

DECEMBER 2016 • CHRIST IS BORN! An end and a beginning

One of the remarkable gifts that God has given to us, and which is shown to us again and again in the life of the Church is the ability to begin anew. Our Lord (and St. John the Baptist also, for that matter) began His ministry with the words, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Repentance is simply turning around from what is not good and holy and beginning again to be good and holy. Christian life is the constant beginning again of effort, sacrifice, joy, celebration, and giving.

December, with the end of a year, and the New Year (2017!) in particular, has always been a special time to reflect on this gift. Not only does the world mark the end of a year and the start of another, but this time causes us to reflect deeply on endings and beginnings. As we enter into another new year, let’s reflect for a moment on the very first beginning. The 20th century theologian and Father of the Church, Father Georges Florovsky, reminds us of this beginning:



“The world exists. But it began to exist. And that means: the world could have not existed. There is no necessity whatsoever for the existence of the world. Creaturely existence is not self-sufficient and is not independent. Creation by its very existence witnesses to and proclaims its creaturehood, it proclaims that it has been produced. But unexpectedly it is precisely in its creaturehood and createdness that the stability and substantiality of the world is rooted.

“God creates in perfect freedom. This proposition is framed with remarkable precision by the ‘subtle doctor’ of the Western Middle Ages, Duns Scotus: ‘The creation of things executed by God not out of any necessity, whether of essence or of knowledge or of will, but out of a sheer freedom which is not moved – much less constrained – by anything external.’ In creation God is determined only by himself. God creates solely out of his goodness. The idea of the world has its basis not in the essence but in the will of God. The might and freedom of God must be defined not only as the power to create and to produce but also as the absolute freedom not to create. God creates out of the absolute superabundance of his mercy and love.” (as quoted in the Time of the Spirit)

Imagine that – God did not have to create us. He did not have to create the world. He did not have to create the Church. God would have continued to be God without any of us, or the created universe. So then, why should we reflect on this very important, but seemingly very simple reality? And why now?

One of our parish members a while back asked me a simple question during one of our “coffee chats.” The question was, “Why did God create me?” My reply was the very simple and classic Orthodox answer: “God created you for two reasons. First, He created you to praise Him.

DECEMBER 2016

St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church • Las Vegas, Nevada

	<p>GREETERS</p> <p>DEC 4: STAFFORD/OSBURN DEC 11: DEMKO/MURPHY DEC 18: MCAULEY/CHONG DEC 25: CAMPBELL/WHEELER</p>			<p>1</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>
<p>4</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: YOUTH EPISTLE: YOUTH POST-COMM: YOUTH NO CHURCH SCHOOL</p> <p>ANNUAL PARISH MEETING</p>	<p>5</p> <p>DESERT DEANERY MEETING San Diego, CA</p>	<p>6</p> <p>ST. NICHOLAS OF MYRA, THE WONDERWORKER</p>	<p>7</p> <p>DIOCESAN COUNCIL MEETING San Francisco, CA</p> <p>DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM ADULT FAITH FORUM</p>	<p>8</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM NO COFFEE CHAT</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>10</p> <p>RUSSIAN CONFESSIONS, 9 AM SLAVONIC LITURGY, 10 AM</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS CHOIR REHEARSAL</p>
<p>11</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: W. DEMKO EPISTLE: WHEELER POST-COMM: JARLSON CHURCH SCHOOL</p>	<p>12</p>	<p>13</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA †FR. ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN</p>	<p>14</p> <p>FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN, December 14-16</p> <p>DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM ADULT FAITH FORUM</p>	<p>15</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM NO COFFEE CHAT</p>	<p>16</p>	<p>17</p> <p>FEEDING THE HOMELESS 10:30 AM</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>
<p>18</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: BROOKS EPISTLE: BITSKO POST-COMM: W. DEMKO CHURCH SCHOOL CHRISTMAS BAKE SALE</p>	<p>19</p>	<p>20</p> <p>PARISH COUNCIL, 6:00 PM</p>	<p>21</p>	<p>22</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24</p> <p>STRICT FAST</p> <p>EVE OF THE NATIVITY DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM VESPERS OF NATIVITY</p> <p>NATIVITY VIGIL, 6:00 PM NOTE TIME!!</p>
<p>FAST FREE 25</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: H. DEMKO EPISTLE: HUFFMAN POST-COMM: HOOD NO CHURCH SCHOOL NATIVITY OF OUR LORD</p>	<p>FAST FREE 26</p>	<p>FAST FREE 27</p>	<p>FAST FREE 28</p>	<p>FAST FREE 29</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>FAST FREE 30</p>	<p>FAST FREE 31</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>

