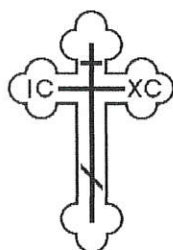


St. Mark Evangelizer

Newsletter for Saint Mark Orthodox Church - 7124 River Road, Bethesda, MD 20817

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January - March 2020 Issue



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

The Voice of Prayer

O most merciful Master, Lord, Jesus Christ our God, through the prayers of our all-pure Lady, Theotokos, and ever-virgin Mary; and of all Thy Saints; make our prayer acceptable; grant us remission of our transgressions; hide us under the shadow of Thy wings; drive far from us every foe and adversary; make our life peaceful, O Lord.

Have mercy upon us and upon Thy world; and save our souls; for as much as Thou art gracious and lovest mankind.

(The final priestly exclamation of the litiya prayers)

“Taken for Granted”

With a relatively full church, I stood vested and ready to serve Christmas eve vigil, wondering how it would sound. I’d woken up that morning with laryngitis which grew worse as the day wore on. With the opening exclamation, my worst fears were confirmed. Weak, erratic guttural sounds punctuated by a few squeaks here and there were made all the worse by the microphone and PA system - a vocal disaster! It was a direct hit on one of the most important feasts of the church year. Faith and experience told me not to panic. After all, I’d lost my voice before, and

God had gotten me through many services in my 35 years of priesthood, so I thought maybe it would improve if I kept at it. It didn’t. With the help of a wonderful choir, readers and a deacon, we reached the litiya. At that point I realized I was probably making everyone really uncomfortable. As matins began, I whispered to the deacon that he would have to do all of my speaking parts in addition to his own. And so we finished - a Christmas indeed to remember!

As I pondered what was happening during the service, I recall reaching into my pocket for a pencil as the deacon chanted the third litiya petition and the line therein: “...that our good God who loves mankind will turn away from us all the wrath stirred up against us, and deliver us...” I underlined “the wrath stirred up against us”. At that point, I thought about the many things that we (and I) often take for granted. The obvious of course, being my voice and with it, the ability to serve. But

I realized that there are also many other more important and profound things as well. Take peace and unity for example.

Having been baptized as an infant and grown up in the Orthodox Church, I’ve heard the scriptures, hymns, prayers and petitions virtually all of my life. Countless times I’ve heard and chanted: “In peace, let us pray to the Lord. For the peace from above... for the peace of the whole world, for the welfare of the holy churches of God, and for the union of all, let us pray to the Lord.” Throughout the ages, there has most certainly been wrath

stirred up against humble believers. I’ve read of it and heard about it happening in the past and in other places around the world. But I and we, for the most part, have enjoyed peace. God has heard our prayers and blessed us,

even as our minds have wandered on auto pilot during our prayers. So obviously important, but so often taken for granted - peace and unity. Our Lord says in the Gospel of St. John: “my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.” (Jn. 14:27) When we think of peace, let us not think of it only the absence of aggression, but the presence of kindness, mercy and joy. We have much to give thanks to God for; not just for the wars that have not touched our lives, but for the Godly peace of Christ’s presence. From the affliction of having lost my voice, I will treasure the voice God has given me and most especially, the Church in which to use it.

With love in Christ, Fr. Gregory



THE AMAZING POWER OF MUSIC (PART ONE)

Submitted by Matuskha Alexandra Safchuk

In the wondrous blending of sounds it is Thy call we hear; in the harmony of many voices, in the sublime beauty of music, in the glory of the works of great composers: Thou leadest us to the threshold of paradise to come, and to the choirs of angels. All true beauty has the power to draw the soul towards Thee, and to make it sing in ecstasy: Alleluia! Kontakion 7, Akathist – Glory to God for All Things.

In this Akathist, made famous by its use during Fr. Gregory Petrov's time in a prison camp, the music of nature, of orchestras and of the angels is referenced. Certainly those who pray this Akathist try to see, as Fr. Petrov did, beyond the restraints of our sometimes bleak and mundane world, our prisons, to a glory that beckons us to the greater Glory.



During the Christmas holiday season I had some glorious musical moments. At the Strathmore, young voices raised in song, created such a hopeful sound. Thank you, Adrian Ahmadi! Attending a performance of Handel's Messiah, where during the Hallelujah chorus, when everyone joins the choir, standing and singing, the crowd veritably trembled with joy. Hundreds of people, singing about Christ! Amazing. In a world where the attempt is to diminish, marginalize and even banish Him, to stand with others, many of whom sang boldly, with arms raised, was a thrill. Thank you, Debbi Dillon! And hearing a quartet of voices, singing familiar Christmas carols in a beautiful setting offered a balm we rarely experience in our secularized world. Thank you, Wayne Tatusko!

