“You appeared to the world today, and Your light, O Lord, has left its mark upon us.”

We hear these words in one of the hymns we sing on the feast of Epiphany, which we celebrate on January 6. “Your light, O Lord, has left its mark upon us.”

Is this a true statement? Have each one of us allowed the light of Jesus Christ to leave His mark on our lives? And what does it actually mean to have the light of Christ shine upon us? What impact should His divine light have in our lives?

These are some important questions to reflect upon as we begin a new year. Any serious Orthodox Christian should longingly desire to have the divine light of our Lord shine within our hearts!

There is a beautiful prayer of the Church that can shed understanding to what impact the light of Christ dwelling within us will have. Try to memorize this prayer, and say it throughout this New Year:

Shine within our hearts, Loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open up our eyes that we may understand the message of your divine Gospel. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments, so that having conquered sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual way of life, thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You are the light of our souls and bodies, and to You do we offer up all glory, honor and worship, to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

We say this prayer at every Divine Liturgy and it teaches us that the light of Christ opens up our minds to the holy mysteries of God. Too often our eyes are focused solely on superficial and worldly things, instead of on meaningful and eternal precepts. We fill our minds daily with the mundane things we hear on radio, TV, and internet. Yet the light of Christ opens our minds to what is pure, holy and truly good in the world. This light then gives us a positive perspective through which to see the world, because we see the good instead of the bad!

We also hear in this prayer how the light of Christ guides us to respect and even revere the blessed commandments of God. How often do people look at God’s Commandments as some unwanted burden? Too many people dread God’s Commandments as rules that hinder us from enjoying ourselves.

Well, the light of Christ opens up our eyes to understand that these commandments our Creator gave us are guidelines which will bless
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

Father Luke A. Veronis
Telephone: (508) 949-7623 (h) (774) 230-6985 (cell)
email: frlukeveronis@gmail.com

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YOUR LIGHT ON US

us and help us get the most out of life. Doesn’t it make sense that the One who created us knows what is best for His creation? Living under the light of Christ helps us appreciate and even love God’s Commandments. They will not be seen as a burden, but as a true blessing that enriches our lives!

A third fruit coming from the light of Christ is that His light helps us conquer our sinful desires. When we live under the light of God, we no longer live under the delusions of this world. Nothing can be hidden, and therefore, we see our sinful habits and ways. At the second coming of Jesus, we want to be standing in front of Him with white robes of purity and love, not covered with the filth of sin. The light of Christ helps us see clearly, and not be deceived.

One final lesson is how the divine light guides us to walk a spiritual life. This spiritual life is a life that is pleasing to God, a life according to His will. In other words, the spiritual life is a life united to God - a life where we walk as Jesus walked!

Ultimately, the light of God is the light of divine love. When we live under God’s light, we live in love and harmony with God, with our neighbor, and with the world around us. Divine light does not allow the darkness of hatred, anger, hurt, bitterness, resentment, guilt, greed, or impurity to reside in us.

As we begin a new year, may we all sincerely seek out, and pray for this divine light. May it shine in us brightly, and may we become mirrors radiating His light back to the world around us.

I wish all a most blessed and enlightening New Year!

With deep gratitude for the eternal light of God,

+Luke

ANNUAL HOUSE BLESSINGS

In memory of Christ’s Baptism on the Feast of Epiphany, when Jesus sanctified all the waters of the world, the Orthodox Church follows an ancient tradition of holding the SERVICE OF THE BLESSING OF THE WATERS on January 6. The Church asks God’s blessing to come upon the water, which we then share with all believers. Through this water the grace of God comes upon us!

In preparation for this special blessing, Orthodox Christians hold January 5 as a strict fast day. Our fasting is a tool which, when properly used, helps us focus more clearly on God and prepares us to enter into the celebration of the feast in a more intimate manner.

Following the service, the priest blesses all the believers in the Church with the holy water and offers them a bottle to take home and drink each day, or whenever they feel a special need for God’s grace. The Church also has the beautiful tradition of the priest taking the holy water into the homes of all believers and blesses their home. Through this ritual we ask for God’s blessings to come upon the household for the new year.

I am looking forward to visiting all the homes of parishioners from January 6 - 20. The following schedule gives an idea of when I will try to visit your area. I will visit the elderly and shut-ins during the morning hours. For those of you who work, I will come between 5:00-7:00 pm. If you have a specific time that you want me to visit, call me (774-230-6985).

If you are not home when I visit your house, I will leave a Church calendar and a bottle of Holy Water at your door. If you want me to return to your home for a blessing, please call me so that we can arrange another time.

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world, whoever believes in me shall not walk in darkness, but shall walk in the light of life.” May each of us strive to walk in His light each and every day throughout the New Year!

HOUSE BLESSING SCHEDULE

Jan 6-9 - Webster
Jan 10,12 - Dudley/Charlton
Jan 13- Oxford, Sutton
Jan 15-17 - Thompson, Fabyan, N.Grosvenordale, Quinebaug, Putnam, Woodstock
January 18-20- Other Areas
RESPONSES TO THE GOOD AND FAITHFUL STEWARD CHALLENGE

Our little Church is getting some attention, from the Worcester Telegram and Gazette, to our local newspapers - The Webster Times & The Yankee Xpress - to the largest national Greek-American newspaper The National Herald. People are hearing about the “Good and Faithful Steward Challenge” and responding in the most positive way!

