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# FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

The monthly newsletter of  
**Saints Constantine and Helen Greek  
Orthodox Church**

Volume XV, Issue 12

December 2023

## Preparation for Holy Nativity

**Abbot Joseph of the St. Gregory Palamas Greek Orthodox Monastery**

Dear friends and benefactors of St.  
Gregory Palamas Monastery,

We greet you in this joyous time of  
preparation for the feast of the Nativ-  
ity of our Lord and God and Savior  
Jesus Christ, and the feast of The-  
ophany commemorating our Lord's  
Baptism. We would like to reflect on  
the conditions that maximize our  
receptivity to His coming and pres-  
ence in the world.

*In calling the Magi by a star, Heaven  
brought the first-fruits of the nations unto  
Thee, a Babe lying in a manger; and  
they were astonished that there was nei-  
ther scepter nor throne, but only the utter-  
most poverty. For what is meaner than a  
cave? And what is lowlier than swad-  
dling clothes? Yet in them the riches of  
Thy Divinity shone forth. O Lord, glory  
be to Thee.—Hypakoe pl. 4*

The above quoted hymn is read after  
the third ode of the canon for orthros  
of Christmas Day and beautifully  
expresses the wonder of the magi as  
they beheld the humility and low-  
liness of the one to whom heaven's  
star had directed them. This is pre-  
cisely the glory of God and the pow-



er of humility made flesh in the Holy  
Child of Bethlehem. It is certainly  
something that goes beyond the im-  
agination and human understanding.  
God in the flesh, glory streaming  
from the cave and manger, angelic  
choirs announcing to shepherds in  
the field the holy birth, visitors both  
great and lowly, who have received  
from heaven the knowledge and  
meaning of this event, are partici-  
pants. On the other hand, the rich  
and wise of the world are totally ig-  
norant of the meaning of this holy  
birth. Herod is enraged and threat-  
ened by this humble child and the

continued on page 2

teachers and priests of the Old Covenant do not receive any invitation or announcement. The humility of God's entrance into the world as the God-man is expressed in every detail of the Nativity of our Lord and this humility teaches us that the prerequisite for receiving Christ is a humble heart and disposition.

St. John Climacus lists "humility" as step 25 of the Ladder, one of the higher virtues. So we see that this virtue does not come to us easily or prematurely. There are 25 steps to take before we arrive at humility. Certainly, a humble person is a person who is actively pursuing the commandments of God, confessing and repenting and otherwise doing all the good that he can possibly do. Having passed through the practice of the fundamental virtues of obedience, penitence, remembrance of death, and contrition, the struggler is on a firmer footing for the struggle against the passions of anger, malice, slander, talkativeness, falsehood, despondency, gluttony, lust, avarice insensitivity, fear, vain-glory and pride. It is precisely in the struggle against the passions that we realize through our progress and our falls that it is only with God's help that we come to any measure of victory over the passions. The above mentioned passions are obstacles to a warm and flowing communion with God. Too often we do not realize how crippling and paralyzing these passions have become. If we work to struggle against them, we forget that it is only with God's help that we have

any measure of victory. Even our failures indicate that we have left God out of the equation. Those failures occur because we were relying on ourselves too much and those failures should direct us back to God. When we have truly turned to God and directed all of our hope on Him then we are on the path to the paradise of humility. That is, we are not worried or anxious about anything, other than to serve and please God.

Humility is truly a paradise and a gift from God. God himself is the most humble and he gives blessed humility to those who have struggled to live in Him and long for communion with Him. St. John Climacus said, *Humility is a grace in the soul and with a name known only to those who have had experience of it. It is indescribable wealth, a name and gift from God 'Learn from Me', that is, from an angel, not from a man, not from a book, but 'from Me', that is, from My dwelling within you, from My illumination and action within you, for 'I am gentle and meek of heart' in thought in spirit, and your souls will find rest from conflicts and relief from evil thoughts.*

