"And they were struck with great fear." (Luke 2:8)

This is the way the Gospel of Luke describes the reaction of the shepherds in the field when they encountered the angelic powers shining forth the glory of God and declaring to them the “good news of great joy” that a Savior, Christ the Lord, was born that very night in Bethlehem.

If you really stop and reflect upon the entire Christmas story, there are quite a few moments when fear and confusion engulfed the key characters.

First there’s Mary, the young 14 year old virgin maiden, who one day unexpectedly meets the Archangel Gabriel. Not only is it a shock to come face to face with an angelic power, but the news he shares is no less upsetting! “You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son… and He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest… and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:30-33)

We can only try and imagine the fear and confusion that Mary wrestled with. How can someone meet an angel? How can a virgin give birth to a child? How can this child be the Son of God? How is this possible? What is happening?

Then we have Joseph, the righteous old man who agreed to betroth Mary and care for her. His world is turned upside down when he discovers that this virgin maiden is pregnant. And she has the audacity to tell him that it is from the Holy Spirit? Again, confusion. Fear. Doubt. Even anger?

Then we have the birth scene. Joseph and the pregnant Mary travel to Bethlehem on a long, dangerous journey only to reach their destination and have Mary’s time of delivery arrive. Yet there is no where to go. No inn or home to stay in. No hospitality to welcome and care for them. The only place
Sts. Constantine and Helen
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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 Elpidophoros of America
His Eminence, Metropolitan Methodios of Boston

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they can go is inside a dark cave full of animals. Imagine the scene. Imagine the smell!

To give birth to a child in such unsanitary conditions is hard to imagine. To realize that this is not only a birth, but the birth of the Son of God? Totally incomprehensible!

Actually, the entire Christmas story seems so unbelievable. When we reflect on its meaning, we can sum it up only by saying that this is truly a deep, unfathomable mystery! How could Almighty God, the Creator of the Universe, come down on earth as a helpless, little child? The omnipotent God now a defenseless babe? What utter humility. Truly an unexplainable mystery.

One of the hymns of our Church succinctly summed it up: “Behold a mystery, a strange and wonderful mystery!” I reflect on this “strange and wonderful mystery” precisely because I want us to realize the radical nature of Christmas. In the midst of all the tinsel and decorations and rampant commercialism of our contemporary celebration of Christmas, serious Christians need to realize that what we truly celebrate has little to do with the superficiality of the world’s merriment. To the contrary, our focus has everything to do with the mystical coming of God into the world! Christmas is about God becoming man, about the eternal Word of God becoming one of us!

The Romanian philosopher, Peter Sutea, noted after the fall of communism in 1990, “The fall of communism is no great revolution. There has been only one revolution in the history of humanity – the coming of God as a man, the incarnation of Divine Love in Jesus Christ!” Through this revolution, love has conquered hate, good has conquered evil, life has conquered death!

Archbishop Anastasios highlights how the Incarnation uniquely separates Christianity from every other world religion. The fact that the Almighty God of the Universe, the One who “is and who was and who is to come,” has become one of us and has experienced life as we experience it is something no other religion can accept. Yet it is precisely here that we see most clearly the divine love of God. Christ totally shared in our human experience - including becoming a defenseless child, being a refugee in Egypt, experiencing rejection, persecution, and cruel suffering - in order to relate with us, and then to lead us from our brokenness to a place of healing, renewal and divine love. Ultimately, the Incarnation is the first step which leads us into the Kingdom of Heaven!

So when we all hear the Christmas story once again this year, let us not quaintly think of Santa Clause and Christmas trees and presents and superficial cheer. Let us instead meditate on the new reality that has come into the world and has forever changed our lives!

I pray we all have a most blessed, joyous and meaningful Christmas celebration!

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

With love in our newborn King,

+Luke
CHRISTMAS SHOULD HUMBLE US
CHRISTMAS TURNS THE WORLD UPSIDE
By Peter Wehner

If you were wholly unfamiliar with the life of Jesus and listened only to what many Christians in America say today, you could be forgiven for thinking that the most important thing Christianity values is worldly power — the power to control and compel, to impose one’s will on others, to vanquish one’s enemies. Blessed are the politically powerful and the well connected, you might assume, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The birth and life of Jesus shatter this narrative. Those of us in the Christian faith believe that Christmas Day represents the moment of God’s incarnation, when this broken world became his home. But it was not an entrance characterized by privilege, comfort, public celebration or self-glorification; it was marked instead by lowliness, obscurity, humility, fragility.

The circumstances of Jesus’ birth “were calculated to establish his detachment from power and authority in human terms,” wrote Malcolm Muggeridge, a 20th-century British journalist who converted late in life to Christianity.

That could be said not just about Jesus’ birth but also his entire life, which was in many respects an inversion of what the world, including much of the Christian world, prizes.

“Christ was born in a manger to a family for whom there was no room,” Craig Barnes, the president of Princeton Theological Seminary, told me. “He was raised by unremarkable parents in an unremarkable part of the world, conducted a ministry that was missed by most people, died as a criminal on a cross, and his ascension was seen only by a small band of disciples who then led a movement that within three centuries changed the world.”

