



St. Xenia Parish News

170 North Lowell Street, Methuen, MA 01844

January/February 2009

Love of God

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807-1867)

Love God as he commanded you to love Him, and not as self-deluded daydreamers think they love Him.

Do not fabricate raptures for yourself, do not excite your nerves, do not inflame yourself with a material fire, with the fire of your blood. The sacrifice pleasing to God is humility of heart, contrition of spirit. With wrath does God turn away from sacrifices offered with self-confident presumption, with a proud opinion of oneself, though the sacrifice be a whole burnt offering.

Pride excites the nerves, heats the blood, arouses daydreaming, enlivens the life of the fall; humility calms the nerves, subdues the motion of the blood, eliminates daydreaming, mortifies falls, enlivens the life in Jesus Christ.

“Obedience” before the Lord “is greater than good sacrifice, and submission than the fat of rams,” said the Prophet to the Israelite king who had dared to offer to God a wrong sacrifice (*1 Samuel 15:22*). When you wish to offer to God the sacrifice of love, do not offer it self-willfully, from a thoughtless impulse; offer it with humility, in that time and that place which the Lord commanded

The spiritual place on which alone spiritual sacrifices are commanded to be offered is humility. (*Saying of St. Pimen the Great from the Alphabetical Patericon*).

The Lord marked the one who loves and the one who does not love by true and exact signs: “If a man love Me, he will keep My word. He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings” (*John 14:23-24*).

Do you wish to learn the love of God? Shun every deed, word, thought, and feeling forbidden by the Gospel. By your enmity towards sin which is so hated by All-holy God, you will show and prove your love for God. When due to weakness it happens that you fall into transgressions, heal them at once by repentance. But it is better to strive not to allow yourself even these transgressions, by strict watchfulness over yourself.

Do you wish to learn the love of God? Assiduously learn the commandments of the Lord in the Gospel, and strive to fulfill them in very deed. Strive to turn the Gospel virtues into habits, into your qualities. For a person who

loves, it is natural to fulfill the will of the beloved with exactness.

“I have loved Thy commandments more than gold and topaz: therefore, I directed myself toward all Thy commandments; every path of unrighteousness have I hated,” says the Prophet (*Ps. 118:127, 128, LXX*). Such conduct is indispensable for maintaining fidelity to God. Fidelity is the unalterable condition of love. Without this condition, love is dissolved.

By the constant shunning of evil and fulfilling of the Gospel virtues—which comprises the whole Gospel moral teaching—we attain the love of God. And by this same means do we abide in the love of God: “If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love,” said the Savior (*John 15:10*).

The perfection of love consists in union with God; advancing in love is joined with inexpressible spiritual consolation, delight, and enlightenment. But in the beginning of the struggle, the disciple of love must undergo a violent warfare with himself, with his own deeply damaged nature: evil, which through the fall became innate to our nature, has become for it a law, warring and revolting against the Law of God, against the law of holy love.

Love of God is founded on love of one’s neighbor. When the remembrance of wrongs is obliterated in you: then you are close to love. When your heart is overshadowed by holy, grace-given peace towards all humanity: then you are at the very doors of love. But these doors are opened by the Holy Spirit alone. Love of God is a gift from God in a person who has prepared himself to receive this gift by purity of heart, mind, and body. The degree of the gift is according to the degree of preparation: because God, even in His mercy, is just.

Love of God is entirely spiritual: “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (*John 3:6*). “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (*John 3:6*): carnal love, as something born of flesh and blood, has material, corrupt properties. It is inconstant, changeable: its fire is completely dependent on matter.

(continued on page 5)

St. Xenia of Petersburg Orthodox Church is a parish of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, under the omophorion of Met. HILARION of Eastern America & New York. The parish newsletter is published bi-monthly under the direction of the Rev. Michael Crowley. In order to ensure timely delivery to our far-flung parish, please submit all notices by the 15th of the month prior to publication to Margaret Lark at (603) 332-9613, e-mail: woolfolk3@gmail.com, or to Father Michael at tcrowley@maine.rr.com. Thank you.