St. John says that Humility eludes adequate description. He asks of the wise for a description of this blessed virtue and the answers are the following. . . *Humility is constant forgetfulness of one's achievements. It is the admission that in all the world one is the least important and is also the greatest sinner. Another says, it is the mind's awareness that one is weak and helpless. A third says, it is to forestall one's neighbor at a contentious moment and to be the first to end a quarrel. It is the acknowledgment of divine grace and divine mercy. It is the disposition of a*

*contrite soul and the abdication of one's own will.*

In the end, this virtue defies description. St. John continues; *Do you imagine that talk of such matters will mean anything to someone who has never experienced them? If you think so, then you will be like a man who with words and examples tries to convey the sweetness of honey to people who have never tasted it. He talks uselessly. Indeed I would say he is simply prattling.*

A humble man gives glory to God for everything. He rejoices in the smallest gifts and blessing as though he had received the costliest treasures of the world. He accepts the circumstances of his life, both good and bad, as providential. He understands these circumstances as either for strengthening and confirmation in faith and virtue, or for his correction and repentance. He is neither increased by flattery, nor decreased by criticism. He fears only a break in communion with God. Humility has become a fortress and protection for his soul. He realizes that the enemy of his ego is the friend of his soul.

The tools that cultivate humility are an exact knowledge of the law of God, an exact knowledge of our sins, repentance and confession. St. John Climacus says; *Repentance lifts a man up. Mourning knocks at heaven's gate and Holy humility opens it. This I say, and I worship a Trinity in Unity and a Unity in Trinity.*

In the popular Christmas carol, *Joy to the world*. We sing, *let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature*

## THE ORTHODOX STEWARD CHRIST IS BORN, GLORIFY HIM!

Over 2023, our Stewardship focus has centered on the Eucharistic nature of our lives and stewardship. Our lives are a gift from God – and are lived in thankfulness in all that we do. Our lives center in the Holy Eucharist as we receive the Holy Mysteries given in the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In receiving the Holy Mysteries, we give thanks to God as we receive what He gives.

In Christ we live and move and have our being. To turn from Him or to deny Him results in chaos in every way. We see it even now in what we experience in our world.



In the joyous exclamation in Holy Nativity, “Christ is Born! Glorify Him!,” we actually end the year as we began it, giving thanks. Focused on the eternal realities in the Incarnate Word, our life is sustained and continued as it has been for all our days!

As we now travel again through this season, we focus on Holy Nativity! Although many themes and traditions--some holy, some not so holy, exist-- our focus is and must be on the life and love that are ours in our Lord and Savior. The Blessed and Holy Trinity is our focus.



The Orthodox Steward practices the Fast and the Feast, with a singular focus on Him who we celebrate. It is vital that we do not let all of the “stuff” and the “noise” of the season distract from the fact That Christ is Born, and we do glorify Him.

In Christ we live and move and have our being! That is missing from secular discussion. An understanding of the Church is totally missing. When these things happen, something else fills their place. When family traditions replace or remove the Church and that which has been handed down through the ages, the temporal and temporary blind us to the Eternal.

Christ is Born, Glorify Him! The Word became flesh and dwelt (and dwells) among us! All of that continues as we gather, Holy Mother Church, around the holy and blessed mysteries given us in the Holy Eucharist! Let’s not leave Christ out of Christmas! Gather in the temple often in order that you are focused on Jesus, author, and perfecter of our faith.

***Christ is born! Glorify Him!***

*Continued from p. 2*

*sing.* So let us prepare ourselves using the tools and gifts that God has given us for the cultivation of blessed humility and we will be prepared to receive Christ who is clothed in the glory of His humility. My great grandmother would often say of the high and mighty, *there was never a bird that flew so high that he didn’t have to come down to earth in order to eat.* When we celebrate these coming feasts, we are celebrating the coming of the one who from the highest heaven came down to earth to clothe us with the Garment of Salvation, to feed us with the Bread of Life and to shelter us in the Holy Ark, the Church. He did not come because he needed something from us. He came because he loves us. May we imitate His Divine Humility and enter the paradise promised to us in His Nativity! *Glory to God in the highest, His peace is on earth and His good pleasure in mankind!*

We assure you of our prayers and good wishes for your health and salvation. May this coming celebration bring you and your loved ones closer to the One who humbled himself in order to lift us up to His heavenly paradise. May your celebration in church and in your homes be a taste of paradise.

