

Message from Fr. Michael....

Dearly Beloved Faithful in the Lord:

"St. Basil and the Vasilopita Tradition"

Soon we will be saying: Happy New Year! I pray that this year of 2020 brings you "all good things that come from above." spiritual prosperity and good health. Wednesday, we celebrate the feast day of St. Basil the Great. He was one of the greatest fathers of the Orthodox faith. He was also one of the most compassionate of clergy, during his time. He was one of the first to establish an orphanage for children. St. Basil the Great was born about the end of the year 329 in Caesarea of Cappadocia, to a family renowned for their learning and holiness. His parents' names were Basil and Emily. His mother Emily (commemorated July 19) and his grandmother Macrina (Jan. 14) are Saints of the Church, together with all his brothers and sisters: Macrina, his elder sister (July 19), Gregory of Nyssa (Jan. to), Peter of Sebastia (Jan. 9), and Naucratius. Basil studied in Constantinople under the sophist Libanius, then in Athens, where also he formed a friendship with the young Gregory, a fellow Cappadocian, later called "the Theologian." Through the good influence of his sister Macrina (see July 19), he chose to embrace the ascetical life, abandoning his worldly career. He visited the monks in Egypt, in Palestine, in Syria, and in Mesopotamia, and upon returning to Caesarea, he departed to a hermitage on the Iris River in Pontus, not far from Annesi, where his mother and his sister Macrina were already treading the path of the ascetical life; here he also wrote his ascetical homilies. About the year 370, when the bishop of his country reposed, he was elected to succeed to his throne and was entrusted with the Church of Christ, which he tended for eight years, living in voluntary poverty and strict asceticism, having no other care than to defend holy Orthodoxy as a worthy successor of the Apostles. The Emperor, and Modestus, the Eparch of the East, who were of one mind with the Arians, tried with threats of exile and of torments to bend the Saint to their own confession, because he was the bastion of Orthodoxy in all Cappadocia, and preserved it from heresy when Arianism was at its strongest. But he set all their malice at nought, and in his willingness to give himself up to every suffering for the sake of the Faith, showed himself to be a martyr by volition. Modestus, amazed at Basil's fearlessness in his presence, said that no one had ever so spoken to him. "Perhaps," answered the Saint, "you have never met a bishop before." The Emperor Valens himself was almost won over by Basil's dignity and wisdom. When Valens' son fell gravely sick, he asked Saint Basil to pray for him. The Saint promised that his son would be restated if Valens agreed to have him baptized by the Orthodox; Valens agreed, Basil prayed, and the son was restored. But afterwards the Emperor had him baptized by Arians, and the child died soon after. Later, Valens, persuaded by his counsellors, decided to send the Saint into exile because he would not accept the Arians into communion; but his pen broke when he was signing the edict of banishment. He tried a second time and a third, but the same thing happened, so that the Emperor was filled with dread, and tore up the document, and Basil was not banished. St. Basil adhered to an ascetical way of life. He fell asleep in the Lord on the 1st of January, in 379 at the age of forty-nine. His writings were filled with wisdom.

These writings were gifts which set forth the doctrines concerning the mysteries both of the creation (see his Hexaemeron) and of the Holy Trinity (see On the Holy Spirit). Because of the majesty and keenness of his eloquence, he is honoured as "the revealer of heavenly things" and "the Great." St. Basil is also celebrated on January 30th with St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. (The reading above is actually through the courtesy of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery)

On January 1st is St. Basil's feast day, the annual family celebration of the Vasilopita occurs. This original event which happened in Cappadocia of Caesarea in the last half of the fourth century is continued in the homes of Orthodox faithful annually.

The Greek word Vasilopita is directly translated as "Sweet Bread of Basil". When the Vasilopita is prepared, a coin is baked into each loaf. Sweet flavoring is added to the bread which symbolize the sweetness and joy of life everlasting. Sweetness also symbolizes that the hope we have, going into the New Year, will be filled with the sweetness of life, health, freedom, and joy for all who participate in the Vasilopita Observance.

When the observance begins, usually on New Year's Day, the bread is traditionally cut by the senior member of the family, in the home, or the priest at the Church. The person who receives the portion of the Pita which contains the coin is considered Blessed for the New Year.

Each portion of the Vasilopita are distributed as follows: The first portion is cut in remembrance of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The second is for the Holy Mother of our Lord, The Theotokos and Virgin Mary. The third is for St. Basil the Great, the other portions are cut for the members of the family beginning with the most senior in age. Portions may also be cut for the Church, the house, the traveller, the visitor and the poor.