Rector:

Rev. Michael Crowley
 16 Channel Road
 South Portland, ME 04106
 (978) 204-0428 (cell phone with voice mail)

Confessions on Saturday during Vigil, on Sunday during the Hours, and by appointment

Parish Council

- President: Rev. Michael Crowley (207) 767-1889
- Starosta: Sdn. Constantine Desrosiers (603) 775-0320
- Secretary: Natalie Pishenin (978) 658-5564
- Treasurer: Anthony Sarantakis (978) 263-2016
- Sisterhood: Matushka Nancy Crowley (207) 767-1889
- Cemetery: to be determined by search committee.
- Interim, Rev. Michael Crowley
- Peter Danas (978) 459-9541
- John Danas (978) 454-0315
- Laryssa Doohovskoy (978) 841-5960
- Roberto Gonzalez (978) 692-1229
- Michael Johnson (603) 893-4593
- John Kekis (978) 456-9865
- Choir Director: Michael Lang (603) 465-9754

Trapeza Schedule

*** =Strict Fast (no meats, fish or dairy)**

If you cannot be at church on your assigned Sunday please call and switch with someone. If you have any questions contact Karen Schidlovsky at (603) 868-6410. Trapeza can be whatever you would like to prepare on your day. Some parishioners prefer to make a big lunch but this isn't necessary. As long as there is enough food for about 50 people, anything is appreciated. Donuts, fruit and pastries are as acceptable as soup and sandwiches. Thank you in advance for your contribution.

January

- 4 Matushka Nancy, Meghan Nettleton, Katia Fredette
- 11 Yolka
- 18 (Yolka) Pot Luck
 Karen Schidlovsky, Nancy Harris, Tanya Vlasenko (Set Up, Clean Up)
- 25 Masha Harris, Kot Engalichev

February

- 1 Natalie Botchkov, Natalya Kirichok
- 8 Josephine Kniaziuk, Mariana Haven
- 15 Nick Kronauer, Vera Sarantakis, Priscilla Choi
- 22 Anna Johnson, Mireille Lang, Alexandra Gonzalez

Sisterhood News:

The Sisterhood is open to all women of the parish.

Thank You...

... to our faithful membership, for all you have done to support, beautify, and grow our blessed parish in the past year (see "From the Pastor" on page 5 of this issue).

... to all who turned out for the workday to tidy up our worship space in preparation for the glorious Feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

Please remember in your prayers...Nicholas, Lilly, Nina, Josephine, David, Vassilisa, Lilly Anne, Margaret, Alexander (Gil).

Please remember to inform the Myrrhbearers Sisterhood if someone is in the hospital or shut in at home.

Financial Update: As of December 31, 2008, the balance on the church mortgage stands at \$35,335. If you have any questions, please see Subdeacon Constantine Desrosiers.

Our Christmas Corner: With material for this month's newsletter being particularly sparse, we thought we would turn this news column over to a variety of little-known facts surrounding the Nativity of our Lord. Many thanks to Natalie Pishenin, who contributed them all.

Did You Know....

...that the name "Emmanuel" means, *God with us*?

...that it was St Justin Martyr who identified the site of Jesus' birth in the second century?

...that because of a mosaic of the Magi dressed in Persian garb, when the Persians rampaged through the Holy Land in 614 A.D. destroying churches, they left the Church of the Nativity alone?

...that it was Queen Helena who erected the first Church of the Nativity in 329 A.D.? She directed that a pagan shrine to Adonis, which was built over the cave of the Nativity by Hadrian in 135 A.D., be torn down.

... that upon meeting Jesus, the Magi were described as handing over gifts and "falling down" in joyous praise, meaning lying prostrate on the ground, which would have an important effect on Christian religious practice? Previously, both Jewish and Roman tradition had viewed kneeling and prostration as undignified, although for Persians it was a sign of great respect, often showed to the king. Inspired by these verses, kneeling and prostration were adopted in the early Church. While prostration is common in Eastern Churches, especially during Lent, kneeling has remained an important element of Christian worship to this day.

Synaxis* of the Most Holy Theotokos

Commemorated Dec 26 / Jan 8



On the second day of the feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos is celebrated. Combining the hymns of the Nativity with those celebrating the Mother of God, the Church points to Mary as the one through whom the Incarnation was made possible. His humanity—concretely and historically—is the humanity He received from Mary. His body is, first of all, her body. His life is her life. This feast, the assembly in honor of the Theotokos, is probably the most ancient feast of Mary in the Christian tradition, the very beginning of her veneration by the Church.