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Second, God Himself is so full of love that He wanted to share that love with someone other than Himself.” There is no necessity in that answer. God did not need to create any of us. He did so because He wants us to know Him and praise Him as our God and to rejoice in this gift of createdness. And He wants us to know that we exist because He loves us so much that despite our sins, despite our lack of faith, despite our weaknesses demonstrated almost moment by moment, it is still better to share His love with us than not.

In this end of 2016 and the start of 2017, we should be thankful that He created us. We should be thankful that we are created in His image and likeness and should use this new beginning to make a new effort at first restoring that image and likeness by acting in a more God-like manner. But this not just another “resolution.” We each should look at the world around us with new eyes, seeing Him reflected in all that surrounds us, especially in each other. We should be thankful that He has given us the Church – His Body – as a gift that allows us to receive His Grace and forgiveness. And we should be reminded at this new beginning that we are to praise Him.

Which brings us to the reality of one of the greatest gifts that He gives us. For He did not just give us the Church, but He gave us the Church expressed in a local community: St. Paul’s, our – my – parish.

As we reflect on the new year, we should also reflect on renewing our commitment to the Church in the place where God expresses Himself as Church – our parish. What kind of temptations cause distraction and laziness? What makes us less than diligent in living out not only our parish life, but our Christian life? We get weak in church attendance, weak in giving, and weak in prayer and fasting. Our real “New Year’s Resolution” is to turn back from that by remembering the great gift that God has given us by creating us and giving us His Church.

One of the greatest ways that we reflect Him and praise Him is by living not the life of the world with its distractions and seductions, but by living for Someone Else and Something Else.

We sometimes forget that life (existence) itself, and Church life itself, is not only a gift from a God, but a responsibility imposed upon us. You

AT A GLANCE...

Dec 4: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Dec 5-6: DESERT DEANERY MEETING, SAN DIEGO, CA

Dec 7-8: DIOCESAN COUNCIL MEETING, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Dec 10: Russian Confessions, 9:00 AM; Slavonic Liturgy, 10:00 AM

CHOIR REHEARSAL FOLLOWING VESPERS

Dec 13: Divine Liturgy, 8:00 AM, ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA

Dec 14-16: Father John out of town

Dec 17: FEEDING THE HOMELESS, 10:30 AM

Dec 18: Christmas Cookie Sale

Dec 20: Parish Council Meeting, 6:00 PM

Dec 24: EVE OF THE NATIVITY; DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (STRICT FAST)

NATIVITY VIGIL, 6:00 PM (SPECIAL TIME!)

Dec 25: NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Send email addresses and corrections to:
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and I alone are responsible for the way we each live out our life and how we hand it back to Him. No one other than you and I have had the gift of St. Paul's parish placed in our hands. God has placed it there Himself and is watching to see what we do with it.

Do we give to the Church and to our parish the same lack of attentiveness, the same lackadaisical effort and the same laziness that we give to other areas of our lives? If we can feel confident that we can hand our very lives over to Him by our manner of living and repentance, can we feel confident that He will look at our stewardship of this parish and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord.?"

As we celebrate the greatest Gift ever given, the Incarnate Son of God, and enter the "newness" of a fresh year, it would be good for each and every one of us to also reflect on our daily relationship with God and His Church.

