, set us apart from all the rest of His creation, and intended us to live in union with Him. He loves us so much so that He gave us, among many gifts, the gift of free will. We all know what happened as a result of this very same gift. Yet God the Father continued to love mankind. In fact, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16. And there, on a cross at Calvary, over two millennia ago, is where the most major and incomprehensible makeover in the history of the world happened--we were all made new by the precious blood of God's own son. Hopefully our hearts are undergoing daily makeovers with every breath that we take. We are in constant need to be washed... to be made new. Through the sacrament of baptism we find new life in Christ. We die to the world and are born in Christ. We are reborn. We are cleansed by the power of living water. Our makeover is completed by the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which we receive during Chrismation. We are strengthened by receiving the Eucharist. We are reminded of our fragile and fallen nature when we seek God's divine forgiveness in the sacrament of confession. We are granted forgiveness. We are redeemed. We are restored in communion with Him. We are not forsaken. We are paid for. All because of Calvary.

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CHILDREN'S TOY MAKEOVER

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So who do I want giving my kids a makeover??? Pickings are slim at the countless aisles overflowing with every toy imaginable at toy stores. But as I enter the doors of our beautiful church, I am reminded of the countless examples of role models I would love for my children to have--the great cloud of witnesses, the Saints of the Church. Saints are an amazing part of our faith; they show us what it means to live your life for Christ no matter who you are, what time in history it is, or where in the world you live. They come from all ages, from all races, from both genders and all walks in life. Some were martyrs for the Faith. Others were apostles, teachers, monastics, missionaries. Yet others were married men and women. There are even whole families of saints, such as St. Sophia and her three young daughters, Faith, Hope, and Charity. There are living saints today who are choosing to lose their life for the sake of Christ. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Matthew 16:25. They are blessed for others insulting and persecuting them and saying all kinds of evil against them falsely for His name sake. They rejoice now for great is their reward in Heaven. All of these people had different circumstances and different crosses to bear. What set them apart (the root of the word "saint" means to "set apart") was their faithfulness to the one who said: "Take Up Your Cross and follow Me."



I also love icons. We, as Orthodox Christians, believe icons are windows into the Kingdom of Heaven. I happened to come across the beautiful religious art of a talented Romanian artist by the name of Iosif Ioan Chezan. With his permission, I converted his beautiful icons into soft dolls for my children by printing the images on fabric and sewing soft tangible dolls. My heart was praying while my fingers were sewing. And as we read Bible Stories, prayed, and learned about the saints of our Church, I found that these dolls were a wonderful way to introduce children to the fascinating and inspiring world of those who lived before us and became martyrs for Christ. The truth is, I'd much rather have a Saint be my child's role model than a plastic Barbie doll or a Terminator. We do not worship Saints; we simply venerate them and ask them to pray for us! We treat these dolls a bit differently than the rest of toys in the house--you won't find them on the floor being stepped on, after all they bear images which we believe to be windows into Heaven. They are meant to be a tangible reminder of something quite intangible.



Here are two that I have made for my children so far: the very first one I made is of the Mother of God, the most blessed and glorious beyond compare Theotokos, holding Christ as a child. The second one is of Archangel Michael. The back is lined with white cotton fabric accented with various gold cross designs--a visual reminder that we each bear a different cross and no two crosses are the same. I plan on making more of these for my children. I would love for them to know and love the Saints of the Church and to strive to imitate them. I pray my efforts bring glory to God through these little dolls. May we all, young and old, illumine Christ's light into the world, much like the Saints did and still do! May we all strive to be renewed, strengthened and made-over, over and over and over again. May we all be His Living Saints Here on Earth! Glory be to God!



I AM YOUR GOD

Submitted by: Vera Bumbak

I am your God – and I stand close by you – Is not this enough?
What more do you desire on earth than My Love of which My Heart is full?

I am your God and I remain faithful to you even when I send you sorrows.
Remember only that I am with you – what more do you desire?

I am your God and I arrange all for your happiness.
If you do not understand now, one day you shall see clearly.

I am your God and I truly love you.
I know all that grieves you, I see every glance, I hear every word that pains you.
Accept all with tranquility and peace because I Myself have allowed and ordered all.
You be faithful to Me and persevere and I shall reward you for all.

