

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

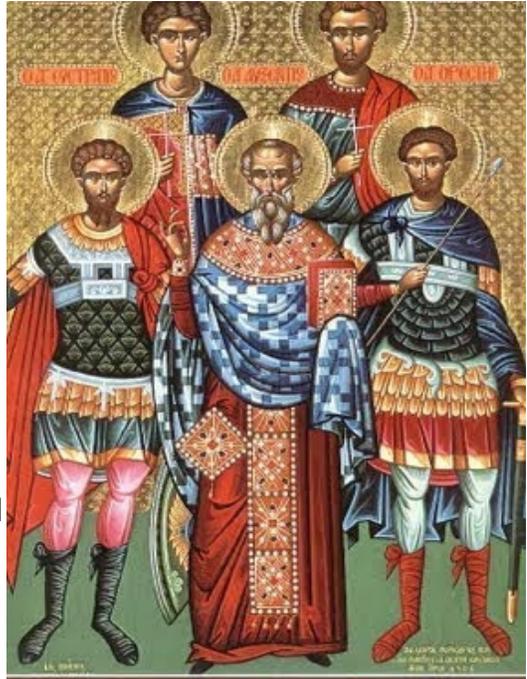
Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



***Please note that attendance is currently limited by restrictions dictated by local response to the COVID-19 pandemic; if you are currently not assigned to an attendance group, please contact outreach@apostlethomas.org for information on when you may attend.**

December 13, 2020 | 2nd Sunday Before Nativity

Holy Martyr Eustratius and Companions

These Saints lived during the years of Diocletian and Maximianus (284-305) the impious emperors, when the duke Lysias was governor of the province of Limitanea and Agrikolaos administered all the provinces of the East.

These five Martyrs revered Christ from the time of their ancestors, but hid the fact that they were Christians, out fear of these tyrants and persecutors. Of these, Saint Eustratios* came from the city of Aravraka, and held the position of secretary and the office of military commander. He had the desire to boldly express his faith in Christ, but feared the outcome of this action. For this reason he gave his officer belt to a servant and commanded him to go to the church of the city of Aravraka and leave it there. The Saint took this action having in mind the following: if his belt, which was left at the entrance of the Holy Sanctuary, was found and taken by the priest Auxentios, it would have been a divine indication that he could step forth and reveal his faith and suffer a martyr's death for which he desired. But if the belt

was found and taken by someone else, it meant that he would keep his faith in secret because it was not time yet to express it.

The servant complied with the mandate of the Saint, and upon returning, informed him that his belt was found and taken by the priest Auxentius. Thus the Saint took the view that his testimony for the sake of Christ will have a good outcome. Indeed, he then presented himself to Lysias and told him with frankness that he believed in Christ. In addition, the Saint came forth before Lysias as the leader among other saints who came from the military class, and was the first to declare himself a Christian and harshly scrutinized Lysias. After this, Lysias, became furious and immediately deposed him from his office. Then, he commanded the executioners to make him go through a terrible torture. First they removed his clothes and left him naked, and after stretching his body on the ground with a special machine, they started beating him mercilessly with whips. Then, he was tied with a rope and lifted up. They lit a big fire under his body and burnt him. They then mixed salt and vinegar and poured the mixture over his burned body parts. After all these, they destroyed his sides with stones. The Saint and Martyr, however, after the miraculous intervention of God, was perfectly healthy. This led Saint Eugenios to join the faith of Christ.

Then the executioners put iron shoes on the feet of Saint Eustratios which had spikes inside them, and led him to Sebaste of Nicopolis in Armenia along with Eugenios. On the way to Nicopolis, Saint Mardarios saw him driven this way and started blessing him much for his endurance and patience. Then, he consulted his wife, who encouraged him to also become a martyr for the love of Christ. Therefore Mardarios came running to Saint Eustratios who was walking, tied himself on the shackles, and told the soldiers that he was a Christian.

