

THE MESSENGER

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF
ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE ORTHODOX CHURCH
DECEMBER 2015



CHRIST IS BORN!! GLORIFY HIM!!

The Nativity of our Lord • December 25

MARK THE DATES

November 24-December 2: Father John out of town

December 5: Christmas Cookie Walk, 9:00 AM-1:00 PM; Choir Rehearsal, 3:00 PM

December 6: **St. Nicholas of Myra**

December 12: Russian Confessions and Liturgy, 9:00 AM; Choir Rehearsal, 3:00 PM

December 13: **Annual Parish Meeting; St. Herman of Alaska**

December 15: Parish Council Meeting, 6:00 PM

December 17: Fellowship Committee Meeting, 7:00 PM (AT DRESKOS)

December 24: **Vesperal Liturgy, 9:00 AM; Nativity Vigil, 6:30 PM**

December 25: **Divine Liturgy, 9:00 AM; THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD**

January 1: **Divine Liturgy, 9:00 AM; The Circumcision of our Lord**

Send email addresses and corrections to: fatherjohn@lasvegasorthodox.com

DECEMBER 2015

ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE ORTHODOX CHURCH • LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

<p>GREETERS</p> <p>DEC 6: WHEELER/CAMPBELL DEC 13: MCAULEY/OSBURN DEC 20: CAMPBELL/MASON DEC 27: MURPHY/CHONG</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>5</p> <p>CHRISTMAS COOKIE WALK, 10:00 AM-1:00 PM</p> <p>CHOIR REHEARSAL, 3:00 PM VESPERS/LITIYA, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>	
<p>6</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: J. HUFFMAN EPISTLE: STRANSKY POST-COMM: WHEELER CHURCH SCHOOL ST. NICHOLAS</p>	<p>7</p>	<p>8</p>	<p>9</p> <p>DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM ADULT CLASS</p>	<p>10</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>11</p> <p>LV CLERGY ASSOCIATION MTG, 10:30 AM</p>	<p>12</p> <p>RUSSIAN CONFESSIONS 9:00 AM SLAVONIC LITURGY, 10 AM</p> <p>CHOIR REHEARSAL, 3:00 PM VESPERS/LITIYA, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>
<p>13</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: DEMKO EPISTLE: HOOD POST-COMM: E. HUFFMAN ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA ANNUAL MEETING</p>	<p>14</p>	<p>15</p> <p>PARISH COUNCIL, 6:00 PM</p>	<p>16</p> <p>DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM ADULT CLASS</p>	<p>17</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p> <p>FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE MTG, 7:00 PM; DRESKO'S</p>	<p>18</p>	<p>19</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>
<p>20</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: ABRAHAM EPISTLE: WHEELER POST-COMM: PARKER CHURCH SCHOOL</p>	<p>21</p>	<p>22</p>	<p>23</p> <p>BAPTISM, 10:00 PM</p>	<p>24</p> <p>STRICT FAST</p> <p>VESPERAL LITURGY, 9:00 AM EVE OF THE NATIVITY</p> <p>VIGIL OF THE NATIVITY, 6:30 PM</p>	<p>25</p> <p>FAST FREE</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM NATIVITY OF OUR LORD</p>	<p>26</p> <p>FAST FREE</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>
<p>27</p> <p>FAST FREE</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: HOOD EPISTLE: BROOKS POST-COMM: TESFAY NO CHURCH SCHOOL</p>	<p>28</p> <p>FAST FREE</p>	<p>29</p> <p>FAST FREE</p>	<p>30</p> <p>FAST FREE</p>	<p>31</p> <p>FAST FREE</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM NO COFFEE CHAT</p>	<p>JAN 1</p> <p>FAST FREE</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM CIRCUMCISION OF THE LORD</p>	



The Messenger

St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

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Las Vegas, Nevada 89112-0635

702.898.4800 • www.lasvegasorthodox.com

DECEMBER 2015 • CHRIST IS BORN!