Each year I look forward to hearing our own choir sing *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. I do not remember ever hearing this carol, really a hymn, before coming to St. Mark. Where was I? And I can't find a better rendition. Not on YouTube. Not on Spotify. Not on Pandora. No, not a single one. And anyone who stayed until after Vigil on Christmas Eve heard the beautiful *Carol of the Bells* and later Christina Berencz sang *O Holy Night*. As she sang, conversations stopped and we turned to soak in the magnificent sound. It's at the very end of the Vigil on our Facebook page. Check it out. Thank you, St. Mark Choir and Christina!

I am not a singer. Yes, I squeak along when there is a need, but I fear that the neighborhood dogs will howl as I sing. I love to listen. Listening to "pleasing" music and even playing an instrument, singing, whistling and humming have been shown to reduce stress hormone levels. And we could all use that. It's good for the heart; it's good for the body and we Orthodox Christians know that it is good for the soul.

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THE AMAZING POWER OF MUSIC (PART ONE)

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Our music conveys mood. It can be sorrowful or joyful. It can make you cry or want to stamp your feet. Author Georgia Cates wrote that, “music is what feelings sound like.” Even in English, not the most melodious of languages, some of the hymnography of the Church is breathtaking. And when a practiced choir sings it, such as ours here at St. Mark, it is sublime. Take it in. Breathe it. Let it roll over you.

We will soon leave the Nativity hymns and begin the movement toward Lent and Pascha. Our music helps to take us there. It gives us the stories of the faithful and the unfaithful and offers us a hand in our own walk. It guides us through remembrance, repentance and rejuvenation and brings us to the Resurrection. Be there for it.

In Christ,

Mka. Alexandra Safchuk



BAPTIZING CULTURES

Photos Courtesy of Victor Lutes

Saturday, November 16th, 2019

The Orthodox Church in America's Archdiocese of Washington D.C. hosted Fr. Michael Oleska over the weekend of November 16th. Fr. Michael spoke all day Saturday on Baptizing Cultures. On Friday night, Fr. Michael spoke to our teens highlighting stories from the Alaskan people. Thank you Fr. Michael for coming to visit! All the talks he gave on Saturday at St. Mark are posted on our Facebook page and on YouTube. Youtube link: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLd2g5WJjrnjKrMB9JDfZsH2RF4oRPeLed>



A WAY OF LIFE

Anonymously Submitted

Alexander Schmemmann, in one of his writings, makes mention of how we need to prepare ourselves for participation in the Divine Liturgy. He makes mention of how the preparation needs to begin well before we walk through the doors of the church. That, in of itself, is no small task.

That puts me in mind of a group of folks who I met starting my first day at St Mark a few years back beginning on the Feast of the Dormition. Those folks demonstrated a sincerity and obvious devout demeanor that impressed me then and continues to impress me to this very day.

The one core value those folks share is that they are very focused in their participation in Orthodoxy. Obviously they will have times of struggle as all of us do but it is evident to those of us observing them in their actions they are providing examples to be followed. If you asked them they would deny it but if you observe how they treat others you will see they are very focused on why we are coming to St Mark and participating in the services.



We can learn from their example. For those of us who struggle to get to church early; for those of us who have to put aside anger and anxiety when we walk through the doors of the church; for those of us who struggle with frustrations related to work or simply traffic driving to church...we can learn from the example set by the good people among us.

Acknowledge to yourself when you are coming to church you are coming with all of your burdens. Do not pretend you are not frustrated; you are not angry; you are not worried. You come to church just as you are.

Come into the church of St Mark, the representation of the earthy Kingdom of God, without reservation, without qualification. And, then, take time to light a candle in the narthex. In doing so you can take a moment to remind yourself of why you are there.

The purpose of lighting a candle goes back millenia. For each of us it may have a different meaning or memory associated with it. No matter. For whatever the light of that candle means for you focus on it and let it ease your heart into a spirit of humility; a spirit of welcome. We are called to be the Light of the World.

We are all capable of doing that. As it is said, Orthodoxy is not a religion, it is a way of life.