As soon as Lysias sat in his judging room, he commanded his soldiers to bring Saint Auxentios before him. There, the tyrant attempted to persuade him to return to paganism, but the Saint refused categorically by stating that he remains steadfast in the faith of Christ. Lysias then became incensed and commanded his executioners and they beheaded Auxentios.

Then Saint Mardarios was led to trial. But despite the efforts of the tyrant to dissuade him, he stayed committed to Christ. Lysias resented this fact and made the Saint go through torture. Therefore, they first pierced his ankles with an iron, and after passing through the holes ropes, they hung him facing down. Then, they burnt his kidneys and back with hot rods. So, in this way, Saint Mardarios became a Martyr and delivered his spirit to the Lord.

Then the judges led Saint Eugenios in. But he also remained steadfast in his faith in Christ. That is why the executioners cut off his tongue from the root and crushed

his legs with clubs. From this suffering the Martyr Eugenios surrendered his soul into the hands of the Lord.

After this, Lysias went to the exercise field in order to exercise his soldiers. Among them, there was a soldier named Orestes. This soldier was a Christian, but until that time, he hid his faith. At some point during his throwing of the javelin, the Cross that he was wearing came out of his clothes and appeared in the open. So after this incident, he had to confess his faith. Lysias was left dumbfounded by this revelation and with his dictates, the other soldiers tied Orestes with iron chains together with Saint Eustratios. But he did not keep them in Nicopolis to judge them himself, but sent them to Sebaste to be judged by Agrikolaos. Lysias perhaps feared that by miracles the Saint would attract many others to the faith of Christ.

Before Agrikolaos, Saint Eustratios who was very well educated and had excellent theological and philosophical training, analyzed throughout Christ's teachings for the salvation of man. With his words, the Saint caused astonishment but also an unspeakable anger in the tyrant. After this, the Saint was imprisoned. There, in prison during the night, he was visited by the Bishop of Sebaste, Saint Blaise (Feb. 11), and was given Communion. Then Saint Eustratios give him the text of his will and asked him for its faithful execution. After some time the tyrant commanded his executioners and they first laid Saint Orestes over a fiery gridiron. There the Saint completed his life and delivered his spirit to the Lord. Then the executioners lit a furnace and threw Saint Eustratios inside it. This is how his life ended and how the five holy Martyrs received from the Lord the crown of martyrdom. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:4-11

BRETHREN, when Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 14:16-24

The Lord spoke a parable, saying, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come,

for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The Holy Forefathers – these are truly great people! If one were to generalize the thought which defines their greatness, only those who fulfill God's will for the human race – a positive will – are truly great, for there is much that happens only by God's allowance. There are also powerful figures who act apart from God's will and even against it. These too can seem great, but not in and of themselves – only according to those great counteractions which God's Providence puts forth to efface the evil caused by them. We know God's direct will concerning eternal salvation; but God's plans concerning the temporal sojourn of people on the earth are hidden from us. That is why it is difficult for us to determine who acts more straightly, or more precisely according to God's will. One can only acknowledge one negative criteria as true: He who acts against God's determination for the eternal salvation of people cannot be considered great, no matter how ostentatious his deeds; for it is evident that he is going against the obvious will of God. Though this known will does not concern temporal, but rather eternal things, it is doubtless that the one will of God cannot contradict another.