ON THE NATIVITY

*St. John Chrysostom
Archbishop of Constantinople*

I behold a new and wondrous mystery! My ears resound to the Shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn.

The Angels sing! The Archangels blend their voices in harmony! The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise!

The Seraphim exalt His glory! All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised.

Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolds within itself on every side the Sun of Justice.

And ask not how: for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed, he had the power, He descended, He redeemed; all things move in obedience to God.

This day He Who Is, is Born;

and He Who Is becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is His. Nor yet by any loss of divinity became He man, nor through increase became he God from man; but being the Word He became flesh, His nature, because of impassibility, remaining unchanged.

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him Angels, nor Archangels, nor Thrones, nor Dominations, nor Powers, nor Principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Yet He has not forsaken His angels, nor left them deprived of His care, nor because of His Incarnation has he departed from the Godhead.

And behold, Kings have come, that they might adore the heavenly King of glory; Soldiers, that they might serve the Leader of the Hosts of Heaven;

Women, that they might adore Him Who was born of a

woman so that He might change the pains of child-birth into joy;

Virgins, to the Son of the Virgin, beholding with joy, that He Who is the Giver of milk, Who has decreed that the fountains of the breast pour forth in ready streams, receives from a Virgin Mother the food of infancy;

Infants, that they may adore Him Who became a little child, so that out of the mouth of infants and sucklings, He might perfect praise; Children, to the Child Who raised up martyrs through the rage of Herod;

Men, to Him Who became man, that He might heal the miseries of His servants; Shepherds, to the Good Shepherd Who has laid down His life for His sheep;

Priests, to Him Who has become a High Priest according to the order of Melchisedech; Servants, to Him Who took upon Himself the form of a servant that He might bless our servitude with the reward of freedom;

Fishermen, to Him Who from amongst fishermen chose catchers of men; Publicans, to

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PARISH COUNCIL

Virginia Hood, Vice-President
Karen Short, Treasurer
Catherine Wilkalis, Secretary
Gregory Brooks
James Brophy
Kevin McAuley
Karen Murphy
Litsa Osburn
Joseph Wheeler

SUB-COMMITTEES

Building & Grounds
Kevin McAuley
Eritrean & Ethiopian Outreach
Genet Bokre
Russian Outreach
Natalia Minkoff
Church School/Youth
Dn. Stephen Osburn, Jr.
Amy McAuley
Stephan Tanksley
Fellowship Committee

Him Who from amongst them named a chosen Evangelist; Sinful women, to Him Who exposed His feet to the tears of the repentant;

And that I may embrace them all together, all sinners have come, that they may look upon the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world. Since therefore all rejoice, I too desire to rejoice. I too wish to share the choral dance, to celebrate the festival.

But I take my part, not plucking the harp, not shaking the Thyrsonian staff, not with the music of pipes, nor holding a torch, but holding in my arms the cradle of Christ. For this is all my hope, this my life, this my salvation, this my pipe, my harp. And bearing it I come, and having from its power received the gift of speech, I too, with the angels, sing: Glory to God in the Highest; and with the shepherds: and on earth peace to men of good will!

May the new-born Lord shine brightly in the heart of each and every one of you, my beloved flock!

Father John

FEASTDAYS

During December, we celebrate the following feasts:

ST. NICHOLAS OF MYRA IN LYCIA
THE WONDERWORKER
December 6 (Sunday)

ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA
(FR. ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN)
December 13 (Sunday)

EVE OF THE NATIVITY
December 24
VESPERS/LITURGY, 9:30 AM
NATIVITY VIGIL, 6:30 PM (THUR)

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

December 25

DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (FRI)

ANNUAL MEETING

Our annual parish meeting will take place following liturgy on Sunday, December 13. Information packets including the proposed 2016 Operating Budget have been emailed and hard copies are available in the vestibule. In addition to the regular agenda, we will be discussing projected capital projects that we included in our bond project.

