There’s a story of a skeptical man who found the idea of Christmas, of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, as an absurdity. He couldn’t accept the fact that at a particular time in history the Creator of the world decided to become a creature and live among humans beings as a simple man. What kind of God would do such a thing? This seemed like nonsense.

One Christmas eve, however, while the man sat in his warm, comfortable home watching a blinding snowstorm outside, he looked out his window and noticed a flock of geese freezing in the cold. As he watched them searching for shelter, he had compassion on them and wanted to help. So he thought to himself, "My barn would be a great place for them to stay! It’s warm and safe; surely they could spend the night and wait out the storm."

So he dressed up, went out and tried to get the geese into his barn. Yet every time he approached the geese, they flew away. He ran after them. He chased them. He tried to shoo them into the barn. With every effort, however, the geese got no closer to the shelter he offered. They only became scared and scattered in every direction, except toward the barn.

Feeling totally frustrated, he exclaimed to himself, "Why don't they follow me! Can't they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm! How can I possibly communicate with them to help them understand!"

He stood silently for a moment as his words reverberated back in his mind: "If only I could become like one of them -- then I could help them understand me, and save them." In that moment he discovered the meaning of Christmas. He came to understand anew why God became human!

Christmas is about a God of love, a God who loved us so much that He willingly became one of us to help us come to a new understanding of what authentic humanity is. He showed us the way to rediscover our divine image and likeness within!

“We bring you good tidings of great joy!” the angels proclaimed. The Good News is that “God is with us,” God is among us, God is showing us the path back to Him!

What makes Christianity unique, completely different from all other world religions, is this mystery of God’s unimaginable love – a love so great that He would humble
The mission of Sts. Constantine and Helen Church is to proclaim the Good News of Salvation through the Orthodox Christian Faith for the glory of our Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We are a community of believers who journey towards our Lord Jesus Christ and one another through our **WORSHIP**, **FELLOWSHIP**, **SPIRITUAL GROWTH**, **WITNESS**, and **SERVICE**. We invite all people to join us on this journey in the Kingdom of Heaven.

We are under the jurisdiction of
His Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios of America
His Eminence, Metropolitan Methodios of Boston

**Father Luke A. Veronis**  
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CHRISTMAS LOVE

Himself and become one of us. As Archbishop Anastasios of Albania reminds us, “All of our lives can be transfigured in a joyous feast, if the truth that “God is with us,” [that God became one of us and showed us the way], becomes the atmosphere in which we live and move and have our being!”

A beautiful hymn that we sing during the Service of the Royal Hours of Christmas summarizes the meaning of Christmas when it proclaims, “Christ is born TO RENEW THE LIKENESS that we lost long ago!” What likeness did we have, and if we lost something important, how can we rediscover it?

A fundamental Christian belief is that God created every person in this world in His image and likeness. I often look at my children and clearly see the physical image of us their parents in them. We all inherit certain genes from our parents and forbearers which make us similar to them. We understand the impact of physical genetics, yet what about the genetics of our soul? When God created the first humans, he placed within them a soul, which was formed in the image of a loving Creator. The fathers of the Church explained how we each have the ability to nourish and cultivate that divine image so it would mature and fulfill its potential in becoming God-like, becoming more and more like Christ.

We each have this unique calling and possibility – to become more and more like Jesus, to live and love and forgive like Christ, to show compassion, goodness and grace as our Lord did, to serve others and to bless all those with whom we come into contact. Our potential is to be one with Jesus and actually be Christ-like to the world around us. That is why St. Athanasios the Great summed up Christmas by saying, “God became human so that humans could become godlike.”

This meaningful and exciting call can transform our lives! Imagine, to become like God! Humanity lost this likeness of Christ when we consciously turned away from God, and we depart further from it each time we use our freedom to stray from God’s commandments and chase after our self-centered and superficial pursuits of life.

Christmas celebrates the moment in history when God acted in a particular and unique fashion. He decided to show His love by coming on earth as a human being, and revealing to the world what true humanity is all about. He incarnated divine agape love so that the world could better understand what true love means. And not only did he show the world what true humanity is, He offered His Spirit to live and dwell within us to help us. Christ came to renew that likeness of God within us which we had lost long ago!

Christmas is the deep incomprehensible mystery of God becoming human, one of us. He did this in order to show us what true human life is all about – a life of compassion, mercy and great love!

I wish you a most blessed and joyous Christmas!

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

+Luke

Heaven and earth are united today, for Christ is born! Today God has come upon earth and we have gone up to heaven. Today all can see the One is who by nature invisible. Let us give glory and praise Him.

Hymn from Christmas Vespers
WHAT IS CHRISTMAS ALL ABOUT?

What is Christmas all about? If you didn’t grow up in a Christian home, come to this Church, or have parents who read you the Christmas story each year, would you know what Christmas was about all? Think about that for a moment. Would you be able to figure out what Christmas is about from what our society says during this festive season?

A while ago I had a discussion with a person who told me they grew up with no religion in their home. They never went to church, never were baptized, and in fact, really never talked about anything religious in their home. This person wasn’t angry at God, or didn’t reject God or His Church because they had some negative experience with religious people. The simple fact was that their family never felt any need to be involved in a religious community, and now in their adult age, they were totally indifferent to Christianity or any other religion.

This describes a growing number of people in our country. Statistics now say that almost 40% of millennials, people between 18-30, don’t identify with any religious community. And this number is growing at a rapid pace.