Join us in the daily reading of scripture. Join us in daily prayer not only for the world and ourselves, but also for our parish. Join us in fasting and feasting. Join us in offering generously of your time, talent and treasure. **Fill out your pledge card and make a concrete commitment to Christ's Church. Attend our annual meeting and help us guide the future!** Our parish – St. Paul's – has needs for daily existence that can only be met by the ones to whom God has given it. He has given us everything we need to care for Him and His Church. Do we squander it, or worse, steal it, by using it for something other than to praise Him?

This is a good time – perhaps the best and only time – to answer these questions. Is the New Year really a renewal and a new beginning, or more of the same old same old, reflected in

the most awful sense possible by weak and mundane "resolutions" to lose weight, exercise more, etc., etc.?

(Edited and modified from an article I wrote in 2010.)

Father John

FEASTDAYS

During December, we celebrate the following feasts:

ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA (REPOSE OF FR. ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN)

December 13
DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM (TUES)

EVE OF THE NATIVITY

December 24
DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (SAT)
VESPERS OF THE NATIVITY
NATIVITY VIGIL, 6:00 PM

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

December 25
DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (SUNDAY)
NO CHURCH SCHOOL

NATIVITY FAST

The Nativity Fast continues until our celebration of the Liturgy of the Nativity on December 25. This time of preparation is a good counterbalance to the "holiday" temptations that our society throws in our face.

During the Fast, **all regular communicants** need to take the opportunity to come for the Sacrament of Confession as part of the preparation. Confessions are heard after Vespers on Saturdays and by appointment. **Father John does not mind making appointments!**

ANNUAL MEETING

Please note that our annual parish meeting will be held after liturgy on **Sunday, December 4**. All voting members of the parish are asked to

make every effort to be present. Besides the normal business of the parish, we will be voting on a proposed amendment to our Parish By-Laws.

A Voting Member must:

- 1) Be at least 18 years of age.
- 2) Have had Confession and Communion at St. Paul's regularly, but at least once, this past year.
- 3) Have a signed financial pledge form on file with the parish.
- 4) Have been a member of St. Paul's for the previous twelve (12) month period.

PLEDGE FORMS

Our 2017 Proposed Operating Budget (for approval at the annual meeting) and 2017 pledge forms have been distributed via email. Hard copies are available in the vestibule. Please have your pledge forms back to Father John or Karen Short by December 11.

TRAVELS

The Desert Deanery will be having its annual meeting in Poway, CA on December 5. We will stay and celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas with St. Nicholas parish and Bishop Daniel in San Diego. Fathers John and Stephen will be attending.

Father John will be in San Francisco for the meeting of the Bishop's Advisory Council and the Diocesan Council on December 7-8.

Father John will be out of town on personal business December 14-16. During Father's absences, Father Stephen will handle adult class and any pastoral emergency.

MCDONALD HOUSE

Our parish is going to help the Ronald McDonald House with collecting gifts for the children and families that have to be residing here for Christmas. Collection bins are available in the vestibule and church hall. A flyer with a very specific list of **new, unused and**

unwrapped gifts is attached to this newsletter. Please help us make the holidays a little brighter for families that are struggling with serious illness in their children.

SLAVONIC SERVICES

Father Alexander will be here on the customary second Saturday of the month (December 10). Russian language confessions begin at 9:00 AM. Slavonic Liturgy is scheduled for 10:00 AM.

CHOIR REHEARSAL

The last scheduled rehearsal for the choir before Christmas is set for Saturday, December 10 following Vespers. All choir members are asked to make every effort to be present.

FEEDING THE HOMELESS

Our next Feeding the Homeless project will be scheduled on December 17. We will begin to construct the lunches and bag all of the items which we distribute at 10:30 AM. We then take them downtown and distribute them and are usually done by 1:00 PM. Please join us! If you can donate any of the items needed for the lunches (or funds to provide such), it would be appreciated.

CHRISTMAS BAKE SALE

The parish will have a Christmas Bake Sale following liturgy on Sunday, December 18. There will be a special Christmas Basket valued at \$150 raffled off. Tickets available now!