– St. Theophan the Recluse

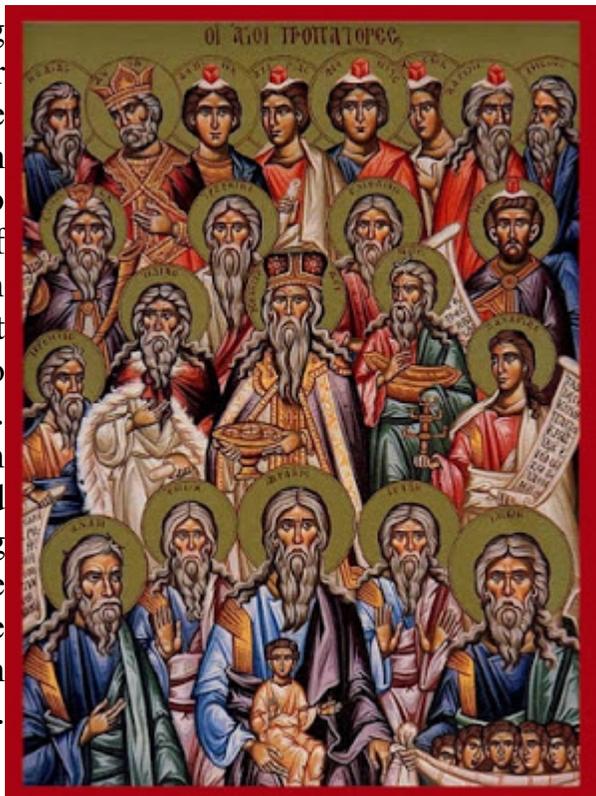
Synaxarion for the Second Sunday Before Nativity

The subject of the blessed Abraham is known as much by the wise men as by common Christians. For the Book of Genesis, written by the Prophet Moses, which speaks of him, is read to be heard by all Christians in the Church, during the fasting days of the Holy and Great Lent. Wherefore we all learn from this book, that our forefather Abraham was from the land of the Chaldeans, and he was a gentile. The Chaldeans were a nation before the Jews. And his father Terah was an idolater. The divine Abraham was also an idolater, but he was not prevented by this

from coming to know the true God. Rather, we should say something strange, for the great Abraham even by this idolatry was led to understand the true God.

When the renowned one understood that nothing created is God, and should not be worshiped as God, and having contemplated the good arrangement of things that exist, and by seeing these things which were made, he came to know their invisible Maker. And having come to know Him, he worshiped Him as God, Who upholds and governs all of creation, and designated these things which have come into being to be suitable and orderly. He was therefore ordered by God to leave his homeland and relatives, and go to the land of Canaan (where also Palestine and Jerusalem are located). Immediately he obeyed, without having doubt in his heart, for he had much faith towards God. For this reason he received as a wager for his faith, a son named Isaac who was born to him in his old age, and he became the father of many nations. Isaac was born of Abraham, Jacob was born of Isaac, and from Jacob was born Judah (from whose tribe Christ was born) and his brother Patriarchs.

For this reason therefore our God-bearing Fathers and Teachers, have arranged it for today to commemorate the divine Abraham, as the forefather from whom Christ was born. And they delivered this to be reckoned by us, not for a long period of many days, but near the birth in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was not done simply by chance, but according to the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For the most good and philanthropic Son of God, made the Patriarch Abraham and his descendants His forefathers according to His human nature. Thus the most divine Fathers rightly deemed for us to celebrate their memory as Forefathers, not long from the Lord's nativity according to the flesh. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*



Also Commemorated: Venerable Arcadius of Novotorsk

The Venerable Arcadius was born at the beginning of the XI century in the city of Vyazma, and was a member of the Syreishchikov family of merchants, who were distinguished for their fervent piety. From a young age, and loving the Lord with all his heart and soul, he resolved to devote his entire life to His service, and to free

his soul from worldly attachments. He was one of the earliest fools for the sake of Christ in Russia, and may have been inspired by reading the Lives of Greek fools such as Saint Symeon of Emesa (July 21) and Saint Andrew of Constantinople (October 2).

These holy fools for Christ tried to live according to the words of Christ: “Do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25). The holy fools were also mindful of Saint Paul’s words: “We are fools for Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we are dishonored. Until the present hour we both hunger and thirst; we are naked and buffeted, and have no fixed abode; we labor with our own hands. When we are reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure. When we are maligned, we entreat. We have become as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things, until now” (I Corinthians 4:10-13).

During the day, Saint Arcadius concealed his exalted angelic life by foolish behavior, and people mocked his appearance, as well as his child-like simplicity, kindness, and ignorance of the necessities of life. This made him seem strange and incomprehensible to worldly individuals, and his conduct became more unusual with every passing day. At night, however, he devoted his time to prayer, standing atop a stone on a hill in the forest outside of town.

