

HOLY SPIRIT BYZANTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH
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December 21, 2025
Sunday Before Christmas, the Sunday of the Ancestors

SCHEDULE OF DIVINE SERVICES

Sunday, Dec. 21: Sunday Before Christmas, the Sunday of the Ancestors

7:00 am Matins 7:45 am Rosary, 8:00 am Divine Liturgy

IMO Amilia Petrilak and William Carr by Theresa Carr

5:00 pm Confessions, 6:00 pm Divine Liturgy

Monday, Dec. 22: 6:00 pm Confessions, 7:00 pm Emmanuel Moleben Final Night

Wednesday, Dec. 24: Christmas Eve, the Martyr Eugenia

(St. Pius X) 2:30-3:15 pm Confessions, 3:30 pm Great Compline, 4:00 pm Vigil Divine Liturgy for Christmas
(Holy Spirit) 7:30 pm Christmas Carols, 8:00 pm Great Compline, 8:30 pm Vigil Divine Liturgy for Christmas

Thursday, Dec. 25: Christmas, the Nativity of Our Lord

(Holy Spirit) 7:00 am Festal Matins, 8:00 am Divine Liturgy for Christmas Morning

(St. Pius X) 10:30 am Divine Liturgy for Christmas Morning

Friday, Dec. 26: Synaxis of the Theotokos

(Holy Spirit) 8:00 am Divine Liturgy

(St. Pius X) 10:30 am Divine Liturgy

Saturday, Dec. 27: Stephen the Protomartyr

(St. Pius X) 10:30 am Divine Liturgy

(Holy Spirit) 5:00 pm Confessions, 6:00 pm Divine Liturgy for the Protomartyr Stephen

Sunday, Dec. 28: Sunday After Christmas – of David, Joseph, and James

7:00 am Matins 7:45 am Rosary, 8:00 am Divine Liturgy with Panachida

IMO Ann Petro by Holy Spirit Parish

5:00 pm Confessions, 6:00 pm Divine Liturgy

Divine Liturgies are open for intentions for this new year. If you would like to make an intention for a Liturgy, please call the office or fill out request form in the back of the church and give it to Fr. Michael.

WINTER CHARITY-THE RED DOOR: Every year, our parish community collects donations for the benefit of a charity in the greater Pittsburgh area during the season of Philipovka as part of our devotional preparation for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas). This year, the parish will collect donations for the Red Door Ministry run out of Divine Mercy Roman Catholic Church. This ministry provides meals, clothes, blankets and other material aid for the homeless in the city of

Pittsburgh. **NEXT SUNDAY** will be the last day for the reception of donations for this cause. Please speak with Mary Dzurichko if you are interested in donating during this penitential season.

GIVING TREE: Please also consider participating in our Giving Tree fundraiser this season. This year we will be focusing on various floors in the property which have become tripping hazards, etc. We hope to use any funds raised to handle necessary repairs and pull from parish savings as little as possible. This campaign will continue through to the **Sunday After Theophany**. More information is in the narthex. Thank you for your consideration!

CHRISTMAS AND THEOPHANY: Please look at your mailboxes for the November parish mailer. It has important details for the upcoming Christmas season, including feast days and the schedule for Christmas and Theophany. We hope to celebrate these wonderful days together as a parish family.

ETERNAL MEMORY: Please pray for the repose of the soul Mrs. Ann Petro, who fell asleep in the Lord on Wednesday December 10th. While her funeral Liturgy was offered on Saturday December 20th, complications in communications meant that the customary 3rd day Liturgy was not offered. That liturgy has been scheduled for **next Sunday, December 28th at the 8:00 AM Divine Liturgy**. Please pray also for the intentions of the Petro family who are grieving at this time. May her memory be eternal!

ARCHEPARCHIAL CHOIR CHRISTMAS CONCERT: This year's concert will be this evening, **Sunday, December 21 at 2:00 pm St. Elias in Munhall**. Following the program, light refreshments will be served in the hall. The concert is free and open to all. **St. Elias, 4200 Homestead-Duquesne Road, Munhall, PA**

THE TRADITIONAL BYZANTINE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS: (Excerpt from the *Byzantine Leaflet* series) The 'predprazdenstvo' or the pre-festive period of the Nativity is celebrated for five days, December 20th to the 24th. In the liturgical books a strict fast is prescribed for the eve of Christmas to remind us of the hardships and privations of Mary and Joseph before the Nativity. Today, this fasting is optional, but in the spirit of our Rite at least abstinence from meat should be observed.