I am your God – are you alone?
I shall be your friend.
No one speaks kindly to you? Come close to Me and I shall be your all in the Blessed Sacrament.
I shall be to you a compensation for all that the world denies you.

I am your God – what more do you desire?
Be of good cheer – may nothing seem too hard for you because he who possesses My Heart and My Love has all that he needs.
The world passes away – time is fleeting – men forsake each other–
Death shall carry off everything from you–
One thing alone shall always remain to you – Your God.



FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT, A POEM

Submitted by: Patricia Rodak



The tears I shed cannot contain the sorrow that I feel,
On picturing Jesus crucified, making His last appeal.
To God to turn His wrath from us for we are sorry fools,
Who cannot fathom what we've done in breaking all His rules.

The jeers, mockings, tauntings,
Are to Him our last good-byes.
The royal robe and crown of thorns,
Just leave me asking "Why?"

I dare not look to see His wounded body, swollen face,
His battered flesh, His heaving chest, marks of bloody disgrace,
That we inflicted on Our Lord, Who came to bring us healing,
Forgiveness, deliverance, mercy pure,
This scene just leaves me reeling!

His mother, crumpled at His feet, sobbing in disbelief,
The darkened sky and heaving earth all sharing in Her grief!

What sin accomplished on that day could lead one to despair,
Paralyzing from what was done, our senses to impair!

Yet God had one great final act to vanquish Evil's spell,
No human mind could dare conceive of Christ's trip down to Hell,
To lead all captives from its gloom to see with us His empty Tomb!
That great third day! Such awesome glory!
The suffering Christ's Resurrection story!

Love could not stay within that grave!
We see Death overcome,
The gates of Heaven opening wide,
To welcome God's own Son!!

And as He promised a place to ready,
For us to join Him there,
I'll follow Christ with thanks to God,
To know a love so rare!!

So now as Easter flowers bloom,
"Christ is Risen!" becomes our shout,
Our hearts rejoice,
For now we know,
What Easter's all about!!

PILGRIMAGE TO VENERATE THE MIRACULOUS MYRRH-STREAMING KARDIOTISSA ICON

Submitted by: Joan Mitchum & Marcella Hydock

On March 14, several women from St. Mark traveled to St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church in Hunt Valley, MD to venerate the Miraculous Myrrh-streaming Kardiotissa Icon, from Saint George Orthodox Church in Taylor, PA. About 12 priests were present for the annual retreat held by the clergy from the greater Baltimore area, including our own Fr. Mark Koczak. The Very Reverend Mark Leasure is the guardian of the icon. This is a beautiful icon of the Theotokos, the Tender Heart, that started streaming myrrh over 3 years ago on the feast day of the Protection of the Theotokos (old calendar). More than 400 people attended the retreat.

The icon is a copy, made by a nun at the Holy Protection of the Theotokos Monastery in White Haven, PA. At one time about 28 nuns from that monastery came to St. George to venerate the icon. While they were praying, myrrh appeared on the glass, and a copy of the image. That had never happened before or since.



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Fr. Mark Leasure told us of miraculous healings that have occurred when people have been anointed with the myrrh from this icon. One was an old man dying from a congenital heart ailment in NJ. His daughter's sister-in-law prayed before the icon in PA that this old man would have a peaceful death. His daughter passed his room that night and saw a light in the darkened room and the beautiful smell of roses. He did not die that night. He visited his doctor the following day; his heart condition had vanished. A woman facing a double mastectomy from stage 4 breast cancer was healed after being anointed with the myrrh. Again her doctors at Sloan Kettering had no explanation why her cancer was gone.

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Bishop Gregory of Nyssa, the head of the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Archdiocese under whom St. George Church lies, worked for more than 20 years in the field of Cardiovascular Research at Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte, NC. He has authored or co-authored more than 100 articles, abstracts and book chapters. When he first saw the icon, Fr. Mark shared how the bishop sat in front of the icon for an hour just looking at it. After an hour, he began crying and reflected, "My scientific mind cannot grasp how this is happening. How an icon painted on wood can exude myrrh. Yet my mind of faith gives glory to God for this miracle."