In anticipation of the feast we say: Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Fr. Joseph and the Brotherhood of St. Gregory Palamas Monastery

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Mission Team  
St. Louis

The Orthodox Mission Team of St. Louis works to nurture an awareness within our local churches of the need to evangelize, catechize, and support missionary efforts and programs globally.



# Hola (Hello) from Guatemala

Jesse Brandow and Juanita Pascual are an Orthodox missionary couple serving under the omophoron of His Eminence Athenagoras, Metropolitan of Mexico and all Central America.

Jesse is from Michigan and graduated with a Master of Divinity from St. Vladimir's Seminary in 2013. He began full-time mission work in 2015, teaching seminarians and lay catechists as well as producing Spanish-language Church publications. More recently, Jesse was appointed by Metropolitan Athenagoras to work as the Spanish-language Publications Coordinator for the Metropolis of Mexico as a whole.

Over the past year, Jesse has been preparing a centralized website for Spanish liturgical texts for the Greek Metropolis of Mexico. The website is called *Liturgia Digital* and he is developing it using a program called Doxa, which was created by OCMC to provide tools for translators and publishers of liturgical texts worldwide. The *Liturgia Digital* website contains many liturgical resources, including the complete Divine Liturgy texts for every day in Spanish, English, and Greek (parallel columns), with all variable hymns and Scripture readings included. Those familiar with the GOA's [Digital Chant Stand](#) will recognize this type of website – such a resource is now available in Spanish!

The *Liturgia Digital* website that was launched on October 26th is essentially a "Version 1.0" because more resources need to be added in future iterations of the site. Currently, the website offers: the complete Divine Liturgy for every day of the year including variable materials (text only, no audio), a page for fixed liturgical books like the Euchologion, and a search function for exploring the liturgical texts. In the future, they plan to add: audio recordings for the Divine Liturgy and select variable hymns, an expanded library of fixed service texts, and eventually Vespers and Matins/Orthros.

It already contains complete Liturgy texts for over ninety days of the year in Spanish, Greek, and English. If all of those texts were printed in trilingual versions, it would require over fifteen reams of paper (more than 15,000 sheets)!

Juanita is from the village of Aguacate, Guatemala, and served as a community health worker at the Fr. Andrés Girón Orthodox Medical Clinic in Aguacate before beginning medical school in 2017. She has completed her medical school coursework and after she finishes this hospital rotation at the end of 2023, she will then begin a year-long internship as the last stage of her clinical work. Juanita looks forward to serving Christ as a doctor in the mission field, caring for those who are most in need!

Please pray for Jesse and Juanita as they continue to answer their calling to serve Christ in Central America, under the blessing of His Eminence Athenagoras. You can help them by offering financial support through the Orthodox Christian Mission Center. You can visit their support page by going online to <https://www.ocmc.org/how-we-serve/missionaries> and clicking on their name.



*Holding 15 reams of paper for a visual example of the amount of paper that would be needed to print the daily Liturgy texts that are already available on*



*As always, please feel free to contact Rosie Hartley, 618-447-9688, if you have any questions, would like to be part of the Mission Team St. Louis, or if you would like to help our missionaries.*

*Thank you for your continued support!*

# Community Christmas Card

2023

It is a Nativity Tradition at Sts Constantine and Helen to send a parish Christmas card to members and friends of the parish. Let us continue to spread the Joy of our Lord!

Those wishing to sign the card are asked to donate \$15 which is placed in an account which provides funds for Church School, Youth ministries, and other educational endeavors of the community.

**We look forward to your participation!**

Simply, make your donation and “sign” a sheet in the way that you want your name to appear. On December 10th, these signatures are gathered, and added to the triptych style card, along with a greeting from Father Achilles, taken to the printer, and mailed during that week.

