WHAT SHALL WE OFFER YOU?

“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.”

This beautiful hymn we sing during the Vespers of Christmas reminds us of an essential part of Christmas - gift-giving. Yes, gift-giving is essential, but not in the sense that most of us think about it. From childhood, we dream of Christmas because of all the gifts we will receive. Even as we grow older, we take delight in offering our own children many gifts.

Well, the essence of Christmas is about gifts, not about the gifts we give our children, but about the greatest gift that our Heavenly Father offered to the world - the gift of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. How the world has changed because of this unfathomable gift!

On one hand, the world doesn’t seem to have changed much. We still have violence, wars, corruption and greed, illness, suffering, and death. Yet one fundamental thing has changed indeed changed! God has entered the world, tasted every aspect of our life except sin, including death itself, and has opened up a new path for all humanity to follow.

Through this gift of Jesus Christ, we now have a concrete example of a perfect life and a true human being in the midst of a fallen society. Our Lord did not just teach about love, but incarnated divine and unconditional love both towards his neighbor, and even towards his enemies. Jesus showed us that the greatest virtue in life is to love unconditionally, humbly serving and sacrificing for the other. We now know very clearly the life we are called to live.
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
Telephone: (508) 949-7623 (h)  (774) 230-6985 (cell)
email: frlukeveronis@gmail.com

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And the gift of Jesus not only set a perfect example for us, but even more importantly, this gift has delivered us from our greatest fear and enemy - death itself. Christmas Day is the beginning of our salvation, because Christ came on earth for one purpose, to destroy the power of death by His own death!

As we make our way towards Christmas Day, with all our shopping and buying presents for one another, let us pause to reflect upon the greatest gift of the season, the priceless gift that our Heavenly Father offers to each of us, and let us find ways to express our sincere and wholehearted gratitude back to Him.

Probably the best way we can show our thankfulness is by imitating His generous gift-giving, but giving especially to those less fortunate, and to those in need! And in order to imitate God, we must offer our best back to Him. We are called to offer our very lives in humble service to our fellow humanity and to God Almighty.

Here lies the secret to a truly meaningful and blessed life. True living comes through giving - of ourselves, of our time, of our material possessions, of everything we have to help others. As Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

May we all grow in our desire to give, and thus, carry this Christmas spirit with us throughout the year.

A most blessed and joyous Christmas to you!!!

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

+Luke

“All things are filled with joy today, for Christ is born of a Virgin… All the angels in heaven greatly rejoice today, the whole creation leaps with joy, for the Savior and Lord is born in Bethlehem.”

Hymns from the Christmas Service

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.

From the Great Vespers of Christmas

“Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a Savior has been born for you who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:13-14

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you this sign: The Virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and shall name Him Emmanuel.”

Isaiah 7:14
GOD’S NEW NAME FOR EACH OF US

What is your name? What’s the name people call you, and what is the name that God knows you by?

Names hold an important place throughout the Bible. We read in many places throughout the Scriptures how God changes people’s name. Abram becomes Abraham. Jacob becomes Israel. Simon becomes Peter the rock. Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the Apostle to the nations.

Jesus uses names and even titles to describe each one of us. Sometimes He calls us servants, followers, disciples, and co-workers. The names become more intimate as we enter into a deeper relationship with Him - He calls us friends, His prize possession, His holy nation. He even reminds us that we are His children, His heirs, living stones of a new temple, even temples of His Holy Spirit.

Names are important. They identify who we are, where we came from, whose family we are a part of. Maybe that is why Matthew begins His Gospel with a genealogy, a list of 42 names, which we read today as the beginning of the Christmas story. He reminds His reader of the earthly lineage from which Jesus came. This list of names reminds us that Christmas is fundamentally about God entering into a human family. Remember, Jesus became one of us, He became fully human without giving up His divine nature.

What is so fascinating, though, is that the 42 names in the lineage of Jesus are full of diverse people, from heroic saintly men to shameful sinners. They’re all part of Jesus’ earthly family. An example of this would be to look at the women’s names in the lineage. Since Matthew offers a Jewish lineage, it would be expected that the names would only be that of the father. Yet, four female names are mentioned, and the surprise is that these female names include a woman who was a prostitute, a woman who was a foreigner, a non-Jew, and a woman who was seduced to commit adultery. And the male list itself isn’t much better. Not a very flattering lineage for the Savior of the world to be a part of; and yet, this is the heritage Jesus took upon Himself.

