



THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

DECEMBER 2007 VOLUME 15 • ISSUE 11

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SPECIAL INSERT:

Valuable information on
2007 Special Tax Benefits
for Seniors Making
Donations to the Building
Fund from their IRA!

QUICK NEWS



Our new HOPE and JOY ministries children joined the GOYA teens for a fun and exciting Turkey Bowl on Thanksgiving Sunday this year. Among the activities were flag football, soccer and relay races, all enjoyed during a magnificent fall day in Pittsburgh. For photos of this event, as well as highlights from the Philoptochos 75th Anniversary, see the Community Life Photo Journal, on pages 5-7 of this issue. And remember, they are posted on our web site, too!

HOLY TRINITY GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH • PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!



The enrollment of Joseph and Mary at the time of the census. Before them the governor Cyrenius and enrolment officer are depicted. Above the scene the inscription reads "...as the descendant of the house of David, Joseph to be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife, great with child."



The Nativity of the Lord. It brings all Heaven and earth into the cosmic and saving event: the Theotokos gives birth to the Only-begotten Son of God; the Star guides the Magi, the Angels proclaim the Good News to the Shepherds; the midwives tend to the newborn child and Joseph ponders.



The inquiring of the Magi by Herod. Three wise men from the East meet with King Herod as described in the Gospels. They inform Herod about the baby who shall become King.

Scenes from the Birth of Christ from the historic Church of Chora in Constantinople. Photographed during the 2007 Pilgrimage.

Our Mission: To proclaim and live the Orthodox Christian Faith in its fullness as faithful members of the Body of Christ

THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

About the Herald

The Herald is the Monthly Newsletter of
Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church

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About the Parish

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Holy Trinity Church is a parish of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh (www.odpgh.org) and Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (www.goarch.org) under the Spiritual Jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church Parish Administration

Clergy

Rev. Fr. John Touloumes, Proistamenos

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Parish Council

Louis T. Loomis, President

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Philoptochos Esther Ladakos, Pres.

GOYA.....Pres. Becky Touloumes, Advisor

ChoirJohn Nychis, Director

Over 50.....Stella Athanasiou, Pres.

St. Lydia Study.....Stacy Dickos, Coordinator

Cemetery..... Bill Fiedler, Chairman

Greek SchoolEffie Kilantonis, Coordinator

Social Hall.....Kathy Romanias, Coordinator



There is no need to ask if we ought to spread or propagate the glory of God, whether by writing, or by mouth, or by good works.

This is something we are obliged to do according to our ability and opportunity."

(Saint John of Kronstadt)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we gather soon to listen to the beloved Christmas Gospel during our celebration of the Nativity, it gives us cause for great thanks that we have been given the gift of hearing it. We live in a country where we are able to choose our faith and worship in freedom. Many people around the world do not enjoy the same. As we recently celebrated Veteran's Day on November 11th, may we never forget those who have paid the ultimate price to guarantee that gift.

But we would not have the Great and Holy Faith of Christ before us had not the Theotokos said "yes" to the Archangel's bidding; had not Joseph chosen the path of righteous faith and protected her; had not the angels been obedient in proclaiming the news; had not the shepherds and the wise men gone and sought Him out; had not the Evangelists and Apostles written it down; had not the martyrs affirmed it through their blood; had not the Councils weeded out the false teachings through the Holy Spirit; had not the faithful priests received and cared for their flocks in the faith from generation to generation; had not mothers taught their children of the love of God; had not our own ancestors carried it with them from their beloved homelands like the Israelites carrying the Ark with them into the Promised Land; had not our parents or someone else brought us to the life-saving rebirth of Holy Baptism and Chrismation; had not someone made that blessed bread which was and is offered and consecrated for us to return to "Bethlehem," which means, "The House of Bread," the Bread of Life, that is, our very Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the beginning and the end.

So why does St. John of Kronstadt say above that there is no need to even ask if we have a responsibility and a calling to continue that holy work? Because it is our part in the work of the Gospel that has been proclaimed to save us and yet remains to be proclaimed by us for the salvation of those who have not yet heard the Good News. We cannot remain silent. When the Pharisees challenged Jesus to keep His disciples quiet about the wonders of God, the Lord himself responded: "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Luke 19.40). How, then, can we keep this gift to ourself?

Some people frown upon passing a gift on, "re-gifting" as it is now known. But Saint Peter later reminds us that we have each been given the greatest gift in Jesus Christ, given to us for the salvation of ourselves and others: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." Now that's a gift that should be "re-gifted" to all generations! Christ is Born! Glorify Him! Proclaim Him!

Yours in Him,

Herald Personal Sponsor for this Issue:

**In loving memory of Father John Kostpolos
from his family**



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Christmas Pageant Rehearsals . . December 2, 9, 14 & 15

During the month of December, there will be various rehearsals for the Holy Trinity Christmas Pageant. Please take note of them:

Sun. Dec. 2 & 9: Various practices in or after class. Each teacher will have information for their class.

Fri. Dec. 14: GOYA will be preparing Christmas bread from 4:00 to 9:00 pm, during which rehearsals will take place for Grades 7-12.

