

## DECEMBER 2017 • Christ is Born! The Winter Pascha

When winter begins to make its way into the northern hemisphere, the Church of Christ begins to celebrate a “splendid three-day Pascha.” These words of the Typikon of the Orthodox Church, the instructions for liturgical worship, are explained by Modern Russian Orthodox commentators in this way:

The feast of the Nativity of Christ belongs to the number of the twelve major feasts of the Church. Yet none of these feasts is celebrated by the Church with as much solemnity as the festival of Christ’s Nativity. It is called Pascha: a splendid three-day Pascha.

In old editions of the Typikon, similarly to the feast of Christ’s Glorious Resurrection, the feast of Christ’s Nativity is called Pascha. This emphasizes its close connection with the mystery of our salvation and deliverance from sin and death; the mystery which the holy Church proclaims in her dogmatic teachings and with which she brings us into direct spiritual contact in her liturgical services and sacraments.

The liturgical services for Christmas, officially called The Nativity According to the Flesh of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, are consciously patterned after the services for the festival of the Pascha of the Lord, the holy Resurrection. There is a forty-day fast. There are prefeast preparations. There are the special royal hours with their prophecies, epistles, gospels, and hymns on the eve of the feast, followed by the vesperal liturgy of St. Basil the Great. There is the solemn all-night vigil, crowned by the matin’s canon and hymns. And finally, after the eucharistic celebration of St John Chrysostom on the day of the feast itself, the celebration continues to its completion in the festival of The Meeting of the Lord in the Temple forty days later. At the center of the festal season remains the original “Festival of Lights,” the holy Epiphany, officially called in the Orthodox Church The Holy Theophany of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The liturgical verses and hymns for Christmas and Epiphany, the Pascha of Christ’s incarnation and manifestation in the flesh, repeat those of Easter, the Pascha of Christ’s death and resurrection. The Lord’s birth and baptism are directly connected to His dying and rising. He was born in order to die. He was baptized in order to be raised. The harmony between the events is overwhelming. The beauty of it is almost more than the believer can bear.

Today He who hung the earth upon the waters  
 is hung upon the tree.

Today He who holds the whole creation in His Hand  
 is born of a virgin.

The King of angels is decked with a crown of thorns.



# DECEMBER 2017

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

<p><b>FAST FREE</b> <b>31</b>          DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM          HOURS: H. DEMKO          EPISTLE: ABRAHAM          POST-COMM: HALLIDAY</p>	<p>GREETERS          DEC 3: CHONG/CAMPBELL          DEC 10: MURPHY/GERALT          DEC 17: MCAULEY/MOROZOVA          DEC 24: HAYDEN/STAFFORD          DEC 31: OSBURN/CAMPBELL</p>					<p><b>1</b></p>	<p><b>2</b>          GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM          CONFESSIONS</p>
<p><b>3</b>          DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM          HOURS: YOUTH          EPISTLE: YOUTH          POST-COMM: YOUTH  <b>ANNUAL PARISH MEETING</b></p>	<p><b>4</b></p>	<p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>6</b>          DIVINE LITURGY 9:00 AM          St. NICHOLAS OF MYRA          DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM          ADULT FAITH FORUM</p>	<p><b>7</b>          COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p><b>8</b></p>	<p><b>9</b>          RUSSIAN CONFESSIONS, 9 AM          SLAVONIC LITURGY, 10 AM  <b>YOUTH SNOW DAY</b>          GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM          CONFESSIONS</p>	
<p><b>10</b>          DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM          HOURS: HOOD          EPISTLE: BITSKO          POST-COMM: JARLSON          CHURCH SCHOOL</p>	<p><b>11</b></p>	<p><b>12</b></p>	<p><b>13</b>          DIVINE LITURGY 9:00 AM          St. HERMAN OF ALASKA          †Fr. ALEXANDER          DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM          ADULT FAITH FORUM</p>	<p><b>14</b>          COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p><b>15</b></p>	<p><b>16</b>          GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM          CONFESSIONS          CHOIR REHEARSAL</p>	
<p><b>17</b>          DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM          HOURS: W. DEMKO          EPISTLE: TESFAY          POST-COMM: BITSKO          CHURCH SCHOOL  <b>CHRISTMAS COOKIE SALE</b></p>	<p><b>18</b></p>	<p><b>19</b>          PARISH COUNCIL, 6:00 PM</p>	<p><b>20</b>          DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM          ADULT FAITH FORUM</p>	<p><b>21</b>          COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p><b>22</b></p>	<p><b>23</b>          GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM          CONFESSIONS</p>	
<p><b>24</b>          DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM          HOURS: JARLSON          EPISTLE: W. DEMKO          POST-COMM: KAUFMAN  <b>NATIVITY VIGIL</b>          6:00 PM</p>	<p><b>FAST FREE</b> <b>25</b>          DIVINE LITURGY 9:00 AM          NATIVITY OF OUR LORD</p>	<p><b>FAST FREE</b> <b>26</b></p>	<p><b>FAST FREE</b> <b>27</b></p>	<p><b>FAST FREE</b> <b>28</b></p>	<p><b>FAST FREE</b> <b>29</b></p>	<p><b>FAST FREE</b> <b>30</b>          GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM          CONFESSIONS</p>	