*A **Synaxis** (Greek: Σύναξις; Slavonic: Собор, *Sobor*) is an assembly for liturgical purposes, generally through the celebration of Vespers, Matins, Little Hours, and the Divine Liturgy. A **Synaxis** often occurs on the day following a Major Feast Day, and is in honor of saints who participated in the event.

The Adoration of the Magi: Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar

Celebrated December 25 / Jan 7

Magi were a priestly caste in ancient Persia. They are thought to have been followers of Zoroaster, the Persian teacher and prophet, and they professed the doctrines of Zoroastrianism. As part of their religion, these priests paid particular attention to the stars, and gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time a highly regarded science. By the first century AD, the magi were identified with wise men and soothsayers.

The word *Magi* is a Latinization of the plural of the Greek word *magos* (μαγος pl. μαγοι). According to the Gospel of Matthew (2:1-16), the wise men or Magi followed a star to the birthplace of Christ. It was written that they were from the east and that they brought three gifts to Christ: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Since there were three gifts, it has been inferred that there were three Magi.

According to tradition, the Magi were baptized by Apostle Thomas, and became bishops. There are numerous variations of the names of the Magi in Greek, but the most common variation is for the name Gaspar, which in Greek is Ἰάσπερος (yasperos) which is Anglicized as Jasper.

Oral tradition of the Middle East has it that the three wise men traveled each on a camel, a donkey, and an elephant! Byzantine art usually shows the Magi in Persian dress (breeches, capes, and Phrygian caps).



Mosaic, ca. 600 A.D., Italy

An Important Note Concerning Financial Contributions: With the new year upon us, and many people beginning to gather together their tax documents to prepare for April 15, this is a good time to reprint this reminder concerning charitable contributions:

Consistent with good financial practice, the parish has maintained records of all donations made to the church. Prior to 2007, the federal tax law required donors who were going to deduct contributions (including cash contributions) to keep canceled checks, receipts or other reliable written records showing the name of the organization and the date and amount given. For many of the contributions given to St Xenia, the canceled check or the statement on payroll deductions was sufficient. For all single contributions of \$250 or more, the federal tax code requires a written statement from the charitable organization. As required, the parish has been sending a year-end statement for tax purposes to parishioners, showing only those con-

tributions that were each \$250 or more. However, if anyone wished a statement of all their contributions for the year, they could ask for it.

In 2007 the tax code changed, especially for people who give cash contributions. These contributions include those made by cash, checks, electronic funds transfer, credit card, or payroll deductions. Donors who want to itemize deductions cannot claim a tax deduction for any contribution regardless of the amount, unless you keep one of the following:

1. A bank record that shows the name of the qualified organization, the date of the contribution, and the amount of the contribution. Bank records may include:
 - a. A canceled check.
 - b. A bank or credit union statement, or
 - c. A credit card statement.
2. A receipt (or letter or other written communication) from the qualified organization showing the name of the organization, the date of the contribution, and the amount of the contribution.
3. The payroll deduction reductions (see Publication 526 (2007)).

To ensure tax compliance for 2009 contributions to our parish, if you are planning to itemize your deductions using Schedule A, the following donation methods are recommended:

1. If you plan to include deduction of your cash donations, please use the parish envelopes provided to you on the candle counter and write your name on the envelope.
2. For checks, if your name is not on the check (for instance, if it is the name of your business), please put the check in the donation envelope and write your name on the envelope.
3. Direct deposit from your bank account
4. Payroll deduction.

Our parish does track contributions made and will, upon request, produce a written statement of contributions made during 2008. This information will include the name of our parish, name of the parishioner, date of each individual contribution, and the dollar amount. Our parish cannot track cash contributions, regardless of amount, that are not properly identified by using the contribution envelope and writing in your name. Everyone who has given single contributions of \$250 or more will still receive a statement without needing to request it, as required by the tax code. This is our best understanding of the current law; if you have additional questions, please consult with your tax advisor.

(continued from page 1)

Hearing from Scripture that our God is a fire (*Heb.12:29*), that love is a fire, and feeling in yourself a fire of natural love, do not think that this is one and the same fire. No! These fires are at enmity with one another and are swallowed up by one another (*Ladder, steps 3 and 15*). “Let us serve in a manner well-pleasing to God, with reverence and fear; for our God is a consuming fire” (*Heb. 12:28-29*).