The Telegram and Gazette highlighted “When it comes to the adage ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive,’ Saints Constantine and Helen Church practices what it preaches.”

“I’m telling my friends that our Church isn’t simply giving out money for us to do good for others, our Church is giving us INSPIRATION!” stated one of our parishioners. “We are starting a movement that others will imitate.”

In fact, more than a dozen priests have contacted Fr. Luke asking for details, and sharing how they want to consider doing something like this in their own Church. They just aren’t sure how they can get their Parish Council to agree with giving away money. They are all amazed that our Parish Council voted unanimously to go forward with this idea. They are watching us and want to hear what happens next with our Church!

“This was a brilliant idea!” A non-parishioner shared. “For me personally, it was quite a lesson… It made me think a lot and pray a lot about the best way to glorify God with the talents I’ve been entrusted by God. It really changed the way I think going forward. That may be the greatest lesson from this exercise.”

Another woman heard about our Challenge and wrote to our Church, “This is absolutely amazing. I can’t imagine a church giving money to its parishioners. I’m floored. This shows me how the Holy Spirit works. Here are people “walking the walk.” This spreads kindness and joy right in their hometown. This Church is showing God’s love in a tangible way, not just some abstract ‘hope’ in Christ. And they get to experience the joy of giving, even if they can’t afford to do it themselves. I’m just blown away by this. Something I’ve never heard of or seen before, and I’m just so impressed.”

The day after we kicked off this Challenge, one parishioner came into Church and handed Fr Luke $250 in gift cards to distribute for Thanksgiving. She came back before Christmas and handed him another $200 in gift cards. And she made a commitment to do some good deed each month because she and her family were so inspired by what they heard in Church.

Another parishioner excitedly told her neighbor about what our Church did. The next day, the neighbor came by her house and handed her $600 in gift
a good act. I donated my portion, along with a bag of food and a bag of clothing, to support a family at St. Luke’s Guesthouse in Southbridge, which is a homeless shelter. My husband knows about a special-needs man who walks to and from work everyday, and always stops at a restaurant on his way home. So he went to the restaurant and paid in advance for his next few meals. My daughter knows a friend who has a relative in need of help. And my son is still deciding what to do.”

Another parishioner visited St. Luke’s Guesthouse herself and was so impressed by the neatness and general feel of welcome. She learned all about this homeless shelter, met those who run it, and then offered them money to help one of the families staying there. “This program felt so right. I thanked God I visited there and saw their work. I want to get more involved.” Other comments included:

“I am so thankful how God provides. I knew someone who needed four new tires for their car. Without this help they wouldn’t have been able to get them. They felt so blessed by our Church.”

“I gave my money to a charity my niece is involved with - Farm Hands Pre-School. It is a multi-ethnic program that works for social justice by educating children in a climate of love, generosity, vulnerability and connection with one another.”

The first 55 families who received this gift have until mid-January to tell us their stories. Then the next group of families will receive their gift. Let’s keep going out there and acting as “good and faithful stewards” as we glorify God with our acts of love!

One family shared, “We divided the money up between the four of us, so that we each had $50 to do cards, and asked her to give them to our Church to pass out to families in need! The same day this happened, our Church received an anonymous letter with a short note - “I read about what your church is doing and am so touched by the idea. Enclosed is $150. Please use this to help someone in need!”

One great consequence of this program is that families are discussing together what to do with the gift the Church has given them. “We sat down together as a family, with our two kids, and brainstormed on who could really use this gift. We were stuck between two families who have had a rough time. One family has car troubles, the husband works several jobs, the wife is disabled and their children need a lot of help. The other family has adopted three sibling who are all survivors of drug withdrawal as infants. They have trouble keeping up with their mortgage and taking care of the kids. We decided to give each family $125, and then took $50 and bought food to make them dinner. We invited both families over and had dinner together with them, and then surprised them with the gift. We relaxed and enjoyed each other’s company and had an awesome time. Thank you so much for allowing us to do this for others, and giving us a chance to help others. We are so grateful to our Church for doing this.”

One family shared, “We divided the money up between the four of us, so that we each had $50 to do
As many of you may already know, I did not run for re-election to the Parish Council this year, and as such, this will be my last reflection as the President. As to the reasons for me stepping aside, I just wanted some time off. In addition, it’s a wonderful thing when others in the church step in to volunteer. I think we need to remember that our church can only move forward as a unified body when as much of our congregation as possible participates in all aspects of our parish, and that includes the Council.

I will miss writing my thoughts in this column, even though my thoughts are sometimes delivered to Father Luke with little time to spare! Many of you have pulled me aside at Church and complimented me or thanked me for what I have written, and I wanted let you know that those words of encouragement meant a lot to me.

What I really wanted to focus on, however, are the challenges our parish faces in 2020. The upcoming year is the year of our 100th Anniversary Celebration, and we want to connect a number of events throughout the year to our anniversary. This is a great way to keep this celebration in the front of our minds and hearts. Our 100th anniversary and all the events tied to it throughout the year are a clear and significant challenge for 2020. One of the biggest parts of the New Year is our “Good and Faithful Steward Challenge” and I hope we all are thinking of ways that we can make a difference with your donations.