# St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

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## RECTOR

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## CHOIR DIRECTORS

Matushka Elizabeth Dresko  
Grace Brooks

## PARISH COUNCIL

Virginia Hood, Vice-President  
Karen Short, Treasurer  
Catherine Wilkalis, Secretary

Gregory Brooks  
James Brophy  
Kevin McAuley  
Karen Murphy  
Litsa Osburn  
Elena Stafford

## SUB-COMMITTEES

Building & Grounds  
Kevin McAuley

Eritrean & Ethiopian Outreach  
Tekeste Nuguru

Russian Outreach  
Natalia Minkoff

Church School/Youth  
Amy McAuley

Fellowship Committee  
Charity Committee

He whose essence none can  
touch is bound  
in swaddling clothes as a mortal  
man.

He who wraps the heavens in a cloud  
is wrapped in the purple of mockery.

God who in the beginning fash-  
ioned the heavens

lies in a manger.

He who freed Adam in the Jordan  
is slapped in the face.

He who rained manna on His  
people in the wilderness  
is fed on milk from His mother's  
breast.

The Bridegroom of the Church is  
affixed

to the cross with nails.

The Bridegroom of the Church  
summons the wise men.

The Son of the Virgin is pierced with  
a spear.

The Son of the Virgin accepts  
their gifts.

We worship Thy Passion, O Christ!

We worship Thy Passion, O Christ!

We worship Thy Passion, O Christ!

We worship Thy Nativity, O  
Christ!

We worship Thy Nativity, O  
Christ!

We worship Thy Nativity, O

Christ!

Show us also Thy glorious Resurrec-  
tion!

Show us also Thy glorious Theo-  
phany!

Jesus lay as an infant in the  
cavern in the reign of Caesar Augustus  
that He might lay in the tomb under  
Pontius Pilate. He was hounded by  
Herod that He might be caught by Ca-  
iaphas. He was buried in baptism that  
He might descend into death through  
the Cross. He was worshipped by wise  
men that the whole of creation might  
adore Him in His triumph over death.  
The Pascha of His Cross was prepared  
by the Pascha of His Coming. The  
Pascha of His Resurrection was begun  
by the Pascha of His Incarnation.  
The Pascha of His Glorification was  
foretold by the Pascha of His Baptism.  
This is what Christians celebrate each  
year in what Father Alexander Schme-  
mann was the first to call "the Winter  
Pascha."

