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# SAINT INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH

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## JANUARY NEWSLETTER AND CALENDAR

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## True Change

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was the king of Ephyra, who was punished because he overestimated his own intelligence and cunning. Sisyphus believed that his cleverness had even surpassed the ruler of the gods, Zeus himself. For his punishment, Sisyphus was forced to roll a large boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down the hill and hit him for all eternity. Sisyphus is an image of endless toil and futility.

Every year at this time, collectively we ask the question, "What is your New Year's resolution?" Wouldn't it be great to set a goal to move in a positive direction this year? To become more physically or spiritually healthy? We all start out with good intentions, but more often than not, we roll that proverbial stone up the hill only to have it come back to us. Oftentimes the drama of our making resolutions and giving up on them takes less than a few weeks.

What does it take to truly change? Truly lasting change takes humility, clarity, sobriety, and brutal honesty, which is the ability to see ourselves for who we really are. If you look at any passionately sinful habit, you will see a lot of "fuzzy" thinking. Our sinful passions distort the clarity of our vision of ourselves and the surrounding world. St. James speaks of one who hears the word of God but does not act on it as "a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was." The problem most of us have is that we either avoid the mirror or obscure the mirror so that we do not have to see ourselves clearly. When the mirror is fuzzy we do not have to correct what we see.

Here is a brief case-study-style illustration of fuzzy thinking: A client suffering from depression and anxiety goes to a local

counselor to help alleviate his symptoms. After the initial visit, the counselor takes the time to clarify what might be the client's issues. "You do not eat healthy, nutritious food, you do not exercise, you consume a lot of news and spend a lot of time searching for entertainment, you wake up with coffee and go to bed with alcohol and as far as I can tell, you have no meaningful spiritual life. Why is it that you think that you should feel healthy at this time?" It is fuzzy thinking to believe that we can live an unhealthy life while at the same time feeling good and healthy.

Another obstacle which prevents us from uprooting our passions and truly changing is the force of homeostasis. Homeostasis "is defined as the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self-corrective ways, to preserve the organizing principles of its existence." In other words, just because one part of the system wants to be different does not mean the whole system is on board. True positive change is always met with resistance. The "system" can be our family, our workplace, or our own spiritual lives. Every single aspect of our being is interconnected, which means any adjustments of our habits will change our whole self.

Do you want to pray more this year? You will have to make the time to pray, deal with laziness, the silence of God, your lack of faith in prayer, your inability to focus, along with all the other things that keep you from being a prayerful person. Becoming more prayerful may affect your sleep habits and what you do with your leisure time. As you draw closer to God, He may show you your sins and more than likely the devil will give you more attention as well. Nothing of value is free of effort. To be clear, the reward for being prayerful is greater than any issue or obstacle but only if you remain committed even in the face of such resistance. The bottom line is that if you want to change, expect a battle.

Finally, remember Sisyphus? He believed that he could outmatch the cleverness of Zeus and, as a punishment, he was doomed to futility. We are not



*"I'm willing to make some lifestyle changes as long as I don't have to do anything different."*

smarter or more cunning than our sinful passions. We cannot be transformed or transfigured without God's help. Christian spirituality assumes that we would never approach any change by ourselves and in our own energies. Jesus tells His disciples in John 15:5 "apart from me, you can do nothing." St. Sophrony puts it this way: "The Christian life is impossible...all we are able to do is to die daily."

With the impossibility of our task in mind, rather than setting a New Year's resolution, perhaps it would be better to pray and ask God to make one for you. After all, it is Christ who is the author and finisher of our faith. We often spend a lot of time and energy focusing on changes that might not be meant to be. One waits until the tree is ripe to pick fruit. The Holy Spirit needs to guide us into all truth.

Many resolutions are simply exercises of our own ego and have no connection to true spiritual health.

As we head into 2018 may God the Father inspire us to see ourselves clearly in the mirror of our hearts. May our Lord Jesus Christ arm us with resilience so that we can face our own resistance to change. May the Holy Spirit guide us on the path of salvation.

In Christ,  
Fr. Theophan

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

- On Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 9am, we serve a short Morning Prayers service.
- We will start a new series of Bible Study on Wednesday the 10th.
- On Saturdays after Vespers starting January 13, we will begin a new series of Catechism classes. Exploring the Orthodox Christian Faith. All are welcome.
- The parish council is scheduled to meet on the 18th at 7pm.
- Our Annual Parish Meeting will be on January 28th after the Liturgy.
- Confessions are heard every Saturday before Great Vespers between 5 pm and 6pm or before Sunday Liturgy between 9:15- 9:40am. There is no need to schedule an appointment unless it is outside of the above times.

## THEOPHANY SERVICE SCHEDULE

- Friday, January 5th - 6pm Great Vespers with the Great Blessing of the Waters.
- Saturday, January 6th - 10am Baptismal Liturgy.
- Sunday, January 7th - Blessing of the Water at Amerson Water Park following the Divine Liturgy.