All voting members of the parish are asked to make every effort to be present for the meeting. A voting member is:

- 1) at least 18 years of age;**
- 2) has been a member of the parish for at least the past twelve months;**
- 3) has been to the Sacraments of Confession and Communion in our parish regularly but at least once in the past twelve months, and;**
- 4) has a signed pledge form on file with the parish office.**

TRAVELS

Father John will be returning from his Thanksgiving holiday on December 2. Please contact Deacon Stephen with any pastoral emergency.

COOKIE WALK

Our annual Christmas Cookie Walk will be held on Saturday, December 5, from 10:00 AM-1:00 PM. Bakers are still welcome — see Tanya Riley to volunteer. And all are encouraged to come and shop for Christmas goodies! Bring friends!

NATIVITY FAST/FEAST

The annual Nativity Fast continues until Christmas, December 25. **Regular communicants should make an effort to come to the Sacrament of Confession before Christmas.**

Then, we are **fast-free** from the until the Eve of Theophany (Jan 5), which is strict-fast.

PLEDGE FORMS

The 2016 Pledge Form has been emailed along with the Proposed 2016 Operating Budget. Please prayerfully fill out your form and return it to Father or Karen Short no later than December 13. Please consider volunteering your time for one of the duties available in addition to your financial pledge.

HOUSE BLESSINGS

A sign-up will be available in the vestibule for those who would like Father John to come and bless the house. Sign your name and phone number and check the preferred time of day. If you have a special request (would like to serve dinner, etc.), please note that. Father will then contact you about the date and time.

SLAVONIC SERVICE

Father Alexander will be here for the regular services on December 12th. Russian language confessions begin at 9:00 AM, followed by liturgy at 10:00 AM.

PROJECT MEXICO

St Paul's has teamed up with Amazon to have a small bit of your purchase go towards our Project Mexico Youth Trip.

A little bit about what we are doing: "Project Mexico & St.

Innocent Orphanage performs works of mercy and helps others do works of mercy in the name of Jesus Christ, transcending cultural barriers by building homes for the poor in Mexico.

Since 1988, Project Mexico has been building safe, secure and weather-tight homes for some of the most impoverished families in Northern Mexico. Every home is constructed over the course of four days and built entirely with volunteer labor. Once complete, these homes are provided so that these families can build a brighter future for themselves and their children."

So before you order anything from Amazon online, type in the link and thank you for your support.

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/88-0242982>

FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

Our Fellowship Committee will meet next on December 17. We will be discussing a new plan for Spring 2016, as we will not be holding the annual Benefit Dinner. If you have ideas, please share them with Father or a committee member.

ADULT FAITH FORUM

Our Wednesday evening Adult Faith Forum sessions continue. We will have Daily Vespers at 6:30 PM, followed by a one hour discussion. This year's topic is *Christ and the Church in the Old Testament*. Please join us!

FEEDING THE HOMELESS

Our next Feeding the Homeless project date is January 16,

2016. If you can donate any of the items needed for the lunches (or funds to provide such), it would be appreciated.

CHARITY

Our normal collections of food for Friends of the Desert continue. Needs: jelly, jam, peanut butter, canned fruit, canned tuna/chicken. Thank you!

ORTHODOX VENDORS

A list of businesses that our parish uses or are owned and operated by Orthodox Christians (some parishioners). We provide this information for you to consider if you need services.

CB Air Conditioning
Cedomir Blagojevic
(702) 493-0295

Dolphin Court Salon & Day Spa
7581 W. Lake Mead Blvd.
(702) 946-6000

Kyklos Café (Greek food)
Galleria Mall
Sophocles Frangakis
(702) 450-1515

Westfield Eye Center
C. Edward Yee, MD
2575 Lindell Road
(702) 362-3937

PRAYER FOR OUR PARISH

We ask everyone to remember our parish in daily prayer:

Lord, God and Savior of all, we thank You for the blessing of St. Paul parish in our lives. May Your word become alive in each and every one of us who strive to follow You. Please bless and multiply all the gifts — time, talent and treasure — which are given in thanks to benefit our mission and glorify Your name. Bless

and multiply the givers and help us all to make present Your Kingdom. For You are the Giver of all that is good, O Christ our God, and to You we give glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

SACRAMENTS/SPECIAL SERVICES

Please follow these guidelines.