Yet maybe Jesus consciously entered into this particular family lineage to make a point. He has come to help lift people up from their brokenness, their bondage, their sinfulness, their darkness, and to give them new names, names that will help them fulfill the potential that God has placed within them. We heard this clearly from the angel who told Joseph in the Christmas story, “Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit and she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Mt 1:20-21)

Jesus enters into a particular family, and into the world itself at a specific time, to save each and every sinner from their sins, from that which separates them from God, and even from the curse of sin, which is death itself!

Here is the “good news of great joy” which Christmas brings – we have a Savior who will take us as we are and change us into something new. He offers us the option to become a new creation. No matter what we have done, no matter how we have failed or fallen short of our God-given calling and potential, He promises us that if we follow Him, and allow Him to be born anew in our hearts, we can become a new creation! As one of the Christmas hymns we will hear tonight says, “Christ is born so that He might raise up the formerly fallen image of humanity.”

Think about your deepest, darkest secret. Maybe it
Maybe Jesus consciously entered into this particular family lineage to make a point. He has come to help lift people from their brokenness, their bondage, their sinfulness, their darkness, and offers them new names.

is from years ago, and still acts as a heavy burden in your memory. Maybe it’s a more recent failing, or an ongoing dark habit. We all have fallen short of the glory of God, plenty of times, and that failing, that brokenness, that darkness may seem to stain our name, and give us the feeling of hopelessness.

And yet, here comes God, taking on our human form, lifting up our humanity to touch His divinity. As Saint Athanasios the Great put it, “God became human, so that humans could become godlike.”

Jesus calls each one of us by name and says, “I knew you before you were born. I made you and formed you in the womb of your mother. I called you into existence. I love you with an everlasting love. I want you to be with me forever to behold my glory. I came to be born at Christmas not just in Bethlehem, but in your heart. Will you receive me? Do you hear me calling? Behold, 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.

We believe in a God who came to seek and save the lost; who came not to be served but to serve; who came to give us the abundant life; who came as light that whoever believes in Him may not remain in darkness, who came not to judge the world but to save it!

Jesus Christ came at Christmas. He comes again this Christmas. He comes each day, waiting to enter into our lives!
My work dictates that I sometimes have to travel overseas to see my customers in various countries. All of my travel has been limited to China and Japan in the Far East, and Europe in the Old World, including Israel. I recently made it back to Israel to visit my customers there. I have been there many times over the past fifteen or so years and I’ve commented to those who ask about the country that there is a palatable tension there.

If you visit Israel you cannot help but be impressed by how much development goes on there. The Israeli’s are very proud of the country that they have built since 1948 and they strive to display their advancements and modernity, especially in the city of Tel Aviv and the surrounding suburbs. Indeed a visit to Tel Aviv is just like going to any major American city, although due to the climate we should think of it more along the lines of San Francisco or San Diego and not so much Boston! The skyscrapers, the superhighways, the train system… Tel Aviv has all the modern infrastructure of the best that the Western World has to offer.

Right now Israel is going through yet another one of its building booms. My main customer in Israel is a company called ECI. They are a major telecommunications equipment maker and they sell their products around the world. I stayed in a modern hotel about a half mile from their office in Petah Tikva, a suburb of Tel Aviv, and that afforded me the opportunity to walk back and forth for the few days I was there and do a little exploring. It was about a ten city block walk from my hotel to the customer and on that walk I passed by no less than five significant building projects.

Each one of these projects was a more than twenty story apartment or mixed use building either taking up the entire block or about half of it. There were multiple cranes on each building lot. In fact, the entire skyline of the metro Tel Aviv area was filled with construction cranes as Israel tries to build enough apartments for its growing Jewish and Arab populations.

At each of the sites I stopped to watch some of the work. I’m always fascinated by heavy equipment and construction sites. In each site, the work was being done by Chinese and African workers. In fact, in each site the construction cranes had Chinese company names on them. It’s well known to everyone in Israel that the Chinese have come to the country to help Israel grow and much of the new construction is done by Chinese firms, and those firms had been building in the cities of Africa for the past ten years and have brought their workers with them from Africa as well. Not only are the Chinese firms building all the high-rise buildings in Israel but they are also building the new subway system for Tel Aviv.