Characteristic of the Christmas Vigil are The Royal Hours, a liturgical devotion celebrated only three times a year-on the mornings of the Eve of Epiphany and of Good Friday besides the Eve of Christmas. They are called "royal" because they were celebrated with great solemnity and in the presence of the royal family. Later in the day, the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great with Vespers is celebrated leaving the late afternoon and evening free for the traditional family celebration of "The Holy Supper" ("Svjata Vecherja").

2 The Holy Supper requires special preparation and setting. The dining table is lightly strewn with hay or straw and then covered with a white linen. In the middle of the table, a large round loaf of white bread decorated with traditional symbols similar to the Paska of Easter and called the "Krachun" (O. SI. Karachun-nativity), is placed between two candles which are lit during the dinner. This explains the derivation of our popular name for Christmas, "Krachun."

This traditional setting of the Christmas table, devoid of all pagan or superstitious implications, symbolically represents the scene of Bethlehem.

The round white bread represents the newly-born Saviour Who called Himself "the Bread of Life" (In. 6:35) ; the table covered with straw or hay represents the manger in which He was laid; the white table cloth His swaddling clothes (Lk. 2:7), and the lighted candle the star of Bethlehem. In arranging the seating, the father, as the head of the household, is seated at the head of the table and the family is seated around him. Besides the seating for the entire family, there is always one empty seat which is reserved for the unexpected guest for whom, in the spirit of Slavic hospitality, there should always be room (comp. Lk. 2:7). 3 Before the supper begins, the father lights the candle, symbolizing the appearance of the star, and leads the singing of the festive Troparion, "Your birth, O Christ our God" (Rozdestvo Tvoje Christe Boze Nas) with the entire family gathered around the table. He then extends his Christmas wishes in words similar to these:

"I greet you with the Feast of Christ's Nativity and wish that the Infant Jesus shower upon all of you His choicest blessings. May we all live in health, peace, and happiness and may we all celebrate another Christmas together. A Merry and Blessed Christmas! Christ is Born!"

The father then embraces and kisses each member of the family, and as he expresses his wishes for good health and happiness, he shares a piece of bread (prosphora) dipped in honey with them. This sharing of the bread symbolizes the sharing of life with Jesus, and the honey represents God's blessings (comp. Ps. 81:17), the source of true happiness.

Since the Eve of Christmas is traditionally a fast day, meat or meat products are never served at the Holy Supper. In many places, custom dictates that even dairy products are excluded. The traditional menu always contains meatless dishes but in great variety and prepared with great care. The meatless dishes symbolize the humility and poverty which surrounded the Birth of Christ. The variety and abundance of food represent the variety and abundance of God's graces.

During the course of the supper, served leisurely and with a certain solemnity, there prevails a joyous atmosphere reminiscent of the angelic message given to the shepherds that first Christmas Eve: "I bring you news of great joy to be shared by all people. Today, in the town of David a Savior has been born to you, Who is Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2:10-11). Between the servings of the

traditional foods, the festive joy is enhanced by the singing of carols, the reminiscing's of the family, and the telling of amusing stories. The Holy Supper is concluded with a traditional carol.

A certain after-supper ritual is generally followed consisting of caroling and the opening of gifts. It is not becoming or customary to retire early on Christmas Eve. Emulating the shepherds, all keep watch (Lk. 2:8) and then, just before midnight, all generally go to church to meet Emmanuel, "God with us!"

The Christmas tree is also part of the Byzantine Christmas tradition, but it is of more recent origin, finding its way into the home of the Byzantine Catholics from Germany at the turn of the last century. It also brings with it much meaningful symbolism. The evergreen tree reminds us of the eternal life brought to us by Jesus Christ, while the tree decorations remind us of His spiritual gifts and blessings. The exchange of gifts from under the tree expresses our mutual love in imitation of the infinite love of our Heavenly Father Who "so loved the world (men) that He gave His only Son, so that all those who believe in Him may not perish but may have eternal life" (In. 3:15-16).

Caroling is a centuries long tradition with our people. It was introduced to us from Kiev, as were many other religious customs. In the life of St. Vladimir the Great, the Prince of Kiev (980- 1015) caroling is mentioned for the first time. The biographer states that our ancestors" during the Christmas festivities used to come together and sing joyous songs, commemorating the birth of Christ." (Nestor the Chronicler) From ancient times, it was a prevalent custom that a group of young people, dressed as angels or shepherds, would carry a model of a star and would visit from house to house to bring joy to the inhabitants ("Dom zveseliti") with their caroling. These are called the Star Carolers.