So for such people, what do they think about Christmas? Would they even know what Christmas is truly all about?

Well, let’s think about what they would see all around them? In my neighborhood, almost all the homes have lights up, lots of lights, beautiful lights along with reindeer, santas, candy canes, snowmen, and some snow dogs. Even a dear Hindu family has lights shining up around their home. The lights are beautiful, but would a non-religious or a non-Christian person have any reason to understand why there are lights? What do they signify or mean?

Then there’s the Christmas music on the radio or in every shop or store we enter. Some stations even have 24/7 Christmas music. Yet, what does this music tell us about Christmas? That chestnuts are roasting on an open fire. That Rudolph has a red, shiny nose. Lots of music about families gathering together to celebrate the most joyous time of the year amidst a winter wonderland. Once again beautiful, nostalgic music that may warm our hearts. But what is its significance. Maybe one out of every 20 or 30 songs may sing about the Christ child, but these few songs can easily get lost in the host of other catchy tunes.

Of course, there are the Christmas cards we send to one another which show beautiful pictures of families. I love getting these cards and seeing how families change year after year. They are beautiful, and they remind us of family and friends. But do they tell us anything about Christmas?

How many of us go to different Christmas or holiday parties which gather co-workers, friends and families together. Great fellowship. Good food. But once again, what does it tell us about the meaning of Christmas?

And of course there’s all the stress and rush of the season – shopping for more and more presents up until the day before Christmas. Feeling overwhelmed, ragged and tired. Does this get across what Christmas is all about?

What a non-religious person probably comes away with from American Christmas is that it is a time for family and friends, a time of celebration and cheer, a time of beauty and fun. Yet they can miss the entire religious message, the main point of Christmas! Seriously, it’s easy to celebrate Christmas and leave Jesus Christ entirely out of the picture!

One friend told me about a Chinese foreign exchange student who lived with them. Although this student had heard about the Western holiday of Christmas in China, they actually knew nothing of its actual meaning. Even after living through the American celebration of Christmas, they still didn’t know what it was all about until they asked their host family, “Why do you celebrate Christmas? Do you really believe in flying reindeer?”
The “good news of great joy” this season celebrates is about God the Creator of the universe becoming a human being. It’s about Jesus the long-awaited Messiah coming to earth to save the world from darkness and evil, sin and death itself. This radical and life-giving message is now lost for many people in all the hustle and bustle of our secular Christmas. Therefore, we Christians need to understand that this season of Christmas is a great opportunity to let other people know about what Christmas is truly about! We have a great opportunity, and a great responsibility to share the good news of great joy with others – to let people know the reason for the season!

**What does your Christian faith mean to you?**

**How has your relationship with Jesus Christ impacted your life?**

What meaning and significance have you found in life because of your faith in God? As I see my parents and other dear elderly friends age and come closer to the end of their lives, I think about their death and I’m not afraid or saddened. Death is not some dreaded and fearful end precisely because of what Christmas ushered into the world!

Christmas is the beginning of the greatest revolution in human history – a revolution which brings true freedom to humanity. Freedom to overcome our sinful temptations and passions and fulfill our God-given potential by uniting to God Himself. As St. Athanasios the Great succinctly put it, “God became man so that man could become god.” This is the great promise of Christmas, to reach our greatest potential as human beings! And this is good news everyone needs to know about!

So I want to throw out a challenge for everyone in this church. Over the next weeks, can each of us make it a point to try and share the Good News of Christmas, the real message of Christmas, with at least one person each week. Think of someone you know who isn’t a Christian – maybe someone who is among the non-religious, or maybe someone with another religious background. Whoever it is, ask them how they celebrate Christmas, and what Christmas means to them. Then, share how you will celebrate Christmas and what Christmas (and Jesus Christ) means to you.

Even think about inviting them to come to Church with you one of these Sundays before or on Christmas. Bring them to our Dec 17 service where we will have our youth Christmas pageant. Or bring them on Dec 24 or 25 when we will joyously celebrate Christmas and sing all the beautiful Christmas carols.

Please remember that there are many people in our society who really don’t know what Christmas is all about. And more and more people are joining their ranks. Let us be like the angels who brought “good news of great joy” to the shepherds. Let us be like the shepherds who shared their great discovery with the villagers of Bethlehem. Let us be like the wise men who after traveling far to see the newborn Jesus, surely went back to their homeland telling their people about the newborn king.

Christmas is a time for family and friends. Christmas is a time of beautiful lights and wonderful music. Christmas is a time celebration and good cheer. But above all else, Christmas is the time that we remember how God entered the world and changed it! Jesus Christ came to conquer Satan and sin and even death itself, and because of that gave each one of us a new life! May we let everyone know about this good news of great joy!
The Light - December 2017

THE VIRTUES OF SAINT NICHOLAS

Sinter Klaas, the Dutch name that we Americans transliterated into Santa Claus, obviously refers to Saint Nicholas, one of the most beloved of all saints throughout the world, and whose memory we celebrate this week, on December 6. Travel across Europe and you can literally find thousands of churches named in honor of St. Nicholas. Greece and Russia look upon St. Nicholas as the patron of their country. In fact, in almost every port throughout Greece you will find a St. Nicholas Chapel, signifying him as the patron of sailors. And not only sailors, but orphans and children turn to St. Nicholas as their patron and protector.