The paradox is that Christianity changed the world despite Jesus’ declaration that his kingdom was not of this world. His disciples did not have notable worldly status or influence. Jesus’ energies and affections were primarily aimed toward social outcasts, the downtrodden and “unclean,” strangers and aliens, prostitutes and the powerless. The people Jesus clashed with and who eventually crucified him were religious authorities and those who wielded political power. The humble will be exalted, Jesus said, and the last shall be first. True greatness is shown through serving others and sacrifice.

All of this calls to mind an account in II Corinthians, one I have been intrigued by for nearly as long as I have been a Christian. In his epistle, Paul is describing a “thorn in my flesh” that was tormenting him. (We don’t know specifically what it was.) Three times he beseeched the Lord to remove it, according to the apostle, to which Jesus replied, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul went on to add, “For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

What does it mean for God’s power to be made perfect in weakness?

It’s a statement as much about us as it is about God. Most of us know that we often grow in times of weakness rather than strength, when we face hardship rather than experience success. That isn’t always the case; sometimes hardships and suffering simply overwhelm us and no good thing comes from them.

Everyone has a breaking point.

But it’s also true that weakness can open the way for greater personal growth, reflection and self-reflection, and focus us on what is essential rather than ephemeral. Last week, a friend who is a counselor told me of a former colleague of his who, because of chronic pain, was bedridden for two years. That pain she’s now largely free of. He described his former colleague as one the most cheerful and loving people he’s ever met. “She’s a better person” for having gone through her ordeal, he said. The point my friend was
making isn’t that suffering is good but that sometimes it can serve a purpose. This is true for people of different faiths and people of no faith.

But from a Christian standpoint, Craig Barnes told me, “Our weakness finally opens our eyes to the need for a Savior. Nothing prevents that more than our strength. No one has ever said, ‘I was so successful I just had to come to Jesus.’”

“We can only love when we are softened,” according to Peggy Wehmeyer, a former religion correspondent for ABC. “We are most likely to be softened when we are weakened.” Ms. Wehmeyer, who wrote movingly about her husband’s suicide in these pages, told me that the aftermath of his death was “the most powerless I’ve ever felt. Trusting in God’s goodness and yielding without being able to nail him down. That’s where peace begins: Surrender, in powerless-ness.”

It’s important to point out here that there are sufferings we may experience that make us a more resilient, deeper and more compassionate person, yet if we were asked whether we are glad for having gone through it, we would answer no.

James Forsyth, senior pastor of McLean Presbyterian Church in Virginia, which I attend with my family, was sexually abused as a teenager. “I wish this thing hadn’t have happened to me,” he says. But, he adds, “You can have scars and still be healed. There are some things in life you never move on from, but you do learn to carry them differently.”

Whatever their full effects, human weakness and suffering are not meant to be ends in themselves. For Christians, they are meant to spur us to seek out God from a place of need and provide an opportunity for the display of divine power. And again: Power understood through the prism of Christianity is different from how the world generally understands power. Kerry Dearborn, professor emerita at Seattle Pacific University, described to me the difference between power over others and the power of connecting with others, which she said requires that there be openness and vulnerability.

As I understand the words of Jesus as recorded in II Corinthians, weakness opens us up to a fundamentally new definition of strength — strength that is not coercive, domineering, prideful and self-seeking but rather compassionate, sacrificial, humble and empathetic. God’s power, perfected through our weakness, makes us instruments of mercy, seekers of justice, agents of reconciliation. It helps us see the world in a different way.

Renée Notkin, a pastor at Union Church in Seattle, told me: “I am daily inspired by how Jesus continually turns the world upside down in regards to power, might, world success and achievement. Jesus’ subversive challenges to the human-crafted structures that oppress and bind is what keeps me following Jesus and holding on to hope that there is a third way — the Jesus way that brings healing to individuals, communities and nations.”

The pastor, with whom I attended high school and college, added, “Jesus was most frequently out among the people — engaging and paying attention to the realities of ordinary people’s lives and helping them see that in God’s eyes they are extraordinary — and so often these are the people who are viewed as weak in the world. I am learning how to live well from those who hold very little worldly power but who are some of the most content and real people I’ve ever met.”

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy,” Jesus declared in his most famous sermon. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

This type of power, often arrived at having traveled through what the Psalmist called “the valley of the shadow of death,” wasn’t simply Jesus spouting off abstract teachings; it was his life story. What the incarnation represents is God entering history not as the screenwriter of the drama but as an actor within it. Jesus is the suffering protagonist.

No one thought it would start quite this way, an infant placed in a manger in a troubled corner of a troubled world. You would have thought he would be among the most inconsequential individuals ever.

You would have been wrong.
HE CAME TO LIVE IN US

“Christ is Born! Glorify Him!”

We all are familiar with the Christmas song “Silver Bells.” City sidewalks, busy sidewalks, dressed in holiday style. In the air there’s a feeling of Christmas… Strings of street lights, even stop lights, blink a bright red and green, as the shoppers rush home with their treasures… See the kids bunch, hear the snow crunch, this is Santa’s big scene, and above all this bustle you’ll hear silver bells, silver bells, its’ Christmas time in the city.”

Well, for too many people, this song accurately reflects their understanding and reality of Christmas – the commercial and secular view of silver bells, busy sidewalks, and shoppers rushing home with their gifts.

