

Saints Peter & Paul
Byzantine Catholic Church
107 South Fourth Street
Minersville, PA 17954

St. Mary's (Dormition of the Mother of God)
Byzantine Catholic Church
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Saint Clair, PA 17970

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Served by: Very Reverend Gregory J. Noga, Pastor

SS. Peter & Paul Cantor: Mr. Paul Konkus

St. Mary Cantor: Dr. Peter Yasenchak

CONFESSIONS: Sts. Peter & Paul: Saturday 2:45-3:30 PM

St. Mary's: Saturday 1:00 – 1:30 PM

SICK CALLS: As scheduled, or anytime in case of an emergency. If anyone is homebound or hospitalized, please call the rectory (544-2074)

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Mark J. Mahal – Funeral Director

The Story of the Origin of Jesus Christ, Son of David, and the Rest of the Names

Matthew's genealogy is extraordinarily comprehensive in his theology of the roots of Jesus' story in the Old Testament. But that is only one part of the story of Jesus Christ. The story has a sequence as well; and the continuing sequence is what makes the genealogy "good news" for Matthew's audience and for us. Human being have been empowered to preserve, proclaim, and convey the salvation brought by Jesus Christ throughout history. The God who wrote the beginnings with crooked lines also writes the sequence with crooked lines, and some of those lines are our own lives and witness.

A God who did not hesitate to use the scheming as well as the noble, the impure as well as the pure, men to whom the world hearkened and women upon whom the world frowned – this God continues to work through the same melange. If it was a challenge to recognize in the last part of

Matthew's genealogy that totally unknown people were part of the story of Jesus Christ, it may be a greater challenge to recognize that the unknown characters of today are an essential part of the sequence. The proclamation of that genealogy in the Advent liturgy is designed to give us hope about our destiny and our importance.

By stressing the all-powerful grace of God, the genealogy presents its greatest challenge to those who will accept only an idealized Jesus Christ whose story they would write only with straight lines and whose portrait they would paint only in pastel colors. If we look at the whole story and the total picture, the Gospels teach us that Jesus' ministry was not thus; the history of the church teaches us that the sequence as not thus. God's grace can work even with people like us.

Father Raymond E. Brown, S.S.

SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD



Icon of the Holy Ancestors

Sunday before Nativity
Sunday of the Holy Fathers
Tone 5

Welcome to the parish communities of SS. Peter and Paul and St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Churches of Minersville and Saint Clair, Pennsylvania. We greet and welcome you to our Church. Our Church is a holy place. Our Church is where we get together in Jesus' Name. It is holy because we come here to worship, to be nourished in faith through Sacred Scripture and preaching, to open our hearts and minds to celebrate the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ and to dedicate ourselves to a life of holiness and service to the Lord and others. The church building itself reflects this faith and calls us to enter into communion with God. We invite you to share our faith in Jesus Christ, to experience our worship and to live a life dedicated to the service of God and one another in Jesus' Name.

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December 19 – December 25, 2021
All Divine Services are livestreamed where noted

Saturday Vigil Divine Liturgy
4:00 p.m. + **John Uschock** req. by Mike Hanchank

Sunday
8:00 a.m. +**Mary Surmay** req. by MM Melvin Koppenhaver (at St. Mary)
9:30 a.m. **Health and Blessing of the Parishioners** (at SS. Peter & Paul)
Livestreamed

Tuesday
8:00 a.m. +**Catherine Kafora** req. by MM Steve Pinchorski

Wednesday
8:00 a.m. +**Mary Hubb** req. by Catherine Reichenbach & Family

Thursday
8:00 a.m. +**Paul Platko** req. by wife, Helen

Friday **Vigil of Nativity** (at SS Peter & Paul)
4:00 p.m. **Special Intention**

Saturday **Nativity of Jesus Christ** (at St. Mary)
9:00 a.m. +**John Uschock** req. by Mike Hanchank

Epistle Readers: 12/4 – Dolores Kramer; 12/5 – Jennifer Keer; 12/6 – Ellen Sinkovich; 12/8 – Marie Wanchick; 12/11 – Gail Burgess; 12/12 – Angela Frank; 12/18 – Madeline Dinich; 12/19 – Anna Keer.

Candles in front of the Icons and on the Sacramental Table are offered for:

Also, for the Nativity, the torches in the main isle are \$5.00 per candle for any intention.

Thank you: I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to all those who prepared the churches of St. Mary and SS Peter & Paul for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

Ladies of St. Mary, I am impressed with the amount of work expended, both for the soup sale and the cookie sale. Each project was successful beyond my expectations. Congratulations!

SS Peter & Paul Kitchen Staff, congratulations on another well-done breakfast. I appreciate the time and effort that went into preparation and clean-up.