What I did not see on all five building lots was Israelis, either Jewish or Arab, among the workforce, and it reminded me of the tension I feel every time I go to Israel. I had to take a few taxi rides to my other customers in other suburbs of Tel Aviv, not within walking distance of the hotel, and in every ride I questioned the cabbies about the construction and growth of Tel Aviv. Cabbies are great to get the feel of the pulse of a city, or in this case a whole nation as Israel is so small. Every cabbie was a Jewish Israeli, and on this trip every cabbie was a Russian Jew. As you may know Jewish emigration from Russia has been significant over the past fifteen or so years.
Now, truth be told, the Israeli economy is humming along very strongly right now. The country is hovering at about 4% unemployment for all citizens. The Arab Israeli unemployment rate is about twice that but the percentage of Arab Israeli’s that participate in the workforce is much lower than the percentage of Jewish Israeli’s that participate in the workforce. This basically means the real unemployment number for the Arabs in Israel is much higher than the approximately 8% reported by the Israeli government.

Back to our cabbies... I questioned each of them as to why I saw no Jewish Israeli’s or Arab Israeli’s on the worksites in Petah Tikva. With respect to the Jewish Israeli’s not being there every cabbie had the same basic answer that was summed up well by one cabbie who said, “The Jewish Israeli’s don’t want that kind of job, they all want to be scientists or businessmen!” On why the Arab Israeli’s are not on the worksites the answers were more guarded but one cabbie summed it up well when he said, “The Arabs keep to themselves.” And there it was, the reason that I always felt this tension in Israel was laid before me by a Russian Jewish immigrant. The Arabs are throughout Israel but in many cases they live in their own conclaves, separate from the economic powerhouse that is Jewish Israel, not participating in it except at the fringes, not enjoying the growth the way the Jewish Israeli’s are. One nation, two separate people, living together but separate in one country. I can’t help but draw parallels in my own mind to white and black America, and how we live siloed in our own communities and how black America doesn’t enjoy the full economic power of the USA.

But all is not lost... I decided to stay an extra day and take a tour of Jerusalem while I was there, something I almost never do (take extra time to do some sight seeing). I expected to sense an even higher tension in Jerusalem, after all, this was the place that everyone over there was fighting over, right? Jerusalem was the place that I saw all the news reports as a child about fighting over individual city streets. Jerusalem was the flash point for all the violence. But no, instead I saw harmony, I saw cooperation, I saw coexistence.

The tour bus picked us all up at one of the downtown hotels in Tel Aviv. It was an English language tour and the clientele was mostly Americans and Europeans. The bus approached Old Jerusalem from the east to go to our first stop, the Mount of Olives, a hill just to the east of Old Jerusalem from which you can look down upon the city, across the small valley where the Garden of Gethsemane is, the place at which Judas betrayed our Lord Jesus. If you’ve ever seen news reports from Jerusalem you’ve seen this place because there is always a background shot over the reporters shoulder that clearly shows the Temple Mount behind the reporter with the beautiful golden Dome of the Rock in it. This very holy Muslim site is believed to be the place that Muhammed ascended into heaven and received from God the commandment that His followers should pray five times a day. By the way, the Temple Mount is built on top of the ruins of the second great Jewish Temple built by King David about 4000 years ago. In fact, the Wailing Wall (the spot considered most holy by the Jews) is one of the original Temple walls that King David built, and it is the lower wall of the Temple Mount, upon which the Dome of the Rock sits. So you can see perhaps a bit why there is a bit of a problem between the Jews and the Muslims over this space.

The Mount of Olives sits right in the middle of an Arab village and it is the traditional starting point for all tours of Old Jerusalem. The tour buses were thick along the sides of the streets and tourists were all trying to get to the best spot for a good photo of Old Jerusalem. And everywhere there were Arab Israeli’s running the show, directing the buses, describing to the tourists the sites to be seen on the Jerusalem skyline, selling souvenirs, offering camel and donkey rides or just pictures with their animals. In short, they were all participating fully in the tourist economy of Jerusalem.
Our tour was tremendous and very informative and we saw many of the most important historical sites. Inside the Old Jerusalem city walls we stopped for lunch in the bazaar, the shopping district in Old Jerusalem in the tiny streets of the old city. All the store fronts and restaurants are run by Arabs, both Muslim and Christian. Governed by Jewish Israeli’s but the business of downtown Old Jerusalem is definitely run by the Arab Israeli’s. Unlike the majority of the rest of Israel, the Arabs here are deeply part of the economy.