For those of us who come to Church on this holy day, though, we remember something radically and completely different. In contrast to the busy city sidewalks with all their noise and lights, we recall a quiet, humble setting, inside a little cave in Bethlehem. Shepherds in the fields see angels. Kings from the East follow a star. And animals surround the Virgin Mary and Joseph looking upon a manger at a newborn infant, as God Himself enters into this fallen world.

In contrast to the superficial commercialism of Christmas, which cheapens the significance of this holy day to a jolly old man in a red suit, or minimizes it solely to a beautiful family gathering, Christians worldwide pause and meditate on something fundamentally different. The most unbelievable event ever in the history of the world takes place! Almighty God acts in a unique and incredible manner. The Creator of the universe enters into His creation by becoming one of His creation, and He does this in the most humble, simple, quiet way.

St. Paul say in the Christmas Epistle, “When the fullness of time had come… When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.”

God has always acted in the world from the very beginning in a variety of ways – through the Old Testament patriarchs, through the Law of Moses, through the prophets, through holy men and women who talked about God. But a particular time came, when God said, “Now is the time for me to act in the most incredible manner – I will go and live among my people! I will epitomize for them divine love! I will show them how to live the most meaningful and abundant life. And then I will do the one thing that no one else would ever do. I will destroy the power of death from which all humankind suffers, and I will open up the doors of paradise for all those who choose to follow me!”

This is precisely the “good news of great joy” that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds. Our Father in heaven, the Almighty Lord, acted and changed the world forever. He showed in the most emphatic and dramatic way, “I have not forgotten you. I can never forget you, because I have created each one of you in the palm of my hand. You are my beloved children, and I have seen your pain, your sorrow, your difficulties and struggles, your despair, your great need, and the dilemma of death itself. Therefore, I have come to live among you, to live with you, to live in you. Will you accept me?”

This journey of seeing God live among us, of believing that He lives with us, and understanding
that He desires to live in us, is the central message and journey of Christmas, which we should carry with us into the New Year and throughout our lives!

GOD LIVES AMONG US. One hymn we sang during Christmas matins said, “How was He, who cannot be contained in any way, contained in a Virgin’s womb? How can He, who is in the eternal bosom of the Father, be held in the arms of an earthly mother? Certainly, this miracle transpired because God condescended to become incarnate. He became one of us and shared in our nature, even though He was not of our nature, while never abandoning His divine nature.”

What an incomprehensible mystery to believe that the infinite and eternal God became a simple human being – a powerless child born of simple parents in a cave of Bethlehem. And yet He did this for each one of us!

So we can rejoice because we know God chose to live AMONG us.

But not only this, that He came to live AMONG us, but also HE CAME TO LIVE WITH US. The angel proclaimed to Joseph that His name would be “Emmanuel” which means “God is with us.” A central teaching of our Orthodox Christian faith is that while God came to earth, He did not stay distant from humanity. He was not born a powerful king in a mighty palace with high walls separating Him from His people. No, He was born in a simple family, raised in a poor village, and lived among His people. He lived with the poor, the simple, the humble, and the suffering. He tasted the common life of people, and lived with them. He completely participated and understood what our life is all about, because He tasted it Himself in the most humble manner.

So we can rejoice because we know we have a God who lives WITH us.

The most important point of Christmas, though, may be the final point. Yes, God lives among us. Yes, He lives with us. But most significant of all, GOD DESIRES TO LIVE IN US!

God came and yet people rejected Him, or ignored Him. King Herod heard of His birth and tried to kill Him. The religious leaders in Jerusalem heard about His birth and yet ignored him. The inn keepers and crowds in Bethlehem were simply too busy and preoccupied with their own concerns to realize who was in their midst. Don’t they represent so many of us today? So many of us who are too busy, too preoccupied with our own affairs, too interested in superficial cares instead of essential matters?

God desires to live in us, and yet He does not force His will upon anyone. In one way, each of us is more powerful than Almighty God. We can choose to keep the door of our heart closed, and not allow Him to enter in. Here lies the tragedy of human history over the centuries following that first Christmas morn.

So we can rejoice because we know that God desires to live in us!

And yet, a question we should all ask ourselves is this: Will each one of us tonight, open up our hearts in a manner we’ve never done before, and allow Jesus Christ to be born anew within us? Will we allow the baby Jesus to live in us and guide us each day of the New Year and throughout our lives? Will we allow our Lord and Savior to truly be our Lord and Savior, and will we allow Him to direct our lives and be in the center of our lives?

This is the central question we should all meditate upon this Christmas!
WHO IS THE REAL SANTA CLAUS?

The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara in Asia Minor. At the time the area was Greek and is now on the southern coast of Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus’ words to “sell what you own and give the money to the poor,” Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships.

Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who ruthlessly persecuted Christians, Bishop Nicholas suffered for his faith, was exiled and imprisoned. The prisons were so full of bishops, priests, and deacons, there was no room for the real criminals—murderers, thieves and robbers. After his release, Nicholas attended the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. He died December 6, AD 343 in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church, where a unique relic, called manna, formed in his grave. This liquid substance, said to have healing powers, fostered the growth of devotion to Nicholas. The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration, St. Nicholas Day, December 6th.