St. Basil the Great, who was a bishop, wanted to distribute money to the poor in his Diocese. However, Basil desired to maintain the dignity of the poor. He did not want his good intentions to appear as charity. so as not to offend anyone. Therefore, he asked some women to bake sweetened bread, in which he arranged to place gold coins. This would allow families, in cutting the bread, to nourish themselves and at the same token, pleasantly give such individuals some economic relief through their discovery of coins baked into the bread.

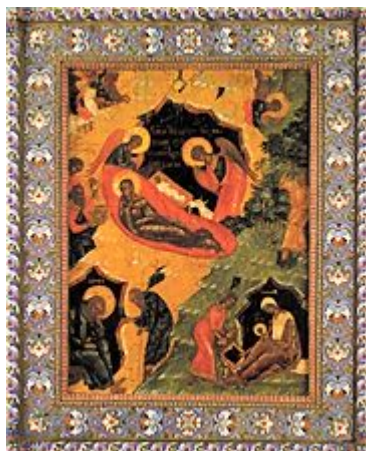
May the sweetness of the Vasilopita rub off onto you throughout this New Year and may our Lord hear our prayers through the intercessions of the Theotokos and St. Basil, for that gold coin that St. Basil offered is symbolically in each of us. We hope you will join us on New Year's Day with Orthros at 9:00 am and the Divine Liturgy at 10:00 am. What a wonderful way to start off the New Year by giving God the glory on the very first day of the year! I remain

In His service,

+Fr. Michael

Saints and Feasts Commemorated

Sunday after Nativity



On the Sunday that falls on or immediately after the twenty-sixth of this month, we make commemoration of Saints Joseph, the Betrothed of the Virgin; David, the Prophet and King; and James, the Brother of God. When there is no Sunday within this period, we celebrate this commemoration on the 26th. Saint Joseph (whose name means "one who increases") was the son of Jacob, and the son-in-law - and hence, as it were, the son - of Eli (who was also called Eliakim or Joachim), who was the father of Mary the Virgin (Matt. 1:16; Luke 3:23). He was of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David, an inhabitant of Nazareth, a carpenter by Trade, and advanced in age when, by God's good will, he was betrothed to the Virgin, that he might minister to the great mystery of God's dispensation in the flesh by protecting her, providing for her, and being known as her husband so that she, being a virgin, would not suffer reproach when she was found to be with child. Joseph had been married before his betrothal to our Lady; they who are called Jesus' "brethren and sisters" (Matt. 13:55-56) are the children of Joseph by his first marriage. From Scripture, we know that Saint Joseph lived at least until the Twelfth year after the birth of Christ (Luke 2:41-52); according to the tradition of the Fathers, he reposed before the beginning of the public ministry of Christ. The child of God and ancestor of God, David, the great Prophet after Moses, sprang from the tribe of Judah. He was the son of Jesse, and was born in Bethlehem (whence it is called the City of David), in the year 1085 before Christ. While yet a youth, at the command of God he was anointed secretly by the Prophet Samuel to be the second King of the Israelites, while Saul - who had already been deprived of divine grace - was yet living. In the thirtieth year of his life, when Saul had been slain in battle, David was raised to the dignity of King, first, by his own tribe, and then by all the Israelite people, and he reigned for forty years. Having lived seventy years, he reposed in 1015 before Christ, having proclaimed beforehand that his son Solomon was to be the successor to the throne. The sacred history has recorded not only the grace of the Spirit that dwelt in him from his youth, his heroic exploits in war, and his great piety towards God, but also his transgressions and failings as a man. Yet his repentance was greater than his transgressions, and his love for God fervent and exemplary; so highly did God

honour this man, that when his son Solomon sinned, the Lord told him that He would not rend the kingdom in his lifetime "for David thy father's sake" (III Kings 12:12). Of The Kings of Israel, Jesus the Son of Sirach testifies, "All, except David and Hezekias and Josias, were defective" (Ecclus. 49:4). The name David means "beloved." His melodious Psalter is the foundation of all the services of the Church; there is not one service that is not filled with Psalms and psalmic verses. It was the means whereby old Israel praised God, and was used by the Apostles and the Lord Himself. It is so imbued with the spirit of prayer that the monastic fathers of all ages have used it as their trainer and teacher for their inner life of converse with God. Besides eloquently portraying every state and emotion of the soul before her Maker, the Psalter is filled with prophecies of the coming of Christ. It foretells His Incarnation, "He bowed the heavens and came down" (Psalm 17:9), His Baptism in the Jordan, "The waters saw Thee, O God, The waters saw Thee and were afraid" (76:15), His Crucifixion in its details, "They have pierced My hands and My feet They have parted My garments amongst themselves, and for My vesture have they cast lots" (21:16, 18). "For My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink" (68:26), His descent into Hades, "For Thou wilt not abandon My soul in Hades, nor wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption" (15:10) and Resurrection, "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered" (67:1). His Ascension, "God is gone up in jubilation" (46:5), and so forth.