Our tour guide, a young Jewish Israeli from South Africa in her mid-20’s did a great job telling us about all the sites. Not only did she inform us of the historical significance of the various spots we visited, she continually showed proof to us of how modern Old Jerusalem works well for all those who live there, specifically the Arab Israeli’s. Israeli’s are painfully aware of how the struggle for Jerusalem has been portrayed in the press, especially in the US. Part of her story that she told for us throughout the day was meant to show the cooperation that now exists in this city that is truly owned by the whole world, but administered at least by the Israeli’s.

After seeing the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the bazaar, various city gates, the Wailing Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, King David’s tomb, and the room built upon the spot of the Last Supper, our tour for the day ended in the Jewish Quarter of Old Jerusalem and our tour guide told us our last and most important story of cooperation between the religions in the Holy City.

In the picture seen here you can see a spot in Jerusalem where there is a mosque and synagogue right next to one another. This is the story of the Sidna Omar Mosque and the Hurva Synagogue. These two buildings, the Mosque literally on the front doorstep of the Synagogue, are a perfect symbol of Old Jerusalem, a city that is holy to three main religions and must coexist with all three. The Mosque, you see, was built by Jews, and the Synagogue was built by Muslims. I did not get that backwards. Jews built the Mosque, and the Synagogue, or at least this latest version of it as it has been built and rebuilt a few times in the past 700 years, was built by Muslims.

There are actually two Synagogues in this area of Jerusalem, the very old Ramban Synagogue which has been used by the local Sephardic Jews for thousands of years, and the relatively new (past 700 years or so) Hurva Synagogue which was built for the Ashkenazi Jews returning to Israel from years in Europe. The story of the Hurva Synagogue starts centuries ago when Israel was ruled by the Mamluk Sultanate out of Egypt. This was prior to the Ottoman Empire ruling this area. The Ashkenazi Jews returning from Europe to the Holy Land saw themselves as separate from the local Sephardic Jews (and probably vice versa) and raised money to pay for the building of the Hurva Synagogue. Not only did they have to pay for the building of the Synagogue itself but they had to purchase the land and pay the ruling Muslim Sultan a tax to allow a non-Muslim house of worship to be built. It was extremely costly.

Over the years as more and more Ashkenazi Jews came back to Israel from Europe they flocked to the area around the Hurva Synagogue. One family purchased a plot of land in the Synagogue courtyard and planned to build a house there. When the sons of the mother of that family came from Europe to settle in Israel they got into a big disagreement with the local Jews and were effectively ostracized by them. In their anger the two sons decided to convert to Islam, and in the mother’s anger at her local Jewish community she donated her plot of land in the Synagogue courtyard, right at the front steps of the Jewish house of worship, so that her property may become a Mosque. In that way, this Muslim Mosque was built by Jews.

As you may expect the building of this Mosque in the courtyard of a Jewish Synagogue was met with anger by the local Jewish community. For years the local Muslims and Jews argued with one another over this small space. At one point, a house next to the Mosque in the Synagogue courtyard collapsed and was torn down, and the Mosque tried to annex the land. A court battle ensued with the local Muslims arguing that the Synagogue should never have been built in the first place. The local Muslim’s rioted and tore down the Hurva Synagogue.

The case was brought before Sultan Kait Bey in Egypt, the Muslim ruler of the Mamluk Sultanate. He sided with the Jews and demanded that the Synagogue be rebuilt. In fact he assigned his
own personal architect to oversee the project. In that way, this Jewish Synagogue was rebuilt by the Muslims.

The story of this Mosque and Synagogue encapsulates all that is Jerusalem. It is similar to the story of how many Christian sects control and administer the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (and sadly sometimes argue and fight over its management), but the building itself is controlled by a local Muslim family who has held the keys to the Church for centuries. One very special and holy city with three religions all co-existing in it, respectful (perhaps begrudgingly) of each other’s right and needs.