HOUSE BLESSINGS

Although it seems far away, the Feast of Theophany is right around the corner. Following the liturgy of the feast and the Blessing of Lake Mead on January 6, Father John will begin blessing the houses of those who wish to have him come.

A sign-up list will be available

in the vestibule of the church. Please sign up, indicate what time of day is best and any special request. Father John will then contact you about date and time.

PROJECT MEXICO

It's on! We are going to be sending another mission team to Project Mexico next summer to help build a house. We ask everyone for their prayers first of all, and the magnificent financial support shown this past year. We already have our allotment of 20 volunteers filled, with a waiting list of those interested.

FELLOWSHIP DATES!

Mark your calendars and join us for the following fellowship opportunities:

Chili Cookoff: Saturday, January 21, 2017, following Vespers. Cooks, start your stoves!

2nd Annual International Dinner: May 20, 2017.

ADULT FAITH FORUM

Our regular Wednesday evening adult discussion group continues. We begin with Daily Vespers at 6:30 PM, followed by one hour of discussion in the parish hall. This year's topic will be *The Parables of Christ*.

ICONOGRAPHY

The next phase of our iconography project will be to complete the east walls of the church (to the left and right of the sanctuary). Renderings are available in the church hall and you are urged to take a look. This is a MAJOR project which will require substantial funding. The two renderings posted in the hall will cost \$36,000 each, a total of \$72,000. **We are once again accepting donations to the Icon Fund. Please consider making an offering above and beyond your normal sup-**

port of the parish!

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

Makeup and Hair Artist
Natalia Kasimtseva (Baker)
(*I travel to client location*)
Text or call: (702) 336-8300
View portfolio at:
www.facebook.com/NataliaKasBeauty

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 15, 2016 MEETING

Rector's Report: Reported that he will be leaving Monday, 21 Nov for travel; Fr. Stephen will serve for Entrance of Theotokos Liturgy. Both Fr. John and Fr. Stephen will attend annual Desert Deanery meeting in San Diego 5-6 Dec; there will be no St. Nicholas Liturgy at St. Paul's on the 6th due to their absence. Fr. John will also attend Diocesan Council in San Francisco on 7-8 December.

Informed Council his house in Connecticut has finally sold. He and Matushka will take 2 days to travel to CT to sign closing papers.

Associate Priest's Report: no report.

Vice President's Report: Observed that sound panels installed on one wall of parish hall have already achieved some decrease in noise level. Discussed wind problem in courtyard with land-

scaper; he suggested adding a border of fine rock around the wood chips and suggested that this has been effective in other settings having a "wind tunnel" problem. Ginny remarked her classroom has no circulation from the HVAC system. Kevin will check on it.

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

Capital Fund: \$247.42

Rainy Day: \$31,589.92

Icon Fund: \$1,592.10

Income for October was \$30,508.66, with expenses of \$21,792.41 for a surplus of \$8,716.25.

YEAR-TO-DATE

2016 Inc \$ 246,908.35

2016 Exp \$ 207,724.60

Inc over Exp \$ 39,183.75

Oktoberfest grossed \$1,664.00 income minus expenses \$658.36 for a net income of \$1005.64.

All parish finances including accounts payable are totally current.

Karen suggested paying down the GoldStar Trust bonds in the amount of \$40,000 by the end of this year. Concerns revolved around maintaining an adequate financial cushion in case of unexpected expenses. Council members resolved to present this proposal at the Annual Parish Meeting and to recommend paying down the bond by the amount of \$40,000.

COMMITTEES

Buildings and Grounds:

Church and parish hall doors: Doors for parish hall, back door of church will be installed this Saturday. Measurements for double doors of church will be taken. Due to a technicality the door company refused to sign installation paperwork because they consider themselves a supplier rather

than a contractor. GoldStar requires a contractor's signature to release our funds from the sinking fund. Kevin may be able to sign as a contractor since he is doing the installing.

Parking Lot Wall Repairs: Joe Wheeler reported we will receive a check from Geico insurance for the bids we have received and can move forward with repairing the wall. Kevin will schedule.