And last, but not least. I offer my thanks and appreciation to the Children in our ECF Program for leading us in song as we celebrated St. Nicholas at the breakfast honoring him. It takes courage to stand in front of all the adults and show us what you are made of: strong stock in Jesus Christ. You are so important in the life of our church, the Body of Christ.

Lest I forget: I am pleased to thank all who participated in the Giving Tree. It was very successful. Thank you Laura Mitchell for coordinating and managing the event.

Let us pray for the victims of the severe tornados this past week. The families who are devastated and mourn the loss of their loved ones must also be kept in our prayers. We invoke the mercy of God asking Him to hold them close and carry their burdens in His hands easing their pain and suffering. Grant, O Lord, to your servants the victims blessed repose and may their memory be eternal.

Reminder: Every Friday from 12 Noon until 3:00 p.m. the SS Peter & Paul church is open for private prayer. The Mystery of Forgiveness is offered from 2:00 p.m. until 3:00 p.m.

Come, spend some time with our Saviour each week in addition to Sunday Worship for the many blessings He provides each day.

Did You Know That ...

...we find rest in those who love us and we provide a resting place in ourselves for those who love us?

...God continually tells and acts like He loves us?

...when love reigns the impossible is attained?

...there is no limitation to love?

...one gets bold for Christ when one is sure Christ loves him?

...love is the tender look that becomes habitual?

...love is the irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired?

...love conquers all?

...prayer is an open line to heaven?

...to follow the Lord we must walk with the Lord?

...it is only Christ who can create unity out of diversity?

...it is true we may face situations beyond our reserves, but never beyond God's resources?

...in every desert of trial, our God has an oasis of comfort?

...they witness best who witness with their lives and their lips?

...Christ is the only bridge over the chasm of sin?

...he who trusts in the Lord shall have mercy surrounding him?

...it is far better to be poor and walk by faith than to be wealthy and walk only by sight?

...if we wish to give our life stability, we must hold on to the promises of our God?

Living Out the Truths of His Name

What's in a name? In a faith predicated on the Word of St. John's Gospel, everything! God's revelation to us in Scripture emphasizes the power of everything to do with language and if we read the Old and New Testaments with an eye for acts of naming, the meaning of names, and their conferral on newly-borns, especially as well, name changes of the sort experienced when a man or woman enters monastic life, God's goodness and the blessing of divine salvation come into focus.

One of the first object lessons in Scripture teaches the authority associated with naming. Our heavenly Father brings the freshly created livestock, wild animals and birds to Adam for him to baptize with names, a potent symbol of our responsibility for the earth and all its creatures. Later, the name Abraham, for "father (*ahh*) of a multitude (*raham*)," represents the divine calling of this first Hebrew patriarch of the Chosen People. Then Jacob (the "heel grabber," he who will "trip you up" cheats his brother Esau out of his birthright, but at Peniel, the trickster wrestles with a significantly unnamed, mysterious and powerful heavenly creature who then renames Jacob "Israel," or *yisra'el* in the Hebrew, from *sara*, "he wrestles with" and *El*, "God." The new moniker suggests this Hebrew leader has come to grips with himself and his identity in God and will now lead a holy life, recognizing always that he is created in the image of God.

Something similar happens to a mercurial fisherman named Simon (from the Hebrew *Shim'on* for "hearing"). He seems open to and swayed by whatever he may be "hearing" or "listening"

to at the moment, as his later betrayal of Jesus shows, but after Jesus renames Simon “Peter” he does become the “rock” or “stone” of pre-eminent and exemplary faith upon which the Church of Christ is built, according to the gospel of St. Matthew. Biblical authors are also keen to emphasize that the meaning of the common Jewish name Jesus originates in *Yeshua*, for “God saves.”

To ancient minds a word is no mere, shallow, hollow label. A name more than identifies a person to the world; it is seen as mysteriously participating in the essence of whatever it represents; it is what it symbolizes. Words connect visible, specific people and things with the invisible, universal reality and truth of which they silently witness and speak. They are identifiers of the inner soul, a concept long lost in western thinking, no doubt a reason why parents today label their children with such weird names. Therefore, when poetic John names Jesus the “Word” in the first chapter of his gospel, the words themselves in that phrase, “the Word” are left to be the “Logos,” “Jesus,” “Love” in an immediate mystical way perhaps lost on our modern imperceptible-to-mystery minds.

On the eighth day our Lord is taken to the temple and is named for our benefit. His name identifies his vocation in life in this world. The name of his mother Mary identified with the Hebrew word meaning *bitterness* shows her as a stalwart and brave woman whose heart will be pierced with sadness according to the prophecy of the just Simeon when the Lord is brought to the temple on the fortieth day. Indeed, her entire life is associated in this word as she witness the vilification and final destiny which He endures for the sake of our salvation.