Through the centuries many stories and legends have been told of St. Nicholas’ life and deeds. These accounts help us understand his extraordinary character and why he is so beloved and revered as protector and helper of those in need.

One story tells of a poor man with three daughters. In those days a young woman’s father had to offer prospective husbands something of value—a dowry. The larger the dowry, the better the chance that a young woman would find a good husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to marry. This poor man’s daughters, without dowries, were therefore destined to be sold into slavery. Mysteriously, on three different occasions, a bag of gold appeared in their home—providing the needed dowries. The bags of gold, tossed through an open window, are said to have landed in stockings or shoes left before the fire to dry. This led to the custom of children hanging stockings or putting out shoes, eagerly awaiting gifts from Saint Nicholas. Sometimes the story is told with gold balls instead of bags of gold. That is why three gold balls, sometimes represented as oranges, are one of the symbols for St. Nicholas. And so St. Nicholas is a gift-giver.

One of the oldest stories showing St. Nicholas as a protector of children takes place long after his death. The townspeople of Myra were celebrating the good saint on the eve of his feast day when a band of Arab pirates from Crete came into the district. They stole treasures from the Church of Saint Nicholas to take away as booty. As they were leaving town, they snatched a young boy, Basilios, to make into a slave. The emir, or ruler, selected Basilios to be his personal cupbearer, as not knowing the language, Basilios would not understand what the king said to those around him. So, for the next year Basilios waited on the king, bringing his wine in a beautiful golden cup. For Basilios’ parents, devastated at the loss of their only child, the year passed slowly, filled with grief. As the next St. Nicholas’ feast day approached, Basilios’ mother would not join in the festivity, as it was now a day of tragedy. However, she was persuaded to have a simple observance at home—with quiet prayers for Basilios’ safekeeping. Meanwhile, as Basilios was fulfilling his tasks serving the emir, he was suddenly whisked...
up and away. St. Nicholas appeared to the terrified boy, blessed him, and set him down at his home back in Myra. Imagine the joy and wonderment when Basilios amazingly appeared before his parents, still holding the king’s golden cup. This is the first story told of St. Nicholas protecting children—which became his primary role in the West.

Another story tells of three theological students, traveling on their way to study in Athens. A wicked innkeeper robbed and murdered them, hiding their remains in a large pickling tub. It so happened that Bishop Nicholas, traveling along the same route, stopped at this very inn. In the night he dreamed of the crime, got up, and summoned the innkeeper. As Nicholas prayed earnestly to God the three boys were restored to life and wholeness. In France the story is told of three small children, wandering in their play until lost, lured, and captured by an evil butcher. St. Nicholas appears and appeals to God to return them to life and to their families. And so St. Nicholas is the patron and protector of children.

Several stories tell of Nicholas and the sea. When he was young, Nicholas sought the holy by making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There as he walked where Jesus walked, he sought to more deeply experience Jesus’ life, passion, and resurrection. Returning by sea, a mighty storm threatened to wreck the ship. Nicholas calmly prayed. The terrified sailors were amazed when the wind and waves suddenly calmed, sparing them all. And so, St. Nicholas is the patron of sailors and voyagers.

Other stories tell of Nicholas saving his people from famine, sparing the lives of those innocently accused, and much more. He did many kind and generous deeds in secret, expecting nothing in return. Within a century of his death he was celebrated as a saint. Today he is venerated in the East as a wonder-worker and in the West as patron of a great variety of persons - children, mariners, bankers, pawn-brokers, scholars, orphans, laborers, travelers, merchants, judges, paupers, marriageable maidens, students, children, sailors, victims of judicial mistakes, captives, perfumers, even thieves and murderers! He is known as the friend and protector of all in trouble or need.

Sailors, claiming St. Nicholas as patron, carried stories of his favor and protection far and wide. St. Nicholas chapels were built in many seaports. As his popularity spread during the Middle Ages, he became the patron saint of Apulia (Italy), Sicily, Greece, and Lorraine (France), and many cities in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Russia, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Following his baptism, Grand Prince Vladimir I brought St. Nicholas’ stories and devotion to St. Nicholas to his homeland where Nicholas became the most beloved saint. Nicholas was so widely revered that thousands of churches were named for him, including three hundred in Belgium, thirty-four in Rome, twenty-three in the Netherlands and more than four hundred in England. Nicholas’ tomb in Myra became a popular place of pilgrimage. Because of the many wars and attacks in the region, some Christians were concerned that access to the tomb might become difficult. For both the religious and commercial advantages of a major pilgrimage site, the Italian cities of Venice and Bari vied to get the Nicholas relics. In the spring of 1087, sailors from Bari succeeded in spirits away the bones, bringing them to Bari, a seaport on the southeast coast of Italy. An impressive church was built over St. Nicholas’ crypt and many faithful journeyed to honor the saint who had rescued children, prisoners, sailors, famine victims, and many others through his compassion, generosity, and the countless miracles attributed to his intercession. The Nicholas shrine in Bari was one of medieval Europe’s great pilgrimage centers and Nicholas became known as “Saint in Bari.” To this day pilgrims and tourists visit Bari’s great Basilica di San Nicola.