Also, a part of the Christmas tradition of our people are the Bethlehem Carolers. These developed from the Middle Ages" Mystery Plays" (i.e., a religious drama based on the events in the life of Our Lord). Bethlehem is a pious re-enactment of the first Christmas by the shepherds and angels as the actors. Depending on the script, there can be other actors involved such as Herod, the Three Wise Men, the Devil, etc. The center of attraction of this portrayal is a small model church with the Nativity scene displayed inside. It is usually carried by two youngsters dressed as angels and placed on the table of the home visited. Around this church, the drama of the Nativity evolves with its dialogues, caroling, and music. The Bethlehem play usually ends with one of the members of the group extending Yuletide greetings and the singing of "Mnogaja L'ita" for all the members of the family. For their noble gesture and visit, the carolers are usually rewarded with goodies or monetary gifts.

One of the greatest highlights of the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord is the solemn celebration of the Great Compline with Litija (Povestere Velikoje).

Long before midnight, at the sound of the first bell inviting the faithful to attend the services, the faithful hurry to the solemnly decorated church. As they continue to keep watch for the arrival of the hour of the Birth of the Savior, they express their genuine spiritual joy in singing the traditional Christmas carols. Exactly at midnight, all bells begin to peal joyously announcing to the world that the Redeemer is born. The solemn celebration of the Great Compline with Litija begins.

After the somber recitation of the chosen Psalms, suddenly the joyous singing of the Song of Isaiah, "God is with us" ("S nami Boh") is intoned. The faithful respond with a joy and exultation that fills the church proclaiming the mysterious Birth of the Son of God.

The liturgical hymns and songs of the Litija and the Matins that follow are gems and masterpieces of Byzantine hymnography. They were composed by such great hymnographers as St. Roman the Melodist (d. 560), St. Sophronius of Jerusalem (d. 644), St. Germanus of Constantinople (d. 733), St. John Damascene (d. 749), St. Cosmas of Maiuma (d. 760), St. Stephen the Sabbait (d. 794) and others. With their inspiring compositions they filled our Christmas Liturgy with a deep sense of mystery, moving poetry, spiritual jubilation and profound gratitude. The midnight services fittingly close with the solemn singing of the angelic hymn of thanksgiving: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Lk. 2:14).

With a treasury of traditions such as these, it is no wonder that the Byzantine Rite faithful so earnestly prepare themselves before the great Feast of the Nativity and derive so much joy and spiritual unction in the celebration of the Feast itself. Christ is born! Glorify Him!

SEEKING VOLUNTEERS: If you are interested in learning to lead Matins as a Reader's Service on Sunday before Liturgy, please see Father Michael. Matins is celebrated on the first Sunday of the month unless otherwise noted.

ICONS AVAILABLE: There are several blessed icons in the church hall, there is no cost to take these home, though a free will offering for the benefit of the parish is welcome.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES: **May God grant you many happy and blessed years!**

12/2 Robert Walicki

12/5 Lynne & Robert Walicki 27th Wedding Anniversary

12/8 Angelino Revilak

12/25 Genevive Revilak

Don't see your birthday or anniversary? Let us know so we can update the directory!

COFFEE SOCIAL VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: In addition to attending services together, it is important that we spend time in conversation with one another. To make it truly a time of sharing – we ask everyone to sign up to host a Sunday. We look forward to seeing you!

EPISTLE: Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23 & 32-40:

“By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise; for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God. By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac descendants shall bear your name.” He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead and he received Isaac back as a symbol. By faith regarding things still to come, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and “bowed in worship, leaning on the top of his staff.” By faith Joseph, near the end of his life, spoke of the Exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his bones. By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.

What more shall I say? I have not time to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, did what was righteous, obtained the promises; they closed the mouths of lions, put out raging fires, escaped the devouring sword; out of weakness they were made powerful, became strong in battle, and turned back foreign invaders. Women received back their dead through resurrection. Some were tortured and would not accept deliverance, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others endured mockery, scourging, even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in two, put to death at sword’s point; they went about in skins of sheep or goats, needy, afflicted, tormented. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered about in deserts and on mountains, in caves and in crevices in the earth. Yet all these, though approved because of their faith, did not receive what had been promised. God had foreseen something better for us, so that without us they should not be made perfect.”

GOSPEL: Matthew 1:1-25:

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, *Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile. After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah. Thus, the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, * because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, * and he named him Jesus.”

SAINT OF THE DAY: Dec. 21 The holy martyr Juliana of Nicodemia. Born to pagan parents, she was at a young age converted to the Faith. She refused to marry the man chosen for her by her parents because he was not a Christian. She was arrested, beaten, and then beheaded, and with her many others who saw her witness and were converted by it. (304)

Dec. 24 The holy martyr Eugenia. Her father was Eparch of All Egypt. Eugenia ministered to the Christians who had been forced to flee the city of Alexandria due to persecution, and was then baptized. She assumed men’s clothing and lived in a

monastery. She was betrayed to the Eparch, who then found his daughter (thought by him to be dead). He was converted to the Faith. They moved back to Rome, where she was beheaded on December 25. (262)

Dec. 25 THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, GOD, AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST “When the fullness of time was come, God sent his only-begotten Son” (Galatians 4:4) to save the human race. Nine months after his conception in the womb of the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity was born in a stable in Bethlehem of Judea. To him be eternal glory and praise! Amen.