Natural love, i.e. fallen love, heats a person’s blood, excites his nerves, and arouses daydreaming; holy love cools the blood, calms both soul and body, draws the inner man towards prayerful silence, and immerses him in rapture through humility and spiritual delight. Many ascetics, having taken natural love for Divine love, excited their blood, and excited their daydreams also. The condition of excitement passed very easily into a condition of frenzy. Many took those who were in a state of excitement and frenzy for persons filled with grace and holiness, while they were actually unfortunate victims of self-delusion.

There were many such ascetics in the Western Church from the time it fell into heresy, in which Divine properties are blasphemously ascribed to a man, and veneration which is due and fitting to God alone is given to a man; many of these ascetics wrote books from their excited condition in which frenzied self-delusion seemed to them to be divine love, in which their disordered imagination painted for them a multitude of visions which flattered their self-love and pride.

Son of the Eastern Church! Shun the reading of such books, avoid following the precepts of those who are self-deluded. Guided by the Gospel and the holy Fathers of the true Church, ascend with humility to the spiritual height of Divine love by the means of fulfilling Christ’s commandments in deed.

Know firmly that love for God is the highest gift of the Holy Spirit, and a person can only prepare himself, through purity and humility, for the receiving of this great gift, through which mind and heart and body are changed.

In vain is the labor, fruitless is it and harmful, when we seek to discover in ourselves high spiritual gifts prematurely: merciful God gives them in His own time, to the constant, patient, humble fulfillers of the Gospel commandments. Amen.

From the Pastor

I write this while we are still in the radiance of the Holy Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. In spite of somewhat treacherous weather, we had a wonderful outpouring of God’s Love and Light on this glorious feast. We had wonderful attendance at the Vigil and Divine Liturgy, and had a most wonderful Trapeza afterwards, with many delicious dishes and the unexpected singing of carols and hymns both in English and Russian by a group of our choir members. It was the best Nativity Trapeza we have ever had, and makes us look forward to the upcoming Parish Yolka.

One thing that again became apparent at our Festal Trapeza is our need to expand our facilities. We fill the church and overflow the parish hall on these festal occasions.

We are, though, coming to the end of our mortgage obligation. As of this writing, we are at or below \$30,000. I have spoken in the past about organizing a building committee, and have renewed inspiration to press on with this in this New Year.

I have already approached a couple of parishioners to be on this committee. If you, the reader of this, have an interest please let me know. We will begin by assessing our needs and developing a plan.

From there we will have to think of finances and/or fundraising for the project.

This will of course span a few years but we had better get started now in order to be ready for the inevitable.

From my perspective it is much more interesting to deal with the challenges of growth than to try to resuscitate a dying situation.

Please know that I realize that it is your love of God and dedication to His Holy Church that fuels our parish’s success. Though there will be continued challenges before us, our Lord Jesus Christ “The Victor” will lead us forward. May we be found worthy to continue His work in peace.

—Fr. Michael



ST. XENIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

170 N. Lowell St. (Rt. 113)/PO Box 147 - Methuen, MA 01844
(phone) Fr. Michael Crowley (978) 204-0428 -- Church (978) 688-1211