Although our American secular society has tried to turn this greatest of saints into a jolly, fat man who wears a funny red outfit and brings a good spirit and lots of gifts to children on Christmas day, we Orthodox Christians never want to lose sight of Nicholas the saint, the 4th century Bishop of Myra, whose real life has inspired so many people throughout the world that they have created countless legends and stories lauding his Christ-like spirit.

Since childhood, many of us have heard stories of Nicholas’ generosity, like when the saint helped the poor man with three daughters by tossing bags of gold into his house. Although certain stories or legends may seem far fetched, we must take care not to lose their underlying meaning, which lift up one of the many Christ-like virtues which St. Nicholas so beautifully exemplified in his life, and which we also are called to cultivate in our own lives.

What were some of these characteristics? First of all, St. Nicholas, like all saints, stood up for the truth of God. Nicholas lived through the persecutions of Diocletian, one of the last Roman emperors who persecuted Christians in the 4th century. Under the threat of imprisonment and even possible death, Nicholas continued to preach the love of God and proclaim His truth. And he suffered for it. The Romans imprisoned him and threatened his life, yet he wouldn’t deny the truth, nor waver in his strict stance for the standards of the Gospel. This same zeal for the truth came out during the First Ecumenical Council, when Nicholas the bishop defended the fullness of our faith – that Jesus was fully God and one with the Father - against various false teachings that were very popular during his day.

His courage and boldness to live out a Christ-like life, and incarnate the truth, even when the surrounding society ridiculed and even threatened such a lifestyle, is something with which we contemporary Christians must learn. Christianity, as an authentic way of life, is not for the faint-hearted. Christianity was never meant to be a ‘status-quo,’ comfortable, easy religion of the masses. Christ called his followers to a life of divine love, which automatically implies a life of sacrifice and humble service to others. This is why Jesus reminded us that few people will have the courage and commitment to walk that narrow path!

And here lies a second quality that stands out from the life of St. Nicholas. Not only as a bishop and a good shepherd of the Church, but simply as a Christian, Nicholas needed to fight against the temptation of self-centeredness – an illness of our fallen nature that plagues each of us – and he did this by constantly looking for ways to reach out to others, especially helping the
oppressed, defenseless and marginalized people of society. Bishop Nicholas was not a leader who revelled in power and authority, but he understood himself as a disciple of the One who washed His disciples’ feet and who constantly cared for the poor. Being a Christian is all about serving others, thus Christian leadership must be servant leadership - always placing the needs of others before ourselves!

We have many stories of Nicholas reaching out in compassion and kindness to the orphaned, to the estranged, to the prisoners, and especially to the defenseless. As I try to repeat in many of my sermons, sincere Christianity points to “the other,” to those outside of ourselves. Love of God means love of our neighbor, and love of the other. We as Christians, and the Church as the Body of Christ, must always have our central attention on charity, outreach and mission – bringing God’s love to others!

The world outside can be an isolated, lonely, often harsh, and an even mean place to live. How bright our light will shine if we radiate Christ’s unconditional compassion, kindness, love and charity, as St. Nicholas did throughout his lifetime.

A third virtue we must live up from St. Nicholas’ life is his generosity. Bishop Nicholas suffered the life of an orphan, having lost both his parents in his teenage years. Yet from the moment that Nicholas received a rich inheritance, he understood good Christian Stewardship, and generously distributed his wealth to those in need. He did not seek to use his wealth for his own well-being and comfort, but realized that his wealth represented a test and temptation, and thus used it to enrich others!

When Christ’s Spirit fills the heart of a disciple, we joyously want to imitate our Lord’s example by giving all that we have to help others. True joy comes through giving. True meaning in life comes from helping and serving others. And the generosity of our giving reflects the maturity of our faith!

A final aspect that St. Nicholas so beautifully exemplified in his giving was the spirit of anonymity. He gave generously, but never for fame or for praise. He simply gave because he understood how generous God was to him first. Everything he had was God’s, and he didn’t want to take credit for anything he gave away. How much can we all learn from that, in this day and age – to give in a secret manner, all for the glory of God!

A courageous and bold defender of the truth, a compassionate and loving helper of the defenseless and needy, and a generous and humble steward of God’s gifts – these represent some of the many virtues of the true Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas.

Throughout this Advent season of Christmas, when we see and hear many references to a fat, jolly old man in the red suit, and even as we read books or tell stories to our children and grandchildren about Santa Claus, let us never lose sight of the true Santa Claus – Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra. And let us try to live out and then teach our children and grandchildren about the Christ-like virtues that made Nicholas one of the world’s most beloved patrons and saints!
BREAKING DOWN THE WALLS
Dr. Bill Black, OCMC Missionary to Kenya

Every single house in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia is surrounded by a wall. The richer the occupant, the more elaborate the security. The poor make their walls out of strips of tin and scraps of plastic and wood. Older houses are surrounded by concrete block walls that have broken glass embedded in the cement along the top. They may even have their walls topped by coils of razor wire. The really important people have added electric fences to the tops of their walls. If people have stuff, they become increasingly obsessed with security.

I’ve come to understand the passage “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17) is about walls, walls designed to keep the wrong sort of people out, and about Jesus’ absolute commitment to tear down these sorts of walls. Judaism had increasingly become a religion of walls, walls put up to keep them safe and pure, walls designed to keep the wrong sort of people out. I believe that their intentions were originally good. But Israel wanted to add to her religion the ways of the nations around her. So for most of her history, Israel’s religion was one of God plus something. They supplemented their religion with alternative traditions, alternative practices, alternative gods and goddesses.