**There are two ways to contribute and participate:**

1. Bring your contribution, sign your name as you would like it to be printed, and leave it with Katherine Wolfe (at the Bookstore in the Church Hall)

2. Send your donation with your name as you would like it to the Church, with the envelope marked “Parish Christmas Card”. Checks should be made out to *Sts. Constantine & Helen Sunday School.* If you do have questions, please contact Ezekiel or Katherine Wolfe, [ekwolfe3@outlook.com](mailto:ekwolfe3@outlook.com)

*Thank you!*

## Holy Sacraments And Services

### Memorials and Trisagias

- ◆ **Sunday, December 3rd~**  
Three Years, Zoe Poulos

*May her memory eternal!*

### Holy Baptism

- ◆ **Saturday, December 2nd~**  
Irene (Emma) Boyles,  
daughter of Alyssa Boyles

*As many as have been baptized into  
Christ have put on Christ!*

*Christ is born; glorify Him! \* Christ is  
come from heaven; go and meet Him. \* Christ  
is on earth; arise to Him. \* Sing to the Lord,  
all you who dwell on the earth; \* and in merry  
spirits, O you peoples, praise His birth. \* For  
He is glorified.*

Katavasia of Christmas

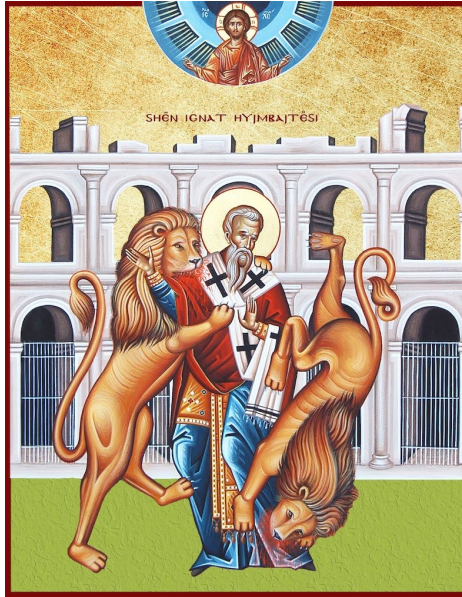
## Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-Bearer, Bishop of Antioch

The Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-Bearer, was a disciple of the holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian, as was also Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (February 23). Saint Ignatius was the second bishop of Antioch, and successor to Bishop Euodius, Apostle of the Seventy (September 7).

Tradition suggests that when Saint Ignatius was a little boy, the Savior hugged him and said: “Unless you turn and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt. 18:3). The saint was called “God-Bearer” (Theophoros), because he bore God in his heart and prayed unceasingly to Him. He also had this name because he was held in the arms of Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

Saint Ignatius was a disciple of the Apostle John the Theologian, together with Saint Polycarp of Smyrna. As Bishop of Antioch, Saint Ignatius was zealous and spared no effort to build up the church of Christ. To him is attributed the practice of antiphonal singing (by two choirs) during church services. He had seen a vision of the angels in heaven alternately singing praises to God, and divided his church choir to follow this example. In the time of persecution he was a source of strength to the souls of his flock, and was eager to suffer for Christ.

In the year 106 the emperor Trajan (98-117), after his victory over the Scythians, ordered everyone to give thanks to the pagan gods, and to put to death any Christians who refused to worship the idols. In the year 107, Trajan happened to pass through Antioch. Here they told him that



Bishop Ignatius openly confessed Christ, and taught people to scorn riches, to lead a virtuous life, and preserve their virginity. Saint Ignatius came voluntarily before the emperor, so as to avert persecution of the Christians in Antioch. Saint Ignatius rejected the persistent requests of the emperor Trajan to sacrifice to the idols. The emperor then decided to send him to Rome to be thrown to the wild beasts. Saint Ignatius joyfully accepted the sentence imposed upon him. His readiness for martyrdom was attested to by eyewitnesses, who accompanied Saint Ignatius from Antioch to Rome.