Each Wednesday there is a service at St. George Church with many people attending. At one of these services a scruffy man, dressed in red shorts and a cutoff t-shirt came up after the service to venerate the icon. After he stood there for a long time, he started crying. He later told Fr. Mark that his whole life he has been filled with hate. After gazing at the Theotokos in the icon, his hate disappeared.

Probably the most moving testament was a letter Fr. Mark read. It was from a teenage girl that had encountered the icon at a summer camp. She had been a very unhappy girl, cutting herself and attempting suicide. Her life changed after encountering the Theotokos.

We were again filled with awe that we have a God Who does wonders!

LENTEN COOKIE RECIPES

Submitted by: Sharon Spaulding

Ok, I confess, I have a *MAJOR* sweet-tooth! I admit it! I try very hard to manage it, but sometimes a girl's gotta have a donut, or cake, or ice cream. Great Lent be a struggle for me in that department since all of my favorite sweet things contain dairy in some form or another. So, after some Internet research (Yay Google!) here are a couple of cookie recipes that I found and love to make during Lent. Of course, one of the goals during the Lenten season is not to over-indulge; I think these offer just enough sweet to curb the craving and are neatly packaged in small cookie portions. The nature of both of these doughs don't really lend themselves to making big giant cookies. (MMM...giant cookies!) Also, to help keep myself from eating the whole batch, I freeze them. They freeze beautifully and not having them out on the counter keeps me from scarfing them all down.

Almond Butter Chocolate Chip Cookies

No-Flour, Dairy-free and Low-Sugar Cookies

Found on www.cleaneatingmag.com (Clean Eating Magazine), By Alison Lewis

Makes: 24 cookies

Hands-on time: 10 minutes

Total time: 22 minutes

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup unsalted almond butter, stirred well
- 3/4 cup Sucanat (can substitute sweetener of choice)
- 1/4 cup coconut oil
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1/4 tsp sea salt
- 3 oz dark chocolate (70% cocoa or greater), broken into small pieces



Photo Courtesy of: Michael Mahovlich

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, stir together first 5 ingredients until blended. Stir in chocolate.
2. Drop dough by rounded tablespoonfuls onto parchment-lined baking sheets. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes or until lightly browned. Let cool on baking sheets for 5 minutes. Remove to a wire rack and let cool for 15 more minutes.

Nutrients per cookie: Calories: 110, Total Fat: 8 g, Sat. Fat: 1.5 g, Carbs: 10 g, Fiber: 1 g, Sugars: 7 g, Protein: 2 g, Sodium: 55 mg, Cholesterol: 10 mg

NOTE- Keep in mind not to use milk chocolate, which contains dairy. Usually you can substitute the sugar 1 to 1 if using something like honey or agave. If you are using a sugar substitute, check the package for the ratio. I think it's different for each one. If you are abstaining from chocolate, an alternative recipe follows .

(Continued on next page)

LENTEN COOKIE RECIPES

(Continued from Previous)

I think my favorite part of this recipe is the freshly grated ginger. It gives these cookies a really great flavor! You may want to double the recipe (I do) as it only makes a half dozen. Enjoy, my friends!

Gluten Free Gingerbread Cookies

Sugar-Free, Gluten-Free and Vegan!

Found on www.theroastedroot.net (*The Roasted Root*), By Julia Mueller

Makes: 6 cookies

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes

Total time: 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS:

- 1-1/4 cup tightly packed blanched almond flour
- ½ tsp baking powder
- ¼ tsp baking soda
- 1-1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp ground nutmeg
- ¼ tsp ground cloves
- 1 Tbsp fresh ginger, peeled and grated
- 3 Tbsp unsulphured molasses
- 3 Tbsp coconut oil, melted and cooled*



Photo Courtesy Of: Julia Mueller

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Add the first seven ingredients (dry) to a bowl and mix together.
3. Pour in the molasses and oil and mix well.
4. Use a spoon to scoop out mounds of cookie dough. Form the dough into cookie shapes (they will bake to the same size and shape you form them into) and place them on a baking sheet.
5. Bake for 10 to 14 minutes or until lightly browned around the edges.
6. Allow cookies to cool at least 10 minutes before removing from the cookie sheet and enjoying.