NATIVITY

Submitted by Anelia Rotunda

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I greet you with love in our Newborn King! I pray you all had a spiritually fruitful Nativity Season. Ours, much like our human hearts, was quite fractured despite our good intentions. Oh, we had good intentions all right and yet somehow we often fell short in our efforts, we failed at fasting and almsgiving, found ourselves in the midst of illness and the hurried life of ballet rehearsals and recitals, school choir performances, Christmas parties and the daily demands of raising children. There were even a couple of days when the sun set on the Rotunda house and found us with hardened hearts, short tempered and not at all Christ-like.



As you can gather by now, we are not quite the poster family for how things ought to get done during the Nativity Lenten Season. I comfort myself with the thought that God does not expect perfection from us. We would be in deep trouble if that was the case. The law is no longer a curse to us because of grace. As I often tell my children, though, God does require obedience from us and asks us to simply do our best out of love for Him while leaning not on our own strength but His. Glory to God for that!

Yet somehow God was able to redeem the entire Nativity Season for us on Sunday night two weeks from Christmas when we sat together around the Christmas tree and instead of doing our daily Advent reading and discussion, we each took a pencil and a notepad and in complete silence wrote letters to Christ. It was on that night that we, a foolish version of the wise men, journeyed following the Bethlehem star and found our way to a humble manger with nothing but sincere gratitude and desire to worship Christ. All we had to offer was our fragmented hearts and our love for the King of Kings. We travelled back to the cold December night when Heaven bent down to enter earth in the most humble yet glorious ways, the very night the Creator clothed Himself with human flesh and joined humanity to bridge the gap between God and man, a gap so vast, a gap which nothing else could bridge. There was no longer a great divide. Emmanuel was with us. A humble young girl, who had nothing else but unsurmountable faith and a sincere desire to obey God, gave birth to hope. The world has never been the same. It never will be. All because of the events that followed in human history (which really is His Story) as a result of what occurred on that cold December night on the outskirts of Bethlehem.

We sat together quietly by our icon corner, in our little church, for what seemed like a long time. We sat in the stillness of the night and wrote. We poured our hearts out to Him, who created us. The creation conversed with

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NATIVITY

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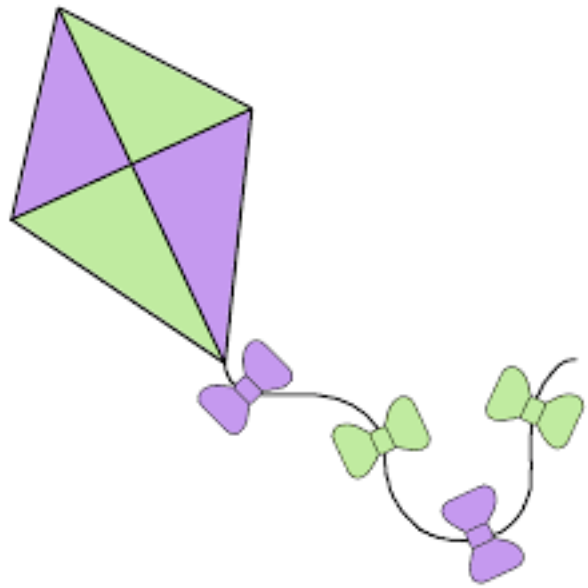
the Creator. After everyone had finished their letter to Christ, we took turns and read them out loud. There was not much we could offer other than pure gratitude and awe. What does one give to a King anyways, and not only that but the King of Kings? All we had to lay down before the infant Christ was our human hearts, cracked and bruised, yet healed, mended and redeemed by His very own presence. Awe... No words... Just tears... and gratitude for what we were given on that cold night in Bethlehem and still receive daily in our lives—grace, forgiveness, redemption, hope, salvation, healing, wholeness, mercy... All undeserved... All freely given to us by the Father. All because of Christ!!!

Below is a poem Ivana wrote that night. She has given me permission to share it. My letter to Christ is also included below as well.

Dear Jesus,

*Thank you for answers that I receive.
Thank you for bees that hum in the trees.
Thank you for a colorful world
And delicious treats to eat.
Thank you for exciting moments
And for a family to sit with.
Thank you for the ground to play on
And tender hugs to say "I love you."
Thank you for ice cream and jars full of jam.
Thank you for kites that fly
And love that never says "goodbye."
Thank you for those lush green mountains
And never ending fountain of life.
Thank you for delicious octopus
And suspicious porcupines.
Thank you for our Queen
Who brought Jesus to us.
Thank you for the Revelation
That reveals the future to us.
Thank you for the sky so high
And for turtles down below.
Thank you for unicorns,
For imagination to think with.
Thank you for valleys so beautiful,
For walruses, xylophones Yoyo's and zebras!*

*Thank you for everything!
Ivana*



(Continued on next page.)