The son of the foster-father Joseph, which means in Hebrew, “God will give you more,” a phrase expressing his gratitude to God for this infant child, in addition to others he has naturally fathered in a previously widowed marriage. It is this child, however which will provide for him the fulfillment of his earthly life from the loving generous God who always “gives more.” The foster-father is reminded of his great and good spiritual legacy because it is also the name of Jacob’s favorite son, who learning humility and forgiveness, matures into a great leader in Egypt, a unifier during difficult famine years (Genesis 41).

The gifts of our heavenly Father to us are often called “blessings,” and the parents of the divine Child are always reminded by their Son of the unending nature of God’s openhandedness. Although our heavenly Father shows his love to us daily by presenting us with many good blessings, they are easy to overlook and take for granted. But having a name that means “Saviour” is in itself a blessed prompt to be grateful. Thus in the name given our Lord, a constant reminder is made to all of us of the way community is made possible when there is harmony between the divine and the ordinary.

Name Upon Name

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham
Matthew 1: 1.

Parents generally have specific and worthwhile reasons for each name they assign to us. After all, it is our name that creates our outlook on life because it describes values and treasured insights which are notable.

We also believe our heavenly Father had specific reasons for the names He included in the beginning of the gospel of St. Matthew the Evangelist which is prescribed reading for the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday prior to the Nativity of our Lord.

It may seem and sound like a long, boring list of meaningless names, but those names serve at least two serious purposes. First, they provide the framework by which true Hebrew believers could establish their family roots and maintain a family religious purity and integrity against outside, watering-down influences. Second, the names reflect the sovereign work of our God. They reveal the dealings of our heavenly Father with his chosen people in the past, which then resulted in the birth of the Messiah. In addition they provide insight into the direct lineage of Christ with the centerline of salvation history, coming to us with the blood line of all the participants and notables of Old Testament preparation and participation. It was because of the activity of these progenitors and forbears in the flesh of the Lord that the Messiah was destined to come among us.

The Lord used all kinds of people in Jesus’ lineage: farmers, kings, a prostitute, adulterers, liars, even finally the ever Virgin Mary who endowed him with humanity in such a way He is able to redeem mankind. When we look over and read and ponder this listing, how overwhelmed we are because it reminds us of God’s faithfulness. Even from an ongoing list of sinners and often wrong-doers, God can bring something good which will make life for man much improved upon the face of the earth.

As we celebrate this Sunday of the Forefathers prior to the Nativity of our Lord, we are reminded by faith in Christ of his faithfulness to each of us and his eager and ardent desire to bring about his purposes, even through the limitations and singular inadequacy of each of us. Christ can and does overcome the world and its self-imposed limitations.

Letting The Word Of God Speak

The centurion said in reply, "Lord I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed..." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Amen, I say to you, in no one else in Israel have I found such faith" Matthew 8: 8, 10.

It is fundamental Byzantine theology that love precedes knowledge. We truly know that only which we love. When we stand back analyzing and coolly calculating, we will never really know. It is only in stepping out into the arena and giving ourselves to a person that a person can speak to us. Love precedes understanding. We do not look forward to receiving something in return.

Take a leap of faith, of love, of self-giving wherein you allow our heavenly Father to speak to you. Dispose yourself to his grace to be used as his instrument. We cannot prove to anyone with any kind of earthly logic or by any bit of persuasive philosophy that this is, for example the Word of God revealed to us, that God exists or that Jesus is Lord. But we can call out and invite ALL to step out, to trust, to love. Say, "Lord, if you are in fact my Lord, then show yourself in my life and speak to my heart." Then pursue the directives of your heart and soul.

Lord, Jesus, how many times while insisting I am a believer in need of healing and restoration, that my faith in your promises to your chosen people of which I am part. Sometimes I hold back, waiting to better understand first before I fully commit myself to your entire teaching to love and live successfully in your kingdom. Help me to turn around this holy time of the Nativity Fast, to love first and then seek understanding which I believe in your good time will be provided me.

Enrich me with a deep and profound faith that I will do your will without questioning or examining its beneficial purpose. So endow me that I respond to all occasions when my faith, my insight, my sincere and acceptable prayer will bring about a change for the better in myself and those whom I so ardently love. Grant me the gift of patience that I hopefully await the manifestation of your will in this life, that I do not hold back the inspiration of your infused grace and decide to do nothing but indulge in self-serving activity and the opportunity you provide for your will to be made known is utterly lost, never to be regained.. Permit my faith response to your first shown love be the time and place you choose to be glorified. Let your word speak through me!

The Feast of the Word Becoming Flesh

"Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give" Matthew 10: 6 – 8.