NOTES

If you don't have nutmeg and cloves on hand, you can omit them and use ½ tsp of allspice.

FOCA HAPPENINGS

ANNUAL CHILI COOK-OFF: 01/31/15

Thanks to all who entered their recipe in our chili cook-off ! Congratulations to our 2015 winners!

- 1st Paula Zabela
- 2nd Tina Burpee
- 3rd Cindy Jefferson



COLONIAL DISTRICT BOWLING TOURNAMENT: 02/07/15 — Trenton, N.J.

At the recent FOCA Colonial District Bowling Tournament in Trenton, NJ, our St. Mark Women's Team took 1st place. Team members were: Pat Ihnat, Diana Haverlack, Marcella Hydock, and Barbara Freimann. Barbara also won High Series with a 476 score. Other bowlers from St. Mark in attendance were: John Ihnat, Michael Hydock and George Freimann. Congratulations bowlers!



RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR WITH GOOD FRIENDS AT THE NOVOGODNY BALL

Submitted by: Kim Ahmadi

Last year while I was at the FOCA Bowling Tournament, I mentioned to Barbara Freimann that Mike and I love to dance. Barbara said, “Well, you have to come to the Novogodny Ball.” So, we bought our tickets, made our reservations, and on the weekend of January 17, we took Adrian to the in-laws and headed for Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

It was nice to get away with great friends from St. Mark. Our motley crew included Barbara and George Freimann, Pat and John Ihnat, Karen and Mark Phinney, and Diana Haverlack. It was even nicer to have the whole weekend planned for us so we didn’t have to think about anything. All we had to do was have fun- and we did just that. We arrived Saturday late afternoon and had a nice dinner followed by a game of dominos in the lobby. I was already “an expert” because I learned to play at the bowling tournament. Mike was the newbie, but he was a fast study.



On Sunday morning, we headed off to the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross in Medford, NJ to attend Divine Liturgy. It was cold and sleeting that morning and it took us about 30 to 45 minutes to get to the church, but we arrived on time. When we pulled into the parking lot, there was only one car there. Since I converted about 10 years ago, I’ve learned many things about Orthodoxy, one of which is a lot of us don’t arrive to church on time. When I saw only one car there that morning, I thought to myself, I know we Orthodox show up late, but this is ridiculous. It turned out that the priest lived in Philadelphia, and because of the sleet and ice, he couldn’t cross over the bridge to New Jersey and therefore cancelled Liturgy. So, we made the best of it and went to breakfast (we Orthodox love to eat too). The rest of the day was spent playing dominos and napping before the Ball.

All dressed up and somewhere to go at the Novogodny Ball!

Like Cinderella, we donned our finest garb for the Ball. The women were beautiful, the men, handsome. We had a lovely dinner and wonderful conversation. Then it was time to dance! People of all different ages were there. A lot of traditional Russian folk dances were played, none of which Mike or I knew. George and Barbara paired up with me, and Karen and Mark with Mike to dance the three-person dance called the “Troika”. I wasn’t great at it, but I can say I’m a better dancer than a bowler. Mike and Barbara did a swing dance. At least they tried. They looked sort of strange on the dance floor, like they were out of sync. It wasn’t until they finished that we found out why. Mike said to George, “Barbara likes to lead.” George said, “She does it to me all the time!”

I loved getting dressed up and I loved the dancing. However the best part of the whole weekend was the laughter we shared as we all told stories of past adventures. I would tell you some of the highlights, but what happens in Cherry Hill, NJ stays in Cherry Hill, NJ. If you want to know interesting tidbits about your fellow parishioners, you’ll have to come with us next year. In the meantime, my lips are sealed, right “Carlos?”



At the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross in Medford, NJ, “Cancelled church? What? NOOOOO!!!”

2015 RUMMAGE SALE

Submitted by: Marsha Zellem

This year's rummage sale is on **Saturday, June 13th from 8:00 am – 2:00 pm**. The rummage sale generally earns \$3,000 to \$5,000 each year towards the general fund and has low overhead, with its only cost being advertising in local papers. The fundraiser is a great way for St. Mark to outreach to the community, build camaraderie between parishioners, and provides us with the opportunity to clean house while helping others at the same time! Donated items are also tax-deductible. The rummage sale provides the community with the opportunity to purchase quality clothing and household goods at a reasonable price. No usable donations are thrown away. So, where do "leftovers" go?