On the way to Rome, the ship sailed from Seleucia stopped at Smyrna, where Saint Ignatius met with his friend Bishop Polycarp. Clergy and believers from other cities and towns thronged to see Saint Ignatius. He exhorted everyone not to fear death and not to grieve for him. In his Epistle to the Roman Christians, he asked them to assist him with their prayers, and to pray that God would strengthen him in his impending martyrdom for Christ: “I seek Him Who died for us; I desire Him Who rose for our salvation... In me, desire

has been nailed to the cross, and no flame of material longing is left. Only the living water speaks within me, saying, ‘Hasten to the Father.’”

From Smyrna, Saint Ignatius went to Troas. Here he heard the happy news of the end of the persecution against Christians in Antioch. From Troas, Saint Ignatius sailed to Neapolis (in Macedonia) and then to Philippi.

On the way to Rome Saint Ignatius visited several churches, teaching and guiding the Christians there. He also wrote seven epistles: to the churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, and Smyrna. He also addressed a letter to Saint Polycarp, who mentions a collection of the letters of Saint Ignatius in his letter to the Philippians (Ch. 13). Saint Irenaeus of Lyons quotes from Saint Ignatius’s letter to the Romans (AGAINST HERESIES 5:28:4). All these letters have survived to the present day.

The Roman Christians met Saint Ignatius with great joy and profound sorrow. Some of them hoped to prevent his execution, but Saint Ignatius implored them not to do this. Kneeling down, he prayed together with the believers for the Church, for love between the brethren, and for an end to the persecution against Christians.

On December 20, the day of a pagan festival, they led Saint Ignatius into the arena, and he turned to the people: “Men of Rome, you know that I am sentenced to death, not because of any crime, but because of my love for God, by Whose love I am embraced. I long to be with Him, and offer myself to him as a pure loaf, made of fine wheat ground fine by the teeth of wild beasts.”

After this the lions were released and tore him to pieces, leaving only his heart and a few bones. Tradition says that on his way to execution, Saint Ignatius unceasingly repeated

## Have a Dickens of a Christmas

Fr. Stephen Freeman

In the late 1600's in colonial Boston, the celebration of Christmas was against the law. Indeed, anyone evidencing the "spirit of Christmas" could be fined five shillings. In the early 1800's, Christmas was better known as a season for rioting in the streets and civil unrest.<sup>1</sup> However, in the mid-1800's some interesting things changed the cultural response to the feast and, in 1870, Christmas was declared a federal holiday (which is to say that prior to 1870, Christmas was not a day-off in America). What happened?

American Christmas demonstrates the amazing influence of literature on a culture. The first important book was by the author, Washington Irving (of *Sleepy Hollow* and *Rip Van Winckel* fame):

In 1819, best-selling author Washington Irving wrote *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, gent.*, a series of stories about the celebration of Christmas in an English manor house. The sketches feature a squire who invited the peasants into his home for the holiday. In contrast to the problems faced in American society, the two groups mingled effortlessly. In Irving's mind, Christmas should be a peaceful, warm-hearted holiday bringing groups together across lines of wealth or social status. Irving's fictitious celebrants enjoyed "ancient customs," including the crowning of a Lord of Misrule. Irving's book, however, was not based on any holiday celebration he had attended – in fact, many historians say that Irving's account actually "invented" tradition by implying that it described the true customs of the season.<sup>2</sup>

The second book, however, was, by far, the more influential: Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. When Dickens is dubbed, "the man who invented Christmas," it is not far from the truth. For the American cultural

celebration of Christmas largely began through the popularity of Dickens' classic story. That same fact, though, accounts for much of the non-religious aspects of America's celebration.



Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* does not overlook the birth of Christ. It presumes the religious aspects of the day and its presence is woven throughout every part of the story-line. There is a brief mention of Bob Cratchett and his son, Tiny Tim, attending Church on the day. But it was not this part of the story that caught the popular imagination. All told, it was the "spirit" of Christmas that sold America on the importance of the day.

Dickens wrote in the depths of the Victorian era. That period was marked, both in England and America, by a rise of romanticism, a popular sentimentality for "old things," "traditions," and "customs." The century before had been dominated by the Enlightenment, when all things rational ruled the day. Indeed, it is not incorrect to see the sentimentality of the Victorian period as a reaction to the coldness of reason. It was a swinging of the cultural pendulum.