Sound Panels: Fr John reported there is a little decrease in the parish hall noise level after installation of 20 sound panels on the south wall. For maximum effect, he believes 20 panels on each wall will be needed. Cost will be \$2,100 to panel all the walls.

Courtyard: (see Vice President's report).

Water District Complaint: The Water District finally contacted Father John and determined the source of the complaint was from ground water and not our problem at all.

Sound system in Church: Fr. John reported we have received two new headset microphones for the church sound system. They have improved wiring and sound quality is much better.

Charity: Homeless feeding on October 15th ran into problems due to city dispersing homeless from their usual location. Council members discussed pros and cons of alternative charitable opportunities. For now, our next downtown homeless feeding is planned for December 17th. A suggestion that we could still make lunch bags and hygiene kits to help support the Guardian Foundation work in Bullhead City was favorably received. Fr. John will discuss this with Jeremiah Bezona.

IOCC: IOCC Sunday is November 20th. We will publicize it in the church bulletin and take special collections for the next two weeks for

IOCC.

Church School/Youth: Fr John reports some problems with classroom teacher reliability and attendance. Amy McAuley will try to address this.

Ronald McDonald House Outreach: A team of 10 youth and adults directed by Bea Makunen prepared a delicious Ethiopian dinner acclaimed and savored by all. Future plans include conducting a toy drive for Christmas; collection bins will be placed for age-specific donations. Ronald McDonald House serves children being treated and recovering from illness and their families.

Project Mexico: Fr. Stephen reports next Project Mexico will be 16-22 June 2017. Two slots still open, with current 19 participants. Cost is \$10,200. Deposit of \$1,900 due 31 Dec 2016. First youth-sponsored coffee hour fundraiser planned for Dec 18. Other fundraisers will include Amazon.com and "Go Fund Me", also e-mail and bulletin reminders. Jamie Campbell is working out transportation logistics and van rental.

Eritrean/Ethiopian: Status quo.

Fellowship: Oktoberfest was a fun-filled evening enjoyed by all. The Christmas Bake Sale will be Sunday, 18 December. Sign-up sheets for bakers are available in the parish hall.

Outreach/website: Fr. Stephen is developing a new, updated website including a password protected parish directory and an improved donation link. Council members will be able to preview it on line.

Russian: no report.

Stewardship: Reported stewardship is in good shape. 2015 had 31 pledges representing 42 adults. 2016 has 37 pledges representing 57 adults. Average pledge in 2015 was \$4080; in 2016 is \$4883. We are significantly

higher on pledges than the average Orthodox parish. However, 57 adults out of all those that come to church is not all that great. The others don't have a signed pledge form. 132 families get envelopes but may or may not pledge.

Fr. John emphasized that in order to vote in parish meetings, one must have a signed pledge on file for 2016 or 2017; blank forms will be available in the vestibule prior to Annual Meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

Iconography: Vladimir (Vova) Krassovsky, the iconographer, will correct the icons in the altar before Christmas on his own expense; no charges to the parish. Jamie is taking the measurements needed.

Greeters Training: no report.

Sunshine Group: Ideas for how this group will function are developing. A suggestion was made to have on hand pre-made or frozen meals for sudden or unexpected needs.

NEW BUSINESS

Budget: A meeting was held on 8 Nov 16 at Fr. John's residence to establish the proposed budget for 2017. A balanced 2017 Budget of \$259,754 was presented to the parish council. It was moved and seconded to present the budget for parish approval at the Annual Meeting. Passed unanimously.

Annual Parish Meeting: Will take place on Sunday, December 4 after Liturgy. Jim Brophy and Joe Wheeler have expiring terms and are also eligible for another term. Both have expressed a desire to continue serving. The current slate of parish council members will be presented for election at the annual meeting. Nominations from the floor, of course, are also welcome.

SHRB: A statement from the Orthodox Church in America using language of the US Supreme Court in upholding the right of religious communities to have Sincerely Held Religious Beliefs (SHRB) in deciding how to allow use of facilities will be presented to the parish council for approval at the next meeting.