1. Books are donated to "Books for International Goodwill". Some books are sold locally, but most are sent overseas.
2. Clothing is picked up by a parishioner from Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Bethesda. This local church provides lunch to 30-50 people every Sunday. During this time, the attendees can go to the clothing room to select items they need. Our Lady of Lourdes provides job training and business clothes for interviews (as well as daily wear) as part of their "Dress for Success" program.
3. Furniture and Household goods gets shipped to Wider Circle in Silver Spring. This organization gives low income families and the homeless the opportunity to move out of shelters and into furnished subsidized housing.
4. Specific Clothing and Household Good items are sent to Interfaith in Rockville. Recipients are low income families that have been deemed "needy" by the Social Service in Montgomery County.
5. "Boutique" items are taken to a thrift store in Northern Virginia. St. Mark earns 50% of the sales.
6. Remainder of donated items are picked up by the Catholic Monastery in Manassas, Virginia. These items are taken to Appalachia and distributed to the needy by the nuns of the monastery.

PLEASE PLAN ON HELPING AT THIS YEAR'S RUMMAGE SALE!

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CALL OR EMAIL OUR RUMMAGE SALE CHAIRPERSON, MARSHA ZELLEM.

The main problem with the rummage sale is that we **DO NOT GET ENOUGH VOLUNTEERS BEFORE THE SALE**. We need volunteers to help at all times throughout the sale, with tasks including:

Before the sale:

- Pricing and sorting donations.
- Putting road signs on local roads (the day before sale).
- Purchasing helium balloons and attaching to road signs near church to catch customers attention (morning of sale).

During the sale:

- Selling and bagging purchased items.

After the sale:

- Removing road signs.
- Packing-up remaining items.



(Continued on next page)

2015 RUMMAGE SALE

(Continued from Previous)

You may begin bringing in your items NO EARLIER THAN May 10th (after church school's last class.) Put all items in the double classroom near the parking lot door. (Please do not block the doorway.) It would be appreciated if you would box/bag similar items together to aid in the sorting process (e.g. all toys in one bag, house wares in one bag, gardening tools in one bag, etc.).

A GOOD RULE OF THUMB to ask yourself when considering whether an item is acceptable for our rummage sale is, "Would I buy this in the condition it's in?" If the answer is "YES!" then it's something someone else will buy as well, and we'll accept it for the Rummage Sale. And remember – You can deduct the current market value of the used, donated items on your income tax return!

REMEMBER- PLEASE DO NOT BRING ANY ITEMS THE DAY OF THE SALE. WE DO NOT HAVE TIME TO SORT AND PRICE THEM WHILE THE SALE IS GOING ON.

GUIDELINES FOR DONATIONS TO THE RUMMAGE SALE:

1. Items must be **clean and free of dirt and grime**. If you've had something stored in your cellar, attic or garage, please clean it off and air it out before donating it.
2. All electrical appliances should be in **working condition**. Please do not bring items that are broken and will not work when plugged in. If you have the operating instructions or user manual for the appliance, including it is a nice touch.
3. Clothing and shoes should be marked with the size if the size designation is missing. Please make sure clothing is **clean and has no stains**.
4. Belts, handbags, jewelry and scarves are acceptable. It would be helpful to attach earrings to an index card so they are not separated.
5. All types of cookware, glassware, dishes and ceramics are acceptable if they are **not cracked or broken**. All items must be in **usable condition**.
6. Games should include all the pieces necessary to play the game properly. Boxes can be taped to keep the pieces inside.
7. Toys should be clean and not broken or rusted.
8. Tupperware or Rubbermaid containers **with lids** are acceptable, but please do not donate margarine containers.
9. Furniture of all kinds is acceptable.
10. Area rugs should be rolled and tied with rope. Please attach a label stating the size of the rug and the material (wool, silk, cotton) if known.
11. Sheets, towels and cloth napkins should not be stained, ripped, or frayed. Tie sheet sets together with ribbon or string or put in a clear plastic bag. Attach label with contents (size of sheets, etc.) Package sets of towels/washcloths and napkins together as well.
12. Books, both paperback and hardback, are good sellers.
13. Holiday decorations acceptable.

