

# **St. Nicholas Orthodox Christian Church**

*30 Cross Street - Auburn, New York 13021 ([www.stnicholasauburn.com](http://www.stnicholasauburn.com))*

**Very Reverend Michael Speck – Parish Priest (315) 246-6051 [mspeck100@gmail.com](mailto:mspeck100@gmail.com)**

**Office Hours Thursday 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM or by Appointment**

**Reverend Deacon David Donch Reverend Deacon Michael W. Speck Reader Nathaniel Donch**

**Sr. Warden - Greg Michaels Jr. Warden – Reverend Deacon David Donch**

**Secretary – Jane Kimak Treasurer – Glenn Peters**

**Sunday, February 11, 2024**

**Hieromartyr Blaise, Bishop of Sebaste**



## **Schedule of Services and Activities**

**Saturday– February 10 – 4:00 PM Panikhida for Irene Bashta**

**5:00 PM – Vespers**

**Sunday, February 11 – 8:40 AM - Adult Education**

- 9:30 AM Divine Liturgy followed by Coffee Hour and Sisterhood Meeting**

**Wednesday, February 14 – 8:30 AM Divine Liturgy**

**Saturday, February 17 – 5:00 PM Vespers**

**Sunday, February 18 - 8:40 AM - Adult Education**

- 9:30 AM Divine Liturgy followed by a Parish Council Meeting and Coffee Hour**

**This Sunday, February 11, we will be collecting canned foods for Souper Bowl Sunday as we do each year. Please help in this effort to relieve the needs of the people of our community. God Bless You.**

**Pork Chop Dinner tickets for our February 25 event are now available. Please see Greg Michaels. We will also need extra help for the dinner, so please plan to take some time to work at this important parish activity.**

**There will be a Sisterhood Meeting this Sunday, February 11, following Divine Liturgy. Please plan to join us to support the charitable work of this parish ministry!**

**There will be a Parish Council Meeting next Sunday, February 18, following Divine Liturgy.**

**Donation**

**\$150 in memory of Peter Aversa and David A. Lupo by  
Dave Lupo for the St. Nicholas Church Benevolence Fund**

## Hieromartyr Blaise, Bishop of Sebaste



Commemorated on [February 11](#)

**The Hieromartyr Blaise (Blasius), Bishop of Sebaste, was known for his righteous and devout life. Unanimously chosen by the people, he was consecrated Bishop of Sebaste. This occurred during the reign of the Roman emperors Diocletian (284-305) and Licinius (307-324), fierce persecutors of Christians. Saint Blaise encouraged his flock, visited the imprisoned, and gave support to the martyrs.**

**Many hid themselves from the persecutors by going off to desolate and solitary places. Saint Blaise also hid himself away on Mount Argeos, where he lived in a cave. Wild beasts came up to him and meekly waited until the saint finished his prayer and blessed them. The saint also healed sick animals by laying his hands upon them.**

**The refuge of the saint was discovered by servants of the governor Agrilaus, who had come to capture wild beasts to loose on the Christian martyrs. The servants reported to their master that Christians were hiding on the mountain, and he gave orders to arrest them. But those sent out found there only the Bishop of Sebaste. Glorifying God Who had summoned him to this exploit, Saint Blaise followed the soldiers.**

**Along the way the saint healed the sick and worked other miracles. Thus, a destitute widow complained to him of her misfortune. A wolf had carried off a small pig, her only possession. The bishop smiled and said to her, “Do not weep, your pig will be returned to you...” To the astonishment of everyone, the wolf came running back and returned his prey unharmed.**

**Agrilaus, greeting the bishop with words of deceit, called him a companion of the gods. The saint answered the greeting, but he called the gods devils. Then they beat him and led him off to prison.**

**On the next day, they subjected the saint to tortures again. When they led him back to the prison, seven women followed behind and gathered up the drops of blood. They arrested them and tried to compel them to worship the idols. The women pretended to consent to this and said that first they needed to wash the idols in the waters of a lake. They took the idols and threw them in a very deep part of the lake, and after this the Christians were fiercely tortured. The saints stoically endured the torments, strengthened by the grace of God, their bodies were transformed and became white as snow. One of the women had two young sons, who implored their mother to help them attain the Kingdom of Heaven, and she entrusted them to the care of Saint Blaise. The seven holy women were beheaded.**

**Saint Blaise was again brought before Agrilaus, and again he unflinchingly confessed his faith in Christ. The governor ordered that the martyr be thrown into a lake. The saint, going down to the water, signed himself with the Sign of the Cross, and he walked on it as though on dry land.**

**Addressing the pagans standing about on shore, he challenged them to come to him while calling on the help of their gods. Sixty-eight men of the governor's retinue entered the water, and immediately drowned. The saint, however, heeding the angel who had appeared to him, returned to shore.**

**Agrilaus was in a rage over losing his finest servants, and he gave orders to behead Saint Blaise, and the two sons of the woman martyr entrusted to him. Before his death, the martyr prayed for the whole world, and especially for those honoring his memory. This occurred in about the year 316.**

**The relics of the Hieromartyr Blaise were brought to the West during the time of the Crusades, and portions of the relics are preserved in many of the lands of Europe [and his memory traditionally honored there on February 3].**

**We pray to Saint Blaise for the health of domestic animals, and for protection from wild beasts.**

# Early Christianity from the Pagan Point of View

**The pagan ideology in the days of the apostles' preaching.**



Edwin Long, *Diana or Christ?*, 1881, oil on canvas.

**Let's face the task of putting ourselves in the place of a pagan of the Roman Empire. Let's "try on his dress". How would he react to the preaching of the Jewish fishermen? Let's listen with his ears and think with his mind. Perhaps then it will be possible to understand more clearly how Christianity entered the Roman world, how it penetrated into homes and into hearts.**

**Ancient culture was focused on searching for meaning: philosophy with its inexhaustible existential questions, sculpture with its proportions and search for the perfect beauty, work on the political structure as a search for a form to embody the ideals of society. All this inspired people to look for a standard and an idyll.**

## **The Birth of Christ on the outskirts of civilization**

**A magnificent emperor ruled in the majestic Palatine Palace, which opened when the King of Kings and the Lord of all Living Things came into the world in a squalid cave in little known Bethlehem on the outskirts of a huge empire.**

**Delving into the religious history of Rome during the time of Christ and the Apostles, we can find amazing meanings, with which the heads of the Romans were “seasoned”. It is impossible to disregard them, and we also cannot help but marvel at the greatness of Divine Providence, which was preparing people’s hearts to accept the Good Tidings of the Salvation of the world and man.**

**Christ was born in the multinational Roman Empire, which included both the East and the West, absorbed the great cultures of antiquity, their customs and religions. Christ was recorded on the census as a citizen of such an empire in order to attract *from the east and from the west... to the Kingdom of God* (cf. Lk. 13:29).**

### **Caesar and the God-Man Christ**

**The Roman Empire was founded almost on the eve of the Birth of the Lord under Emperor Octavian Augustus (the 30s BC—14 AD). Studying the life and activity of the emperor, in whose days the Savior was born, we admire the greatness of Divine Providence. By the earthly order of things, the minds and the hearts of the citizens of the Roman world were being prepared to accept the Heavenly Fatherland.**

**We will single out several facts from the life of the pagan emperor, which can be considered symbolic and even to some extent “prototypal”. They prepared the pagan hearts to receive the message of the Savior and salvation.**

**1. We know about St. Isaiah’s prophecy that Christ would bring peace: *And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks* (Is. 2:4). The prophets themselves, centuries before Christ, said of the Messiah, *This man shall be the peace* (Mic. 5:5). In Rome just before Christ’s Birth and in the early years of Jesus’ life, the idea of ending wars and establishing peace (*pax Augusta*) were widespread. Thus, in 13 BC, the “Altar of Peace” was set up in Rome. In “The Acts of the Divine Augustus” the Emperor emphasized that during his reign the gates of the temple of the god Janus were closed three times, which meant the end of all wars and was a symbol of peace. Christ, Who brought true peace, deigned to come to earth in the days of the cessation of wars.**

**2. Christ is the Son of God, God Who came into the world, clothed in our nature and making us His kin. All nations and kingdoms must offer their glory to Him. He brought everyone together before Him: *At the name of Jesus every knee should***

***bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth* (Phil. 2:10). He, the true Son of God, was born under the emperor who called himself the “son of god.” This is what Octavian, Julius Caesar’s adopted son, called himself. In the time of Octavian, the cult of imperial liturgies appeared (“liturgy” means “work of the people” in Greek, because they were performed at the expense of the empire’s population). January 1, 42 BC, the senators proclaimed Caesar god, and Octavian became known as the “son of god”.**