We do much the same today. We go to church and do our religious duty. Yet a lot of us are not that different from Israel. We, like Israel, are hedging our bets. However religious we may seem, however spiritual our language may be, our religion of God + Stuff ≠ Christianity. A religion of God + the pursuit of status or pleasure ≠ Christianity. These are the sort of issues that the Old Testament prophets are so vexed about. Israel was determined to practice a religion of God + Asherah or Baal. They wanted to be like their neighbors. But that’s not why God saved you from slavery in Egypt, the prophets said. God saved you for himself. God saved you so that he could bring glory to himself. God saved you so that you could be the means by which the nations who were still in darkness all around you might see and understand and respond to the light of his love. God didn’t save you so that you could then compromise yourself into irrelevance. Yet Israel chose not to listen. And after warning her again and again, judgment finally came, just like judgment will eventually catch up with you and me if we choose not to listen. Israel and then Judah were destroyed. The temple burned. And a remnant was taken into captivity in Babylon.

When God kept his promise to restore his people from captivity and bring them back to the land, the remnant of God’s people decided that they would never make that mistake again. Many determined that they would never allow themselves to be contaminated or corrupted by the ways of the nations again. So they began building walls and the heart of their religion shifted from being God-centered to being holy. Thus circumcision became very important because it separated those who were on the inside from those who were on the outside. Keeping Sabbath and eating kosher and keeping the feasts became very important because it separated those who were on the inside from those who were on the outside. The desire to maintain holiness become so paramount that those on the outside began to be seen as the problem and the enemy, to be shunned and avoided and driven away.

Judaism became a religion of walls. Only the holy could come in. Only the pure could draw near to God. And the biggest symbol of all was the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem which had four sets of barriers. The first wall had signs posted which said, ‘No Gentiles past this point on pain of death.’ The next wall kept women from coming any closer. The next barrier into the temple could be crossed only if you were a consecrated priest. And the Holy of Holies was cordoned off from the rest of the temple by a thick curtain, and only the high priest carrying the blood of a goat that was sacrificed for the sin of the people could enter once a year.

God had said to Abraham? ‘I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you...and you will a blessing... and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’ (Genesis 12:2-3) Rather than be the means by which God blessed the nations, by the first century, Judaism was committed to keeping the nations away. They thought God’s blessing was meant for them and them alone.
Jesus came to destroy every barrier and knock down every wall. It’s what got him crucified. He breaks down the walls that kept out the lepers by healing them. He breaks down the walls that kept out women by including them in his circle. And here in our passage, even the temple itself, the symbol of everything this religion stood for, the bastion of nationalistic holiness itself, comes under Jesus’ direct attack. Jesus goes into the court reserved for the gentiles and drives out the money changers and overturns the tables of those selling animals for sacrifice. I used to think that Jesus launched a direct attack on corruption that had taken root in the worship that was going on at the temple, but Jesus himself actually explains what he means. ‘And as he taught them he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”’ (Mark 11:17) Literally, Jesus says, ‘You have made my house a cave of bandits.’

Jesus knows exactly what he’s doing; he has chosen his words intentionally. Nationalistic Jews hated the Gentiles, because they perceived that the Gentiles were a direct threat to their purity and therefore their existence as God’s people. But they especially hated the Romans, because the Romans had conquered them, and the Romans were in charge of the holy land, the land that God had given to his people. So for the sake of God’s holy land and people, for the sake of their religion, the Gentile Romans had to be driven out at all cost. So bands of nationalistic Jews had formed for just that purpose, to harry and harass the Romans, to foment rebellion and create the conditions whereby the showdown battle between God’s holy people and their enemies might finally take place. These nationalistic Jews the Romans called bandits usually hid in the caves.

Jesus makes the direct charge that the temple itself has become the focus of a movement to drive out the nations once and for all. That’s not what this house is for, says Jesus. God is not the God of one nation, He’s the God of all the nations. Every barrier that you put up to protect your interests, your religion, your people, your culture, your holiness is a barrier set up against the will and purpose of God.

Can you begin to see why Jesus aroused such hostility. Jesus was too much of a threat. So they worked together with the Romans to silence the challenge to their agenda. By using the Romans to crucify this blasphemer, the Jews scored the additional propaganda points by claiming that this man is actually under God’s curse, because doesn’t the Law say, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’? But they didn’t understand. They didn’t realize that Jesus had all along intended to lay down his life in such a way to offer himself as a sacrifice, to take upon himself the curse of God’s covenant that God’s people deserved because they had broken the covenant. Jesus had systematically broken through almost every wall. Yet one more wall remained, the biggest wall of all. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.’ (Mark 15:28)

The wall created by our own sin separating us from God has been torn down. Jesus himself offered his own blood as a sacrifice before his Father so that our sins might be covered and forgiven, and we be given a new life.

For Christians, I think there is an even deeper challenge. First century Judaism had lost its way. God intended Israel to be the bridge of his love to all the nations. Many were concerned only for themselves, to protect their status and privileges...
WHY DID GOD BECOME MAN?
Fr. Anthony Coniaris

Why did God choose to come to us in person? What were the reasons that compelled Him to visit us? They must have been awfully important reasons to make God empty Himself and take the form of a servant. Couldn’t He have sent someone else? Couldn’t He have ordered an angel or an archangel to come? Why did the Lord of the Universe Himself have to come?

We see an indication of why God would ultimately come to earth in the Old Testament, when we hear God say, “I have seen the affliction of my people and heard their cry… for I know their sorrows and sufferings and trials. And I have come down to deliver them” (Ex 3:7-8)

God came because He cared. He came in order to deliver us from the slavery of sin and death. He came because He loved us! We can summarize this best by quoting the Evangelist John “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

We do not believe in an absent God, an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive God. We believe in a God who, when humanity fell into the ocean of sin and was drowning, did not just stay in heaven and shout directions on lifesaving, but who jumped into the ocean to save us. We believe in a God who intervenes in our lives.

Jesus Christ came at Christmas. He comes again this Christmas. He comes each day, waiting to enter into our lives!

BREAKING DOWN THE WALLS

Continued from page 7

and identity. Many had built walls. Many had forgotten that God had an agenda.

Have we as a Church forgotten, as well? The Church has done a very good job of surviving, even thriving, but have we ever asked, why has God brought us here? Have we forgotten that God has an agenda? Are we busy building walls, creating our own private island of privilege and prosperity? Have we become satisfied and complacent with a religion and with religious institutions designed to serve and meet our needs? Have we become a cave of bandits? Are we guilty of hijacking God’s agenda for the nations and spending his blessing on ourselves? What walls need to come down in our live and in our church today? Who are the lepers today? Who are the sinners and tax collectors today? Who are the outsiders and foreigners today? Our reason for existing as a church is so that God’s blessing may flow through us to the world around.

Our walls may not be as obvious as the walls of Addis Ababa and Nairobi, but most of us have been just as industrious. Will we be a community of men and women passionately committed to God’s agenda for blessing the nations, God’s agenda for reaching his broken world with Christ and his gospel? Or will we simply be another club passionate about preserving our perks and comfort and privilege, our ethnic identity and our traditions? Be careful. Take seriously God’s call and wrestle with God’s agenda. But beware. It is a dangerous thing. This is how people have always heard God’s call. This is why people, even today, might be willing to leave everything behind, leave all their comforts and even their home and become a missionary, like I did in Kenya.

What makes Christianity completely different and unique from all other world religions is that Almighty God became one of us - to deify each one of us!

Archbishop Anastasios of Albania
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Harry/Tina Jordanoglou
Angeliki Karapanos
Rozeta/Lou Kamceva
George/Helen Kerbici
Said/Bozhena Khozami
Bill/Christine Kiritsis
Steven Kladas
Rena/Thomas Klebart
Kostas/Kristyn Aganis
Gulapka/Ilija Kostovski
Alexandra Koulax
Angelou Koulax
Gus Koulax
Sophia Koulax
Scott/Kathy Kunkel
Sandy/Gerry Kunkel
Trish Lareau
Helen Lepine
Jennie Manthos
Leslie Manthos
Olympia Margaritidis
Maria Karastogiannis
Alex Massie
Elizabeth/Ryan McCarthy
Marie McNally
Lorna McWilliam
Helen Metropoulos
George/Julie Milios
Demetrios/Hariklia Milios
Vasilios/Grace Milios
Bob Miranda/Lea Koveas
Yanni/Katie Mironidis
Del/Marie Monroe
Irene Mountzouris
Pauline/Carl Mueller
Neal/Charlotte Neslusan
Charles Nikopoulos
George Nonis
Kosta Panagiotou
Ted/Gloria Panagiotou
Barbara Pappas
Emanuel Pappas
Helen Pappas
Olga Pappas
Sam/Evelyn Pappas
Steven Pappas
Chuck/Misty Pappas
Jimmy Pappas
Glykeria Partsalis
Louise/Richard Pavlech
George/Christina Penesis
Olga Poloukhine
Jared/Stephanie Quill
Deb Raymond
Dan/Sue Rivelli
Jamie/Garry Ross
Ron/Sandy Sanderson
Nick/Mary Seferi
John/Eleni Sgouritsas
Dimitri/
Efkapia Sidopoulos
Dorothy Sosnowski
Tina/Jim Sullivan
Eleanor Teguis
Ted Theodores
John/Ana Thomas
Stelian/David
Thompson
Ted/Betty Tonna
Mark/Therese
Totolos
Nick/Lois/Totolos
Fr Luke/Faith Vernon
Lorraine Veslo
Edna Vogel
Steve/Kelly Vosnakis
Tasi Vriga
Danielle/David Weiss
Paul/Eleni
Xanthopoulos
Vasiliki Zahariadis
Helen/Bill Zenon
Yuri/Tatyana Zhuk

As of November 26, 131 out of 170 Families have given an average $791 offering towards their Stewardship to support our beloved Church.

Please Fulfill Your Pledge and Send in your Offering before the end of the Year!!!

We have collected $103,713 out of our budgeted $115,000.
A Warm Welcome to the Dunning Family (George, Annalisa, Helen, Ephraim, Francis, Lucy and Symeon not yet born) and Mike Kokoszka into our Church family!

THANK YOU to everyone who helped put together 32 Thanksgiving Baskets to families in need. Thanks to Sandi Kunkel, Helen Pappas and Park n Shop for donating 10 turkeys for our Thanksgiving Baskets and to Angelo & Eleftheria Moutoudis for donating and 30 more turkeys for our Thanksgiving Baskets and the Living Bread Luncheon for Thanksgiving,

A THANK YOU NOTE

Dear Fr. Luke,

The Park Ave Elementary School staff would be honored to host your December Living Bread Luncheon meal in memory of Cindy Johnson. Cindy had a huge impact on our community and the community of Webster and this is the least we can do in her name. We remember her always in our thoughts, prayers, and every-day lives. Thank you for providing this opportunity to help the families of Webster.

Sincerely,
The Park Ave Elementary School Family
Thanks to all the volunteers who have come out to serve our meals on the first Saturdays of October and November, and who also spent their Thanksgiving Day cooking a delicious, traditional meal for all our guests!
A month or so ago we were fortunate to have a miraculous myrrh streaming icon here at our church. While standing in line waiting to be anointed, there was a young mother and her two sons in front of me. I could see out of the corner of my eye the older son, who I learned later, was in 6th grade, kept looking at me. I turned to smile at him and saw he had a very concerned look on his face. Before I had the chance to say “hi,” he said to me in a very serious tone, “I know why I’m here, but I don’t know what I’m supposed to do?”

I replied to him, “No worries. When Fr. Luke comes over to you, he will anoint your forehead, each side of your face, and chin with the sign of the cross,” I said, “Hold out your hands like this, he’ll do the same on the top of your hands and on your palms.”

Relief came over his face and our conversation continued on who he was, what school he was in, why he was here, and how they were friends with one of our parishioners that invited them to come be anointed.

For days following, I thought of this story and it made me think. His words were so simple, yet the meaning was much deeper.

Fr Luke asked me to speak about “What God and the Church mean to me and why I give back to the Church.” I struggled with how I would start this but then I remembered my conversation with this boy and thought it was something we should all think about. We know WHY we are here – we come to encounter God, to pray, to ask forgiveness, to seek spiritual guidance and inspiration, and for so many other things. But do we know WHAT we are supposed to do as followers of Jesus Christ? Of course, we all know when to kneel, or make the sign of the cross or receive communion. We know certain rituals and practices, but I what I am referring to is, HOW DO WE SHOW OUR GRATITUDE? What do we give back to the church and how do we show God we are thankful for our blessings? Of course, it should be more than just saying thank you to God.

As I continue to share my thoughts on this topic, I want you to all understand that I am NOT the expert at showing my gratitude. I often forget, and put other things higher on the priority list. From time to time, however, I often feel a nudge, or a kick in the pants, reminding me – “Lisa, you are blessed…give thanks and give back!”

Many of you may, or may not know, these two things about me. In 2003, my family suffered two tragedies within a couple months when both my niece and my brother passed away at young ages. These traumatic events turned life turned upside down for me and my entire family. I was trying to be strong for the other family members, and the one and only thing that kept me going, was my faith. I turned to God to carry me through those dark times and He did. I realized, though, that I needed to do more than just go to church to express my gratitude. I wanted to help our church, I wanted to participate in whatever way I could - not for my glory, not for any recognition I would get, but to give back to God in gratitude! To show my gratitude in concrete ways!

Six years later, in October 2009, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Two days prior to that my beloved husband, Dan, asked me to marry him. What a roller coaster of emotion! I was happy, sad, angry, excited...you name it, every emotion went through me. I recall on one of my very angry days, when I was particularly angry at God, I kept asking, “WHY? WHY is this happening?”

God answered my angry plea! Not on that day, but months later. Once again, I felt I needed to continue to express to God how thankful I was. I continued my journey of participating as much as could in the Church to show my gratitude! This Church, and our beautiful Church family, have become a very significant part of my life. When I am not here, I miss the feeling of love and peace I receive when I come. And when I am here, I long for more. How I wish life was more about what we experience at Church, and not about the daily grind. I’m sure many of you would agree.

I shared those two stories with you because these events helped me realized that being thankful is more than just about saying “Thank you.” It is about doing something concrete! It is giving back! It is about showing gratitude in different ways!
There are many ways we can show our gratitude. Most people assume that when we talk about giving back in the Church, it’s always financial. Of course, we do need to support our Church financially and help keep the programs and facilities running. I want to remind people, however, that there are many other ways to give back along with our finances. Helping with our new soup kitchen, the Living Bread Luncheon, which is happening every first Saturday of each month, and even happening on Thanksgiving Day this year! Visiting our homebound parishioners, joining and getting active in the Philoptochos or deciding to run for Parish Council. What about participating in Project Mexico, donating time to our local hospitals, or collecting supplies for victims of natural disasters, or like we have recently done in our Church with the 53 boxes of supplies we sent to Project Mexico, or the 30 Thanksgiving Baskets we’re offering to families, or the 45 presents we’re getting for the Christmas Giving Tree.

We all have the ability to give back one way or the other! Some may be able to give more financially and maybe not so much with their time. Others can offer many volunteer hours, but may give less financially. How you give back is an individual choice according to how you feel you’ve been blessed by God. Just make a choice that is filled with love in your heart. As the Bible says, “God loves a cheerful giver!”

At this time of year when the holidays are so close to us, particularly Thanksgiving this week, take the time to reflect on all that you are grateful for. Possibly you’ve had the experience of sitting around the dinner table on Thanksgiving day, and having each person around the table say what they are thankful for. Well, this year, maybe you can add one thing. Have everyone say what they are thankful for AND what are they doing to show their gratitude!

I ask you all to please reflect on these words, and remember **GIVE THANKS and GIVE BACK!**

*Lisa Healy*

*Parish Council President*
**EARLY RISERS**
**SATURDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY**

7:00am-8:00am
Saturday, Dec 2, 9, 16

EVERYONE WELCOME!

“How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path.”

Psalm 119:103,105

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**WEDNESDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY**

10:00am-11:15am
Wednesday Dec 6, 13

EVERYONE WELCOME!

Come and enjoy delightful fellowship, while learning your faith and growing in your relationship with God!!!

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**2017 Annual Church Family Christmas Card**

Our Philoptochos Society will offer an opportunity for all our Church Family members to be a part of our annual CHURCH FAMILY CHRISTMAS CARD. The Christmas Card goes to the homes of all our parishioners wishing them blessings during the upcoming holiday season.

A minimum donation of $15 per family is greatly appreciated. All donations will support the various philanthropic ministries of the Philoptochos.

If you would like to be included, please give your donation and the names to Donna Cooney or Debby Raymond by Dec. 10 or mail them to the Church Office, noting Church Family Christmas Card.

---

**SIGN UP FOR PROJECT MEXICO 2018**

Our Church reserved 25 SPOTS for next summer’s trip!

**July 18-24, 2018**

For anyone with questions, or if you are interested in participating in building a home for Project Mexico next summer, contact Fr. Luke

To reserve a spot, give a $100 deposit by December 18th.
Christmas Poinsettia

If you would like to donate a Christmas Poinsettia in memory or in honor of a loved one, or for the Glory of God, please send in $60 to the Church Office. We will purchase the poinsettia and list the names of those honored or commemorated in our Monthly Bulletin.

We are also looking for donors for our new $250 Christmas Tree.

SUNDAY SCHOOL
ST NICHOLAS CELEBRATION
DEC 3
CHRISTMAS PAGEANT
DEC 17
CHOIR CHRISTMAS CAROLS - Dec 24

THE CHRISTMAS GIVING TREE
See Leah Didonato or Mary Seferi to help purchase one of 35 Christmas gifts for children from needy families, or one of 15 Christmas gifts for the elderly at Holy Trinity Nursing Home.

WEEKDAY SERVICES
Dec 2 - 6:00pm Great Vespers
Dec 6 - 9:30 Divine Liturgy for St Nicholas
Dec 9 - 6:00pm Great Vespers
Dec 13 - 9:30 Divine Liturgy for St. Herman of Alaska
Dec 16 - 6:00pm Great Vespers
Dec 20 - 9:30 Divine Liturgy for St. Ignatios the Godbearer
Dec 22 - 9:00am Royal Hours for Christmas
Dec 23 - 6:00pm Great Vespers
Dec 24 - 5:00pm Christmas Vespers
Dec 25 - 10:00 Christmas Day Liturgy
We will be having our Christmas luncheon after church on December 3rd at Point Breeze. Please see Marie McNally if you would like to go. The cost is $20.00. We will have a short meeting followed by our meal. If you would like to exchange gifts, please bring a gift. We will then play a few games of bingo. Let's make it an enjoyable afternoon. We have worked very hard all year long so we deserve to have a good time! Hope to see you there!

I would like to express our deepest sympathy to the family of Helen "Cin" Tsigaridas, a beloved member of our Philoptochos. She was a lovely lady and will be missed. May her memory be eternal!

I hope everyone has a very Merry Christmas and a Blessed and Happy New Year! Stay healthy and be happy throughout this holiday season!

With love and affection,

Evelyn Pappas
Philoptochos President

Make a $75 Donation for Coffee Fellowship
In Honor of Some Special Event/Person or In Memory of a Loved One.

THANK YOU to Tasi Vriga who donated the coffee for the weekly Coffee Fellowship for the month of November “In Loving Memory of his sister Elizabeth Vriga”

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator;
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist;
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist;
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer;
But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.
## COFFEE FELLOWSHIP

### SERVING GROUPS

**Dec 3** - Thomai Gatsogiannis, Trish Lareau, Deb Raymond, Evangeline Wilson

**Dec 10** - Donna Cooney, Leah Didonato, Rena Klebart, Betty Tonna, Therese Totolos

**Dec 17** - Marie McNally, Christa Benoit, Sandi Kunkel, Mary Seferi, Carolyn Niemeck

**Dec 24** - Kathy Bilis, Sara Darligiannis, Marie Monroe, Charlotte Neslusan, Stephanie Quill

**Dec 31** - Thomai Gatsogiannis, Trish Lareau, Deb Raymon, Vange Wilson

### Pastries/Donuts Groups

These groups will bake or bring in pastries/donuts and/or fruit and veggies for our coffee fellowship. We are looking for more volunteers to help!!!

**Dec 3** - Titi Chito, Rina Sgouritsas, Lorna McWilliam, Pres. Faith Veronis

**Dec 10** - Sandi Kunkel, Evelyn Pappas, Gulapka Kostovski, Betty Tonna

**Dec 17** - Kathy Bilis, Marie Monroe, Eleni Sgouritsas, Tina Collelo

**Dec 24** - Leah Didonato, Mary Seferi, Olga Poulakhine, Vasiliki Zahariadis

**Dec 31** - Sara Darligiannis, Sissy Darligiannis, Therese Totolos, Helen Constantine

**Jan 7** - Lisa Healy, Marie McNally, Despina Condos, Trish Lareau

**Jan 14** - Charlotte Neslusan, Evis Jordanoglou, Dolly Sosnowski, Annalisa Dunning

**Jan 21** - Lynn Purcell, Rayne Purcell, Sophia Foisy, Kelly Vosnakis

## YOUTH EPISTLE

### READERS

**Dec 3** - Zach Beaudry

**Dec 10** - Kiera MacKenzie

**Dec 17** - Lily Mueller

**Dec 24 am** - Olivia Neslusan

**Dec 24 Christmas Eve** - Panayiota Veronis

**Dec 25** - Theodora Veronis

**Dec 31** - Maia Beaudry

## USHERS & GREETERS

### SCHEDULE

**Dec 3** - Nicoleta Cojocaru, Arthur Darligiannis, Zach Gianaris, Jared Quill, George Kerbici

**Dec 10** - Arthur Bilis, Del Monroe, Chris Geotis, Thomai Gatsogianis, Trish Lareau

**Dec 17** - Marie McNally, Matt Benoit, Lisa Healy, Nick Seferi, Mary Papageorge, Ron Sanderson

**Dec 24 Morning** - Neal Neslusan, Jimmy Karapanos, Bill Thompson, Tasi Vriga, Tatyana Zhuk, Mike Chito

**Dec 24 Christmas Eve** - Nicoleta Cojocaru, Arthur Darligiannis, Zach Gianaris, Jared Quill, George Kerbici

**Dec 31** - Arthur Bilis, Del Monroe, Chris Geotis, Thomai Gatsogiannis, Trish Lareau
“What shall we offer you, O Christ? Who for our sake appeared on earth as a human? Every creature made by you offers you thanksgiving: The angels offer you a hymn. The heavens, a star. The magi, gifts. The shepherds, their wonder. The earth, its cave. The wilderness, a manger. And we offer to you, a Virgin Mother.”

A Hymn from Christmas Vespers

“Look for our safe and convenient online giving at bottom left of Church webpage at www.schwebster.org

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

Stewardship Update as of Nov 26th. We have 131 stewards out of our 170 stewardship members who have given to support our church in the year 2017.

PACESETTERS ($1000-$2000) - 19 Stewards

TORCHBEARERS ($2001-$4000) - 9 Stewards

GOOD SHEPHERDS (over $4000) - 5 Stewards

Average Pledge: $791

SAVE THE DATE AND START PLANNING

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land
February 2019

Estimated cost $3500
Start saving up for this once in a lifetime trip!!!

Learn your Orthodox Faith from Orthodox podcasts, music, teachings at

www.myocn.net

www.AncientFaith.com

“A Hymn from Christmas Vespers

 Luke 2:13-14

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“A Hymn from Christmas Vespers

 Luke 2:13-14
Remembering Our Church Family

Important Dates in DECEMBER:

Try to make a visit, give a call, or express your congratulations to members of our Church family who celebrate special days this month.

**BIRTHDAYS:**

- Dec 3    Nikita Zagoras
- Dec 4    Nicole Peterson
- Dec 7    Evis Jordanoglou
- Dec 8    Maria Mironidis
- Dec 12   Helen Tsigaridas
- Dec 22   Vasil Condos
- Dec 22   Elise Purcell
- Dec 23   Kenneth Peterson
- Dec 25   Chris Geotis
- Dec 26   Paul Geotis
- Dec 29   Anestis Jordanoglou
- Dec 31   Eric Beland
- Dec 31   Emmanuel Pappas

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES:**

- Dec 11  Arthur & Sara Darligiannis
- Dec 26  Vasil & Despina Condos
- Dec 31  Chuck & Misty Pappas

**NAMEDAYS:**

- Dec 4    **St. Barbara**
  - Barbara Constantine
  - Barbara Desrosiers
  - Barbara Gianaris
  - Barbara Pappas

- Dec 6    **St Nicholas**
  - Nick Adamopoulos
  - Nike Avlas
  - Nike Beaudry

- Dec 12   St. Spyridon
  - Spiro Pappas

- Dec 16   St Eleftherios
  - Eleftheria Moutoudis

- Dec 17   St Daniel the Prophet
  - Dan Rivelli

- Dec 20   St Anastasia
  - Madison Anastasia McWilliams

- Dec 25   Christmas
  - Christy Atsales
  - Christa Benoit
  - Chris Constantine
  - Chris Geotis
  - Chris Grzyb
  - Chris Milios
  - Emmanuel Pappas

- Dec 26   St Joseph the Betrothed
  - Joseph Gliniecki

- Dec 27   St. Stephen
  - Stephen Foisy
  - Stephanie Quill

- Dec 26   St David the King
  - David Bilis
  - David Thompson
Thank You to those who sponsor our monthly bulletin!
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<td>Dec 31</td>
<td>Jan 1 St Basil</td>
<td>2 Unceasing Prayer Chain Begins Today for 7 Days</td>
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<td>New Year’s Eve Day 8:30 Matins 9:30 Divine Liturgy</td>
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A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have come so many times to us and found no resting place. 
Forgive us for our overcrowded lives, 
our vain haste and our preoccupation with self.

Come again, O Lord, and though our hearts are a jumble of voices, 
and our minds overlaid with many fears, 
find a place however humble, 
where You can begin to work Your wonder 
as you create peace and joy within us.

If in some hidden corner, in some out-of-the-way spot, 
we can clear away the clutter, and shut out the noise and darkness, 
come be born again in us, and we shall kneel in perfect peace 
with the wisest and humblest of people.

Help us enter into this Christmas celebration with humility, 
with joy, and most of all with a desire to discover You anew! 
Yes Lord, give us a Christmas from within, that we may share it from 
without, on all sides, all around us, wherever there is a need.

God help us, every one, to share the blessings of Jesus Christ 
with others, in whose name we keep Christmas holy.