Although the venerable one’s love of solitude helped him to remain unknown for a time, people soon became aware of the Saint’s virtuous life. They noticed that when he prayed in church, his very appearance seemed to change. His face became radiant, and his attention was completely focused on the prayers. Sometimes he would weep, shedding tears of compunction and repentance. It never occurred to anyone who observed him at such times that he might be a madman. Furthermore, his advice always seemed to be good, and his predictions always came to pass. He spoke only rarely, however, preferring to remain silent.

Whenever there was a Cross Procession, Saint Arcadius would take a broom, and for two days ahead of time he swept the streets, starting from the cathedral to the church. In this way he demonstrated that one must have inner purity and keep God’s commandments, especially when preparing for a Church Feast.

At that time, Saint Ephraim of Novotorsk (January 28) would often travel to Kiev to visit the more experienced Elders. Once, on the way from Kiev, he stopped at Vyazma, where he heard about Arcadius. From that moment, the young ascetic became the disciple of Elder Ephraim, who helped him to avoid the spiritual dangers inherent in the difficult and unusual exploit of foolishness for the sake of Christ. Elder Ephraim taught him that being despised by others could lead the mind

away from God, because knowing that one was suffering unjustly often leads to pride. Thus, such a way of life could also darken one's mind and heart, instead of leading one to enlightenment and the renewal of the inner man (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Over time Arcadius strengthened himself by constant spiritual struggles. He joined his Spiritual Father in Novotorsk, where Saint Ephraim tonsured him into the angelic Schema. After this the people of Vyazma witnessed several miracles which were accomplished through the prayers of Blessed Arcadius, but he fled from worldly glory and went to a place along the upper Tvertsa River. Saint Arcadius also participated in founding a church and monastery dedicated to the royal Passion-Bearers Boris and Gleb (May 2).

After moving into the new monastery, Saint Arcadius cut off his own will and obeyed his Spiritual Father, Saint Ephraim, in all things. Saint Arcadius never missed a service; he and his spiritual guide were always the first to come to church for Matins. After his Elder's repose, the Venerable Arcadius continued to labor according to his precepts, living a life of prayer, fasting and quietude. When he had lived in the Monastery of Saints Boris and Gleb for several years, he departed peacefully to the Lord on December 13, 1077. His body was buried next to his Spiritual Father, Saint Ephraim.

The inhabitants of Torzhok and the surrounding areas frequently experienced the power of the grace-filled actions of the Venerable Arcadius, and clearly saw in them a sign of God's favor. Whenever they turned to him with faith and prayer, they always received relief from their illnesses and deliverance from their sorrows through his intercession. The holy monk often appeared to the inhabitants of the city of Vyazma in dreams and visions and delivered them from troubles and sorrows. In their minds there was no doubt concerning his holiness.

The canonization of Saint Arcadius of Novotorsk for local veneration apparently took place around 1584-1587. In Vyazma's church of the All-Merciful Savior (built in 1594), and a side chapel dedicated to Saint Arcadius was built soon after his glorification. A combined celebration of Saints Arcadius and Ephraim was established by Metropolitan Dionysius sometime around 1584-1587. The relics of Saint Arcadius, glorified by miracles of healing, were uncovered on June 11, 1572.

On July 11, 1677, with the blessing of Metropolitan Cornelius of Novgorod and Velikiy Luki, Archimandrite Eustathios of Novotorsk monastery solemnly recovered the incorrupt relics of the Venerable Arcadius of Novotorsk and transferred them to a crypt in Saints Boris and Gleb cathedral at Novotorsk (New Market); and in 1841, the left side chapel of Saints Boris and Gleb cathedral church was dedicated to Saint Arcadius. On August 14, 1798 the Saint's holy

relics were placed in a stone coffin, which had served as the resting place of Saint Ephraim until 1572.

