

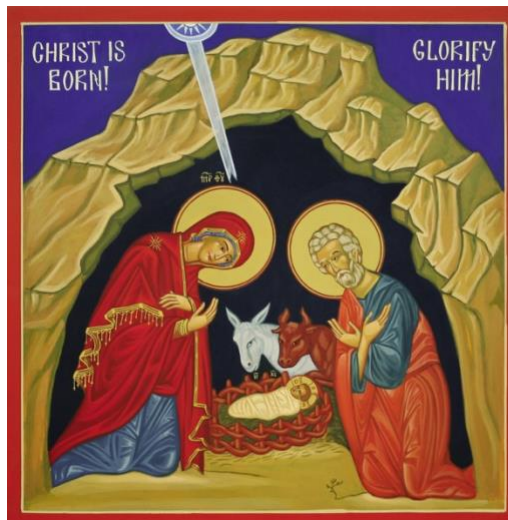
12-16-20

Dear Faithful of Saint John’s,

There will be a lot information in the following letter, so please read it patiently and carefully as it describes Church services for weeks ahead.

Christmas Celebrations

The days of Christmas are nearly here, and soon the days will begin to grow longer, something we Alaskans eagerly await. We are still living, however, under the precautions required by the pandemic, so I want to explain how we will celebrate Christmas in our Church services this year. As it turns out, if we follow the pattern we have established, we will have five Divine Liturgies during the Christmas season, which extends from Christmas Eve through the leavetaking of Christmas on December 31. Each one of these Liturgies will be assigned to one of our five Liturgy Groups and this essentially will be the Church Christmas celebration for each of these Groups. Here is the schedule below:



DAY/DATE/SERVICE/TIME (Livestream)	GROUP
Thursday, December 24, 6:15am, 9:15am, 12:15pm, 3:15pm – “Royal Hours”	All
Thursday, December 24, 6:15pm – Vespers Liturgy of Saint Basil for Christmas Eve	BC
Friday, December 25, 9:00am – Christmas Matins and Liturgy of Saint John	JK
Saturday, December 26, 9:15am - Christmas Liturgy and Synaxis of the Theotokos	GHI
Saturday, December 26, 7:15pm – Great Vespers	All
Sunday, December 27, 9:30am – Matins and Christmas Liturgy	DE
Wednesday, December 30, 6:15pm – Christmas Liturgy for Leavetaking	LAF

I encourage you to attend the Liturgy to which your Group is assigned and to let this be your in-person Christmas celebration. In each of these services we will sing Christmas music, including Christmas carols at the end. If you need to come to a different service, this may be possible, if you contact Deborah Stallman and ask if there is room so that we do not exceed our limitation of 50 persons. The half-hour-long “Royal Hours” on Christmas Eve are open to all, and all of the main services highlighted in red will be livestreamed as well. We all know that such scheduling is not what we would wish, but there is no reason it needs to rob us of the joy of Christmas, if we will simply accept this as what God has allowed for us in this time. In these next two weeks the tide of the pandemic is turning. Let us thank God for this.

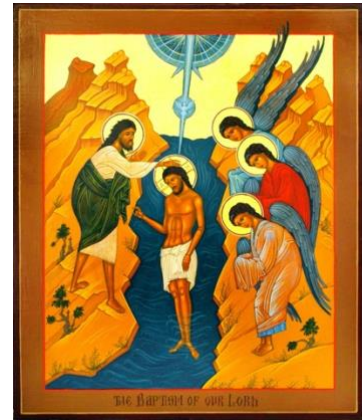
Epiphany Celebrations

We will follow the same general pattern for our celebration of Epiphany on January 6. Here is the schedule:

DAY/DATE/SERVICE/TIME (Livestream)	GROUP
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Saturday, January 2, 7:15pm – Great Vespers for the Forefeast of Epiphany	All
Sunday, January 3, 9:30am - Forefeast of Epiphany	JK
Tuesday, January 5, 6:15am, 9:15am, 12:15pm, 3:15pm – “Royal Hours”	All
Tuesday, January 5, 7:15pm – Great Vespers for Epiphany	All
Wednesday, January 6, 6:15pm – Blessing of Water and Divine Liturgy	GHI & LAF
Saturday, January 9, 9:15am – Epiphany Liturgy	JK
Saturday, January 9, 7:15pm – Great Vespers for the Postfeast of Epiphany	All
Sunday, January 10, 9:30am – Matins and Epiphany Liturgy	BC
Wednesday, January 13, 6:15pm – Epiphany Liturgy for Leavetaking	DE

This Great Feast is an even older celebration in the Church than Christmas and remembers the “manifestation” of God in the world, both through the Incarnation of Christ and the presence of the Holy Trinity at His baptism. Since on this Feast we do the Great Blessing of Water, at each Divine Liturgy following Epiphany, the priest will pray a blessing for all who are present and sprinkle them with the Blessed Water. We will not be able this year to do individual Home Blessings as is our usual custom during this time, but each family can take home some of the Blessed Water from the Church and use it to bless their own homes this year in a simple way.



Bring a Poinsetta to Church

Remember to bring a poinsettia beginning this weekend to help decorate the Church. Thank you to Rhonda Clodfelter who will be working with a few others to decorate the Nave.

GCI Repairs and Livestreaming

John Marc has worked with GCI this week to upgrade and repair some problems on GCI’s end of the Church’s internet. We are hopeful this will also help improve our livestreaming quality.

Recording of “Din Cer Senin,” a Romanian Christmas Carol

Deborah Stallman worked with a small choir to make a recording of an English version of the beautiful Romanian Carol, Din Cer Senin. The choir consisted of Denise Ray, Cara Fletes, Elisa Betson, Michael Jones, Dan Palmer, and Joe Dunham. An mp3 of the carol is attached to this email, along with the words of the carol.

I truly hope you can use the days ahead to prepare for Christmas and to celebrate what it means that Jesus Christ has been born into our beautiful but infected world. As our Metropolitan Joseph has reminded us at times, let us prepare room in our own hearts for Christ, even as we prepare our homes as the simple stable in Bethlehem was once prepared long ago.

Fr. Marc

P.S. I will also include below a reflection on “waiting,” which I shared with the student of Saint John’s School earlier this week.

An Advent Reflection on Waiting

Waiting is a part of human life. During this time of year we think about the Old Testament forefathers and mothers who waited all their lives across many generations for the coming of the Messiah. On a smaller scale we find ourselves each year waiting for the coming of Christmas as the days of Advent slowly come and go. The whole world has been waiting months for a vaccine to end the coronavirus pandemic. But simple waiting can be quite a trial for us who now measure time in the milliseconds 4G versus 5G, who download an album or a book they want in seconds, and who routinely hope for next-day delivery on everything. Still, even we moderns cannot escape times waiting. When I have to wait, I sometimes pick up my iPhone and play a game just to kill the time. But is there something more valuable about waiting, something I can do with time other than just kill it? Waiting can give us time to rest, to reflect, to persevere, and to prioritize. And ultimately waiting can help us be more grateful when that for which we are hoping finally arrives. Betsy and I both were unexpectedly tearful with gratitude when three of our own children, healthcare workers, received the coronavirus vaccine this week. I know others had similar feelings as well. The Scriptures speak about waiting this way:



“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope” Psalm 130:5.

“It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” Lamentations 3:26.

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”
Philippians 3:20.

So, perhaps most of all, waiting can help dislodge us from the delusion of our pride that lets us imagine we are powerful and instead humble us to seek God and to find the meaning of our life in Him who is the author of life and who loves us.