• *Baptisms.* A personal meeting scheduled with Fr. John will be necessary to schedule any baptism requested.

• *Matrimony.* A date and time for weddings must be requested at least six months (preferably twelve) in advance. There will be premarital sessions for both bride and groom to attend.

• *Memorials (Panikhida).* Requests for a memorial must be made at least one week in advance. If possible, the service should be served on Saturday. Other requests will be met as pastorally possible.

PARISH COUNCIL SYNOPSIS NOVEMBER 17, 2015 MEETING

Rector's Report: Reminded council of the baptisms to be served on the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos prior to Liturgy and his upcoming travel from November 24-December 2. Father Aurel Sas will serve.

Vice President's Report: Ginny reported: (1) The retreat held on Saturday November 14 was very enjoyable; the speaker was an excellent teacher. Attendance by retreat participants at Vespers afterward was poor.

(2) We need another bookstore person to substitute for Karen Wheeler when she is away. Suggestions welcome.

Treasurer's Report: Karen Short distributed our financials before the meeting:

Capital Fund: \$7,462.09

Rainy Day: \$11,761.64

Icon Fund: \$13,084.70

Income for October was \$20,248.57, with expenses of \$14,638.12 for a surplus of \$5,610.45.

YTD 2015 (Jan-Oct)

2015 Inc \$ 204,065.72

2015 Exp \$ 186,249.58

Inc over Exp \$ 17,816.14

All parish finances including accounts payable are totally current.

Reminded council members that all receipts for 2015 needing to be reconciled or reimbursed must be submitted to Treasurer NLT December 31. This includes petty cash or line item receipts.

Informed council that the mortgage to Bank of Nevada is now paid off. Council agreed to treasurer's discretion to include additional bond payment up to \$1000 above normal amount.

Joe Wheeler reported that the Oktoberfest proceeds were: Receipts \$1631.00; Expenses \$165.39; Net income \$1465.61.

COMMITTEES

Building and Grounds: Kevin reported:

(1) Bell Tower: the metal ladder has been installed. It will be ready for inspection once an enclosing cage has been installed.

(2) Doors: The contractor's

price estimate quote for church doors is behind schedule but we should have it in a few weeks.

(3) Kevin will have the price quote to repaint the church building by parish meeting. He already has the quotes for refurbishing the church roof.

(4) New LED lights and electronic ballasts were installed in the office and library.

(5) LED flood lighting has been installed illuminating the courtyard.

(6) Father John suggested calling Mike Mahoney, the sound tech to evaluate reducing the noise problem in the parish hall.

(7) Fr. John reported the theft of Mike Adam's trailer that was parked inside the fence around the back of the property. Someone cut the chain on the gate. Police report has been filed.

Charity: Next Feeding the Homeless event will be Saturday, January 16, 2016.

IOCC: Joe Wheeler reports:

(1) IOCC rep will visit our parish on December 20. A reception coffee hour after Liturgy is planned.

(2) School bags for Syria need final packing and shipping. Rae will do that this week.

Church School/Youth:

Project Mexico: 14 have signed up. Funds still needed. Amazon smile account and GoFundMe page have been set up. Funding sources were discussed. \$1400 advance has been requested by Dn. Stephen for the deposit.

Youth Service Project: Church school youth will bake cookies for Ronald McDonald

house; 5 kids attend at a time.

Eritrean/Ethiopian: no report.

Fellowship: Fellowship Committee met on November 5th.

Upcoming Scheduled Activities include: (1) Cookie Walk, December 5. Tanya Riley is coordinating.