Through the centuries St. Nicholas has continued to be venerated by Orthodox and Catholics and honored by Protestants. By his example of generosity to those in need, especially children, St. Nicholas continues to be a model for the compassionate life. Widely celebrated in Europe, St. Nicholas’ feast day, December 6th, kept alive the stories of his goodness and generosity. In Germany and Poland, boys dressed as bishops begged alms for the poor. In the Netherlands and Belgium, St. Nicholas arrived on a steamship from Spain to ride a white horse on his gift-giving rounds. December 6th is still the main day for gift giving and merrymaking in much of Europe. For example, in the Netherlands St. Nicholas is celebrated on the 5th, the eve of the day, by sharing candies (thrown in the door), chocolate initial letters, small gifts, and riddles. Dutch children leave carrots and hay in their shoes for the saint’s horse, hoping St. Nicholas will exchange them for small gifts. Simple gift-giving in early Advent helps preserve a Christmas Day focus on the Christ Child.
THE MAN WHO INVENTED CHRISTMAS

How many of you have ever seen some version of Charles Dickens’ “The Christmas Carol?” It’s probably one of the most famous and beloved Christmas classics that countless people watch every year. There are many local productions throughout towns around the country. Even Hollywood seems to come out with some new version of this story almost every year.

Well, Pres. Faith and I have our annual tradition of watching some version of this, our favorite being the musical version starring Kelsey Grammer. Well, several years ago a new movie came out entitled, “The Man Who Invented Christmas.” Despite its heretical title, it proved to be another delightful and quite creative version this Christmas classic, telling how Charles Dickens came to write it. Dickens wrote it in only six weeks, right before Christmas in 1843, at a time following three literary flops and a major debt following his best selling “Oliver Twist.”

Did Dickens invent Christmas? It is said that his book in 1843 led the British to celebrate Christmas in a different way – with gatherings around one’s families, offering good will toward suffering human beings all around us, and trying to bring out the side of light and love in our lives during this festive season? Thus, maybe Dickens helped to create the contemporary atmosphere in our society when we celebrate Christmas.

What is it about The Christmas Carol that holds our attention year after year? Is it that it’s a story of redemption, compassion, kindness, generosity, and love?? Is it the power of seeing Mr. Scrooge’s miserly, greedy, pathetic, egocentric, lonely, and depraved worldview transformed by the spirit of Christmas?

And yet as much as I enjoy it, every year when I watch this classic, I can’t stop asking myself where is Jesus in it all? Isn’t Christmas centered on the birth of baby born in Bethlehem who changed the history of the world? Where is that in The Christmas Carol?

Now, maybe one could argue that “The Christmas Carol” conveys the spirit of Jesus, the virtues that he incarnated, and the good news that Christ proclaimed – that life is about love, compassion, kindness, and generosity, along with a hope of redemption for each and every one of us, even if we are as pathetic as Mr. Scrooge. Yes, Dickens conveys these virtues in such a moving and inspiring way, and yet, I still feel that as much good as he conveys, he leaves out the essence of Christmas. And this version of “The Man Who Invented Christmas” confuses people all the more with its title.
is so much more as well.

Sometimes I hear people question certain aspects of the Christmas story, as well as the fundamental beliefs of our faith. Nicholas Kristof, one of my favorite NY Times writers, is a great example of this. Every Christmas and Easter he will write a religious op-ed piece, typically where he will interview various religious leaders. He will ask them about the meaning of Christmas or Easter. He will share his own admiration for the man Jesus of Nazareth, and all his teachings, but he will also voice his skepticism about various tenets of the Christian faith. He especially doubts anything miraculous.

He will inevitably ask the person he is interviewing if he can be considered a Christian even if he doesn’t believe in the “Virgin Birth” or the physical Resurrection of Christ. How are such things possible, he asks, that a virgin can become pregnant and give birth to a child? Or that a dead person can resurrect from the dead?

Of course, Kristof is focusing on a paradoxical detail while really ignoring the more fundamental, earth-shattering truth – Christmas isn’t mainly about a virgin birth, but it’s all about the God and Creator of the Universe became Himself a human being! The Divine Supernatural Being becoming one of us with one goal in mind - to life up humans into His divinity, to sanctify our lives in a new way.

Here is the center of what Christmas is all about! If one wants to question a smaller detail, like a Virgin birth, why not focus on the major issue of the infinite God becoming a small, finite human being. If this is possible, than isn’t something else like a virgin maiden giving birth to a child possible?

Thus, let us never forget that Christmas isn’t simply about being “the most wonderful time of the year.” Christmas shouldn’t be mainly about our family gathering. Christmas isn’t just about all the Christmas music we hear for two months, or about all the gifts we give and receive.

Yes, it is a beautiful time of year when people try to share good cheer and are more generous than they typically are. There are many delightful aspects of Christmas.

Yet, the reason why it is the “most wonderful time of the year” is precisely because of the radical “Good News of Great Joy” which the angel proclaimed to the shepherds! God’s divine and eternal light has shined in the darkness of this world in a unique manner, and the coming of this Light offers the promise to change humanity!

Christmas is all about God becoming a human being and changing our understanding of what a true human being is! It is all about God becoming man, so that we can be filled with His Divine presence and become like God. Jesus, the God/Man showed us what true agape love, divine compassion, kindness, generosity and hope are. He incarnated these virtues in a person, and then challenged each one of us to follow His example. And even though our fallen human nature tries to lead us astray – to the miserly greedy, egocentric and lonely life of a Mr. Scrooge – Christmas opens to us a new life!

If we truly want to become loving, kind, generous, and compassionate, let us never forget that the Source Itself of these virtues is Jesus Christ Himself! Let us come to know Him in the depths of our hearts. Let us embrace His way of Life. Let us invite Him to be born anew in our lives and allow His Spirit to live within us! This is the good news of great joy that Christmas proclaims.

We have a new path in life, a transformative path, that will not only change our own lives – making our lives all the more meaningful and filled with purpose – but will inspire and motivate us to become the agent of change for others, helping them discover this path of new life!

Charles Dicken’s The Christmas Carol is a delightful story that we can all enjoy once again this Christmas season. Let us take care, however, not to leave out the Source of all good virtues, Jesus Christ Himself! Here is the essence and center of Christmas!

And as Tiny Tim would say, “And may God bless us, everyone!”
100TH ANNIVERSARY
SHARING THE LIGHT

Vision and Goals

In honor of our beloved Saints Constantine and Helen Church’s 100th Anniversary
(founded in 1919 and celebrating 100 years in 2020/21)

We have set a goal to raise $250,000 to help our Church share the Light of Christ to the local community and the world through certain charitable projects, while also beautifying and upkeeping our Church Building.

Some POSSIBLE Outreach Projects and Church Beautification/Upkeep Projects in honor of this event:

**OUTREACH AND CHARITY:**
- Working with “RIP Medical Debt” to pay off $2 million in medical debt for hundreds of families in Central Massachusetts
- Sending St Innocent Orphanage and Project Mexico $15,000 to help them survive this COVID crisis
- Sending our Metropolis of Boston Summer Camp Program $10,000 in gratitude for all they do for our youth.

**CHURCH BEAUTIFICATION AND UPKEEP:**
- New $45,000 HVAC System and Duct Work for Church Sanctuary
- New $30,000 Roof for Church Sanctuary
- LED Lighting for Chandeliers in Church
- Pantocrator Icon on Ceiling of our Church (completed)
- Possible Marble Flooring for Church Solea and Altar
- Possible Outdoor Pavilion and Landscaping for Backyard of Church
- Other Projects???
Please Consider Participating in this once in a Lifetime Celebration

THANK YOU!!!

FUNDRAISING GOAL: $250,000

TOTAL IN CASH AND PLEDGES: $166,300
(as of November 15)

ARCHANGELS ($40,000-$50,000)
♦ An Anonymous Donor Inspired by our Church’s Good and Faithful Steward Challenge

ANGELS ($30,000-$39,000)
♦ Michael and Titi Chito

PRINCIPALITIES: ($20,000– $29,000)
♦ Marion Thomas
♦ Philip and Barbara Thomas

GOOD SHEPHERDS: ($15,000 - $19,000)
♦ Neal and Charlotte Neslusan

TORCHBEARERS: ($10,000 - $14,000)
♦ Joey Gliniecki
♦ Sandi/Gerry Kunkel

BENEFACTORS ($5000-$9000)

PATRONS: ($2000-$4900)
♦ Jared and Stephanie Quill
♦ Anonymous Donor offering our new Visitation Icon

SUPPORTERS: ($1000-$1900)
♦ Athina Bilis
♦ Leah DiDonato
♦ Mary Fatsi
♦ Bill and Christine Kiritsis
♦ Ted Theodores
THANK YOU TO THE 2020 STEWARDS

To all the faithful Church Family members who have given a financial donation towards their 2020 Stewardship Offering as of November 15, 2020.

As of November 15, only 121 out of our 160 Families have donated towards their Stewardship Offering.

Thus far the average offering is $910/year.

Please Fulfill Your Pledge and Send in your Offering before end of the Year!!!
We have collected $110,208 out of our budgeted $143,000.

Help us surpass our goal by year end!

Deb Raymond
Dan/Sue Rivelli
Ron/Sandy Sanderson
Nick/Mary Seferi
John/Eleni Sgouritsas
Dimitri/Efkarpia Sidopoulos
Dolly Sozsnowski
Eleanor Teguis
Ted Theodores
John/Ana Thomas
Marion Thomas
Phil/Barbara Thomas
Bill Thompson
George/Lynne Tonna
Ted/Betty Tonna
Fr Luke/Faith Veronis
Niko/Susan Veronis
Edna Vogel
Steve/Kelly Vosnakis
Tasi Vriga
Danielle/David Weiss
Evangeline Wilson
Eleni Xanthopoulos
Vasiliki Zahariadis
Bill/Helen Zenon
Yuri/Tatyana Zhuk
WELCOME INTO OUR FAMILY

On November 1st, we had the blessing to welcome three new members into our Church Family. Chris Pantazi was baptized, with Rayne Purcell acting as his sponsor. Meanwhile Doug Chapel, with Anton Cojocaru as his sponsor, and Stacey Bergeron, with Presbytera Faith as her sponsor, were both chrismated.

We warmly welcome these three special people into our beautiful Church family, and we wish them well as they journey into the Kingdom of God. We all know that this journey of faith is not always an easy journey. Yet together, we can experience a transformative life with deep meaning and purpose. May God bless them and keep them and us faithful and safe in the grace of our Lord!