Father Thomas Hopko  
*The Winter Pascha*

These words offered by our beloved  
Father Tom, highlight the parallels

## AT A GLANCE...

**December 3: Annual Parish Meeting**

**December 6: St. Nicholas of Myra, Divine Liturgy 8:00 AM**

**December 9: Russian Confessions, 9:00 AM; Slavonic Liturgy, 10:00 AM**

**YOUTH RETREAT/SNOW DAY (MT. CHARLESTON)**

**December 13: St. Herman of Alaska, Divine Liturgy 8:00 AM**

**†FR. ALEXANDER SCHEMANN (1983)**

**December 16: Choir Rehearsal after Vespers**

**December 17: CHRISTMAS COOKIE SALE AFTER LITURGY**

**December 19: Parish Council Meeting, 6:00 PM**

**December 24: NATIVITY VIGIL, 6:00 PM**

**December 25: NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, DIVINE LITURGY 9:00 AM**

**December 25-January 4: Fast-Free Period**

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

between the Nativity and the Resurrection of our Lord. The earth offered a cave for His birth, but it also offers a cave for His burial. As we gather to celebrate the coming in the flesh of the Son of God, we must also remember that our own birth in Him is connected to our own resurrection in Him.

May all the light and joy of His coming be alive in each and every one of you as we gather for this celebration! Christ is Born!

*Father John*

#### FEASTDAYS

During December, we celebrate the following feastdays:

#### ST. NICHOLAS OF MYRA

DECEMBER 6

DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM (WED)

#### ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA

†FR. ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN (1983)

DECEMBER 13

DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM (WED)

#### NATIVITY FAST

The annual Nativity Fast continues, of course, until the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord on December 25.

Every regular communicant should take the time during the Fast to make the journey to the Sacrament of Confession. Confessions are heard during and after Vespers on Saturdays and by appointment.

#### ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

We will hold our annual parish meeting on **Sunday, December 3**, following the liturgy and a brief coffee hour. All voting members should be present. A voting member is:

- 1) At least 18 years of age;
- 2) Confesses and communes regularly, but at least annually, at St. Paul's;

3) Has a signed financial pledge card on file with the church office, and;

4) is a member of the parish for the previous 12 month period.

#### PLEDGE FORMS

Every parishioner is asked to prayerfully consider and then make a generous financial commitment to the parish. Please return your signed pledge form to Father John or Karen Short no later than December 15. As always, be assured that the form remains completely confidential.

#### HOOD FUND

We continue to ask for your help in a charitable outreach to the Hood family. We ask you to consider a donation by check, card, or online, earmarking

it for the Hood Collection.

OurYouCaring Page:

<https://www.youcaring.com/viginiaginnhood-899443>

#### YOUTH RETREAT/SNOW DAY

A Youth Retreat/Snow Day for youth ages 5-17, in conjunction with the youth from St. John's, will be held on **Saturday, December 9**. See below.

#### SLAVONIC LITURGY

Father Alexander Shkalov will be here as usual on Saturday, December 9. Russian language confessions start at 9:00 AM, followed by the Slavonic Liturgy and fellowship.

#### CHOIR REHEARSAL

The choir will be rehearsing following Vespers on December 16. All choir

**YOUTH NATIVITY SNOW DAY**  
FOR AGES 5-17  
**DEC 9, 2017**  
SIGN UP

CONTACT FRs. SERAPHIM OR STEPHEN TO SIGN UP  
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH - 702-221-8245  
ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE ORTHODOX CHURCH - 702-521-6988  
PARENT (DRIVER) VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

**SCHEDULE:**  
9 AM - ARRIVAL @ ST. PAUL'S CHURCH  
9:15 AM NATIVITY PRAYER SERVICE  
9:30 AM - BREAKFAST  
10 AM - LOAD UP & LEAVE ST. PAUL'S CHURCH  
11:30 AM - ARRIVE @ SAWMILL PICNIC AREA (NV-156)  
11:45 AM - DISCUSSION SESSION  
(FR. SERAPHIM 1ST - 6TH GRADE | FR. STEPHEN - 7TH-12TH GRADE)  
12:15 - 2 PM - PLAY  
2 PM - LUNCH  
2:30 - 4:30 PM - PLAY  
4:30 PM - LOAD UP & RETURN TO ST. PAUL'S CHURCH BY 5:30 PM

members are asked to make every effort to be present.

### CHRISTMAS COOKIE SALE

Our annual Christmas Cookie Sale will take place after liturgy on Sunday, December 17. Bakers are asked to consider volunteering to bake some goodies for the sale. A sign-up list is available in the hall.