## MANY YEARS!

Birthdays  
January

1 George Moore  
6 Alexander Gratigny  
6 Olga Uchakin  
14 Esmé San Bonaventura  
20 David Scouten  
21 Timothy Marble  
24 Leann Almquist  
27 Anton Osobov

Anniversaries

1 Colin & Molly Croft  
12 Ray & Patti Lanier

## ST. INNOCENT ANNUAL PARISH MEETING JANUARY 28TH

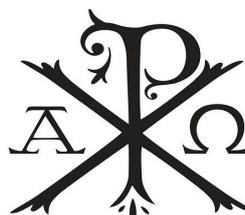
In Acts 1 after our Lord ascended it is recorded that the Apostles and 120 people gathered in the “upper room.” It was in the context of a meeting that God in His mercy and wisdom poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Once a year, every year at St. Innocent Church we gather together in Christ to have our Annual Parish Meeting.

Our Annual Parish Meeting is an opportunity to review the mission of our parish and how we are accomplishing that mission. What is our vision? What are we doing to accomplish the vision that God has given us?

The Annual Meeting is also an opportunity to connect with our community as a whole, to hear about the work of the various committees, to give input, and help shape the direction of our parish for the future. The business side of the annual meeting involves voting on various measures that directly affect the life of our community such as electing parish council members and approving next year’s parish budget.

As a member of St. Innocent Orthodox Church, your attendance is vital to the health and success of our parish in the years to come. Please save the date and make it a point to attend this important community gathering.

May God bless us with the same blessing He sent upon His Apostles in the upper room.



## ETIQUETTE FROM OUR CHURCH HANDBOOK

### In and Out

Certainly parents should have ready access to the doors to take small children out if they are distracting or need a short break—for this reason the doors are to be accessible, i.e. let us avoid the temptation to congregate around the back door, and challenge ourselves to move forward into the Nave. Aside from taking small children out if they are a distraction, or using the restroom, one should avoid going in and out of the church during services or allowing their children to repeatedly open and close the doors.

### What do I do during the Censings?

There are many local customs dealing with the censuring of the Church. In some places, people move to the center of the Church as the priest censes the icons on the church walls and in others they stay where they are. Here at St. Innocent people should stay where they are while the priest is censuring. In general, while the priest or deacon is censuring people should stop venerating the icons in the center of the Church.

### Standing and sitting

The traditional posture for prayer and worship in the Orthodox Church has been to stand. If you need to sit this is no sin, just be aware that there are sometimes when you should definitely stand such as the beginning of the service “Blessed is the Kingdom”, the Gospel reading, the Little and Great Entrances, the Anaphora “Let us stand aright”, the singing of the Creed, the “Our Father”, the distribution of Holy Communion, whenever the priest gives a blessing, and the Dismissal.

A few solutions to our chair shortage when the church is full:

- If you are able bodied, stretch yourself, work on standing for the entire service.
- If you do not need a chair – give it up for a guest. Give up your chair for our elders. Give up your chair for pregnant women.

- Children should feel free to sit on the floor if they need to. Parents can also sit on the floor if they like. This actually is fairly typical in the OCA. At St. Tikhon’s where there were not many chairs it was common for people to sit on the floor during the sermon our announcements. The rugs are not boundaries.

- Move to the front where there is more space.
- Some would suggest that we should simply get more chairs. There is little room for more chairs. Our church was not designed to have pews. Even if we add a few chairs this is going to continue to be an issue.

## SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

We are always looking for people to serve by donating their time and talents in the parish. Thank you to all those who have responded!

Here are a few needs we have:

- Calling all ladies! If you can sing and would like to join our fine choir please let Mark know. There is a need for a few more female voices.
- For many years we have tried to organize greeters to welcome visitors in the parish.
- We could use more money counters, those who help count the offering weekly after the Divine Liturgy.
- We always can use people who cook and provide our fellowship meal on Sunday's.
- We always need help cleaning up after the coffee hour or on Church cleanup day. This last Church cleanup had four people out of 50.

What about ministry ideas?

- Organizing meals for those in need.
- Visiting those who cannot make it to church.
- Helping our elder people of the parish.

Please take the time to consider what ways you can help our parish. Thank you to all those who serve already. Your sacrifice makes a big difference our small community.



## THEOPHANY HOUSE BLESSINGS

It is a tradition in the Orthodox Church to have your house blessed every year between the feast of Theophany (January 6) and the beginning of Lent (February 19 this year). In many places, after the water is blessed on the day of Theophany the priest would begin to go house to house, blessing with the Theophany water. In our time many people live further away from Church so it has become the custom for the priest to be invited to a particular home to do a house blessing.

House blessings are the spiritual version of a spring cleaning. Over the year our houses slowly collect dust and dirt, likewise, our homes over the year can become "spiritually dirty". It is therefore important to cleans and refresh our living environment.

In general, the priest will bring all that is needed to bless the house. There are a few things the homeowner can provide such as an icon of Christ and a candle. Also, a list of first names for whom prayers are to be offered, including members of the family and all those living in the house. The list should have a clear distinction between the living and the dead.