Help Us Reach Our 2020 Stewardship Goal

During this COVID Pandemic, we have financial challenges as a Church Family. Thank God, we have received $119,208 in Stewardship Giving, which is better than at this point last year. Yet 2020 stewardship goal increased by $20,000 to $143,000. Please help us reach our goal by the end of the year!

121 out of 160 Families have sent in Stewardship Donations. If you have not done so yet, please send in your support for our beloved Church. If you have not fulfilled your pledge, please do so.

The average 2020 stewardship donation is $883.

20 PACESETTERS (Giving Between $1000-$1999)
11 TORCHBEARERS (Giving between $2000-$3999)
5 GOOD SHEPHERDS (Giving between $4000-$5999)
2 ANGELS (Giving more than $6000)
It is not unusual to give thought to how we keep a fast. Will it be in a strict manner? How will my fasting be possible when I’m at work or at school? How will I teach my children to fast? When we ignore the Fast, we feel guilty and the need to confess. It is strange, however, that we do not give similar thought and time to what it means to keep the Feast. For fasting is about the Feast—not about the Fast. Everything is about the east!

Our popular culture has no difficulty keeping its feast of Christmas—and though we complain about how commercial the feast becomes—we live in a commercial culture. Our way of life and economy are grounded in consumerism. If we stop shopping, the nation will collapse (as a consumer nation).

Almost everything in our culture radiates from its consumerist existence. Even how we think of what it means to be human is driven by consumerism. Popular culture thinks of a human being as a center of consciousness with free will. It is a very simplified view of the human—but ideally suited for shopping. We think, we decide, therefore we shop!

Thus, the popular feast of Christmas is kept by doing a lot of what we do best—we shop. It is something of a redemption that at least an aspect of our shopping is buying things for others. But the Orthodox understanding of the feast is not grounded in consumerism. We do not believe people were created to consume. We are created to commune.

We do not eat in order to live—we eat in order to be in communion with God. When we live rightly, everything we do is done in order to enjoy communion with God and with other human beings. Said quite simply—we exist in order to love.

We keep the feast of Christmas, not by consuming or affirming our place within the world of consumption—we keep the feast by entering more deeply into the life of communion—with God and with others.

We enter into communion with God through prayer and devotion and the keeping of His commandments. We enter into communion with others through forgiveness, acts of kindness and generosity. Communion often consumes things—we eat and drink Christ’s Body and Blood. But we do not eat His Body and Blood as though we were predators or as though His Body and Blood were objects to fill our bellies. We eat and drink Christ’s Body and Blood in order to share in His life and in order to share our life with Him.

Our use of the things of this world with regard to others can become communion if we treat those things in the same way. If the things in our life are a means of sharing—both our own lives and in the lives of others—then they can become communion.

A gift, given and received as an act of sharing, and not simply an act of consumption, can quickly rise to the level of communion. There are gifts I have been given through the years whose value comes not from the market but from the giver and the “life” of the giver that is carried by the object. Such things in our lives bring remembrance and communion with every use.

We approach the feast of God’s greatest gift—His life incarnate in our world. God became man. In so doing He revealed our humanity as itself a great gift. The life of every human being bears the potential of communion with God. Every act of kindness, offered even to the “least of these,” is received as an act of communion with God Himself.

Keep the Feast with care this year!
The Light - December 2020

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS

After discussing with the officers and looking over Governor Baker’s orders limiting how many people can gather together, we have decided to cancel our Christmas party. A few weeks ago we thought it was a good idea to get together and see each other, but now things have changed. Hopefully things will get better in the Spring and we can plan something then.

Thank you to everyone who donated gift cards and bought and sold tickets for the December Calendar raffle. The proceeds will definitely help our treasury! We will draw the winning names every Sunday.

Don’t forget to contact Debbie Raymond or Donna Cooney to put your name in our Church’s annual Christmas Card. Someone will be at church every Sunday to collect names. Please donate $15 per family name.

Our deepest sympathies go out to the families of Eleni Xanthopoulos and Marion Thomas. Both of these dear women were life long members of the Philoptochos and we will deeply miss them! Eleni and her crew were planning to bake sweet breads for Christmas but unfortunately with Eleni’s passing, no one has the heart to do them without her. She was our leader in Bread Making and gave us direction. Her daughters gave us her mother’s recipe so we can continue her legacy but it will never be the same. There will be a huge void in our church family in their passing!

We will not be putting together Christmas Baskets, but if you would like to make a donation for this, Fr. Luke is still putting together 20 Ham Christmas baskets. Or if you’d like to make a donation for gift cards, our Church also gives out gift cards to families in need.

We wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Stay safe and healthy during these unprecedented times. We are all praying and hope that life will normalize as 2021 goes forward, and we hope to gather together and see everyone soon in the New Year!

With love and appreciation,

Evelyn Pappas

24 HOUR ADVENT PRAYER CHAIN

From December 1-7, we will have a “24 Hour a Day Christmas Prayer Chain.” We are looking for 24 parishioners who will each commit to pray in their homes for one hour a day during the first seven days of December. Each parishioner will commit to pray at a different hour of the day and night. This means that at every moment from December 1-7, someone from our Church Family will be lifting up their voice in prayer, supplication, thanksgiving and praise to God.