### HOUSE BLESSINGS

Father John will begin blessing houses after the Feast of Theophany (January 6). A sign-up list will be available in the vestibule – if you wish him to come and bless your house, please sign up.

### OUTREACH

Daron (Basil) Clanton, son of Maria Clanton, is incarcerated in prison in Indian Springs, NV. If anyone would like to correspond or send a card to cheer him up it would be greatly appreciated. His address is:

Daron L. Clanton, #1185388  
HSDP  
PO Box 650  
Indian Springs, NV 89070

### ADULT CLASS

Our Adult Class continues with a serious look at the *Miracles of Christ*. As usual, we begin with Daily Vespers at 6:30 PM, and then have discussion 7:00-8:00 PM. Please join us and learn your faith!

### FEEDING THE HOMELESS

Our next Feeding the Homeless project will be held on a date to be determined in January. We meet at 10:30 AM then construct the lunches and bag all of the items, which we then distribute downtown 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. See Cathy

Wilkalis for more information.

### IOCC

We need a new parish liaison to International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC). If you are interested in helping us out in this position, please see Father John.

### 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 support 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 (NEW!)

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

Edward Yee  
Doctor of Ophthalmology  
2980 S. Jones Blvd., Suite A  
(702) 362-3937

Jon Failla, NP  
Axis Health Care Clinic  
www.axishecvegas.com  
(702) 331-1800

Focus Mental Health Solutions  
www.focusmentalhealth.com  
(702) 790-2701

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

Maximos Horton

Tesla Solar Inc.

www.teslasolarinc.com

(435) 922-9771

Taffer Computers

*Website Design, Marketing,  
& Computer Repair*

Fr. Stephen Osburn

(702) 521-6988

### 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 14, 2017 MEETING

*Rector's Report:* Fr John reminded council he will be spending Thanksgiving as customary with family, leaving Tuesday 11/21 after Liturgy. Fr Stephen will be in charge in his absence.

Informed council - criminal background checks are due again per OCA requirements every 3 years; this year it will be through a centralized electronic link. Fr John will e-mail a special link to all persons requiring background checks so they can fill in the necessary information for their background check on-line.

*Associate Priest's Report:* Fr Stephen reported he currently is working with one catechumen, Karen Peters, and has been keeping busy with youth activities.

*Vice President's Report:* no report.

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

Capital Fund: \$20,313.55

Rainy Day: \$88,291.21

Icon Fund: \$5,512.81

It should be noted that \$45k was moved from the Capital Fund to the

Rainy Day Fund to get it out of checking and into the savings account for safety. But our actual savings are only about \$40k.

Income for October was \$18,490.33, with expenses of \$20,297.60 for a **deficit of \$1,807.27.**

2017 YTD FINANCIALS (10/31)	
2017 Inc	\$ 228,153.81
2017 Exp	\$ 223,574.51
Inc over Exp	\$ 4,579.30

Accounts Payable is totally current. The parish is staying solvent. Money has been transferred from savings.

*2018 Budget:* Karen reviewed the proposed 2018 operating budget. The balanced budget of \$212,408 is \$47,346 less than the 2017 budget. Two large differences: the bond program has been paid off, and Fr. Stephen will be leaving for his own assignment in June. Karen emphasized even though the bond obligations are paid off, the financial advantages are offset by a monthly income decline of almost \$10,000 due to the relocation of seven active and generous pledging parishioners. Father John is confident that newcomers and catechumens getting ready for reception into the Church will help offset that. Karen plans a presentation to the parish on November 19 to inform everyone of this situation and encourage increased pledges.

Motion to present the projected 2018 budget to the parish at the Annual Meeting by James Brophy; seconded by Virginia Hood; approved unanimously by council.

### COMMITTEES

*Buildings and Grounds:*

*HVAC:* Replacement unit is still on backorder for the office HVAC system. No funding problem is antici-

pated.

*Doors:* All measurements have been done. The door is not in yet. Mike Metzler will install the final door on the church (side entrance). Once the door is installed, all doors will be painted, signs will be posted as needed on doors, and the front wall of the parking lot will be painted.