Traditions surrounding the blessing differ according to local custom. In general, when the priest comes, all who are present

in the house gather around the icon with the candle. Often the family will say the Trisagion Prayers and then help the priest sing of the Troparion of the Feast of Theophany. Then a family member, often the head of the household, leads the priest through the house with the candle. As he goes, the priest sprinkles holy water and prays for a blessing upon each room and the activity that goes on there. For houses which have never been blessed the process is a little more involved, the priest will discuss this with you.

It is a pious custom in many cultures to offer the priest a donation. This donation is never required or even expected. If you desire to have your house blessed please sign up at Church or you can email or call me to set a date and time. I look forward the opportunity to visit all of your homes.

**On Saturday, January 20th Houses in the Macon area.**

**On Saturday, January 27th Houses in the Warner Robins area.**

**If you would like to have your house blessed at one of the scheduled Saturday's please sign up by following this link:**

**[Theophany Sign up Sheet 2018](#)**



In 2017 the Parish Council decided to investigate Church Management Software. The goal of such software is to have a system that integrates our church communications and finances. This streamlines many administrative tasks.

### **What is Realm?**

Realm is many things. It is a directory where each member can manage their own information. It will be the new church calendar and email system. Realm is our new financial software which makes it so people can donate, set up automatic or even text payments. People can also see their own giving history through Realm. Realm can be used as an online meeting place for various ministries of the church, as well as a tool to increase communication between the members of these groups and ministries.

### **Why Should I Be Interested?**

With Realm, you are able to take possession of your profile that we at St. Innocent use to keep track of your contact information. Once you take possession of it, you can then keep all of your own information up to date, opt-in to an online church directory (viewable only by other church members), and provide other information such as a photograph, birthday, name day information, etc.

The more exciting aspect of Realm, however, is that you can then join various groups representing the ministries of the church. Each group has its own newsboard, group chat, and event calendar. All of this is also available in a convenient app for iOS and Android smartphones. You never have to wonder again when your next group meeting is, you can check right from your phone, RSVP to events, and communicate with other group members!

Realm also provides a handy way for you to keep track of your stewardship and giving. You'll be able to see exactly how much you've donated to the church, and how much you have to go to meet your stewardship goals. You can even safely and securely give right from your phone using the app!

### **Where can I get it?**

Everyone who is currently in our instant church directory will receive an invite to Realm in the first week of January. Any information that you provided for the instant directory has been manually put into your profile. You will be sent a link that you can follow to create your own login information and take possession of your profile. You'll then be able to sign in to the St. Innocent Realm Portal.

After you've created your login information with the link mentioned above, you can then download the Realm Connect app. When you open the app for the first time you'll select "I already have a login" at the bottom of the welcome screen, and sign in using the login information you created. It's that simple!

Either search in your app store for "Realm Connect," or follow the links below on your smartphone to download the app:



iOS App



Android App

## January 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7 9:40am 3 & 6th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy Blessing of the Waters at Amerson River park With Picnic	8 1 Circumcision of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ	9 2 9am Morning Prayers	10 3 6pm Daily Vespers	11 4 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	12 5 Strict Fast 6pm Great Vespers for Theophany with Blessing of Waters	13 6 10am Baptismal Divine Liturgy for Theophany 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
14 9:40am 3 & 6th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	15 MLK Day	16 9am Morning Prayers	17 6pm Daily Vespers 6:45pm Bible Study	18 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry 7pm Parish Council Meeting	19	20 10-4pm House Blessing Day Macon 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers 7pm Orthodoxy 101
21 Zacchaeus Sunday	22	23 9am Morning Prayers 6pm Paraklesis (Prayer group)	24 6pm Daily Vespers 6:45pm Bible Study	25 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	26	27 10-4pm House Blessing Day Warner Robins 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers 7pm Orthodoxy 101
28 Publican & Pharisee	29	30 9am Morning Prayers	31 Fast Free Week 6pm Daily Vespers 6:45pm Bible Study			
9:40am 3 & 6th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 12pm Annual Parish Meeting						

## February 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
4 Prodigal Son 9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	5	6 9am Morning Prayers	7 6pm Daily Vespers 6:45pm Bible Study	8 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	9 9am Divine Liturgy Meeting of Christ in the Temple	10 10am Church Cleanup 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers 7pm Orthodoxy 101
11 Last Judgment 9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	12 Meat Fast Fr. Theophan @ DOOS Pastoral Conference Jackson MS.	13 Meat Fast Fr. Theophan @ DOOS Pastoral Conference Jackson MS.	14 Meat Fast Fr. Theophan @ DOOS Pastoral Conference Jackson MS. 6pm Readers Vespers	15 Meat Fast 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	16 Meat Fast	17 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers 7pm Orthodoxy 101
18 Forgiveness Sunday 9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy Followed by Forgiveness Vespers 12:45pm Agape	19 Great Lent Begins 6:30pm Compline with the Great Canon	20 9am Morning Prayers 6:30pm Compline with the Great Canon	21 6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy	22 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry 6:30pm Compline with the Great	23 6:30pm Akathist to the Theotokos	24 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers 7pm Orthodoxy 101
25 Sunday of Orthodoxy 9:40am 3 & 6 <sup>th</sup> Hours 10am Divine Liturgy With Icon Procession 11:45am Agape	26	27 9am Morning Prayers	28 6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy			