

Welcome!

A Quick Introduction to Our Church for First-Time Visitors



We would like to welcome you today to **Nativity of the Holy Theotokos Orthodox Church!** We're glad you decided to visit. If this is your first time attending an Orthodox Christian service, you will probably have some questions, so we've prepared this guide with you in mind. Our priest, Father Anastasios Hudson, is available after the service to answer any additional questions you may have.

Mission Parish. We are a mission parish, which means a community in the process of growing into full parish status. We started in 2008 when a local family reached out to Father Anastasios to begin services, and gradually we have grown, moving to our current location at the end of 2010, and hoping to continue to reach many more people in the years to come. There are not as many Orthodox Christians in the Greenville area as in other parts of the country, but we are working to change that! As a mission community, many of us travel long distances to attend, so attendance varies from week to week. We have three services a month, because Father Anastasios lives in Raleigh and comes in to Greenville to serve our community. He holds a secular job in order to serve us as a volunteer priest.

What Is Liturgy? If you are a Lutheran, Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, or Methodist, you already have an idea of what liturgy is: a series of hymns and readings are followed by a sermon, and then there is the Service of Holy Communion. If you are from an Evangelical, Baptist, or other tradition, you may not be familiar with the idea of liturgy. A liturgy is a prayer service which includes Holy Communion and follows a set order—a progression. The service that we use can be traced back to

the Apostolic times, and the prayers that you are witnessing will be the same prayers that other Orthodox Christians all across the world are praying in unison, in a cycle which has remained relatively unchanged since the fourth century. The codification of liturgy coincided with the codification of the Holy Scriptures—in other words, the liturgy is as old as the concept of all the divine writings being included together in a book we now call “the Bible.” In fact, the liturgy is full of scriptural references and quotations, and the Bible contains allusions to liturgy (in Isaiah and Revelation, with the angels chanting “Holy, Holy, Holy” for instance). If you get lost or don’t know what’s going on, don’t worry! Just watch, pray, and take it all in.

Standing vs. Sitting. Orthodox worship is conducted standing, as we stand in anticipation of the Resurrection of the Dead and the Second Coming of Christ. It’s also a much more mobile form of worship, with congregants moving about a bit more than you might be used to in a Western Church. We have temporary chairs in our parish to accommodate those with difficulty standing and those not used to standing for long periods of time. Visitors are free to stand or sit as needed, but it’s a good idea to take a cue from the congregation and “go with the flow.” One should particularly make sure to stand during the reading of the Gospel and whenever the priest is censuring (using incense).

References to the Virgin Mary. You will hear the word Theotokos mentioned often in our liturgy. This is a title of the Virgin Mary that indicates that she is the Birthgiver of God. This title—which existed beforehand—was confirmed in AD 431 at the Council of Ephesus. Please see our pamphlet “What does the Word Theotokos Mean?” for more detail. We want to make it clear from the start that Orthodox Christians *only* worship the Holy Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We do believe, however, that the saints, especially the Virgin Mary, are aware of our condition while they are close to God in the heavenly realm, and that they continue to pray for us like they did when they were alive on Earth. In other words, for an Orthodox, we believe

that just like we can pray for you or you for us, a saint can pray for us too, and prayers addressed to saints are asking them to intercede for us, but are not *worship*. The glory of the saints testifies to the power of Jesus Christ to work change in fallen men's lives, and our honoring saints and asking for their prayers is ultimately honoring Christ God who gloried them.

Holy Communion. The Orthodox Church practices what is known as "closed communion," which means that only members of the Orthodox Church may receive Holy Communion at an Orthodox liturgy. There are several reasons for this; the main reason is that receiving Holy Communion (note the root word "union") is a sign of unity of belief; while many of our visitors believe in Jesus Christ, there are some unfortunate divisions between Christian Churches and divergences of beliefs. Orthodox Christians believe that sharing Holy Communion would be a sign of a reality that unfortunately does not currently exist. Another reason is that not everyone has the same belief in the Eucharist as we do; Orthodox Christians believe that during the Liturgy, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ mystically, and not just symbolically. Finally, Orthodox Christians do not themselves receive Holy Communion at every liturgy, because one must be prepared through prayer and fasting and confession to one's priest. Please note that by not giving communion to our non-Orthodox guests, we are not seeking to make any judgment about them personally, and we are very happy to have you here with us. We encourage you to participate in our worship as much as your own conscience permits.

A Matter of Preference? We're a little different than other Christian Churches, and that's for a reason. We don't believe that the Church changes with the times, or that God wants there to be many different denominations doing things differently and even holding contradictory beliefs. We Orthodox believe that we are the original Church established by Jesus Christ Himself, preserving the ancient practices inherited from the Apostles and passed down to our day. Rather than

ask yourself whether you *like* what you see, we ask you to ponder whether what you see is *true*, and if so, please continue to read up and learn about the Orthodox Christian Church!

Contact Information. If you're not able to stay and talk to Father Anastasios after liturgy, you can always contact him for follow-up in the following ways:

By email: gocraleigh@gmail.com

By telephone: (919) 827-4945 (*please make sure to leave a message*)

On Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/anastasios.hudson> (*please make sure to send an introduction with your friend request*)

You can also be added to our mailing list by emailing us at info@holytheotokosgreenville.org

Welcome again from all of us at Nativity of the Holy Theotokos Orthodox Church!

NATIVITY OF THE HOLY THEOTOKOS
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