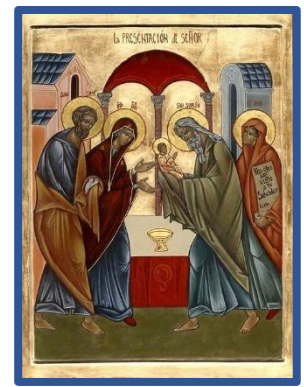


Sts. Peter & Paul Church Council News

February – March 2025

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Priest's Corner

Every year I have the privilege of visiting so many of our parishioners homes to bless them with the Holy Theophany water – something I enjoy very much, as it gives me the opportunity to visit with our families in a much more personal way. While doing so this year, a question came up as to why we do this every year. Doesn't the Church teach that the Grace of God is ever new, never growing old or expiring? If this is so, wouldn't a single blessing of a home be adequate forever? Why do we repeat such rituals every year?

The answer is quite simple. It is not the Grace of God, which needs to be renewed. It is us, who need to be reminded of that Grace, which already surrounds us and abides within us. It is we, who need to be renewed to that Grace, because it is we, who forget it, bury it in our hearts through our forgetfulness and sinfulness. Consider the fact that the Grace, which baptized us into Christ is the same as it was the day we received it yet, we tarnish it through our errors and trespasses. Knowing our weakness, God and His Holy Church give us the opportunity – through our contrition and confession of that sinfulness - to, yet again, be renewed to that Grace. Every year, we celebrate the great events in the life of Our Lord, His Most Holy Mother, the apostles and saints, reminding us of the great mercies God has bestowed upon us throughout our lifetimes.

How blessed we are, to have such a time as Great Lent to help cleanse our souls and bring ourselves closer to God. When Our Lord Jesus Christ healed a young man who was a lunatic, whom His apostles could not, He explained to them, that "This kind (of demon) can only be expelled through prayer and fasting" (Mk: 9, 29). Each of us is plagued by our own

demons and what better opportunity than this very time of the year to refocus our spiritual lives, expel these demons and truly make a permanent change in our lives for the better. Great Lent is the time for introspection, spiritual self-examination and prayer, all of which helps to clarify our perspectives on life and properly set our priorities.

Unfortunately, all too many of us misunderstand this opportunity and even see lent as a burden. Even those who try to "do lent" properly, often forget everything they tried to achieve during this time on the very first day of Pascha, or very shortly thereafter. Worst of all, is the fact that some celebrate Pascha not as a spiritual celebration of the Lord's Resurrection, but a celebration of the end of lent. We all know that the evil one never sleeps. During this most holy time of the year, when we are trying to improve our spiritual condition, the evil one increases his efforts to push us from the path of salvation we are trying to follow. Be aware of this. Even more so, make every effort to celebrate the Great Feast with spiritual joy and not unbridled "partying" and drunkenness, because the evil one simply gathers such souls into his snares, negating virtually everything we had gained during lent – and maybe even more.

"Thy grace has shone forth, O Lord, the illumination of our souls has taken place. Now is the acceptable time, the season of repentance is here. Let us cast aside the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light that we might pass through the tempest of the Fast and reach the celebration of the third day resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, the Savior of our souls."

--- Fr. Alexander



Congratulations to all those celebrating their Namesdays*:

- Feb. 3 – Anthony Peneherra
- Feb. 6 – Xenia Poluektov & Xenia Schettig
- Feb. 7 – Gregory Stez
- Feb. 9 – Ivan Stez
- Feb. 10 – Efrem White
- Feb. 16 – Metropolitan Nicholas, Anna Krassovsky, Anna Litvinenko, Simeon Collins
- Feb. 23 – Valentina Bertram
- Feb. 25 – Alexei Krassovsky, Alexei Sinitsky, and Alexei Spring
- Feb. 27 – Archbishop Kyrill
- March 4 - Theodora Dokos & Bozhidar Dokos
- March 13 – Kira Chistiakoff, Kira McPhee and Kira Poluektov
- March 17 - Daniel Judd
- March 23 – Kalissa Chistiakoff
- March 30 – Reader Alexei Khlopoff

God grant them all Many Years!

**)Fr. Alexander asks, that you please notify him if we have missed anyone's namesdays in our lists. Thank you!*



Starosta's / Warden's Corner

We had a wonderful Christmas celebration. The choir sang beautifully under the direction of choirmaster Vera Peterson. The church was decorated by a large group of our parishioners and the flower arrangements surrounding each icon were made by Elena Piskuleva and Arina Bohn. Beautiful poinsettias were provided by Lena and Ilya Poluektov.

The Theophany service was well attended this year and the weather held up for the outside blessing of the water.

On January 30th, our parish had the honor of serving of serving an Akathist and molieben before the great and miraculous Kursk-Root Icon of the Mother of God.



As a reminder the link for live streaming services is:

<https://stream.streamingchurch.tv/stream.php?churchid=church8703>

Previously recorded services may be viewed at:

https://streamingchurch.tv/ci/mf/media/notes_grid/church8703

You may also find links to these pages on our website:

<https://www.stsproca.org/>

—**Paul Johnson**

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Sisterhood News

Preparation for the Nativity celebration was, naturally, a main focus of the sisterhood's activities for the period of time covered in this newsletter. Sharon Buot organized the decoration of our dining hall, and she was gracefully assisted by her friend and coworker, Laura Miles, a staffing coordinator from North Bay Post Acute facility. Many people contributed crowd pleasing, traditional, holiday dishes for our special Nativity lunch on January 7th.



We feasted on tender and juicy meats, red caviar and smoked salmon appetizers, and a large array of salads. This year we had an unbelievable abundance of desserts! Thank you very much to everyone who participated in making the Nativity lunch a big success. And a special thank you to Anna Ferguson for being in charge of the lunch on January 8th, the second day of Nativity celebration.

As usual, we all enjoyed a beautifully decorated church, with Christmas trees, and lots of fresh, bright green fir branches and cheerful red bows behind each icon. Everyone is understandably busy in the last few days before Christmas, and it is hard to find time for church decoration. But it would be sad to celebrate our

wonderful special Nativity services without the festive uplifting atmosphere that the decorations help to create in our church. Our starosta, Paul Johnson, is always very grateful to those who were able to come and decorate the church. This year he offers heartfelt thanks to Deacon Father Athanasius, Michael Peterson, Vera Zaro, Anna Koval, John Reighard Ashley Collins, and Anna and Daniel Judd, and everyone else who stepped in to help.



Another part of the beatification of our church for the holidays is elegant flower arrangements around the icons that have been possible through the hard work and dedication of our wonderfully talented flower ladies - Elena Piskuleva and Arina Bohn. As always, they are finding the freshest and most beautiful flowers and making amazing arrangements that brighten our church and bring us joy. Thank you very much, dear Elena and Arina.

The holidays would not be complete without spreading the cheer to our elderly, sick, and shut-in parishioners. The sisterhood continued our tradition of delivering nicely decorated Nativity gift baskets to all



of them. Anna Judd thanks everyone who donated items for the baskets. We ended up with so many delicious treats! We had home baked cookies, dry and fresh fruit, chocolates, mini-calendars, fancy pens,

personal hygiene items, and many other small treasures. Thank you very much to Gloria Collins and her daughter, Ashley, for taking time to organize all the donations and decorate the baskets together with Anna Judd. Also, a special thank you goes to Nina, George Franke's daughter, who every year contributes unique home crafted items for the baskets. Nina is very creative and very talented, and we always appreciate her contributions. Also, a special thank you to Kapa Huhlov and Natalie Sabelnik, who always go out of their way to donate lots of beautiful and useful items. Please forgive us if we have forgotten to mention anyone. Most definitely, we are sincerely grateful to each and every one who generously help to continue this charitable program, including those who volunteer to personally deliver the gift baskets to the elderly.



Our volunteer drivers, this year, were Aliona Russi, Vera Zaro and Vera Williams. Thank you all!

During the last couple of months, in addition to the big

Nativity celebration, our sisterhood organized small celebrations of several birthdays during the lunchtimes, like Lena Poluektova's birthday on January 7th. We even had a double birthday celebration on January 5th -- for Magdalena Merriss, who turned two, and Daniel Judd, who turned 22.



Sharon Buot continues to do an incredible job in organizing groups to prepare our Sunday lunches, every single week, while, in addition to it, working super hard herself in the kitchen. Thank you very much, dear Sharon, for your dedication, selfless service, good will, and resilience! And thank you to all our sisters and brothers who contribute their cooking talents to make our lunches so successful.

God bless everyone!



The Joy of Lenten Services

*(A presentation made by Fr. Alexander at the
Diocesan Pastoral Conference)*

Part I

When I was a boy, standing in the altar of our church in Burlingame, I recall my feelings of excited anticipation of the dramatic changeover which would soon take place in the church on Forgiveness Sunday. I remember how we altar boys would chatter excitedly about the challenges of the upcoming Great Lent: the fasting - and how strict we planned to be this year, the Canon of St. Andrew, the Presanctified liturgies and, of course, the services of Holy Week. Needless to say, this was a very immature outlook on Lent and its meaning and, in a similar fashion, our expectation of Pascha was equally immature, being happy that Lent was coming to an end. Even so, these impressions



were, and to us as pastors we need to recognize that they are, important.

As a boy, I was greatly inspired by the conduct of my first spiritual father, Fr. Nikolai Masich during the Divine services generally, but particularly during lent. The manner in which he seemed to take very closely to heart the words of the Canon, or those of the Passion Gospels drew me very close to those words and their meaning. Being a very emotional individual myself, this should not come as any surprise. I was always very impressionable and the images I witnessed as such, and later as a young man, had a profound effect on me. I think all of us can remember such an individual, who so inspired us, that we would wish to follow their example and may even have been the reason we entered the priesthood ourselves.

We know, of course, that the Holy Fathers teach of sobriety of mind and not to allow ourselves to be swayed by emotions, passions or other very human

frailties, lest we fall into прелесть, or spiritual delusion, imagining ourselves worthy of some great spiritual epiphany which, again as young men we probably did, perhaps thinking of this as a reward for our lenten labors or fervent prayer and would wish to recreate these feelings through our emotions. Charismatic revivalists prey on this very weakness to attract people to their causes, artificially creating a sense of spirituality, when such, in fact, does not exist. St. Peter exhorts us to: *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”* (1 Peter 5:8) We speak of nepsis or vigilance and awakesness: “be alert and awake”. We understand the meaning of the nous and the “willing to believe” aspect of our souls.

But such understandings are given to those who truly seek their spirituality and unfortunately, a majority of our parishioners are not as aware of these things as they should be. According to St. Maximos of Mt. Athos, the struggle against the corruption of the passions is conducted through ascetic effort to purify the soul. What better time than Lent, to engage in such ascetic efforts? At the advanced stages this involves “bringing the mind into the heart” where the term “mind” is more correctly stated *nous* - that faculty of the soul by which man enters into communion with God. Purification of the soul, which is achieved only through the help of Divine Grace, is pursued through one's efforts to fulfill the commandments of Christ, participation in the Holy Mysteries of the Christian Orthodox Church, private prayer, fasting according to the Church calendar, study of Holy Scripture and the lives of the saints, and vigilant watchfulness over the thoughts to prevent sinful thoughts from becoming sinful actions, and then passions. We, as priests, must do all we can to engage our faithful in such



understandings through homily, spiritual discussions, confession and so forth.

We must acknowledge, however, the fact that our services, prayers, chanting and church surroundings play very much on our emotions. We do react to what we see, hear, smell and the atmosphere which surrounds us. As a young priest I recall how Archbishop Antony would summon all of the priests in the Bay Area to be at the Forgiveness Sunday vigil at the cathedral. He would insist that we all participate in the vespers entrance in our finest gold vestments - he himself serving in his own - until the words: *“Turn not away Thy face from Thy servant, for I am sorrowful...”*

The lights would dim and the single serving priest, in nothing but a black stole, would mark the beginning of Great and Holy Lent.