Of course, our big regular events throughout the year, from the religious feast days through fundraisers like our annual festival and the Gyro-fest, demand much of our attention. In addition to all of this, we should strive to have a very thoughtful and contemplative Great Lent and Pascha. Let us keep in our minds those that have gone before us who have built our parish in the hopes that we could celebrate what is so central and crucial to Christianity, Jesus’ giving of His own life to save ours.

During this year of celebrating the founding and history of our Church, we will also focus on the growth, or regrowth, of our Church Family. It is often said that entities like ours, church groups especially, are either growing or declining and rarely exist and last for a long time in a steady state. In this, our 100th year, we need to focus on doing the hard work of proactively growing our community!

We need to target more people than just our own biological family members. If all of our brothers, sisters, sons and daughters (and grandchildren) attended church then that would be wonderful and we’d quickly run out of room! Yet that’s not how life is. Children move away when they get to be adults. Some of them fall away from the Orthodox Church and accept another form of Christianity. Some fall away from religion altogether. Some even fall in love with and marry those of another religion and warmly embrace it, like I did with my beautiful and wonderful wife Charlotte and Orthodoxy.
The changes in one’s life suggest that we cannot depend on the families that founded this church, or their descendants, to provide the proper level of involvement in the church to let us grow. Nor can we depend on those families that have recently joined us to provide an unending well-spring of new celebrants. The publicity our Church has received through the “Good and Faithful Steward Challenge” provides a wonderful opportunity to tell people about our Church, and to invite them to “come and see!” Hopefully through this we will get some new members who will join our Church Family!

Just as Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28:19 at the mountain in Galilee, “Go forth and make disciples of all nations”, we must also reach out beyond our close circle of family and church friends to help our community grow. This is hard work to do, especially in the United States where we have somehow mixed up the important and fundamental tenet of freedom of religion with freedom FROM religion. We are a nation that is so sensitive to one’s religious background (or lack thereof) that it is deemed an insult to even broach the topic in polite conversation (and it seems as if the good people of New England have this attitude in spades!) Yet, we need to remember that freedom of religion (along with freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly) is the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The amendment was written to stop Congress from violating our right to practice religion freely. The amendment says nothing about limiting our right to spread the Good News. We just need to do so in the right way.

As Christians we should always be ready to discuss with those that are interested what our faith means to us, why we practice our religion, and why we do it specifically at Saints Constantine and Helen Church in Webster.

As Christians we should always be ready to discuss with those that are interested what our faith means to us, why we practice our religion, and why we do it specifically at Saints Constantine and Helen Church in Webster.

will only do something new and different if they perceive there to be a benefit to them. I know that praying every day make me feel better. I know that coming to church every Sunday and once in a while during the week makes me feel better and challenges me to become a better person. I know that hearing Father Luke’s sermon every week is a big positive in my life and gives me guidance to proceed in my life in the best possible way.

It may sound too self-centered of the folks we would speak to on this topic, but if given the chance, we must let them know what is in this for them. Why would they want to come and experience our church? Indeed, why would they want to come to church at all? This is the message we need to send forth, if the opportunity arises, and I hope that it does for all of us this year, many times!

While we are celebrating this year of our 100th anniversary, my hope to all of us is that we also think about the rebirth and regrowth of our parish, and we use every opportunity to spread the Good News with the aim of expanding the participation of those currently outside our Parish, but who are nonetheless God’s children.

+ + +

Our Church thanks Neal for his years of service as our Parish Council President and as a Parish Council Member! God grant you many blessed years!!!
The Light - January 2019

EPIPHANY (THEOPHANY):  
FOR THE SALVATION OF US ALL  
Metropolitan Anthony Bloom

The salvation of humankind, the salvation of the world created by the Word is not a one-sided act of God. The Incarnation would have been as impossible without the humble assent of the Virgin Mother as it would have been without the positive will of the Father. But also, in the Incarnation only a beginning is made to our salvation.

Saint John Chrysostom in one of his Homilies says that Christmas is like a dawn, but Epiphany which for us means the baptism of Christ, is like a full light of day. Why? Because in the Incarnation, in the birth of Christ, the Son of God become the Son of Man in Bethlehem. God seizes upon the humanity which is offered Him by the faith of the Virgin Mother, which is the culminating point of all the faith of those who ever longed for the coming of their Savior and believed in it, those whose names are written in Christ's genealogy, and the many, many, the millions whose names are unknown to us, but who are all known to their Lord and their God.

In the Incarnation, however, in the Nativity of Christ in Bethlehem, God takes hold of a frailty of a child, and, as a parable, gives Him to us. Love is always given; love is always defenseless, love is always ultimately vulnerable, and the more perfect the love, the more fulfilled, the more defenseless, the more given and vulnerable it is. Divine Love is incarnate in Bethlehem; and the humanity of Christ there receives passively the gift of this union with God as the result of the perfect faith of the Mother, the Virgin Mother Who has offered Herself and Her Son to be God's own Son.

On the day of the Baptism, Christ has reached the fullness of His human maturity, and now, it is the humanity of the Word Incarnate that takes upon itself, in an act of perfect freedom, of entire faith, of unreserved obedience, of heroic surrender the task which Love Divine has laid upon Him. He comes to Jordan free of sin, and He is baptized. Why? A Western Presbyterian minister of France told me once that he sees it in the following way: the people came to John the Baptist soiled, polluted by sin in an act of repentance and of faith, of a return to God, washed their sins in the waters of Jordan; and these waters became heavy with human sin, became what the legend of so many nations call, the dead, the killing waters of sin. And Christ comes; and He, pure of stain, immerses Himself in these waters of death as one would immerse white wool into a dye, and comes out; comes out of these waters carrying upon Himself all the sin that has been washed in these waters.