As my bus ride took us back to Tel Aviv I had the thought that it is entirely appropriate that in the spot that all three major Abrahamic religions consider so central to their faith, and that has been fought over for centuries, that there is an acceptance by the locals that live there that they all must coexist. How else should it be? Of course it should be this way.

While I believe that the fighting over what we now call Israel will continue for many years, sadly probably long after my lifetime is over, I left Jerusalem with the confidence that the fight may not start here. Indeed, if it were up to the local Jews, Muslims, and Christians I think the current status quo of all three coexisting and respecting one another’s needs and rights would be perfectly acceptable. Maybe the peace in Jerusalem, uneasy as it may seem, can be a model throughout this overcrowded world?

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.

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord! Let us proclaim the present mystery by which the partition has been broken and the flaming sword withheld: now shall the Cherubim let us all come to the Tree of Life. As for me, I am returning to the bliss of Paradise whence I had been driven by the original disobedience. Behold, the Image of the Father has taken the form of a servant! He has come down to us from a Mother all-pure, and yet He has remained unchanged: He has remained true God as He was before, and has taken on Himself what He had not been, becoming Man out of His love for humanity. Wherefore, let us raise our voices in hymns and sing: "O God who was born of the Virgin, O our God, have mercy on us!"
The Light—December 2018

GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY!!!

The internet news is full of depressing and even scary news. Plenty of greed and corruption. Prejudice, hatred, and meanness towards one another. Violence and wars around the world. Economic struggles and challenges. Sometimes when we read the news, we can get quite depressed with humanity.

This time of year is supposed to be about toys and presents and children’s cheer. Christmas is about holiday parties and families coming together to share in love. Of course, Christmas is also about the joyful wonder and miraculous events of our Lord’s birth, a birth that changed the world! Ultimately, Christmas is about the “GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY” that a newborn Savior brings into the world! We may face a harsh reality in the world today, but this time of year we pause to celebrate something different. For the Christmas Story isn’t just for children, but it is the greatest, earth-shattering event in history that has a practical and concrete message for any darkness which we may face in our world today.

In many ways, our world is not so different from the world into which Mary and Joseph welcomed the newborn Jesus. I recently watched the movie The Nativity Story, which offers a beautiful and powerful rendition of the first Christmas. In it, one can see the harsh reality into which Jesus was born. In the opening scene, Herod’s soldiers are racing to Bethlehem with orders to kill all the children two years old or under. The villagers are unprepared and have no defense as soldiers go from house to house with swords drawn and screaming women all about.

In another scene, Herod’s soldiers enter the village of Nazareth to collect taxes for the Romans and for themselves. When one family can’t pay their taxes, the soldiers randomly take their daughter and say that she will pay their taxes by becoming a slave. There’s little the villagers can do. They can revolt, and yet the Romans mercilessly crucified rebels and quickly squelched any rebellion. Jesus was born in a world under oppression, where half of the empire were slaves. He lived in a simple village on the edge of poverty. As an infant, he tasted the life of a refugee, fleeing his homeland and living in Egypt. The life of a first century Jew was surely one of uncertainty, confusion, anxiety and fear, much like the suffering seen in places like the Middle East, or parts of Africa and as in other developing countries.

Within that gloomy context the angels come to the shepherds crying out, “Do not be afraid, behold, I bring you GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY which will be for all people. For there is born for you this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord... Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and good will towards all!”

The Jews waited for centuries for the coming of their Messiah. They waited under oppression and injustice. They waited in poverty and hunger. They waited under confusion and fear. They waited for centuries, yet they never lost hope! God had promised a Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One to come and bring in the reign of a new kingdom. So they waited in faith under extremely difficult circumstances.

The event of Christmas heralded good news to all those who were waiting. As St. Paul explained in his letter to the Christians in Galatia, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under that law, that we may receive adoption as His children!” The fullness of time had come, and God decisively acted!

In times of uncertainty and confusion, like times of today, Christmas reminds us that God has not forgotten us, nor has He abandoned us. In fact, God has come to us, and even become one of us! The unfathomable mystery of our faith is how Almighty God, the Eternal One, the Creator of heaven and earth accepted to become human, a humble creature, and entered a fallen world where evil prevailed. He tasted life as a refugee, as a poor villager, as an oppressed people. He witnessed the suffering of the masses from the greed and vanity of a
The feast of Christmas proclaims to us that God has acted decisively in the world, and if we choose — it’s up to us — if WE choose to allow Him to be born in our hearts and live under His reign, than we will know that “God is with us” and will help us face whatever challenges the world offers.

few. He faced violence, oppression, and death itself. He understood the evil that our world can produce — He tasted it, He confronted it, and ultimately, He overcame it!

Christmas is about “GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY” — and the good news is that Jesus not only showed us the way to live under a different reign than the kingdom of this world, but He promised to walk with us, to be in us, and to help us live that divine path. When others choose to live in greed, He showed us how to live in love and charity. When others choose to live under the delusion of power and authority, He showed us how to live in simplicity and humility. When others choose to live under hatred and vengeance and violence, He showed us how to live in mercy and forgiveness. When others choose to live under the fear of death, He showed us how to live life to its fullest, never fearing death, because we know that death is not the end!

The “GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY” that Christmas brings is nothing less than a new way of living, a new way of becoming truly human in the deepest sense of the word. The Christian path means becoming human as Jesus was human — lifting humanity to a new level, the original level it was meant to be lived. God became one of us, so that we could become united to Him and live in Him!

When we look around at the evils of our world — the greed, the violence, the deception, the impurity, the superficial and empty claims to fame — we must realize that these images we see on the internet every day are only one side of the human story. We can choose to follow these paths of superficiality and end up in similar disappointment, despair and emptiness, or we can choose to follow a completely different road, with an entirely different ending.

Christmas, and the coming of Christ reveals to us a radically new path in life that He invites us to follow — the way of divine love, the way of mercy and forgiveness, the way of humility and service, the way of meaning and purpose, the way of abundance leading to eternal life.

Now, this way of Jesus is not an easy path! It is a way that begins in a humble cave in a simple manger in the poor village of Bethlehem, continues in a life of sacrifice and service to others, and passed through a terrible Cross. Yet if we choose, in our own lives, to walk this narrow and difficult path of Christ, we are choosing to live with the Christmas spirit throughout the year. We will live a life of wonder and joy because we will miraculously be transformed by the truth that “God is with us.” As Archbishop Anastasios writes, “our lives will be transfigured in a joyous feast breathing and moving in the atmosphere that “God is with us.””

No matter what the newspapers say, and no matter what happens in our country or in the world around us, don’t be anxious or afraid. The feast of Christmas proclaims to us loudly that God has acted decisively in the world, and if we choose — it’s up to us — if WE choose to live under His reign and in His kingdom, than we can be assured that “God is with us” and He will help us remain victorious over any and every evil that the world offers.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him! A blessed Christmas to you all!
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.

2018 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. 1st, or mail them to the Church Office, noting Church Family Christmas Card.

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 residents at Holy Trinity Nursing Home.

Come and Enter Into the Spirit of the Season by Attending our annual CHRISTMAS RETREAT

“The History, The Mystery, & The Ministry of Christmas”

9:30am-12:30
Saturday, December 9

Guest Speaker: Fr. Christopher Stamas

Fr. Chris has served as the priest at St. George Cathedral in Springfield for 17 years. He has a dynamic ministry, led a religious program on a local television station, led two trips to the Holy Lands, and is active in University ministry.
Thanks to all for offering 31 Thanksgiving Baskets along with 45 Turkeys and gift cards.

We sent 55 boxes for Pantry Partners of St. Innocent Orphanage!!!

Our Thanksgiving Crew who served 80 meals Thanksgiving Day!!!

From Our December Living Bread Christmas Meal
PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS

On November 4th we had our meeting after church. It was well attended. We discussed various upcoming events. Please see Debbie Raymond and Donna Cooney to sign up for our church Christmas card. Also please see Sandi Kunkel if you would like to fill a Christmas basket for the needy.

Our Christmas party will be held on December 9th at 2:00 at Point Breeze and will cost $20.00 per person. Please see Marie McNally and sign up. If you would like to exchange gifts please bring a gift between $5 and $10. And don't forget we will again be playing bingo. So please join us in celebrating the Christmas season together.

On November 17th we had our Spaghetti Supper. It was very well attended and probably our best one ever! We made a little over $3000.00. We served 180 meals with 360 meatballs! Thank you John and Eleni Sgouritsas for your generous donation. Next year 200 meals! Lol! Thank you to all the businesses that donated towards the placement ad which made $625.00. Thank you to all that donated and helped with the set up, preparation, serving, tickets, center table etc. and a special thanks to Chris Geotis who always helps us put out the signs and take them in for our functions throughout the year. He always goes unnoticed. I can always count on all of you to step up and help! Good job!

Please see Sandi about your 2018 dues.

I would like to take this time to thank all our Philoptochos sisters for your hard work, your love, and your dedication throughout the year! You are all amazing women and thank you for being there for me and our society whenever needed! I love you all!!! Have a happy and healthy Christmas to all of you and your families!

With much love and gratitude,

Evelyn Pappas

SIGN UP FOR PROJECT MEXICO 2019

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

July 9-16, 2019

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 20th.

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

Stewardship Update as of Dec 3rd. We have 140 stewards out of our 170 stewardship members who have given to support our church in the year 2018.

PACESETTERS ($1000-$2000) - 18 Stewards

TORCHBEARERS ($2001-$4000) - 7 Stewards

GOOD SHEPHERDS (over $4000) - 6 Stewards

Average Pledge: $826
Thank you to the 2018 Stewards

To all the faithful Church Family members who have given a financial donation towards their 2018 Stewardship Offering as of December 3, 2018

As of Dec 3 we have 140 out of 170 Families have given an average $826/year towards their Stewardship Offering to support our beloved Church and ministries.

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

We have collected $115,667 out of our budgeted $120,000. Help us reach our goal by year end!
LIVING BREAD LUNCHEON DONORS

The November Thanksgiving Luncheon was donated in loving memory of Iona Bisca, the grandmother of Nicoleta Cojocaru!

The December Luncheon is being donated in loving memory of Bessie Koulax from Charlotte and Neal Nesluscan and family.

We are looking for Donors to sponsor the “Living Bread Luncheon” for each month in the New Year. You can honor some special person or event, or offer the meal in loving memory of a beloved one.

We serve approximately 80-100 guests each month, as well as deliver meals to the elderly of our parish. A $400 donation will cover the cost of each month.

NOVEMBER PARISH COUNCIL SUMMARY

- Went over 2019 Proposed Budget in Preparation for General Assembly Meeting
- Stewardship Committee organized to meet and develop new ideas to further stewardship program starting in the new year.
- Front Doors of Church being stripped and re-stained. Will by done by December 6
- Update on Parish Foundation Repairs. Very pleased with all the work being done.
- Parish Council Elections will be Dec 9th. Six spots open.

FALL GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING

- Approved the 2019 Budget of $243,000
- Report on the Foundation Repair for Parish House. Should be completed by Dec 9th
- Audit Report will be given in Spring General Assembly
- 100th Year Anniversary Committee will start meeting in January to Prepare for celebration in 2020
HOLY LANDS PILGRIMAGE
Feb 15-24, 2019
7 Spots Still Open
If interested, contact Fr. Luke ASAP for this once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage.

Parish Council Elections
December 9th

VISIT OR SEND A NOTE TO THE ELDERLY OR SICK OF OUR CHURCH FAMILY THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON
Vasili Siozopoulos - Webster Manor
John Nicholopoulos - St Francis Home, Worcester
Evelyn Aperges
Nike Avlas
Mary Baxter
Liberty Brassard
Bill/Despina Condos
Maria Econome
Barbara & Zach Gianaris
Stergios/Noula Giantsios
Harry/Tina Jordanoglou
Jennie Manthos
Lorna McWilliam
Hariklia Milios
Carolyn Niemeck
Evangelia Panagiotou
George Papageorge
Emmanuel Pappas
Olga Pappas
Vassy Tanko
Edna Vogel
Christina Yakovleva

THANK YOU!!!
To Evangelos and Eleftheria Moutoudis for donating 35 Turkeys!
To Sandi Kunkel for donating 10 Turkeys!
To All Our Parishioners and the Philoptochos who donated towards Project Mexico Food Pantry, Thanksgiving Baskets, Christmas Baskets & the Giving Tree this holiday season!

24 HOUR ADVENT PRAYER CHAIN
Thanks for the 26 people who took part in our semi-annual Seven Day 24 Hour Prayer Chain during the two main Lenten Seasons. This is a beautiful way to enter into the “reason for the season,” the true spirit of Christmas!
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

COME AND JOIN A BIBLE STUDY

10:00am WEDNESDAY MORNINGS
or
7:30pm THURSDAY EVENING
at the home of Fr. Luke and Pres. Faith
(41 Noble Street, Dudley)

We are studying “The Gospels: The Extraordinary Life of Jesus of Nazareth with the video series “Drive Thru History with Dave Stotts”

SUNDAY SCHOOL
ST NICHOLAS CELEBRATION
DEC 9

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT
DEC 23

CHOIR CHRISTMAS CAROLS - Dec 24

For a Child is born to us, a Son is given us; upon His shoulder dominion rests. They shall name Him messenger of great counsel, wonderful counselor, mighty one, sovereign Master, Prince of Peace, Father of the age to come. His dominion is vast and of His peace there shall be no end.

Isaiah 9:6-7

WEEKDAY SERVICES
Dec 5 - 6pm Vesperal Liturgy for St Nicholas
Dec 12 - 9:30 Liturgy for St. Spyridon
Dec 21 - 9:30 Liturgy for St. Ignatius
Dec 24 - 9:00am Royal Hours for Christmas
Dec 24 - 4:00 Christmas Matins
Dec 24 - 5:00 Christmas Liturgy
Dec 25 - 10am Christmas Liturgy
Saturday Vespers - 6:00pm
Coffee Fellowship Supply
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 2  Titi Chito, Rina Sgouritsas, Lorna McWilliam, Pres. Faith Veronis
Dec 9 – Sandi Kunkel, Evelyn Pappas, Gulapka Kostovski, Betty Tonna,
Dec 16– Kathy Bilis, Marie Monroe, Eleni Sgouritsas, Tina Collelo
Dec 23 - Leah Didonato, Mary Seferi, Olga Poulkhine, Vasiliki Zahariadis
Dec 30– Sara Darlagiannis, Sissy Darligiannis, Helen Constantine, Alexandra Koulaux
Jan  6 – Lisa Healy, Marie McNally, Despina Condos, Trish Lareau
Jan 13 – Charlotte Neslusan, Evis Jordanoglou, Dolly Sosnowski, Annalisa Dunning
Jan 20– Lynn Purcell, Rayne Purcell, Sophia Foisy, Kelly Vosnakis

COFFEE FELLOWSHIP SERVING GROUPS

Dec 2 - Donna Cooney, Leah Didonato, Rena Klebart, Betty Tonna
Dec 9 - Marie McNally, Christa Benoit, Sandi Kunkel, Mary Seferi,
Dec 16 - Kathy Bilis, Sara Darlagiannis, Marie Monroe, Charlotte Neslusan, Stephanie Quill
Dec 23 - Thomai Gatsogianonis, Trish Lareau, Deb Raymond, Vange Wilson, Alexandra Koulaux
Dec 30 - Donna Cooney, Leah Didonato, Rena Klebart, Betty Tonna

YOUTH EPISTLE READERS

Dec 2 - Zach Beaudry
Dec 9 - Kiera MacKenzie
Dec 16 - Lily Mueller
Dec 23 - Helen Dunning
Dec 24 - Panayiota Veronis
Dec 25 - Maia Beaudry
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:**

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We Need Help for Coffee Fellowship Hour.
Please let Fr. Luke know if you can help ONCE every EIGHT weeks to bring pastries, donuts, fruit or veggies for our coffee fellowship, or if you want to join a group to serve once a month.

IS OUR CHURCH IN YOUR WILL?
Remember Christ’s Beloved Church in your Estate Planning and Legacy Giving!
Help promote our Church and the Gospel of our Lord even after your death!

COMMIT TO 20 MINUTES WITH GOD EACH DAY
Use Fr. Luke’s Daily Email to help you spend 20 minutes every day connecting with God throughout the new year.
You can sign up to the daily email at the Church’s website www.schwebster.org. On the left column of the main page you will find a place to sign up.

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

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Webster, MA 01570
tel: 508-943-6278
Because We Care
Richard D. Majersik, Director
www.shaw-majersik.com

114 Point Breeze Road
Webster, MA
508-943-0404

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<td>8:30 Matins</td>
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<td>9:30 Divine Liturgy</td>
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A Blessed and Happy New Year!
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.

AMEN.