(2) Spring event. Still need a project. The consensus was not to have any Benefit Dinner this year. Since this has been a major fundraiser, all agreed to hold a special council meeting to brainstorm ideas.

Outreach/website: The front page of the parish website has been renewed regularly.

Russian: Father Alexander will be here in December.

Stewardship: Pledge forms will be distributed and due December 13.

OLD BUSINESS

Iconography: One panel has been received, and one more is on the way. Will plan out the rest of the project to determine costs. The capital funds in bond program may be used for this.

Bond Program: The program is essentially completed. Our only remaining obligation is to make payments on time to the trust company.

NEW BUSINESS

Annual Meeting: December 13. Committees and individuals asked to turn in reports. Detailed list of Capital Project items needed from Buildings and Grounds (Kevin).

Parish Council: Two auditors need to be elected to fill slots. See Parish Council Longevity Chart (attached)

Budget: (Karen Short)
Summarized budget details; (1) Fr. John receives a 2% adjustment in salary; everything else remains the same.

(2) Dn. Stephen receives \$1k/mo. stipend.

(3) The assessment expense will be more in 2016 because it is a percentage of higher income.

(4) Bond payments are the same as the previous mortgage payments.

(5) Line assessment removed (for income); everything else is from stewardship.

(6) Stewardship income figure (\$204,602) is more than last year but reflects what the actual will be for 2015.

(7) Additional funds for flowers not needed except for Christmas and Pascha.

Biggest budget changes are: (1) Deacon's stipend, (2) Percentage assessments to the diocese instead of a flat "head tax", (3) increase in maintenance and security due to necessary improvements/upgrades.

Motion and second to present proposed budget to Annual Parish Meeting. Approved unanimously.

Next Council Meeting:
Tuesday, December 15, 2015.

PARISH DIPTYCHS

This list of parish departed is to remind us all of those whom we love and miss and to spur us to remember them in our daily prayers. They will be remembered in the proskomedia before each liturgy.

MONTH OF DECEMBER

Tiblets Araia
December 12, 2003

Mila Popovich
December 13, 1997

John Kort
December 13, 1998

Olga Neitzke
December 13, 2003

Gennady Skobelev
December 13, 2006

James Makovlev
December 20, 1999

Alexandra Otterness
December 22, 1996

Andrijana Djokic
December 26, 2002

Alexander Sabanov
December 27, 2005

FR. ALEXANDER'S WINTER PASCHA

Father Alexander Schmemmann was the dean of Saint Vladimir's Seminary in Crestwood, New York, and the spiritual father, teacher, pastor, and friend of countless people not only in America but around the world. He died on December 13, 1983, the same day of the year as Saint Herman of Alaska. For those who knew him, and those who will yet come to know him, the day of Father Alexander's death will always be a precious part of the Church's celebration of the Christmas-Epiphany season.

As we have already noted, the expression "Winter Pascha" was coined by Father Alexander. The Church's Typikon speaks of the celebration of the Lord's Coming in the flesh as a "splendid Pascha." It was Father Alexander who added the adjective "winter" for those of us who celebrate it in the darkness of wintertime, when the light is just starting to shine more brightly and the nights begin to shorten, heralding the victory of Light and Life in the springtime Pascha of the Lord's Death and Resurrection.

Father Alexander learned that he had cancer in the fall of 1982. He greeted the disease as the opportunity for Christian witness. As a person who spoke so much about Christ, he said, it

was fitting that he be put to the test to confirm in action, by God's grace and power, all that he had proclaimed in words. The disease was God's gift to him of the possibility to practice what he himself had preached so forcefully and so enthusiastically for so long.

Father Alexander underwent his personal "Winter Pascha" in December of 1983 as he "passed over from death into life," in what Mrs. Schmemmann, in her letter to the seminary community, called the "feast of Father's dying."

Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (Jn 5:24)

On Thursday, December 8, Father Alexander received Holy Communion and was anointed in the sacrament of Holy Unction in his hospital bed in New York City. At the end of the service, when he kissed the Cross of Christ, and the priest and people said, "Amen!" Father Alexander pronounced loudly and clearly: "Amen! Amen! Amen!" This triple amen comes from the celebration of the Holy Eucharist when, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the offered Gifts are changed into the Body and Blood of the Lord.

Again we offer unto Thee this reasonable and bloodless worship, and ask Thee, and pray Thee, and supplicate Thee: Send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts here offered....

And make this Bread the precious Body of Thy Christ. Amen!

And that which is in this Cup, the precious Blood of Thy Christ. Amen!

Making the change by Thy Holy Spirit. Amen! Amen! Amen!
(The Eucharistic Prayer of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom)

Father Alexander received Holy Communion for the last time on Sunday, December 11, the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers. After partaking of the Holy Mysteries, now at home, Father listened to his family and friends sing the prefeast hymns of Christmas which he especially loved. When the praying and singing was over, he said simply, "Thank you."

On Monday morning, December 12, because of a mistake in the official church calendar of the Orthodox Church in America, the liturgy for the feast of St. Herman was celebrated in the seminary chapel. Later that morning Father Alexander was seated in a chair in his room and listened to the hymns and prayers of the Church's office of The Separation of Soul and Body. He was blessed once more with the consecrated Oil used for the mystery of Holy Unction, and lay again on the bed in which he was to die.

It stormed in Crestwood from Sunday to Tuesday, December 13. It was dark. The wind howled. There was thunder and lightning. The sidewalks and roads were flooded. Branches of trees were strewn all over. Father Alexander gave up his spirit to the Lord on Tuesday afternoon, surrounded by family and friends. Metropolitan Theodosius arrived minutes after Father passed on, and a memorial service was sung over his body, which was immediately prepared and vested and taken to the seminary chapel, there to begin the splendid celebration of Father Alexander's "Winter Pascha."

Thousands of people came. More than a hundred priests and bishops assisted. The seminary choir sang, with all of the faithful. Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese and Metropolitan Philip of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, among others, spoke at the services. In response to Metropolitan Theodosius' sermon at the end of the divine liturgy on Friday, December 16, the entire body of the faithful proclaimed: "Amen! Amen! Amen!" Amen to the will of God. And Amen to the life and death of Father Alexander!

The day of Father's funeral was sunny and cloudless. Everyone remarked that it was like Pascha in the spring. And everyone experienced, in hearing Father Alexander's own words which were read at the divine liturgy, what Pascha always means for those who believe.

The purpose of Christianity is not to help people by reconciling them with death, but to reveal the Truth about life and death in order that people may be saved by this Truth....If the purpose of Christianity were to take away from

man the fear of death, to reconcile him with death, there would be no need for Christianity, for other religions have done this, indeed, better than Christianity.

The Church is the entrance into the risen life of Christ; it is communion in life eternal, "joy and peace in the Holy Spirit." And it is the expectation of the "day without evening" of the Kingdom; not of any "other world," but the fulfillment of all things and all life in Christ. In Him death itself has become an act of life, for He has filled it with Himself, with His love and light. In Him, "all things are yours; whether...the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:21-23). And if I make this new life mine, mine this hunger and thirst for the Kingdom, mine this expectation of Christ, mine the certitude that Christ is Life, then my very death will be an act of communion with Life. For neither life nor death can separate us from the love of Christ. I do not know when and how the fulfillment will come. I do not know when all things will be consummated in Christ. I know nothing about the "whens" and "hows." But I know that in Christ this great Passage, the Pascha of the world has begun, that the light of the "world to come" comes to us in the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit, for Christ is risen and Life reigneth.

Finally I know that it is this faith and this certitude that fill with a joyful meaning the words of St Paul which we read each time we celebrate the "passage" of a brother, his falling asleep in Christ:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess 4:16-17).

(Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*)

*Father Thomas Hopko,
The Winter Pascha*