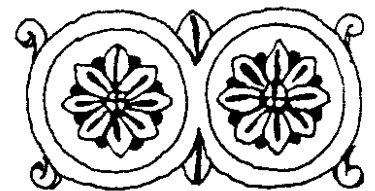
America's religious history has been a conflicted mix since the very beginning. The New England colonies (among the earliest) were settled largely by Puritans, dissenters from the Church of England, who wanted a radical reform of English Christianity. Unable to achieve their desires in

*Continued from p. 6*

the name of Jesus Christ. When they asked him why he was doing this, Saint Ignatius answered that this Name was written in his heart, and that he confessed with his lips Him Whom he always carried within. When the saint was devoured by the lions, his heart was not touched. When they cut open the heart, the pagans saw an inscription in gold letters: "Jesus Christ." After his execution Saint Ignatius appeared to many of the faithful in their sleep to comfort them, and some saw him at prayer for the city of Rome.

Hearing of the saint's great courage, Trajan thought well of him and stopped the persecution against the Christians. The relics of Saint Ignatius were transferred to Antioch (January 29), and on February 1, 637 were returned to Rome and placed in the church of San Clemente.

[Www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org)



*Continued next page*

England, they came to America and established their Churches here. They opposed Church festivals and frivolities of almost every sort. Their strict and dour form of Christianity waned and morphed over the decades, becoming a fairly moderate version of generalized Protestantism. The lower colonies (Virginia and to the South) were settled (officially) by Anglicans. However, migrations quickly populated those areas with dissenters, particularly the Scots-Irish who were largely Presbyterian with Baptists as well. Catholics were a tiny minority, restricted, for the most part, to Maryland.

English Churches outside of the Catholic and Anglican were non-liturgical. The “feast” of Christmas was as absent as the “feast” of anything else. It was not part of their consciousness. Thus, the growth of a popular Christmas in the mid to late 19th century took place outside the walls of the Church. It became a cultural holiday, with an emphasis on family and the home.

Surprisingly, Christmas is probably far more a part of Protestant Church life in America today than at any time in our history. But the echoes of cultural Christmas remain strong. When Christmas Day falls on a Sunday, Christianity in America revisits its conflicted past. It is not unusual to see Churches of a more Evangelical background cancelling Sunday services, deferring to Christmas as a “family” celebration. For liturgical Churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, etc.) such a practice seems scandalous in the extreme.

I might note, however, that the “power” of Christmas as an event in our culture, is rooted in the culture rather than the Church. In the Orthodox Church, Christmas is but one of twelve major feast days. If those feast days fall anytime other than a Sunday, attendance at Church

will be thin indeed. And though Christmas is one of the three greatest of the twelve (Pascha, Christmas, Theophany), only Christmas and Pascha (always on a Sunday) receive great attention in America. Those of us who feel a certain superiority in our Church’s celebration of the Christmas feast, would do well to reflect on our



own neglect of the other feasts.

This is not an article about what “should” be. Cultures are what they are and got that way by their peculiar history. If America were an Orthodox or Catholic country in its beginning, many of the other major feasts would likely be national holidays and their customs would be widespread. Such is the case elsewhere in the world.

There are protests against the secular Christmas that say, “Put the Christ back in Christmas!” From a liturgical point of view I’ve wanted to add, “And put the Mass back in Christmas!” It is, after all, a feast of the Christian Church. Neither of these, however, will likely be dominant in a culture that once had little Christmas at all.

Another suggestion I might make is to “put the Dickens back in Christmas.” I can think of no better homage to the man who “created” the modern celebration of the holiday than to read his delightful *A Christmas Carol*. If you

do not want to read, watch a movie version. Several of them are quite faithful to the book.

But, more than this, would be the moral of Dickens’ story: Christmas is well-kept by a life of generosity and kindness. That dear story is one of profound repentance, the healing of relationships and the righting of wrongs. Dickens’ Christmas was synonymous with a life lived in accordance with the gospel. He said it well at the end of his story:

Bob Cratchit was very surprised, and so were many people who found Scrooge so changed. Scrooge became a better person. To Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. Scrooge became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city or town in the world could know. It was always said of Scrooge, that he knew how to keep Christmas well. May that be truly said of us, and all of us!