The solemn celebration of the 300th anniversary of the transfer of the holy relics of Saint Arcadius to the cathedral of Saints Boris and Gleb in 1677 took place in the city of Novotorsk in July of 1977.

On July 21, 2019, a portion of the relics of Saint Arcadius of Novotorsk were presented to the Cathedral church of Saints Boris and Gleb Monastery by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

Saint Arcadius is also commemorated on August 14 (the day of his blessed repose), July 11 (the transfer of his relics in 1677), and June 11 (the discovery of his relics). (*from oca.org*)

Prepare for Christmas with SPF50

The November-December 2020 edition of SPF50 is now available digitally on acrod.org. This issue begins the week of November 15th and includes a Scripture reading guide and prayers designed specifically for families to prepare to celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord. If you haven't tried SPF50 yet, consider joining in now. While the holiday season is undoubtedly a busy time, by making a commitment to read from the Bible and pray together for 50 minutes a month, your family will "keep Christ in Christmas" while spending quality time together. To access this material or to find out more about how SPF50 can help your family grow in Christ, visit the Diocesan Website at acrod.org and look for the SPF50 logo.

New Diocesan Youth Ministry Programs

Dear Parents and Diocesan Youth, Glory be to Jesus Christ! Our Diocese is pleased and excited to offer 2 NEW Youth Ministry Programs!!

In order to keep our Diocesan Youth connected to each other in the time between our sessions of "The Vine and the Branches," and to continue fostering their relationship with Christ, we are offering two optional Youth Ministry Programs for your children to participate in! Your child may join and participate in one or both of these programs. Both are for children Ages 5-18 (Kindergarten through 12th Grade). They are:

1. "HOMEROOMS" WITH OTHER DIOCESAN YOUTH (asynchronous) – Using the website/app "Homeroom", Diocesan youth will be able to stay in touch with each other on a private, controlled forum by creating and replying to posts, posting pictures and video reflections, and participating in group and individual challenges. This provides a private, controlled social-media-like atmosphere where only the youth who are added may see each other's posts

and allows these youth to stay connected to each other. The Youth Workers assigned to each Homeroom will regularly monitor interactions and will make posts, share reflections, and offer fun challenges and other discussion prompts for youth to respond to and interact with in a safe environment. Youth will be free to visit and use the "space" as often as they like. Once you sign up for a "Homeroom" you will be sent an email with other information and an invitation to join. Two "Homerooms" will be established: one for Youth ages 5-12, the other for Youth ages 13-18. Again, "Homerooms" will be monitored and participated in by our Youth Workers.

2. MONTHLY CHECK-INS (synchronous/live)- Using Zoom, Youth will be joining others their age from around the Diocese for quick live monthly get-togethers that will generally just be social in nature. These Check-ins will be 20-30 minutes in length and will be facilitated by one of our Youth Workers. Once you sign up for the "Check-ins" you will be sent an email with other information and an invitation to join.

Signing up for BOTH the Monthly "Check-ins" AND for a "Homeroom" will enable your child to interact with their peers around the Diocese in both a live form (monthly), as well as in an ongoing fashion as much as they would like. Youth Workers will help facilitate both the Check-ins and Homerooms.

Here is a link to sign up for either one or both of the above Youth Ministry Programs: <https://forms.gle/kjBpm91roxe7Lv4x9>

Please fill out this form for **EACH INDIVIDUAL CHILD** to indicate which of the program(s) you would like your child to participate in.

Please sign up by Monday, December 28!!!

If you have any questions, please contact Fr. Stephen Lopusky at fr.stephen.loposky@gmail.com or 724-662-4840.

Thank you! Yours in Christ,

The Vine and the Branches Ministry Team

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Presbyteria Katie Baker & family, Santiago Alzugaray, Patty Blaydoe, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Luke & Marlana Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Howl family, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl & family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, Luke & Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Nicholas Pavlik, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore & Christina Ristas, Robinson Family, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Joe & Darlene Waters, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Dcn. Nectaros & Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)