2015 BAZAAR—SAVE THE DATE!

Submitted by: Tina Burpee



2015 ST. MARK FOOD FESTIVAL AND BAZAAR **NOVEMBER 6, 7, 8**

We need everyone's help to make our annual bazaar successful. Sign-up sheets to work at the bazaar will be put up around Labor Day. Please watch for them and the food preparation workshop schedule.

Also, a piroghi and blini luncheon will be held on Sunday, May 3 after Liturgy. The proceeds from this free-will offering luncheon will be used towards ingredient purchases for our 2015 bazaar. We hope to see you there!

Bazaar Committee: Tina Burpee, Coy Williamson, Jerry Marti

Bazaar Coordinator: Tina Burpee

Department Chairs:

Bakery: Martha Baxtresser and Ginny Albert

Desserts: Nancy Stanton

Candy: Tammy Jacobsen

Beverages: Justin Barber

Grand Raffle: Shirley and Paul Dean

Small Raffle: Paula Zabela and Vicky Jacobsen

Vendors: Tina Burpee

Food Preparation Chairs:

Piroghi: Daniela Mihailov and Helen Kerch

Halupki: Christine Cacic

Beef Stroganoff: Coy Williamson and Mary Ann & Doug Fitzgerald

Blini: Susie Needham and Sharon Spaulding

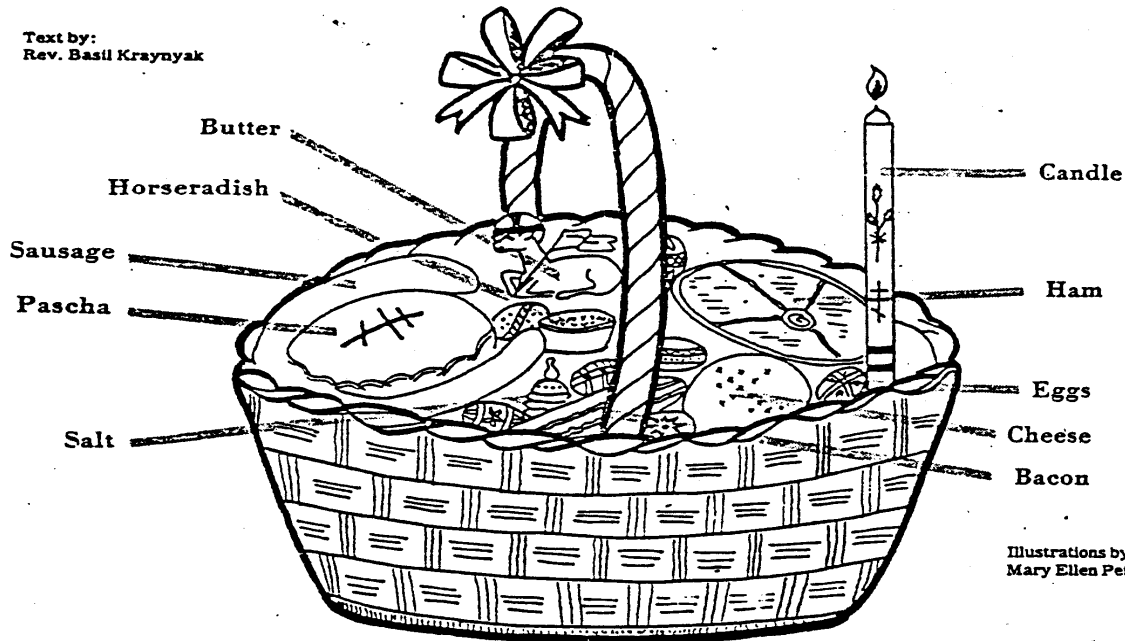
Piroshki: Matushka Sasha Safchuk and Martha Vance