Ancient thought, ancient intuition had already perceived something of this mystery in the story of Hercules which is mentioned by one or another of the spiritual writers of old. Hercules stands for the hero who saves; he kills with an arrow the Centaur, the creature
which is both beast and man, an image of what sin makes of us: beasts and men at the same time, because the image of God cannot be washed but it can be profaned; it cannot be destroyed but it can become monstrous as in the legend of Centaur. And on his dying moment the Centaur sends to Hercules his tunic asking him to wear it in memory of his victory, traitorously. And when Hercules puts it on, it clings to his body and burns him like fire. And he tears it away together with his flesh and his life.

Isn't this an adequate image, an intuition of genius of what happened in Christ? Yes, He merges Himself, He immerses Himself in these waters of death; He comes out of them wearing on His body, in His humanity all the consequences of human sin, as Hercules put on the tunic soaked with the blood of the beast-man. And Christ will die of it because it is the only way He could free, not Himself but mankind of its sin. We are Christ's own people; our vocation on earth is to be in history, in the course of our short-lived existence, what Christ has been: love divine incarnate; vulnerable unto death and unto torment; helpless because it is totally and freely given.

And our vocation is to struggle within us against everything which is sin, everything which is evil, to free ourselves by faith and obedience, by love and ascetical endeavor of everything which is not worthy of God, of everything to which God cannot unite Himself. And then, give ourselves unto life and unto death for the salvation of every person, of every nation and of the world.

This is what this feast of Epiphany tells us. Let us follow the footsteps of our Master, from centaurs let us become truly human beings, and as human, unite ourselves with God in Christ by the power of the Spirit, and lay down our lives, and offer if necessary our death for the salvation of all who need it. Amen.

RECIPES FOR A BLESSED & HAPPY NEW YEAR

Take twelve fine, full-grown months; see that these are thoroughly free from old memories of bitterness, anger, hurt and hatred; cleanse them completely from every clinging spite; pick off all specks of pettiness, littleness, pride, and self-centered passion; in short, see that these months are freed from all the bad memories of the past.

Look at each new month with a newness and freshness of life, clean as when God brought forth each day from the great storehouse of time. Cut each of these months into 30 or 31 equal parts. Do not attempt to make up the whole batch at one time (so many persons spoil the entire lot this way), but prepare each day one day at a time.

Into each day put equal parts (and a good share at that) of divine love, joy, faith, patience, courage, hope, generosity and kindness. Add a good portion of fidelity, tolerance, work (some people omit this ingredient and so spoil the flavor of the rest) and rest (leaving this out is like leaving the oil out of the salad dressing - don’t do it). And make sure not to forget a good measure of prayer, meditation, Bible-reading, and a serious attempt of Christ-like living. After every six days make sure to leave the seventh day as a day for God - going to Church and being filled with His Holy Mysteries.

Put in about one teaspoonful of good spirits, a dash of fun and relaxation, a pinch of good-natured folly, a sprinkling of play, and a heaping cupful of good humor.

This is a sure-fire recipe for a most blessed and joyous New Year!
ELDER EPHRAIM OF ARIZONA
A Contemporary Saint Who Passed on to Eternal Life in December

Elder Archimandrite Ephraim (Ioannis Moraitis – June 24, 1927) was an archimandrite and former abbot of Philotheou Monastery on Mount Athos, spiritual guide of four monasteries on Mount Athos and of eight women’s convents in Greece, as well as the founder of 19 monasteries in the United States and Canada. He resided in Arizona at St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery until his repose (December 7, 2019).

Elder Ephraim was a hieromonk for 71 years and an elder for more than 50 years. He was a disciple of Saint Joseph the Hesychast of Mount Athos and lived in monastic obedience to him for 12 years until the saint’s repose in 1959. Elder Ephraim wrote many books on his experiences and homilies of Saint Joseph.

Elder Ephraim was born in 1927 in Volos, Greece, on the day of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, and was given a baptismal name of John. He grew up in poverty and helped his father at work, but always tried to emulate the pious life of his mother Victoria (whom he later tonsured a nun). He desired the monastic life around 14 years of age, but he did not get a blessing from his spiritual father to leave and become a monk until he was 19.

Once, just a month before he left the world, his friends decided to visit elder Joseph the Hesychast. Ioannis did not have any valuable gift to send with them, so he sent a small pouch of vermicelli and wrote a note. When unpacking the gifts, elder Joseph remarked: “This child will become a monk here.” When the friends of Ioannis returned and told him these words, he just forgot it – he had no idea about his future monastic life and had no blessing from his spiritual father.

When Ioannis was a little baby, his mother had a vision and understood that he will become a monk at Mt. Athos. So she was preparing him all his life, having this vision in her mind, and when he was 19, she finally decided to send him to elder Joseph. And now the spiritual father did not object as well.

On September 26, 1947, Ioannis arrived at Mt. Athos to the St. Anna’s skete. Elder Joseph got to know about his arrival from the patron saint of both Ioannis and of the keliya of Elder Joseph – St. John the Baptist. As elder Ephraim recalls in his book, at the pier he met Elder Arsenios who said: “Are you Iannakis from Volos?” – “Yes, how do you know me?” – “Elder Joseph knows that from the Fair Forerunner. He appeared to him today and said: I brought to you a sheep. Place it within your fence.

So Ioannis became a disciple of Saint Joseph the Hesychast who tonsured him in 1948 and gave him the name Ephraim. Ephraim was subsequently ordained a deacon, and then a priest. The life in the brotherhood under Elder Joseph was very austere and ascetical, and Ephraim made great spiritual progress under his holy Elder.

In his book, Elder Ephraim thanks Elder Joseph for his severe but very proficient teaching. Only after leaving the world, Ephraim understood his very strong pride. In the world, he lived a chaste and pious life and was thinking high of himself. Only with Elder Joseph he began to see it, especially when the Elder made comments about his behavior. During 12 years, Ephraim heard his name from the Elder only twice – all other times he used only nicknames. But behind his back, the Elder constantly blessed him – Ephraim got to know this later from other people. Also during confession of thoughts, Elder Joseph never spoke sharply. He described in detail the origin of thoughts and mistakes, so Ephraim thought that the Elder knew him better than he knew himself.
After Elder Joseph’s repose in 1959, Elder Ephraim continued to live in asceticism until he became the abbot of the Holy Monastery of Philotheou in 1973, where he was able to revive the spiritual life in a short time. Due to the reputation of Elder Ephraim, the monastery’s brotherhood grew rapidly. Elder Ephraim was asked by the council of Mount Athos to revive and expand several other monasteries on Mount Athos which had a dwindling number of monks. These monasteries were Xeropotamou, Konstamonitou, and Karakallou. He was also asked to repopulate the Great Lavra but declined. Along with the monasteries on Mount Athos, there are several other monasteries in Greece under Elder Ephraim’s spiritual guidance, including the monastery of St. John the Forerunner in Serres, that of Panagia the Directress in Portaria (Volos), and that of the Archangel Michael, a formal metochion of Philotheou on the island of Thasos.

In 1979, Elder Ephraim became ill and needed surgery. Then his spiritual children from Canada offered to do the surgery in Canada. The Elder agreed, the operation was successful. For more than a month Elder Ephraim stayed in America and met representatives of the Greek community. He got to know that the spiritual life in the Greek circles have been disrupted, people stayed for a long time without confession and with grave sins, were taking Communion totally unprepared and did not keep the canons of the Church. They forget the pious Orthodox life, Greek national traditions and were accustomed to a vicious lifestyle.

Father Ephraim decided to go to America more and more often. He first visited Canada and then he was invited to the United States. In the end, the council of the Holy Mountain warned him that he cannot continue this way and must choose: either the Holy Mountain, or America. The Elder began to pray and it was revealed that his place is in America. He decided to move to the U.S. – for the spiritual care of his flock and the revival of spiritual life in the Greek communities of North America.

The first monastery he established was that of Nativity of the Mother of God in Pennsylvania, near the city of Pittsburgh. The main monastery has the name of St. Anthony the Great and is located in the middle of the Sonoran Desert in Arizona. Here Archimandrite Ephraim resided most of the time. He arrived to the desert in 1995 with 5 monks. There was no electricity, no water and no building materials. But the Elder was not afraid of difficulties and urged the brethren not to despair and believe in God. He heard in that place Athonite Bells and saw his Elder, Joseph Hesychast there and thus he knew that there they should build the monastery. He said: “We came to build the temple and the monastery and, for our diligence, God will bless our work”. Soon people began to donate money and materials, the main church was built in just 4 months. The whole territory was planted with olive and citrus gardens.

Elder Ephraim developed a reputation of being a grace-filled confessor, a true Athonite elder, and had thousands of spiritual children around the world: monastics, clergy, and laity. He is considered by many to be the first to establish an authentic Athonite monastery on American soil. In his life, Elder Ephraim founded 19 monasteries in the United States and Canada for women and men alike, as well as a nursing home.

On December 7th, 2019 at 10pm, Elder Ephraim fell asleep in the Lord. May his memory be eternal and may we have his blessing.

“Love Christ. Breathe Christ. Make Jesus dwell within your soul. Fear no one for we belong to God.”
CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!
2019 Christmas Pageant

Christmas Caroling To our Living Bread Luncheon Guests
The Light - January 2019

Christmas Caroling to Parishioners

A Visit from Saint Nicholas
THANK YOU TO THE 2019 STEWARDS

To all the faithful Church Family members who have given a financial donation towards their 2019 Stewardship Offering as of Dec 31, 2019

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Lisa Healy
Anestis/Evis Jordanoglou
Harry/Tina Jordanoglou
Angeliki Karapanos
John/Maria Karastogiannis
George/Helen Kerbici
Said/Bozhenia Khozami
Arthur/Samantha Kiritsis
Bill/Christine Kiritsis
James Kiritsis
Rena/Thomas Klebart
Mike Kokoszka
Gulapka/Ilija Kostovski
Alexandra Koulax
Angela Koulax
Gus Koulax
Sandy Kunkel
Scott/Kathy Kunkel
Trish Lareau
Helen Lepine
Garin/Anna Livingstone
Elena Mackenzie
Laurie Manthos
Leslie Manthos
Chris/Alex Massie
Lorna McWilliam
Diana/Alex Megas
Helen Metropoulos
Demetrios/Hariklia Milios
John Milios
Vasilios/Grace Milios
Bob Mirandola/Lea Koveas
Yanni/Katie Mironidis
Del/Marie Monroe
Pauline/Carl Mueller
Neal/Charlotte Neslusan
John Nikopoulos
Victor/Linda Nizamoff
George Nonis
Evangelia Panagiotou
Kosta Panagiotou
Ted/Gloria Panagiotou
Gregory/Lindsey Panagiotou
George/Mary Papageorge
Barbara Pappas
Chuck/Misty Pappas
James Pappas
Sam/Evelyn Pappas
Stephen Pappas
Glykeria Partasalis
Louise/Richard Pavlech
Melanie/Stephen Philbrick
Olga Poloukhine
Christine Bilis Porazzo
Jared/Stephanie Quill
Deb Raymond
Dan/Sue Rivelli
Stephanie Robillard
 Sandra Roy
 Ron/Sandy Sanderson
 Lucia/Michael Scafidi
 Nick/Mary Seferi
 John/Eleni Sgouritsas
 Dimitri/Efkarpi Sidopoulos
 Dolly Sosnowski
 Tina Sullivan
 Eleanor Teguis
 Ted Theodores
 Marion Thomas
 John/Ana Thomas
 Phil/Barbara Thomas
 Bill Thompson
 Steliane/David Thompson
 George/Lynn Tonna
 Ted/Betty Tonna
 Nick/Lois /Totolos
 Fr Luke/Faith Veronis
 Edna Vogel
 Steve/Kelly Vosnakis
 Tasi Vriga
 Ted Vriga
 Danielle/David Weiss
 Evangeline Wilson
 Eleni Xanthopoulos

As of Dec 31, 132 families out of our 160 Families have offered something towards their Stewardship Offering for 2019 to support our beloved Church ministries.

The average 2019 offering was $928/year.

Thank you for helping us surpass our budgeted goal by collecting $122,500!

We still hope the other 30 families who did not offer stewardship offerings for 2019 will support our church!
STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

We have 132 stewards out of our 160 members who have given stewardship offerings to support our church in 2019.

PACESETTERS
($1000-$1999) - 21 Stewards

TORCHBEARERS
($2000-$4000) - 12 Stewards

GOOD SHEPHERDS
(over $4000) - 5 Stewards

For 2020, we have a budgeted stewardship goal of $143,000, which is $20,000 over this year’s stewardship.

We need everyone’s help to reach out goal. Please consider increasing your stewardship offering for 2020. Can you increase your giving by 1% of your annual income?

Try to become a Pacesetter, or a Torchbearer, or Good Shepherd in your support of our beloved church!

All of us should strive to glorify God with the gifts and treasures that God has given us, and one of the ways to glorify God is to support His Church!

DAILY DISCIPLINES FOR THE NEW YEAR

1. Pray Every Day and many times throughout the day
2. Meditate and sit in silence for 10 minutes, connecting with God.
3. Fill Your mind with all that is good, noble, pure and edifying
4. Express Gratitude to God and to all
5. Free yourself from all anger, resentment and bitterness
6. Don’t leave room for envy, jealousy, or greed, but rejoice in the joy of others
7. Serve others with joy
8. Do acts of kindness deliberately
9. Smile and bless each person you meet
10. Keep an eternal perspective on life, remembering how brief life on earth is.

A Daily Prayer for the New Year

THE SERENITY PRAYER

Reinhold Niebuhr

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.
**THANK YOU**
To Everyone who Offered a Christmas Donation to our Beloved Church

To our Philoptochos, Angelo & Eleftheria Moutoudis, Sandi Kunkel, and all those who helped put together the 35 Christmas Ham baskets and gift cards we gave out to families in need.

Two front Door Wreaths – In loving memory of Van, Alexandra, Pete Thomas from the Thomas Families

For the Poinsettias:
* For three pointsettias in memory of Elizabeth Vriga and for the glory of God from Louise and Richard Pavlech
* Two pointsettias in loving memory of our daughter Susan Marie from Barbara and Phil Thomas
* In loving memory of Mariann Naumovski from her beloved daughter Kathy Kunkel
* In loving memory of our parents from Chris and Helen Constantine
* In loving memory of Charles and Loucia Christos from Sam, Evelyn, Angelo, and Dhimitra
* In loving memory of Stavros and Evangelia Pappas from Sam, Evelyn, Sakis, Lola, and Olympia
* For the glory of God from Linda Masters
* In loving memory of my grandparents Louis and Elpene Thomas from Linda and Al Masters
* In loving memory of Ellen Monroe from Del, Marie, and Steve Monroe
* In loving memory of my parents and brother Chris from Rita Carabina
* In loving memory of Maria Argyric Patras from Pauline Mueller
* In loving memory of Charlie and Helen Pappas from Sandi and Gerry Kunkel
* In loving memory of Donald Notis from Sandra Note Roy
* In memory of Hritos Bilis from his wife Athina Bilis
* In loving memory of Paul Xanthopoulos from Sophia Foisy and Eleni Xanthopoulos
* In loving memory of my husband Charles Chito from Ann

**THANK YOU!!!**
To Mike Chito, Neal Neslusan and Lisa Healy for all that they’ve done to fix up the Parish House

Mike and Neal put in hundreds of hours of labor in repairing the house, and Lisa donated numerous things for the house, as well as took care of other repairs.