I absolutely think that Christmas should be a time for Christians to gather in Church to give thanks for the birth of Christ. But outside its doors, no one of us could do better than Scrooge. The busy-ness of Christmas, as well as the business of Christmas, could do well to listen to the words of Scrooge’s partner, Jacob Marley, the tortured soul doomed to wander the world in chains. Scrooge observed to him that he was always a good man of business. Marley replied:

“Business!” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. “Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”

Would that such business were as popular as the tinsel and trees. Thank you Charles Dickens, for having said it so well.

Fr. Stephen Freeman  
*Glory to God for All Things*



## COME AND SEE CONFUSING TIMES

We live in strange times, confusing times, to be sure. Not so long ago, we witnessed terrible terrorist attacks by Hamas. It was shocking, to be sure! Strangely, many support those attacks, as we have seen because of the situation in that area of the world. It becomes “worse” because now we can actually see the actions and acts, and we hear of all the reasons to justify them.

Israel was attacked, and now we see retribution. What is strange to me, however, is how the language goes. We judge the events of October 7 as barbaric (some do), and yet the words coming out of Israel are literally to destroy Hamas. Both want to destroy the other. It is OK for “us” to do something to another – but the same terrible actions are judged not “just” if they are done to “us.”

I received a greeting from Dr. Maria Khoury, who lives in Palestine. Facts are facts; the Christians in Palestine and Israel and their churches are being destroyed, whether they are targeted or not. Innocent people are being used by powers in one state or another as pawns or refugees. Military installations are being placed or hidden near hospitals and “neutral” businesses. Evil, however justified in human terms, is afoot.

In this case many Palestinians are literally calling for the utter destruction of Israel, and Israel is making statements that seem to be calling for destruction of Palestine. Seems like pretty much the same thing to me. Not new, either. Nations and states and powers have been doing the same thing throughout history. Sadly, constant warfare and constant power mongering never really accomplish anything.

It occurred to me again during all this that when humans abandon their Creator and Savior, minds are tangled up and absurdity is called wisdom in human terms. And it is even more clear that we all can find meaning and pur-

pose and order in Christ. In HIM we live and move and have our being. In Him we find order.

In Holy Mother Church, in Holy Orthodoxy, that which has been handed down through the ages must remain. We must pray! We must seek and speak the truth, lovingly and with respect, but also without compromise. It is for this purpose that our liturgies, our preaching, and the Mysteries are NOT affected by current fads and trends.

Even within what calls itself “church” we find a meandering and wandering in every way in our day. But then, in the discussions among churches, accommodation and getting along seem to reign. We want people to “feel good” in whatever their situation rather than speaking truth with love.

What to do? Pray. Pray without ceasing. Listen, listen to what we have received from the Blessed and Holy Trinity through the apostles, handed down through the ages. Look to Jesus in His Body the Church and live and follow His statutes and Commandments. Speak with all love, but speak and live the truth.

Taking turns killing each other isn't an option. And “taking sides” isn't always helpful. Don't use the Church for political posturing. Be in the world but not of the world.

And never, ever forget that our Lord and God and Savior is always with us! It is a troubling and frightening time to be sure! But, looking to Jesus we still say

*Glory to God for All Things  
Christ is Born! Glorify Him!*

*Ezekiel*

*“For of what use is existence to the creature if it cannot know its Maker? How could men be reasonable beings if they had no knowledge of the Word and Reason of the Father, through Whom they had received their being? They would be no better than the beasts, had they no knowledge save of earthly things; and why should God have made them at all, if He had not intended them to know Him? But, in fact, the good God has given them a share in His own Image, that is, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and has made even themselves after the same Image and Likeness. Why? Simply in order that through this gift of Godlikeness in themselves they may be able to perceive the Image Absolute, that is the Word Himself, and through Him to apprehend the Father; which knowledge of their Maker is for men the only really happy and blessed life.”*

— St. Athanasios of Alexandria

*On the Incarnation*

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 Fr. Achilles Karathanos, Parish Priest