Chicken Kiev: John & Pat Ihnat and Ann and Matthew Prentice

Spanakopita: Marsha Zelle

HOW TO PREPARE A TRADITIONAL SLAVIC EASTER BASKET

Text by:
Rev. Basil Kraynyak



Illustrations by:
Mary Ellen Petro

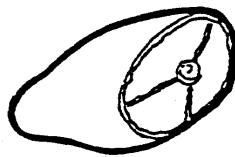


PASCHA - The Easter Bread (pron. pá-ska.) A sweet, yeast bread rich in eggs, butter, etc. Symbolic of Christ Himself who is our True Bread. Usually a round loaf baked with a golden crust decorated with a symbol indicative of Christ. Sometimes a cross (+) of dough is placed on top encircled by a plait giving it a crowned effect or Greek abbreviations for the name of Christ. The letters XB indicate the Slavonic for Christ is Risen.

CHEESE (Slav. Hrudka or Sirets pron. hrood-ka or sí-rets) A custard-type cheese shaped into a ball having a rather bland but sweet taste indicative of the moderation that Christians should have in all things. Also, creamed cheese is placed in a small dish and both are decorated with symbols (see Pascha) out of cloves or pepper balls.



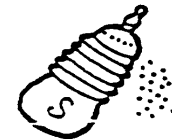
HAM (Slav. Šunka - pron. shoon-ka.) The flesh meat popular with the Slavs as the main dish because of its richness and symbolic of the great joy and abundance of Easter. Some may prefer Lamb or Veal. This is usually well roasted or cooked as well as other meats so that the festivity of the day will not be burdened with preparation and all may enjoy the Feast.



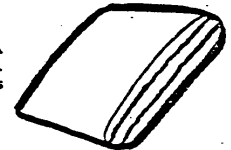
BUTTER (Slav. Maslo pron. má-slo) This favorite dairy product is shaped into a figure of a Lamb or small cross and decorated as the cheese. This reminds us of the goodness of Christ that we should have toward all things.



SAUSAGE (SLAV. Kolbasi - pron. kol-bú-si) A spicy, garlicky sausage of pork products, indicative of God's favor and generosity.



BACON (Slav. Slanina pron. sla-ńi-na) A piece of uncooked bacon cured with spices. Symbolic of the overabundance of God's mercy to us.



EGGS (Slav. Pisanici pron. pi-sún-ki) Hard-boiled eggs brightly decorated with symbols and markings made with beeswax. Indicative of new life and resurrection.



SALT (Slav. Sol' pron. sol') A condiment necessary for flavor reminding the Christian of his duty to others.



HORSERADISH (Slav. Chrin pron. khrin) Horseradish mixed with grated red beets. Symbolic of the Passion of Christ still in our minds but sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection. A bitter-sweet red colored mixture reminds us of the sufferings of Christ.

These articles are placed in a wicker basket and a ribbon or bow is tied to the handle. A decorated candle is placed in the basket and is lit at the time of blessing. A linen cover usually embroidered with a picture of the Risen Christ or symbol with the words "Christ is Risen" is placed over the food when brought to the Church.

In some places a large Easter Bread (Pascha) is made and brought separately in a large linen cloth. If the origin of the people was from a wine growing area, a sweet wine may be brought.



ST. MARK ANNUAL PASCHA BAKE SALE will take place following Liturgy on *Palm Sunday, April 5th*.

Paschal breads, nutrolls, butter lambs, and kielbasa will be for sale.

UPCOMING EVENTS



BLESSED MAT. OLGA OF ALASKA WOMEN'S PRAYER GROUP

The Blessed Matushka Olga of Alaska Prayer Group meets regularly on the 1st Tuesday of the month at 10:30 AM in the church nave for intercessory prayer. In addition, the group meets regularly to pray varying Akathists on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 10:30 AM in the church nave.