14,000 infants (Holy Innocents) slain by Herod in Bethlehem

The infant-slaying Herod mentioned here is the same one that ruled at the time of Christ's Nativity. In those days, certain Magi, who were wise and noble men, perhaps even kings, set forth from the East, and came to Jerusalem, seeking the King of the Jews, Who had been born; and they said that in the East, where their homeland was, an unusual and strange star had appeared two years before, which, according to an ancient oracle (Num 24:17), was to signify the birth of some great king of the Jews. "For we have seen His star in the east," they said, "and have come to worship Him" (Matt. 2:2). Hearing these things, Herod was troubled, and the whole city together with him. Then, having inquired and been informed by the high priests and scribes of the people that, according to the prophecies, Christ was to be born in Bethlehem, he sent the Magi thither and ordered them that, when they would find the Child, to inform him, so that he also - as he affirmed - might go and worship Him. But the Magi, after they had worshipped, departed by another way to their own country by a divine command. Then Herod was wroth and sent men to slay all the infants of Bethlehem and the parts round about, from two years old and under, thinking that with them he would also certainly slay the King Who had been born. But this vain man who fought against God was mocked, since Jesus the Child, with Mary His Mother, under the protection of Joseph the Betrothed, fled into Egypt at the command of an Angel. As for those innocent infants, they became the first Martyrs slain in behalf of Christ. But their blood-thirsty executioner, the persecutor of Christ, came down with dropsy after a short time, with his members rotting and being eaten by worms, and he ended his life in a most wretched manner.

FATHER MICHAEL REQUESTS...that we, as a faithful community keep the following individuals in our prayers: Maria Lambrinos, Steve Anastos, Lilly Kashou, Angelo Romas, and Suzanne Vaishnani, daughter of Ted Simon. Please notify Fr. Michael if you have anyone else who should be included for special prayers. May they be under the grace and tender watch of our Lord.

TODAY, Sunday after the Nativity, at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, the Oath of Office will be administered by Fr. Michael to the new Parish Council members for the 2020-2022 term, listed in alphabetical order:

Gianouka Alikikos, Peter Diamantakos, Tina Hall, Lynda Ivan, Cholly Kashou, George Koutsaris, Patricia Zades Loposky, George Papastratis, Sophia Papastratis, Kostas Papatomas, Nicholas Pappas, Marian Recu, and Julie Ryan.

**SCHEDULE OF CHRISTMAS SERVICES FOR 2019 CHRISTMAS/
2020 THEOPHANY SEASON:**

Wednesday, January 1, 2020: Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord and the feast day of St. Basil the Great - Orthros 9:00 am and Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 10:00 am

Sunday, January 5, 2020: The Eve of the Feast of the Holy Theophany of the Lord - Orthros 9:00 am and Divine Liturgy 10:00 am

Monday, January 6, 2020: Feast of Holy Theophany - Orthros 8:45 am and Divine Liturgy 9:45 am - The Great Blessing of the Waters is to be at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on this day, January 6.

Wisdom of the Fathers

Nathanael too enters ... saying, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" ... Nevertheless, He is not ashamed to be named even from thence, signifying that He needs not ought of the things of men; and His disciples also He chooses out of Galilee.

St. John Chrysostom - Homily 9 on Matthew 2, 4th Century

At His birth [He] is laid in a manger, and abides in an inn, and takes a mother of low estate; teaching us to think no such thing a disgrace, and from the first outset trampling under foot the haughtiness of man, and bidding us give ourselves up to virtue only. For why do you pride yourself on your country, when I am commanding thee to be a stranger to the whole world?

St. John Chrysostom - Homily 9 on Matthew 2, 4th Century

Philoptochos is having their annual luncheon on Sunday, January 12 between 1:30-2:00 at Union Diner, 3000 E. Main St. All are welcome. If you are interested in going, please let Lynda Ivan or Katy Gianakouros at (607) 342-7227 know to let Union Diner in Endicott know how many will be attending.

Whether you are an Orthodox Christian, or this is your first visit to an Orthodox Church, we are pleased to have you with us. Although Holy Communion is reserved for baptized and chrismated (confirmed) Orthodox Christians, all are invited to receive the "ANTIDORON" (blessed bread) which is not a sacrament, but is a reminder of the "agape feast" that followed worship in the early Church. After the Divine Liturgy this morning, please join us in the Church Hall for fellowship and refreshments. We hope that you will return often to worship with us, to grow in Christ and in our Orthodox Faith. For any spiritual, religious, or sacramental matters, please contact Fr. Michael (607) 795-1474.