*Courtyard:* 1) Kevin obtained a bid from Bilmar Contracting for the courtyard improvement project for a total amount of \$98,246.97. Some cost reductions may be possible and the work can be done in stages. Kevin, in collaboration with the architect, will devise a plan and present the proposal and plan at the annual meeting. An alternate plan would be to have King's landscaping remove the trees and install artificial turf for \$39,000. (See attached Bilmar contract proposal.)

2) The water irrigation system is being worked on by King's Landscaping. They will be paid when finished then they will begin regular landscape maintenance. The maintenance contract has not been executed as of this meeting.

*Charity:* Feeding the homeless will take place Saturday, November 18, for a total of three homeless feedings this year. Currently there is a balance of \$52.00 remaining in the fund but is expected to have a balance of zero by the end of fiscal year in December.

*IOCC:* Still need coordinator.

*Church School/Youth:* a movie night is scheduled for parish youth and parents on November 18th. There will be a Nativity youth retreat with St. John's in December. There will be a "snow day" at Mt. Charleston with a contingency plan in case of no snow. Fr Seraphim and Fr Stephen are working jointly on these youth projects. Additional plans include a youth "craft day" making Christmas ornaments.

*Fellowship:* There will be a Christmas Cookie Sale on December 17 after liturgy.

*Outreach/website:* no problems.

*Russian:* No concerns. Russian Liturgy was held on November 11.

*Stewardship:* Karen Short will give a summary of our financial situation after Sunday Liturgy 11/19. It is hoped that people will increase their pledges.

## OLD BUSINESS

*Sunshine Group:* no report

*Annual Parish Meeting: (Fr. John)* will be held after Liturgy on December 3. Agenda will include:

1. Nominations/election of lay delegate to the All-American Council in St. Louis, MO, July 23-27.

2. Ratification of Budget.

3. An additional item, a By-laws Amendment, will be added to the agenda of the Annual Parish Meeting: By December 2017, Parish by-laws must be in compliance with the new Statute of the Orthodox Church in America ratified at the 2015 All-American Council. A review of our parish bylaws revealed there was only one paragraph that could be seen as not in conformity with the current Statute. This is Article III, Section 4 d.

4. Nominations/election of replacements to the Parish Council to replace Ginny Hood and Cathy Wilkalis. Kevin McAuley has agreed to serve as Vice President. Father John asked council members for suggestions for candidates.

*Bookstore:* Debra Sancer will be in charge of the Bookstore. She has begun an inventory, and has already sold \$50 worth of merchandise. Calendars are on order and will sell for \$10 when they arrive.

## NEW BUSINESS

*None*

*Next Council Meeting:*

Tuesday, December 19, 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.

## 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 ONLY A SINNER DEALS IN ABSOLUTES

Last year at this time, I wrote a reflection on how *Lord of the Rings* was the only real Christmas movie. Most of the feedback was good and I got some questions as well. One in particular had to do with "Is it okay for us, as Orthodox Christians to watch non-Christian movies? In particular, can we find

Christ and His message in the secular movies, music, and art we love?" The simple answer is yes. We can and do find God, both the good and the bad in Creation and the arts. More so, what we see, as we understand our faith is that God is experienced not just with our minds but through all our senses. We taste and see that the Lord is good in the Eucharist. We sing His praises in the divine services through the angelic voices of the choir. We feel the warmth of the candles as we offer our prayers up to Him. We prostrate up and down, creating a living icon of the Fall and our rising from it to the Resurrection.

All of these things are experienced in our liturgical lives. Yet, after the service ends, where does this lead us in our entertainment and arts? Orthodox Composer Avro Part once said, "in the world we experience God in the entertainment and arts that we enjoy." Just like how Christ uses parables to illustrate the presence and understanding of His Kingdom, we also use the arts and entertainment to interpret Scripture and a deepening of a relationship with God. Avro Part also said, "all of music finds its certain feelings with God. Everything outside of it has no meaning."