NATIVITY

Continued from Previous

Dear Jesus,

Thank you that You came... Thank You that You are about to come again... We prepare room to receive You in our hearts tonight. You are welcome in our midst... There is room for You here...

I am thankful for Your life here on earth, for the ways You taught us about our Heavenly Father, for Your obedient and spotless life, for the vast love the Father and You have for mankind, that same love which found a way to redeem and restore man back to God, to save us from ourselves, to bring salvation to a world hopelessly lost in complete darkness caused by our very own sins.

I am thankful for the Most Pure and Blessed Mother of our Lord and for Joseph. I am thankful for all the righteous and faithful people who lived and allowed themselves to be used for the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth, that great cloud of witnesses, the Saints. I am thankful for the light of Christ, which still extinguishes the darkness in my own heart. I am thankful for the grace God the Father extends to me every day, for His tender mercies and His faithful provisions in my life. I am thankful even for the times God has disciplined me in my own life, because I know He disciplines those He loves. I am thankful for my scars because they remind me of the places I have been, the pain I have endured and the Healer who has made me whole. These very scars are my own testimony of my personal history with God. I am thankful that I am adopted into the family of God, that He relentlessly pursued me and opened my eyes to see and recognize Him and proclaim Him as Lord over my life. I am thankful for God's forgiveness and His desire for us to have life and have it abundantly.

I am thankful for the blessings I have received in my life, which I can trace to the Father's hand... I am thankful for the Church, the Body of Christ, for my spiritual teachers, for all my brothers and sisters in Christ. I am thankful for my parents and for my family, for my husband and my children (the ones here and the one in Heaven), for a warm home, for the sound of fire cracking in the fireplace, for all my provisions.

I am thankful for that cold December night in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago when the story of redemption first begun. Glory to You, oh Lord! Glory to the Newborn King!

Amen

“The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Psalm 51:17





Help IOCC Rebuild in TX & FL

Want to help your neighbors get back on their feet? In the wake of a disaster, families often need help rebuilding and repairing their homes. Volunteer for a week to help individuals and families move toward long-term recovery.

REQUIREMENTS & COST

- You don't need to be skilled —just energetic!
- You must be 18 years old or older, but 16- and 17-year-olds may volunteer if accompanied by a parent or guardian.
- Provide your own transportation to/from the Homebuild Team location.
- \$100 covers all your costs on the ground (room/board & local transportation)

DATES & LOCALES

- Daytona Beach, FL – January 6-11, 2020
- Key West, FL – March 9-14, 2020
- Key West, FL – March 16-21, 2020
- Houston, TX – June 15-20, 2020
- Houston, TX – June 22-27, 2020
- Houston, TX – August 15-20, 2020

Go to **iocc.org/homebuild** for current build openings

For more information, contact Krista Hamann: 612-389-7278
volunteercoordinator@iocc.org



INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

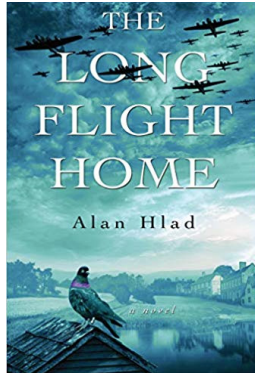


UPCOMING EVENTS

WOMEN'S BOOK CLUB MEETINGS

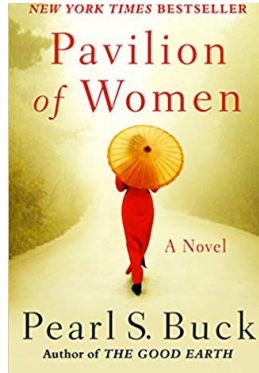
The women's book club meets on the fourth Sunday of the month, following Liturgy, in the Library for discussion. Here are the upcoming books and dates:

January 26th



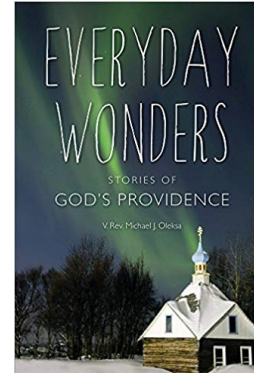
The Long Flight Home
Alan Hlad

February 23rd



Pavilion of Women
Pearl S. Buck

March 22nd



Everyday Wonders
Fr. Michael Oleksa

SHADY GROVE PREGNANCY CENTER BANQUET

This year's fundraiser banquet will be held on Sunday, October 20th at the Rockville Hilton Hotel. We'd like to have our usual table of at least ten people from St. Mark. Please let Marcella Hydock know if you will attend. Thank you!