There is an incredible beauty to the lenten services and a very sober joy, which comes with the performance of them. The arrival of Lent, while portending of the great effort we, as priests, will be undertaking - conducting the services, hearing many confessions, and all while trying to conduct the fast properly ourselves and fighting off one’s own demons, also feels like an arrival at a safe port. A sense of coming home, of getting back to basics. Engaging ourselves more completely in the most important purpose of our priesthood. The radical change, which we witness during the Forgiveness Sunday vespers service symbolizes that radical change in our focus and attention back to that, which is most important in our priesthood and in our personal lives. This continues, of course, into the first week and throughout the rest of lent. It is unfortunate, however, that so few come to these services. So few come to hear the magnificent words of St. Andrew: *“Where shall I begin to weep for the actions of my wretched life?”* (1st Ode)

“Let us joyfully begin the all-hallowed season of abstinence” cries the Holy Church, *“and let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendor of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good courage. So, that clothed in the raiment of light, we may hasten to the Holy*

Resurrection.” (Stichira at Matins, Monday of the 1st week)

When I was a college student, I used to schedule my Spring semester classes in such a way as to have Wednesday and Friday mornings off, so that I could come to the Cathedral at 7AM to attend the matins and hours services. I was impressed with how the prayer of St. Efrem was now more “routine” as we settled into the fast - not spoken with upraised arms or grandiosely - as maybe we do on Forgiveness Sunday or the last time on Great Wednesday. This, I see, as one of the



first examples of where emotions begin to take a back seat to simple prayer and the building of true spirituality. This is particularly interesting to our parishioners when they too are able to attend these services, since the prayer of St. Efrem is not read on the weekends and only at

the end of each service during the week. We hear the prayer at the end of matins, 1st, 3rd, 6th and 9th hours, then after the typica and finally during vespers and/or liturgy - making for a lot of prostrations and a very intense service. One tends to leave the church after such a marathon feeling that they have truly “been to church” and have gained a great deal from the experience. St. John of Kronstadt writes, *“that the man who is truly engrossed in his prayer loses track of time. Time no longer has meaning as he is in commune with God and there is no other place he would rather be.”*

Another aspect of the weekday services which I have always liked was that they were so different from the usual Saturday evening services we are so accustomed to, particularly in the parishes. These differences, once again, underline the sobriety of the lenten period and are complex, which requires particular attention on our part to make sure they are conducted properly. I see this as a great advantage, as we sometimes let services “pass us by” while the canon is being read or other parts of the service are going on, to which we have become so accustomed. Whereas here, by following the services and their conduct more closely, we can also pay greater heed to

the words actually being read or sung, which again, should be not only for the benefit of our parishioners, but of ourselves, first and foremost.



Here, the teachings of one of our most esteemed priests of blessed memory, Fr. Elias Wen stand out most clearly in my mind. Fr. Ilya never read homilies as he was shy about his Chinese accent - the fact that he spoke fluent and perfect Russian notwithstanding. Fr. Ilya taught by example, being at every single service

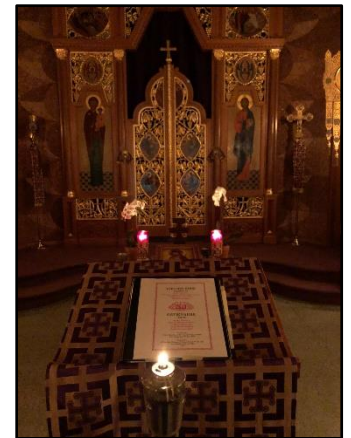
in the cathedral, morning and evening, all year round, regardless of whose turn it was among the priests to be there. May God grant eternal rest to Fr. Ilya, this magnificent example of humble and complete dedication to the service of God and His Holy church.

A number of our parishes are blessed with readers and choirmasters who know the lenten services and can conduct them without our help. Even so, I find it most beneficial to myself, quite frankly, to be on the kliros, reading and singing with them - actively participating in the service - and trying to take the words to heart.

One set of services, to which we can, hopefully attract more of our parishioners are the memorial services celebrated daily and, more conveniently, on Fridays and Saturdays of Meatfare week and the mid-weeks of Lent. The opportunity to commemorate and pray for all of our reposed pastors, arch pastors and relatives in Christ is a gift all of us enjoy each time we celebrate the Divine liturgy year-round. But these services also give us a great opportunity to impress upon our faithful, the critical importance of such prayers and commemorations and again, because it is Great Lent, they may be more open to understanding this and make the effort to come to such services. Listening to the endless lists of names is a truly humbling experience, particularly when we remember that, one day, our names will be among them. God grant that there will be those who love us enough to commemorate us in the future.