In our Lord Jesus Christ, our heavenly Father achieved the perfect synthesis of God and human. God gave humanity the vision of its wholeness and totality and assured us that we can be at home within that vision. That is what this season of the Nativity Fast calls us to recognize and therefore to live. The incarnation of Jesus demonstrates that our heavenly Father meets us where we are if we but repent and change, if we but not only confess Christ on our lips, but live him by faith response to his first-shown love. It assures us that we do not have to leave the world or relinquish our humanity in order to know, love and serve our God, but very simply that we must turn from evil. In the birth of the God-man, we have been consecrated in truth, so we are sent into the world to continue the saving pattern of embodiment in Christ.

We tend to fear incarnation precisely because it makes our faith response so real, so particular, so worldly. We prefer to express our religious profession on the level of the word, yet the pattern our Lord introduces us to is word becoming flesh, profession on our lips becoming Christian living. The great lie is that redemption can happen apart from incarnation and this we label the "scandal of particularity." For the believer, power is always hidden in powerlessness, just as our God is hidden in a poor baby born in a manger in Bethlehem.

We may want the spiritual without the flesh, we may want the cosmic without the concrete, but if the Word is ever to be loved and shared, we must assume embodiment, making God's values our own and permitting them to guide the activity of our daily lives, which is always concrete, emphatic and ordinary. There God is perfectly hidden and perfectly revealed in the totality of our daily response to his love.

Jesus sent the disciples into the world to carry on his ministry of love. We are inadequate, by ourselves, to do what He did, what the disciples did in imitation of his life, but with God's grace, all things become possible.

"In those days John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' It was of him that the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "A voice crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths"" Matthew 3: 1 – 3.

So during this sacred time we must remember everything because memory is the basis of both pain and rejoicing and we cannot have one without other. We are not quick to heal all the memories, our

sinful past, unless that means also feeling their effects deeply and taking them all into our salvation history. Our God calls us to suffer the whole of reality, to remember particularly the good along with the bad so that the good is appreciated, so that the good of God's coming among us is never relegated to an obscure dark mysterious past. This is the course of the journey toward new sights and new hope. Memory creates a readiness for salvation, an emptiness to receive and be filled with redeeming love and a fullness to enjoy it.

Strangely enough it seems much easier to remember the hurts, the failures, the rejections, but in a seeming love of freedom our heavenly Father allows us to be vulnerable to evil. And until we have learned to see evil comes to us easily and can hold us in its grips we will not appreciate the value of the coming of our God in the flesh among us.

Yet, only in an experience and remembering of the good do we have the power to stand against death, to recall with perfect humility that our God loves us so much He assumes our frail flesh to redeem us. Baruch tells Jerusalem, you must "rejoice that you are remembered by God." In that remembrance we have new sight and the evil can be absolved and blotted out now that we have the spiritual wherewithal to overcome it in the Christ Child.

We must remember that we and the world we live in is yet imperfect so that we can recall God's saving power to be fortified by a hope in new world, both inner and outer, that will be transformed by the activity of God's saving grace in us.

"Here comes your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the dumb will sing" Isaiah 35: 4 – 6.

Finally, then the purpose of the holy time is to continually permit to reverberate what we are told at our baptism, that we have finally been adopted from our separation and incorporated into the hidden mystery once again of the Blessed Trinity. It takes all our lives to believe our baptism. We do not have to earn our place; we already have it; all that is necessary is that we continually maintain it. We must agree that we have the divine nature in us because we are children of our God.

Where else did we come but from God? What was once inside of God is now outside of God and it is us, human beings created in his likeness, always laboring to cooperate with his freely bestowed grace that we become like him in word and deed. Our blessed faith announces it again and we are blessed and fortunate under heaven to hear it and believe it and implement it. We then become the announcers of the Good News by our lifestyle; we proclaiming the sonship and daughterhood of our Creator God.

Confused souls turn everything around. Some people spend their whole lives trying and thinking they can earn what they already have, trying to be worthy of God. We cannot get worthy; we are worthy; we must recognize it and live it. The primary things that initially separate us from our heavenly Father is the belief that we are separated, so we live like we are separated!

The Nativity Fast is a time particularly when we proclaim with boldness that we belong to God, that we cannot earn God's love because we are utterly dependant on God for what we need most, but God is always ready to give us what we need, not necessarily what we want. For our part, then, we have to retune ourselves to responding to him in his prescribed way so that when we ask in faith, we can grow more and more in trust and hope.

Enfleshed in us is the gift of salvation and if we recall and remember all that He does for us, we can in all truth remain his faithful sons and daughters!



Adorn yourself, O Bethlehem.
Open your gates, O Eden.
Enter, O Magi, and see salvation swaddled in a crib.
Behold the star shining above the cave;
it announces the life-giving Lord
who saves the human race.
—verses from Vespers of the feast of Saint Andrew