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p> <b>3</b> 14th Sunday of St. Matthew 8:45 Matins 10am Divine Liturgy</p>	<p> <b>4</b> St. Barbara The Great Martyr</p>	<p> <b>5</b> St. Savas the Sanctified 6:30pm Great Vespers of St. Nicholas at the Family Life Center; reception</p>	<p> <b>6</b> St. Nicholas The Wonderworker 8:30am Matins 9:30am Divine Liturgy At the Family Life Center, Town and Country, MO; reception</p>	<p> <b>7</b> St. Ambrose of Milan</p>	<p><b>1</b></p>	<p> <b>2</b> 1pm Baptism 5pm Great Vespers Holy Confession</p>
<p> <b>10</b> 10th Sun. of St. Matthew 8:45 Matins 10am Divine Liturgy</p>	<p> <b>11</b> 5:30pm Great Vespers</p>	<p><b>12</b> St. Spyridon the Wonderworker 9am Matins 10am Divine Liturgy</p>	<p><b>13</b> St. Herman of Alaska</p>	<p><b>14</b></p>	<p> <b>15</b> St. Eleutherios, Bishop of Illyria</p>	<p> <b>16</b> 5pm Great Vespers Holy Confession</p>
<p> <b>17</b> 11th Sunday of St. Matthew, St. Dionysios of Zakynthos 8:45 Matins 10am Divine Liturgy</p>	<p><b>18</b></p>	<p><b>19</b></p>	<p> <b>20</b> St. Ignatios The Godbearer</p>	<p><b>21</b> 5:30pm Vespers</p>	<p><b>22</b> Anastasia the Great Martyr 10am Royal Hours of Holy Nativity</p>	<p> <b>23</b> 5pm Pre-Festal Vespers of Holy Nativity Holy Confession</p>
<p> <b>24</b> Sunday Before Nativity: 8:45matins, 10am Divine Liturgy 5pm Great Vespers</p>	<p><b>25</b> Holy Nativity 9am Matins 10am Divine Liturgy <i>Christ is born, Glorify Him!</i></p>	<p><b>26</b> Synaxis of the Theotokos</p>	<p><b>27</b> St. Stephen, Protomartyr (Fast Free)</p>	<p><b>28</b></p>	<p><b>29</b> The Holy Innocents (Fast Free)</p>	<p><b>30</b></p>
<p><b>31</b> Sun Before Theophany 8:45 Matins; 10am Div. Liturgy 6pm Great Vespers</p>						

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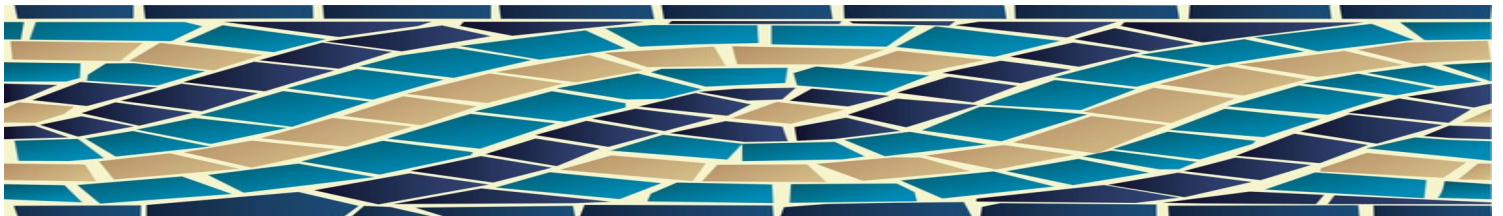
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Thank you!



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**AS AN EXPRESSION OF CHRIST'S LOVE,**

**FOCUS exists to serve the poor by bringing together Orthodox Christian churches and community partners to provide Food, Occupation, Clothing, Understanding, and Shelter and other assistance to address the needs of local communities.**

**For the Month of December Our Parish will continue to collect:**

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Boxed Oatmeal 12 oz (High Need)  
Shelf stable milk 32 oz (VERY High Need)**