What attracts people to something more than anything else, is when it touches them personally. We conduct Parent Saturday services several times in the year, yet so few people come to them. On the other hand, when someone near or dear to an individual dies, they make every effort to come to the panihida or the funeral, as this affects them most directly. The emotional tie, brings the individual into spiritual action. How do we use this to our advantage, without become charismatic or overly emotional, thereby running the risk of attracting people to ourselves, rather than to Christ? It is here we need to consider our own spirituality, our own desires to be in church, at prayer to be fasting and all of the good things we try to impress upon our parishioners.

In his lectures on Pastors, Pastoral service and Confession, Met. Anthony Khrapovitsky speaks of the proper priest "*possessing a burning desire to celebrate the Divine Liturgy himself, not merely as part of a concelebration with others but to offer the Bloodless Sacrifice himself.*" As a brief aside on this point, there is a practice, which came out of Moscow, where concelebrating priests would not read the various liturgical prayers themselves during such concelebrations, but would merely stand there while the presiding bishop would do so. This has never been the accepted practice here in the Church Abroad, because, by reading all of the prayers together, we are, in fact, concelebrating - not merely watching someone else do it. At the moment of consecration during the Eucharist the priests would "flock" around the altar table, quietly saying the blessings together with the presiding bishop, thereby actively participating in the consecration of the Holy Gifts. Another "dramatic" moment, which impressed me greatly and a practice which should be maintained.



Speaking for myself, but I do think most of you will agree with me, when I first even considered the priesthood my thoughts were not about doing homilies or hearing confessions and certainly not about the parish council meetings, Sisterhood issues and the endless phone calls, problems and so forth - but of "rejoicing in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. We are blessed with three liturgies, which we regularly

serve and again, each of them has their “uniqueness” which makes them so special - no matter how many times we celebrate them. And, once again, these differences serve their important purposes most particularly during Great Lent.

The very preparation of the first Lambs to be sanctified for the liturgies during the first week, herald the beginning of all of the special services of Lent. The very unusual nature of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, draws great attention to it, to the readings and the prayers said and chanted during it. Truly, “*The light of Christ illumines all*” as we sing the words: “*Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as incense*” on bended knee.



Choir Notes



The Nativity and Theophany of Our Lord feast days were very joyous and festive. The choir, after many hours of rehearsals and practice, sang beautifully and prayerfully. As a young choir, we are gaining more knowledge and confidence in our singing and musical abilities. I thank our mentors, Misha Mogilev (basses), Vika Kochergin (sopranos), Nadia Mogilev (altos), and Aliona Russie (tenors), for helping our new singers feel welcome.



The commitment and energy the choir members have is really amazing. We are so pleased to have new members join our choir. Let’s keep it growing.

If you would like to join, please get in touch with Vera Peterson

—*Vera Peterson*
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Newsletter Submissions

When submitting photos (original size, please) and other items for the newsletter, please email them to our

editor, Misha Peterson, at msvnp28@gmail.com or you may text them to 661-305-8364.

—*Michael Mogilev, Publisher*



☎ Our Council Members ☎

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Orthodox Community Events

- **Angels Unaware Ministry, first Thursdays**, hosting a group of homeless adults from the Redwood Gospel Mission, February through April. Please contact Natasha Tennyson at 707-971-0154 if you can help set up, serve, and clean up. Helpers arrive between 5:00 and 5:30 p.m. Guests arrive ~6:00 p.m. Parish hall, **St. Seraphim Orthodox Cathedral**, 90 Mountain View Ave., Santa Rosa..
- Thursday, **February 13**, 5:30 p.m. Akathist to St. Seraphim, followed by **Men’s Fellowship dinner**. **St. Seraphim Orthodox Cathedral**, 90 Mountain View Ave., Santa Rosa.
- **Catechism classes restart, Sat. afternoons** at 3:30 p.m., **February 15**. St. Seraphim Orthodox Cathedral, 90 Mountain View Ave., Santa Rosa.
- **Akathist to Matushka St. Olga of Alaska, Wednesdays**, 5:30 p.m., followed by Vespers. St. Seraphim Orthodox Cathedral, 90 Mountain View Ave., Santa Rosa.
- **Father James Jorgenson** of St. Seraphim of Sarov Orthodox Church is teaching a series of **Thursday evening Bible studies** at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom. Please e-mail Brian Rademacher at brianrademacher@gmail.com to be added to the list.
- Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) event, “Go Make Disciples of All Nations,” Sunday, Mar. 30. Vespers, 5:00 p.m., followed by dinner and mission awareness and fundraising program. 1110 Highland Dr., Novato, CA 94949. For info, please email florettaburrows@live.com.