With that said, over the coming months I'm going to write a few reflections that are geared towards some of our most popular movies, TV shows, and music. So if there are any suggestions on media that you want a reflection on, please feel free to ask. Now with *Star Wars the Last Jedi* around the corner, and since we just had our youth movie night watching *The Force Awakens*, I'd like to get one of my favorite movie series out of the way. Namely, I want to address the Christian elements of redemption in Darth Vader.

Star Wars is a story all about redemption. It is a story about Darth Vader/Anakin Skywalker, the Chosen One being redeemed by his son, Luke. When one looks at the character of Darth Vader, they see a man who was not always this man, but once a Jedi. They also see a man who died on the shores of Mustafar because in his rage, he allowed hatred, greed, pride, and ego to take over.

This wasn't an overnight transformation. Anakin's journey to the Dark Side occurred over time, whereas when we knew the right thing to do, he decided in a different direction. Through this choice, he would slowly be enslaved by the Dark Side because he not only flirted with it, he embraced it. Though many of us have never done anything to his level, after all he is a fictional character, we can resonate that he was a man who fell to sin.

We all know very well that we should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, come to more services, forgive and love others, and serve those in need, but we also spend too much time arguing, being glutenous, greedy, and prideful, but sometimes it seems easier to just embrace our dark sides instead doing what is right. We want to do better but our lives are so busy sometimes that we feel as though everything else is a greater priority than our salvation. In our baptism we swore to destroy sin, working to a life of repentance and a relationship with God, but often we become the thing we swore to destroy.

If we look further at the character of Vader, we see the full embodiment of sin. His perspective was more so to save his wife, not let others around him suffer, have complete control for himself, and be more concerned on his own will, instead of the Will

of the Force. He became so wrapped up in his own desires that everything he cared about was lost and he died (which is why the character of Anakin and Darth Vader are always seen as too separate people). It is from this perspective, that Anakin was led to the Dark Side. He fell prey to sin as merely a figment of his imagination and that evil in the universe was merely a point of view. He was convinced and weakened by the idea that everything is really relative in reality. That moreso, there are no consequences for doing wrong.

This message radiates so well today because we live in a relative culture. The phrase, "You do you" is not only part of mainstream, but is seen as the religion of today. We are taught to no longer attach to the known world and to God's Will, but to allow darkness to reign supreme. Sinfulness in this world is no longer a care to many people. Many people today have no problem with abortion, homosexuality, immorality, etc. The family is seen as a constructed unit you can create any which way you want instead of one that was always designed to participate in Communion with God. As well, it seems though there is nothing being done to stop such normalization of sin. The very evil we've sworn to destroy now reigns supreme.

So looking back at the redemption narrative play out in Anakin Skywalker, it becomes a type of allegory for us who are trapped in the talons of evil. Make no mistake, Darth Vader is a bad guy, but seeing that someone who embodies everything wrong with society finding the Light after years of embracing it, is something to look at as, even we can be redeemed. In the way in which we would look through the Gospels, Vader is the thief on the Cross who at the very end repented

and was with Christ in the Kingdom (which is another reason we see him standing alongside Obi-Wan and Yoda as Force Ghosts at the end of the Return of the Jedi).

Redemption comes down to choice. Initially Vader says he is unable to break free from the Dark Side because he believes he has no choice. "You don't know the power of the Dark Side. I must obey my Master". Yet, this obligation is broken because the evil within him was something he choose to embrace, not something he was bound to. The only way he returns to the Light Side is through choosing, through love, to break free.

The moment that Anakin is brought back to life is when he saves his son on the Death Star. He recognized a need at that moment that all he had done was wrong and repented in that final moment. "Tell your sister you were right." Likewise, and I'll conclude by saying, if we also can recognize that we always have a choice to repent and that the results is that we see God doesn't punish us for our sins, rather rescues us from them. We see further that it is in the midst of all of this, that we are led to a life in the Light, which is the Light of Christ and Communion with God. Regardless of what is happening in today's world, in all the evil around us, we should try and remember that we have a choice to embrace Christ's message. We can look to characters like Vader, who were pure evil and embodied enslavement to sin, see that even they can repent, and know that so can we. So look to art as a perspective to reflect, teach, and help us in our a life in Christ and one that aids us in our Christian journey to the Cross and to the Resurrection.