Next Council Meeting:

Tuesday, December 20, 2016, 6:00 PM

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

Yonas Andebrehan
December 10, 2015

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

FATHER STEPHEN'S CORNER
"NOW COME THE DAYS OF THE KING!
MAY THEY BE BLESSED!"

Anyone who knows me knows that I love Star Wars. I'm super excited for the new Rogue One movie this month, all of the new material that has released over the last couple years, and what is yet to come; but Star Wars isn't my favorite movie/book series. My favorite series is actually the Lord of the Rings and everything from that universe/lore.

Now I bring this up as we draw closer to Nativity/Christmas because there will be a lot of Christmas movies watched this month with our friends and families. Most, if not all, of them will be directed towards the spirit of Christmas: the lights, food, trees, presents, etc... but none of them will really embody what or who the feast is really all about: Jesus Christ and His birth. Some might contain a quip or two directed to Christ, but they won't actually reflect on the nature of the feast. We will not really see any films advertised that show Christ as the sheer, absolute gift of God taking on our human condition for the sake of all of Creation.

However, as I semi-alluded, there is one film this holiday season you should watch if you want an allegory of Nativity feast. The movie is the Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. Aside from the two qualifying elements, being that it was released in December of 2003 and is my favorite movie of all time, it is a story of redemption and renewal of another's life.

The Nativity feast shows us how in

the coming of our salvation, Jesus comes as something small, tender, and vulnerable. He comes as a baby that is hardly noticeable in a weak and hidden place. God, who most would expect to come in a loud and impressive manner, comes as a little Child, who will grow up and carry a Cross for the sins and redemption of mankind, destroying death by His own death on the top of a mountain. He redeems all of Creation by rising above the brokenness of our sin.

Likewise, we see in the character of Frodo a small, but humble, individual who freely takes on the burden as redeemer of Middle Earth. He bravely volunteers to take the Ring of Power to Mount Doom to destroy it. Frodo's walk is a similar walk to Christ's own journey to Golgotha. Now throughout the film/book series, we see the trials and tribulations from Frodo and his temptation of sin with the Ring, something Christ obviously didn't have.

However, it should be noted just how many parallels there are in the final film. Frodo's walk to Mount Doom is a eerily similar walk to Christ's journey to Golgotha. It is painful and hard. He wants to give up but knows he must finish. Further, just like the Cross, the Ring of Power becomes a crushing weight for Frodo which requires his friend Samwise (paralleling Simon of Cyrene) to carry him and the Ring up the mountain in order to destroy it. Similarly when Frodo accomplishes his mission, just like Christ he says "it is finished. It is done."

Of course this is a vague summary and comparison of the movie, but the reason it fits so well as a Christmas movie has to do with the size of the hero in this story.

Like Jesus as a baby in the Nativity

feast, Frodo isn't a large person. In fact, the whole story centers much on that fact that he is but a small hobbit: a half the size of a human. His small stature emphasizes a real sense in the world we live in that it is much larger than we realize. It shows just how much humility, love of neighbor, and jovial joyfulness of Creation is wrapped into a little person who sees only to save it.

Frodo, like Christ, would rather help his friends, through love and free will service than see them destroyed by evil. Like Christ, Frodo willingly sacrifices and gives up everything, including his own life (which he does at the end of the story by traveling to the Undying Lands) so that they can all experience the goodness the redeemed world has to offer. If that isn't enough to convince you, let me finish with the following quotes from the film: "I have to destroy it, Smeagol. I have to destroy it for both our sakes." "We set out to save the Shire, Sam. And it has been saved... But not for me.... The last pages are for you". Frodo saves Middle Earth with himself but in our real world, Christ as a child has come and reconciled everything to Himself. He did not do it just for you, or me, but for all of mankind.

As we go forth throughout the rest of the holiday season, many of us will be spending time with loved ones and friends, trying to decide what Christmas movies to watch that reflect the nature of the season. Consider the LOTR: The Return of the King as a good natured film (parental advisement for children, of course) as your Christmas movie of choice that will encapsulate the theme of the season which is in the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ and all that He does for the sake of our salvation.