The purpose of our Prayer Chain is two-fold: First, to help the participants get into the real “spirit” of Christmas - one that helps us prepare to receive our Lord Jesus Christ into our lives anew. Second, to get our Church Family to pray for one another and all those who have any special needs. If you know someone who needs extra prayers, please give their names to Fr. Luke before December 1.

If you are interested in participating in this Prayer Chain by committing to pray for one hour a day in your home during each of the first seven days of December, please contact Fr. Luke. He will provide for you the prayers and the structure of how to pray for one hour.
THANKSGIVING BASKETS

THANK YOU for everyone who donated and helped us buy and distribute 69 Turkeys and BASKETS for Thanksgiving. Through your kindness and generosity we were able to help 68 Families have a blessed Thanksgiving celebration!!

CHRISTMAS BASKETS and GIFT CARDS

We know we will have many requests for Christmas baskets and gift cards for Christmas presents. All donation are welcome to help us put together 50 Christmas Baskets and give out gift cards to help families celebrate a joyous Christmas.

Thanksgiving Baskets

Thank you for everyone who donated and helped us buy and distribute 69 Turkeys and BASKETS for Thanksgiving. Through your kindness and generosity we were able to help 68 Families have a blessed Thanksgiving celebration!!

Christmas Baskets and Gift Cards

We know we will have many requests for Christmas baskets and gift cards for Christmas presents. All donation are welcome to help us put together 50 Christmas Baskets and give out gift cards to help families celebrate a joyous Christmas.

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.

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.
The Light - December 2020

2020 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.

THANK YOU
To an anonymous donor for offering the Drive Thru Living Bread Luncheon for December
For the Glory of God!

USHERS & GREETERS SCHEDULE
(Only for Ushers and Greeters who feel comfortable being back in Church)

Dec 6 - Arthur Bilis, Chris Geotis, Thomai Gatsogiannis, Trish Lareau
Dec 13 - Neal Neslusan, Mike Chito Jimmy Karapanos, Brenda Romillard
Dec 20 - Nicoleta Cojocaru, Chris Dillon, Bill Thompson,
Dec 24 - Marie McNally, Matt Benoit, Lisa Healy, Debby Raymond
Dec 27 - Arthur Bilis, Chris Geotis, Thomai Gatsogiannis, Trish Lareau

We need more ushers!!! See Fr. Luke.

Please Continue Stewardship Support With Online Giving

During these uncertain times, we want every member in our Church Family to know they are not alone, but we are there for one another. If there is anyone in our Church Family that has a need, please contact Fr. Luke. If you want to donate toward our Church COVID Fund, which Fr Luke will give to those in need, please send a check to the Church office.

Please continue to support our Church through your stewardship and generosity:

1. By sending in your stewardship offering each week or month.
2. Making online donations or buy candles to light up our church at https://my-site-108326-103062.square.site/.
3. Or go to our website on bottom left corner for online giving at http://schwebster.org/

YOUTH EPISTLE READERS

Dec 6 - Helen Dunning
Dec 13 - Panayiota Veronis
Dec 20 - Maia Beaudry
Dec 24 - Helen Dunning
Dec 25 - Panayiota Veronis
Dec 27 - Maia Beaudry
GOD GRANT YOU MANY BLESSED YEARS!

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 4  Nicole Apostola
Dec 7  Evis Jordanoglou
Dec 8  Maria Mironidis
Dec 22 Elise Purcell
Dec 23 Kenneth Peterson
Dec 25 Chris Geotis
Dec 26 Paul Geotis
Dec 29 Anestis Jordanoglou
Dec 31 Eric Beland

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES:**
Dec 5 George/Helen Kerbici
Dec 11 Arthur & Sara Darligiannis
Dec 18 Dan/Katie Neeland
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
Nicoleta Cojocaru
Nick Kiritsis
Niko Milios
Nick Rivelli
Nick Seferi
Nicholas Thompson
Nicholas Veronis

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

Dec 27 St Joseph the Betrothed
King David, St. Stephen
Joseph Gliniecki
Stephen Foisy
Stephanie Quill
Steve Vosnakis
David Bilis
David Thompson

MEMORY ETERNAL TO OUR BELOVED

**ELENI XANTHOPOULOS**
November 7

**MARION THOMAS**
November 17

May our Lord open up the gates of paradise to our two beloved parishioners.
IS OUR CHURCH IN YOUR WILL?

Remember Christ’s Beloved Church in your Estate Planning and Legacy Giving!

What a beautiful way to remember the Church that has blessed you and nourished you throughout your life.

Even after you have gone to be with the Lord and join the Church Triumphant in the company of the saints, you can still help the Church here on earth continue her sacred ministry of love and hope to the world!

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 through Meditation and Scripture.

Sign up to the daily email at www.schwebster.org and go to bottom right column of homepage.

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

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

www.myocn.net

www.AncientFaith.com
Thank You to those who sponsor our monthly bulletin!

Dudley - Auburn - Blackstone

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Richard D. Majersik, Director
www.shaw-majersik.com

Point Breeze
Your Restaurant on Webster Lake
114 Point Breeze Road
Webster, MA
# DECEMBER 2020

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CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

“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

“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