**3. In the days when Christ God, Who revealed to us the Name of God the “Father”, was an Infant and made His first steps, Octavian received from the Senate the honorary title of “father of the fatherland” (*pater patriae*—2 BC). Octavian did not choose Mars, the god of war, as his patron deity, but Apollo, who brings order and arranges human affairs. Christ, Who was born at this time, truly arranged all our affairs for good. He is the only One Whom the Prophet Isaiah called the *everlasting Father* during the foundation of Rome (Is. 9:6).**

**4. Pagan emperors and kings of Rome bore the title “Pontifex Maximus”, literally “the great bridge builder”—the one who united the earthly with the Heavenly. In fulfillment of the great Pontifex, the cult charged to avoid not only touching, but even looking at the dead, including one’s relatives, which Octavian observed carefully. Let us recall that in the Old Testament, given 1400 years before the Birth of Christ, the high priest of the true God was forbidden to touch the dead, even his own parents.**

**In the paganism of Rome and in the Jewish religion there was a foretaste that death had nothing to do with the true High Priest. It was fulfilled in Jesus. Christ is the Conqueror of death: He came to destroy its power and make the way, the bridge *from death unto life* (Jn. 5:24). Not only did He raise others from the dead, but He even entered death Himself, and death, trampled down, could not bear His burial that lasted three days.**

**5. Octavian’s adoptive father Julius Caesar became the first “god” proclaimed in Rome. After that he was killed by supporters of the republic. He wore the purple robe of Jupiter of the Capitoline Hill and went down in history. Let’s recall how the soldiers at Pilate’s trial put a purple robe on Christ—the clothes of Caesar and Jupiter. Christ always called Himself the Son of Man, being God from Heaven. He was put to death. But He rose again, having conquered death and hell.**

**After another victory a statue was erected to Caesar as to the “invincible god” (“pantocrator” in Greek), where he was depicted leaning on a sphere that symbolized peace. Christ, the true “Pantocrator”—the Almighty—enlightened the whole universe, wins all the battles that those who believe in Him wage in His name, and contains the world with His Love.**

**6. There were oak leaf wreaths in the military halo of glory of Rome—the symbol of Jupiter. A valiant soldier was crowned with it as a reward for saving a fellow soldier on the battlefield. The saved one wove a wreath for him for the great good deed of saving his life. The saved one was supposed to honor his savior as his father. When Emperor Octavian saved the country from civil war, he was regarded as a benefactor. An inscription has survived in Ephesus that calls Octavian “the common savior of all human lives.”**

**Christ is the Savior from the power of death. He alone is the true Savior of all people’s lives. When the Apostles spoke of salvation, all the Gentiles understood the true meaning of this word: salvation from the power of death, the gift of life.**

#### **From the earthly to the Heavenly—from the emperor to Christ**

**At the turn of the age, Rome was engulfed by a surge of lively religious feeling, and the center of that feeling was the emperor—a living god who brought peace, a good and just winner. It seemed that the whole world was being renewed. At that time, the poet Ovid revived the concept of a Golden Age where people would be faithful to justice without coercion. The emperors who succeeded Octavian Augustus did not come up to the people’s expectations; among them were both worthy men and outright monsters.**

**Both in Judaism and in the Roman State at the time of the preaching of the Apostles there was a “Great longing” for an earthly kingdom with an earthly living and good god. This idea brought both Jews and Gentiles to Christianity. Let’s recall the great Paul and the great former pagan witnesses—the elite of the Roman State: Great-Martyrs George the Victorious, Demetrius of Thessalonica and Barbara.**

**Researchers note that the New Testament authors were already using terms from the imperial cult, explaining the relations between man and Christ the Savior. Pagan religious honors rendered to the emperor, and all the hopes pinned on him, became a reflection of the glory of Christ. Through the Roman State on the**



**earthly level the minds were prepared for the Heavenly message. Earthly values carried a deeper meaning and Heavenly hopes.**

**The desire for purification was the religious motivating force of Rome at the turn of the old and the new eras of mankind, in the years when the Deliverer came, and *unto Him shall the gathering of the people be* (Gen. 49:10). Christ was killed by the Sadducees because He proclaimed Himself God, but He truly resurrected, and streams of preaching about the great King of Kings flowed into all corners of the empire. These were fervent words supported by deeds, life and miracles. This confirmed the belief that He was indeed the true Son of God, God and the Savior, the Ruler and the Peacemaker. Researchers call the ancient religion the “Old Testament of European Christianity”, and Augustus the “Roman David”—the king and a prototype of the true Messiah.**

**What the prophets had said was fulfilled. The Almighty came *that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly* (Jn. 10:10). Pagans, disappointed in the subsequent decline of Rome, could not but believe this.**

***Archpriest Andrei Gavrilenko***