- **Slavic Festival, May 2–3, 2025.** This two-day festival will feature Slavic traditions and culture with performances, food, and crafts. Russian Center, 2460 Sutter St. San Francisco, CA 94115. Fri., 5:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.; Sat., 11:00 a.m. to 10 p.m. \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors and students. Proceeds from ticket sales will go towards humanitarian aid in Ukraine and restoring our historic venue. www.russiancentersf.org/events
- **LA Fire Relief.** Many of us are aware of the devastating fires that have struck the Los Angeles area and Southern California in January. Tens of thousands of acres burned, cities and neighborhoods leveled, lives lost, and miles of destruction. It is in these moments that Orthodox Christians need to demonstrate the spiritual fortitude given to them, by the Grace of God, to help all those in need. We ask

our God for His intercessions, the Queen of the Angels the Most Holy Theotokos, and the Heavenly Bodiless Powers for their protection. To help, make a donation through the St. Sophia LA Cathedral's Fire Relief Assistance Effort, <https://saintsophia.org>.

- **Annual Lenten Retreat, Sunday, March 30. Holy Virgin Cathedral.** Keynote speaker: Attorney Matthew Namee, historian, researcher and writer on "St. Tikhon: God's Blessing to America." Divine Liturgy followed by speaker at approximately 10:30 a.m., lunch, and afternoon session. 6210 Geary Blvd., San Francisco. For more info, visit www.sfsobor.com or email Archpriest Peter Perekrestov, protoierei@gmail.com.





Celebrate Maslenitsa with Russian Blini!

Delicious traditional pancakes to indulge in.

Come to Our Annual Blini Lunch

Sponsored by the Sisterhood of
Sts. Peter & Paul
Russian Orthodox Church



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Sunday, February 23, 2025
11:30–3:00

Delicious yeast based pancakes, a
traditional pre-Lenten dish served with
melted butter and sour cream with
optional side dishes of
smoked salmon, herring, and caviar.

For pre-orders of Paskha or Kulich,
please contact:

Nadia Stewart at (925) 708-1868



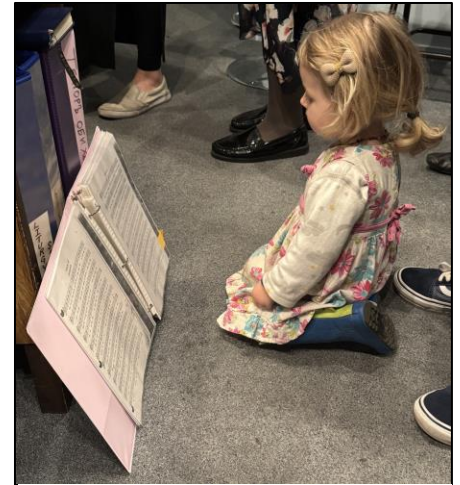
Parish Life



In December, Katya and Andrei Peterson (above) attended the St. Herman's conference in Toronto, Canada. They are pictured with their cousin, Katia Semenov, who is a resident of the Toronto area. Yevgenia Rickard (right) pictured with Vera Peterson, also attended the conference. A record 240 youth attended this year's East Coast conference.



During a luncheon after Sunday liturgy, parishioners were treated to a serenade by Kira Poluektov (on harp) and Vera Peterson (on violin)



Our youngest choir member, Maggie Merriss



The many happy faces celebrating the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