JANUARY 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Dec 28 (Dec 15) Holy Forefathers Tone 3 9:30 Hours and Divine Liturgy Fast: wine & oil	Dec 29 (Dec 16) Pr Haggai	Dec 30 (Dec 17) Pr Daniel	Dec 31 (Dec 18) M Sebastian & comp	1 (Dec 19) Martyr Boniface	2 (Dec 20) HM Ignatius of Antioch	3 (Dec 21) VM Juliana 4:00 Small Vespers 6:30 All-Night Vigil Fast: wine & oil
4 (Dec 22) Pentecost 29 Tone 4 9:30 Hours and Divine Liturgy Fast: wine & oil	5 (Dec 23) 10 MM of Crete	6 (Dec 24) M Eugenia 6:30 Nativity Vigil	7 (Dec 25) NATIVITY OF THE LORD 9:30 Hours and Divine Liturgy	8 (Dec 26) Synaxis of the Theotokos	9 (Dec 27) Protomartyr Stephen	10 (Dec 28) 20,000 MM of Nicomedia 6:30 All-Night Vigil Fast free
11 (Dec 29) Pentecost 30 Tone 5 9:30 Hours and Divine Liturgy 1:00 Parish Yolka Fast free	12 (Dec 30) VM Anysia	13 (Dec 31) St. Melania	14 (Jan 1) Circumcision of the Lord	15 (Jan 2) St. Seraphim of Sarov	16 (Jan 3) Pr. Malachi	17 (Jan 4) Synaxis of the 70 Apostles 6:30 All-Night Vigil Fast free
18 (Jan 5) Pentecost 31 Tone 6 9:30 Hours and Divine Liturgy 6:30 Vigil of Theophany Fast: wine & oil	19 (Jan 6) THEOPHANY OF THE LORD	20 (Jan 7) Synaxis of the Baptist	21 (Jan 8) St. George the Chozebite Fast	22 (Jan 9) M Polyeuctus	23 (Jan 10) St. Gregory of Nyssa	24 (Jan 11) St. Theodosius 6:30 All-Night Vigil Fast
25 (Jan 12) Pentecost 32 Tone 7 9:30 Hours and Divine Liturgy	26 (Jan 13) MM Hermylus & Stratonicus	27 (Jan 14) St. Nina St. Sava of Serbia	28 (Jan 15) St. Paul of Thebes Fast	29 (Jan 16) Chains of St. Peter	30 (Jan 17) St. Anthony the Great	31 (Jan 18) SS Athanasius & Cyril 6:30 All-Night Vigil Fast: fish, wine, & oil



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FEBRUARY 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 (Jan 19) Pentecost 33 Tone 8 9:30 Hours and Divine Liturgy	2 (Jan 20) St. Euthymius	3 (Jan 21) St. Maximus	4 (Jan 22) Ap. Timothy Fast: wine & oil	5 (Jan 23) HM Clement	6 (Jan 24) St. Xenia of Rome Bl. Xenia of St. Petersburg Fast: fish, wine & oil	7 (Jan 25) St. Gregory the Theologian 4:00 Small Vespers 6:30 All-Night Vigil
8 (Jan 26) Publican & Pharisee Tone 1 9:30 Hours and Divine Liturgy	9 (Jan 27) St. John Chrysostom Fast free	10 (Jan 28) St. Ephraim Fast free	11 (Jan 29) St. Ignatius Fast free	12 (Jan 30) Three Holy Hierarchs Fast free	13 (Jan 31) SS Cyrus & John Fast free	14 (Feb 1) M Tryphon St. Brigid of Ireland 6:30 All-Night Vigil Fast free
15 (Feb 2) MEETING OF THE LORD 9:30 Hours and Divine Liturgy	16 (Feb 3) SS Symeon & Anna	17 (Feb 4) St. Isidore	18 (Feb 5) M Agatha Fast	19 (Feb 6) St. Bucolus	20 (Feb 7) St. Parthenius Fast	21 (Feb 8) GM Theodore 6:30 All-Night Vigil
22 (Feb 9) Meatfare Sunday Tone 3 9:30 Hours and Divine Liturgy	23 (Feb 10) HM Charalampus Fast: dairy, fish, wine, & oil	24 (Feb 11) HM Blaise Fast: dairy, fish, wine, & oil	25 (Feb 12) St. Meletius Fast: dairy, fish, wine, & oil	26 (Feb 13) St. Martinian Fast: dairy, fish, wine, & oil	27 (Feb 14) St. Auxentius Fast: dairy, fish, wine, & oil	28 (Feb 15) Ap. Onesimus 6:30 All-Night Vigil Fast: dairy, fish, wine, & oil

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St. Xenia Orthodox Church
170 North Lowell Street
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Methuen, MA 01844

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DIRECTIONS TO ST. XENIA CHURCH:

From I-93 North or South take Exit 46, Routes 110 and 113 Dracut and Lawrence. If you were travelling North on I-93, take the exit and go around the rotary and under the highway. Follow the signs and bear right off the rotary for Route 110/113 Dracut. **If you were travelling South on I-93,** bear right at the bottom of the exit ramp towards Route 110/113 Dracut.

Where Routes 110 and 113 split, bear right onto Route 113 towards Dracut. You will pass several cemeteries on your left, including the Polish National Catholic Cemetery. The very next gate on the left is the entrance to St. Xenia's. Please note that the church is on the left just before the Hickory Hill Golf course, so if you pass the golf course, you will have missed the church. Parking is available on church grounds.