GROCERY CARDS

Please consider donating grocery cards for the needy all, and especially, through-out Lent! Please see Father Gregory or John Bilyeu for questions or donations. Thank you!!

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.

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 Debby 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, JAN 7th, 10:30 AM
- TUESDAY, FEB 4th, 10:30 AM
- TUESDAY, MAR 3rd, 10:30 AM

Akathist Dates & Times:

- TUESDAY, JAN 21st, 10:30 AM
- TUESDAY, FEB 18th, 10:30 AM
- TUESDAY, MAR 17th, 10:30 AM

UPDATER

New Address

Evelyn Leleck
3701 International Drive #404
Silver Spring, MD 20906
Phone: 301-598-3697

Births

10/18/19- Leni Ann, 8th grandchild of Larisa Looby



Memory Eternal!

Deaths

9/27/19- Margaret Ashley (Mother of Carol Mary Ashely)
11/10/19 - Daniel Lungociu
11/29/19 - Donald, Uncle of Sharon Carter
12/19/19 - Nicholas Antich



May Their Memory Be Eternal!

Happy Birthday!

January

1 Jim Orban
 2 Stacy Pedersen
 4 Samuel Kumar
 5 Michael Albert
 Anna Meyendorff
 7 John Bainbridge
 Lisa Cannon
 Ted Koopersmith
 Pamela McHugh
 8 Alexander Masick
 9 Susan Petro
 Debbie Sieff
 11 Debbi Dillon
 Anelia Rotunda
 13 Elspeth Berry
 Susan Orban
 14 Joan Mitchum
 15 Nicholas Bilyeu
 Michael Bezuneh
 16 Justin Ciubotaru
 17 Hannah Perry
 Janice Victorov
 18 Katheryn Cannon
 John C. Petro
 19 Tom Cipu
 Leroy Gumpert
 22 Slavina Skenderska
 23 Eugenia Jankovic
 24 Peter Dillon
 Anthony Sekellick
 25 Rose Zabela
 26 Matthew Nimmer
 Ivana Rotunda
 27 Michael Berencz
 James Lacko
 28 Kaitlin Barber
 Nicholas Herrera
 29 Jurreta Heckscher
 Marilyn Macht
 Michelle Corbin
 31 Rodica Cipu

February

1 William Koopersmith
 2 Olga Skenderska
 Andrew Wickard
 5 Gabriel Baleanu
 Victoria Olynik
 Fr. Gregory Safchuk
 6 Anna Catherine Mersereau
 7 Abigail Datch
 8 Juliana Moser
 11 Marge German
 Stefan Gleason
 Tom Jenkins
 Tamara Karas
 Anna Kronick
 14 Luke Matthew Tatusko
 17 Nicholas Lapato
 Clark Little
 Chloe Nimmer
 18 Peter McHugh
 19 Nina Borissow
 Mary Ann Fitzgerald
 Donna Glenn
 21 Roberta (Mitchum) McCunney
 22 Nancy Stanton
 24 Caleb German
 Michael McCunney
 25 John Bilyeu
 Stacy Nimmer
 Tabitha Voth
 27 Isaiah Rodak
 28 Marjorie Sielinski

March

3 Mat. Tamara Cowan
 4 Gwyneth Berry
 Samantha Sokich
 6 Doug Dillon
 Ryan Jefferson
 7 Eileen Holovac
 10 Debra Yakubik
 11 Cormac Allen
 Jerry Lutes
 Kyra Smerkanich
 12 Arianna Cacic
 Aaron Prose
 13 Nadia Burns
 Catherine Mikuluk
 14 Beth Tucker
 15 David Hardy
 Sean McHugh
 16 Patricia Ihnat
 17 Matthew Looby
 19 Catherine Corbin
 20 Vera Bumbak
 Kieran Perdue
 25 Michael Mihailov
 26 Kellie Holovac
 27 Alice Krenitsky
 Theo Sheppard
 29 Susan Sielinski
 30 Michael Ahmadi
 31 David Rodak
 Rachel Sieff
 Zachary Sieff

Happy
 Birthday