Dec. 26 THE SYNAxis OF THE THEOTOKOS AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY. On the second day of the Christmas feast, the Church gives glory and praise to the most holy Theotokos, who bore our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The holy martyr Euthymius, bishop of Sardis in Lydia, who on account of his veneration of the Holy Images was forced into exile by the iconoclast Emperor Michael. Finally, when Theophilus was emperor, he was brutally beaten with leather thongs, and he fulfilled his martyrdom. (840)

Dec. 27 THE HOLY APOSTLE, FIRST MARTYR, AND ARCHDEACON STEPHEN, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. First of seven deacons, whom the Apostles chose to be fellow-laborers in the ministry, he was also the first of the disciples of the Lord to pour out his blood at Jerusalem. He provided testimony for Christ Jesus, whom he saw standing in glory at the right hand of the Father. He was covered over by stones while praying for his persecutors.

Our venerable father and confessor Theodore the Branded of Apamea in Bithynia, a monk of the laura of St. Sabbas in Palestine, priest and martyr. In Constantinople with his brother St. Theophane (the Hymnographer) he endured much in the defense of the Holy Images. He endured scourging, prisons, exile, and even brands on his forehead, for which reason he was called Graptus. He expired in prison. (845)

PILGRIM VOCATION ICON PROGRAM 2025/2026 BYZANTINE CATHOLIC METROPOLITAN CHURCH OF PITTSBURGH:

PITTSBURGH: Vocations are an integral part of the future of the Church. Following God's call to live in lives of service to Him through Ordination, Marriage, or Consecrated Life is something that all of us in the Church have a vested interest in praying for and promoting. From October 2025 through January 2026, Holy Spirit Byzantine Catholic Church will join the rest of the Metropolitan Church in praying for Vocations by participating in the Pilgrim Vocation Icon Program. Every week, from October 5, 2025 – January 17, 2026. Families are encouraged to sign up to take the Pilgrim Vocation Icon home for a week and to pray the Moleben for Vocations in their home during the week of the Icon's sojourn. Through these prayers, we hope that the next generations of vocations will embrace their God given callings, and that we may be strengthened in the universal call to discipleship and holiness. The Parish sign-up sheet will be in the Vestibule of the church or call the Rectory at: 412-881-8344 and leave a message with your choice of dates. Shut-ins are also encouraged to participate. We will deliver the Icon to you.

ON-LINE GIVING IS HERE! If you wish to make a monetary donation to our parish – you can do so on our website or by using this QR code. Remember every dollar helps support the mission of our parish community. Thank you.



PRAYER FOR OUR FOUR SAINTLY BISHOPS: Please pray for the causes of our four Saintly Bishops and ask them to intercede for your specific intentions: O Almighty God, our Lord, we bless You, we praise You, and we thank You for all the graces which You, in Your infinite mercy have bestowed upon us. We are especially grateful for giving us four saintly and heroic Bishops: **Bishop Theodore G. Romzha, Bishop Paul P. Gojdich OBSM, Bishop Basil Hopko, and Bishop Alexander Chira**,

who, by their courage, charity, and intrepid faith, inspired our Ruthenian people in the darkest moments of their history. By their great sufferings, humiliating imprisonment, and violent death they gave living witness to their Catholic faith and glorified Your exalted name. Therefore, O Gracious Lord, glorify them in return by Your divine power and inscribe their names in the book of Your Saints. For you are holy, our God, and we render glory to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever, and forever, Amen. With Ecclesiastical Approbation Acknowledgment of answered prayers: Postulator's office, 54 Riverview Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15214, U.S.A.

PRAYER FOR SEMINARIANS: **Saints Cyril and Methodius**, Venerable Apostles of the Slavs and Patrons of our Byzantine Catholic Seminary, we place our Seminarians in your loving care. Help them to grow in humility, meekness and prudence. Enkindle in them a burning zeal for souls. May their hearts be filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and may they learn to know and love the church so that they may always and everywhere think, speak and act with Her, the Glorious Spouse of Christ. May they become exemplars of generosity and detachment from the things of this world. But above all, O Venerable Patrons, help them to truly know, love and serve the Eternal High Priest, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose priests they aspire to be. Amen. St. Michael the Archangel, Defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, By the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits, who prowl throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