Thank you very much!

**100th Anniversary Dates to Remember**

Jan 12 - Vasilopita Luncheon and Talent Show
March 13-15 - Eikona Music Weekend and Concert & Visit from the miraculous **Kardiotisa Tender Hearted Icon**
June - Getting to Know our Neighbor Dinner
July - Indian Princess Greek Night
Nov 14, 2020 - 100th Anniversary Gala Dinner at the Mansion at Bald Hill in Woodstock, CT
THE TRADITION OF THE “VASILOPITA,” which means the sweet “bread of Basil” commenced in the fourth century, when Saint Basil the Great wanted to distribute money anonymously to the poor in his Diocese. He commissioned some women to bake sweetened bread, in which he placed gold coins. Thus the needy families, in receiving the bread, were pleasantly surprised to find gold coins. St. Basil is considered as one of the greatest philanthropists in Church history. He was the first person ever to establish an orphanage for children, and is the founder of the modern day hospital. The Vasilopita tradition has been carried on until today, where special sweet bread is prepared at the beginning of the New Year.

Pancake Breakfast & Bake Sale
Sponsored by our “Good and Faithful Steward Challenge”

8:00am-11:00am, Saturday, Feb 8
(snowdate Feb 29)

Includes 2 pancakes, scrambled eggs, 2 sausage, homefries
Milk, Coffee, and Juice

Tickets: Adults $8.00  Children under 12 $6.00

All Proceeds to benefit the homeless of our community through the Blessed Backpack Brigade and the Veterans Council
PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS

Happy New Year everyone!

Unfortunately we were not able to hold our Christmas party this year due to bad weather both times. We will try to figure something out where we can get together.

I would like to thank Eleni and her ladies for baking the koulourakia for our shut-ins for Christmas. She made extra that we sold after church. We made an additional $300 for our ministry. Another thanks to Donna Cooney and Debbie Raymond for collecting the names for the Parish Christmas Card this year. We appreciate your time and effort! Thank you to all who filled the Christmas baskets for the needy. We put together nine baskets and Sandi Kunkel filled them with hams and special gifts. Thank you Sandi!

We decided to cancel the Spaghetti Supper for February. There was not enough time to plan after the holidays, but we will try to find another date. We will do the Calendar Raffle selling tickets in May and drawing names in June. We need to do these fundraisers to meet our philanthropic outreach and to give to our youth for the Metropolis Camp and Project Mexico in the summer.

Our next meeting will be held on March 1st after church. We usually take January and February off due to the cold weather. See you then.

A special thanks to all of you for your love and support throughout this past year and previously. It is truly appreciated. Without all of you we would not be able to accomplish everything we have done this year. We should be very proud of ourselves.

Hope you all have a happy and healthy 2020! And new decade to look forward to. And a wonderful new year to celebrate our Church's 100th year Anniversary!

With Appreciation and love,

Evelyn Pappas

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW 2020 PARISH COUNCIL

Kathy Bilis
Michael Chito
Leah DiDonato
Chris Geotis
Joseph Gliniecki
Lisa Healy
Sandi Kunkel
Marie McNally
Evelyn Pappas
Olga Poloukhine
Jared Quill
Debby Raymond
Nick Seferi
Bill Thompson

LIVING BREAD LUNCHEON

12:30-1:30pm, Saturday, January 4

The January Luncheon is offered in loving memory of NICHOLAS STATHIS

You can honor a special person or offer the meal in loving memory of a beloved one for a $400 donation (which will feed 120 people)
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!!!*

Jan 5 – Lisa Healy, Marie McNally, Despina Condos, Trish Lareau
Jan 12 Charlotte Neslusan, Evis Jordanoglou, Dolly Sosnowski, Annalisa Dunning
Jan 19 – Lynn Purcell, Rayne Purcell Sophia Foisy, Kelly Vosnakis
Jan 26 – Titi Chito, Rina Sgouritsas, Pres. Faith Veronis
Feb 2 – Sandi Kunkel, Evelyn Pappas, Gulapka Kostovski, Betty Tonna
Feb 9 – Kathy Bilis, Marie Monroe, Eleni Sgouritsas, Tina Collelo
Feb 16 - Leah Didonato, Mary Seferi, Olga Poulokhine, Vasiliki Zahariadis
Feb 23 - Sara Darlagiannis, Sissy Darligiannis, Helen Constantine Alexandra Koulax

USHERS & GREETERS SCHEDULE

Jan 5 Arthur Bilis, Chris Geotis, Thomai Gatsogiannis, Trish Lareau
Jan 12 Marie McNally, Matt Benoit, Lisa Healy, Nick Seferi
Jan 19 - Neal Neslusan, Jimmy Karapanos, Brenda Rombillard Tatyana Zhuk, Mike Chito
Jan 26 - Nicoleta Cojocaru, Chris Dillon, Jared Quill, Bill Thompson

COFFEE FELLOWSHIP SERVING GROUPS

Jan 5- Sara Darlagiannis, Christine Kiritsis, Charlotte Neslusan, Stephanie Quill, Brenda Rombillard
Jan 12- Donna Cooney, Leah Didonato, Rena Klebart, Betty Tonna, Atsede Tsegaye
Jan 19 - Thomai Gatsogiannis, Trish Lareau, Deb Raymond, Vange Wilson,
Jan 26 - Marie McNally, Christa Benoit, Sandi Kunkel, Mary Seferi, Chris Dillon