Please join us as you can and please remember us in your prayers. All prayer requests may be given to Debbi Dillon, Mat. Alexandra or Marcella Hydock. Also, there is a prayer request email address on the St. Mark website. We hope you can join us on:

Intercessory Prayer Dates & Times:

- **TUESDAY, APRIL 7TH**, 10:30 AM
- **TUESDAY, MAY 5TH**, 10:30 AM
- **TUESDAY, JUNE 2ND**, 10:30 AM

Akathist Dates & Times:

- **TUESDAY, APRIL 21ST**, 10:30 AM- Glory to God For All Things
- **TUESDAY, MAY 19TH**, 10:30 AM- Akathist of our Sweetest Lord Jesus Christ
- **TUESDAY, JUNE 16TH**, 10:30 AM- Akathist of our Mother of God Nurturer of Children

STEPPING STONES MEAL DELIVERY

Please sign up for monthly food preparation and delivery to Stepping Stones shelter in Rockville, MD. The sign-up sheets are on the Outreach bulletin board outside the fellowship hall. Delivery dates are as follows, with deliveries taking place after Liturgy:

- **SUNDAY, APRIL 5TH** - Meat Loaf
- **SUNDAY, MAY 3RD** - Roast Chicken
- **SUNDAY, MAY 31ST** - Pork BBQ

WOMENS BOOK GROUP

St. Mark Women's Book Group meets on the last Sunday of each month in the parish library after Liturgy. Meeting dates and books to discuss are listed below:

- **SUNDAY, APRIL 26TH**:
 - *"The Mirrored World: A Novel"* by Debra Dean. A novel about the life of St. Xenia.
 - Debra Dean, the author plans to join us by FaceTime for a discussion of the book during our time together on April 26th.
- **SUNDAY, MAY 31ST**:
 - *"No Biking in the House without a Helmet"* by Melissa Fay Greene.
- **SUNDAY, JUNE 28TH**:
 - *"The Peach Keeper: A Novel"* by Sarah Addison Allen.



LEAN PLATE CLUB

The Lean Plate Club meets the 3rd Sunday of each month following Liturgy in the parish library. Future meeting dates are below.

- **SUNDAY, APRIL 18TH**
- **SUNDAY, MAY 16TH**
- **SUNDAY, JUNE 20TH**

CHURCH SCHOOL

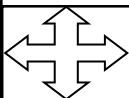
- **APRIL 4TH** – First Confessions, 2 PM
- **APRIL 4TH** – Pascha Workshop, 3 PM
- **APRIL 19TH** – Church School Easter Egg Hunt, following church school
- **MAY 10TH** – Last Day of Church School
- **JUNE 7TH** – Church School Picnic, following Liturgy

UPDATER

NEW ADDRESSES

Rosty & Julia Shiller (and family)
79 Franklin St., Annapolis, MD 21401.

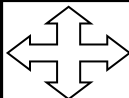
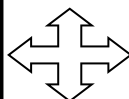
Anna Groner
Autumn Assisted Living, 23185 Milestone Way, #211, California, MD 20619.



Births

02/27/15 — Isaiah Gabriel Rodak, son of David and Susan Rodak, first grandchild of Patricia Rodak.

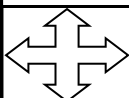
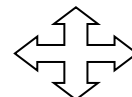
May God Grant Him and His Family Many Years!



Baptisms/Chrismations

02/07/15 — Micah Alexander Needham, son of Mark and Susanna Needham.

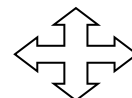
May God Grant Him and His Family Many Years!



Deaths

- 12/28/14 — Mary Calomiris, mother of Jenifer Calomiris
- 02/04/15 — Catherine Vance, mother-in-law of Martha Vance
- 02/12/15 — Joan, Jan Truitt's aunt
- 03/04/15 — Barbara, Paula Zabela's cousin
- 03/05/15 — Baby of Rebecca Cramer, daughter of Jim Orban
- 03/06/15 — Nonnie Moore, Coy Williamson's sister
- 03/09/15 — Margaret Nelson, mother of Shirley Dean
- 03/18/15 — Fr. Thomas Hopko

May Their Memory Be Eternal!



CAN YOU NAME THESE PEOPLE?

Photo From Church Archive: 1986 Bright Monday Procession



ANSWERS TO LAST EVANGELIZER'S CAN YOU NAME THESE PEOPLE?

Photo From Church Archive: 1987 Church School Class



Left to Right:

Christina Funk (Masick), Jennifer Glazer (Marti),
Nicholas Masick, Kathy Rudin (Mytryshyn),
Phillip Hydock, Joanne Yurchak, Christina Berencz
(Barber), Susanna Needham (Barber).