YOUTH EPISTLE READERS

Jan 5 - Maia Beaudry
Jan 12 – Kiera MacKenzie
Jan 19 - Lily Mueller
Jan 26—Kara Bilis
Feb 2 - Helen Dunning
Feb 9 - Zach Beaudry
Feb 16 - Panayioti Veronis
Remembering Our Church Family

Important Dates in JANUARY:

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:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 1</td>
<td>Kara Bilis</td>
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<td>Michael Pappas</td>
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<td>Bill Zenon</td>
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<td>Jan 3</td>
<td>Garry Ross</td>
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<td>Jan 3</td>
<td>Mary Papageorge</td>
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<td>Jan 5</td>
<td>Smaranda Cojocaru</td>
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<td>Neal Neslusan</td>
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<td>Gloria Panagiotou</td>
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<td>Olivia Neslusan</td>
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<td>Gary Colello</td>
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<td>Thomai Gatsogiannis</td>
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<td>Mike Kokoszka</td>
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<td>Coral Cynthia Rose Breton</td>
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<td>Theodora Veronis</td>
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<td>Niko Milios</td>
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<td>Panayiota Veronis</td>
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<td>Jan 31</td>
<td>Sandi Kunkel</td>
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**NAMEDAYS:**

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<tr>
<td>Jan 1</td>
<td>St Basil the Great</td>
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<td>Bill Anthopoulos</td>
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<td>Jan 6</td>
<td>Epiphany - “Ta Fota”</td>
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<td>Jordan Bouthilier</td>
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<td>Fofo Kapsounis</td>
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<td>Fotini Veronis</td>
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<td>Jan 7</td>
<td>St John The Baptist</td>
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<td>Yanni Mironides</td>
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<td>Yianni Moutoudis</td>
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<td>John Neslusan</td>
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<td>John Thomas</td>
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<td>Jan 17</td>
<td>St. Anthony the Great</td>
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<td>Tony Beaudry</td>
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<td>Anton Cojocaru</td>
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<td>Jan 18</td>
<td>St Athanasios</td>
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<td>Arthur Bilis</td>
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<td>Arthur Peterson</td>
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<td>St. Tatiana</td>
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<td>Tatiana Zhuk</td>
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<td>Jan 28</td>
<td>St Ephraim the Syrian</td>
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<td>Ephraim Dunning</td>
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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, or at different stages in 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!

SIGN UP FOR PROJECT MEXICO

Our Church reserved 25 SPOTS for next summer’s trip! Only 4 spots still open!!!

July 16-23, 2020

Give a $100 deposit and talk with Fr. Luke to reserve your spot.

I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 121:1-2

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
<table>
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<td>Strict Fast</td>
<td>Theophany</td>
<td>7 St John the Baptist</td>
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<td>St Anthony the Great</td>
<td>No House Blessings</td>
<td>No Vespers</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 Matins 9:30 Divine Liturgy w Blessing of Waters</td>
<td>8:45 Matins 9:30 Liturgy w Water Blessing House Blessings in Webster</td>
<td>8:45 Matins 9:30 Liturgy</td>
<td>11:30 Ecumenical Clergy Luncheon at Church House Blessings in Webster</td>
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<td>House Blessings in Dudley</td>
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<td>8:30 Matins 9:30 Divine Liturgy 11:15 Vasilopita Luncheon w Talent Show</td>
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<td>10:00 Bible Study</td>
<td>6:30 Bible Study at home of Fr. Luke &amp; Faith</td>
<td>St Anthony the Great 8:45 Matins 9:30 Liturgy</td>
<td>5:00 Vespers</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 Matins 9:30 Divine Liturgy w Parish Council Installation 11:30 PC Meeting</td>
<td>Martin Luther King Day</td>
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<td>10:00 Bible Study</td>
<td>6:30 Bible Study at home of Fr. Luke &amp; Faith</td>
<td>St Gregory the Theologian 8:45 Matins 9:30 Liturgy</td>
<td>5:00 Vespers</td>
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<td>8:30 Matins 9:30 Divine Liturgy</td>
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<td>10:00 Bible Study</td>
<td>The Three Hierarchs 8:45 Matins 9:30 Liturgy 6:30 Bible Study at home of Fr. Luke &amp; Faith</td>
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<td>12:30 Living Bread Luncheon 5:00 Vespers</td>
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Welcome to Flight 2020

Good morning and welcome to flight # 2020!

We are preparing for take off into the New Year so please make sure your Attitude and Blessings are secured and locked in an upright position.

All self destructive devices should be turned off at this time.
All negativity and hatred, hurt and discouragement, pride and ego should be put away.

Should we lose altitude under pressure during the flight, reach up and pull down a Prayer.
The Captain always responds to any Prayer.
Prayers will automatically be activated by Faith.

Once your Faith is activated you can assist other passengers.

There will be NO BAGGAGE allowed on this year’s flight.

I assure you we will arrive at our destination safely.
Remember, our destination is kindness and love, understanding and forgiveness, respect and compassion.

The Captain has cleared us for takeoff.

Have a wonderful flight!

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!