Sat. Dec. 15: The complete cast rehearsal for the Holy Trinity Church School Christmas Pageant will be held on Saturday morning, December 15, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. Please note: Grades 5 to 12 are asked to be present at 9:00 a.m. to rehearse speaking parts; Grades 4 and under are asked to be present at 10:00 for the complete rehearsal. All students and staff are requested to be present. "Bonus" attendance credit will be given for all students who participate in the rehearsal.

PAGEANT REHEARSAL SCHEDULE FOR SATURDAY, DEC. 15

Grades 5 to 12.....9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Grades 4 & under.....10:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Church School Christmas Pageant December 16

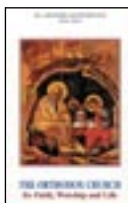
The Holy Trinity Church School ministry will be offering its annual Christmas Pageant on Sunday, December 16. All the students of the Church School will be involved in this event. On that day, following Holy Communion, all Church School students and staff will depart for their classes and final preparations for the pageant. All our parishioners are asked to stay for the pageant and coffee hour in the social hall

No Church School Class December 23, 30

Attention, parents: there will be no Church School class on December 23 and 30 due to the holiday celebrations, so please plan on being in church together as a family for the entire service on those days.

St. Lydia's Orthodox Women's Study December 13

The St. Lydia Women's Study Ministry is a place for women to share in fellowship and to study scripture, the Orthodox Faith and family life in today's world. The meetings take place every other week on Thursday mornings at 9:30 a.m. at the home of Jan Petredis in Wexford (NOTE: During December, meetings will be held at the home of Susan Zikos). New participants are always welcome! The fellowship is enjoyable and the approach is casual, but the subjects are important for today's women and families. The source text for this year's study is: "The Orthodox Church: Its Faith, Worship and Life" by Fr. Antonios Alevisopoulos. Books will be available at the meetings. Remaining dates for the Winter/Spring are: Dec. 13; Jan. 3, 17 & 31; Feb. 14 & 28; Mar. 13 & 27; Apr. 10; May 8. All Holy Trinity women are welcome and invited to bring a friend! For further information on this worthwhile and informative group or for directions to the meetings, call Stacy Dickos at 412-367-0925.



St. Nikodemos Men's Fellowship December 4

The St. Nikodemos Men's Study Fellowship is an Orthodox men's fellowship, study and discussion group which meets on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at from 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m. at the office of TriadUSA, Suite 1600, Three Gateway Center, downtown. The group seeks to provide a regular meeting for working men to discuss issues of faith, work and family. It is open to all interested men and has been centrally located downtown to accommodate easy access for the lunchtime meetings. The remaining dates for 2007/2008 are: Dec. 4, Dec. 18, Jan. 15, Feb. 5, Feb. 19, Mar. 4, Mar. 18, Apr. 1, Apr. 15, May 6 & May 20. Everyone is welcome. Meetings start at 12 Noon and finish at 1:00 pm. For directions, call Gus Georgiadis at 412-880-4999.

Orthodox Studies Forum December 5

Now in its second year, the Orthodox Studies Forum is designed for adults who are interested in learning more about the Orthodox Christian Faith. It is led by Father Radu Bordeianu and is for both those who have been Orthodox all their lives and want to learn more as well as those seeking to embrace Orthodoxy from another background and grow further in their faith. The group is currently finishing the book, "The Orthodox Church" by Bishop Kallistos Ware and will continue in January with a new selection, "The Eucharist" by Fr. Alexander Schemann.

The group meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month from 7:00-8:30 p.m. September through May at the La Roche College campus, 9000 Babcock Blvd., Pittsburgh (next to UPMC Passavant Hospital). The room is in the A.J. Palumbo Science Center, Room SC106. (Please note: The group will not meet on December 19 due to the Christmas holiday.)

YOUTH MINISTRIES

HOPE and JOY Christmas Theatre December 1

The HOPE and JOY ministries for young children are planning on a fun Christmas event for young people and would like to know how many families would like to attend. The event is a live theatrical performance at the Little Lake Theatre in Canonsburg on Saturday, December 1, at 1:30 p.m. The show is "Madeline's Christmas". Tickets are \$12 for adults and \$10 children and must be reserved ahead of time for group rates. Please contact Penny Georgiadis at 724-935-2383 today if you are interested in attending.

GOYA Christmas Fireside Chat December 9

The GOYA will hold its annual Christmas Fireside Chat at the home of Maria Georgiadis on Sunday, December 9 from 5:00 to 8:30 p.m. Please call Maria at 724-935-2383 to let her know you are coming.

GOYA Christmas Bread Sale December 16

The GOYA will be making freshly-baked Greek Christmas Bread available at Coffee Hour on Sunday, December 16. Plan on buying some for the holidays! Thanks!



WORSHIP LIFE

Weekday ServicesDecember

Please take note of the following weekday Liturgies for the feast days in the month of December. Please note that we are currently on the time schedule for "Winter Hours:" Orthros is at 9:00 a.m., followed by Divine Liturgy at 10:00.

Mon. Dec. 3.....St. John the Hesychast

Followed by the Philoptochos Senior Citizens Christmas Luncheon

Tue. Dec. 4St. Barbaba/St. John of Damascus

Wed. Dec. 5.....St. Savas the Sanctified

Wed. Dec. 5*, 7pm.....Vespers of St. Nicholas

Thu. Dec. 6*St. Nicholas the Wonderworker

** All services for St. Nicholas held at St. Nicholas Cathedral*

Tue. Dec. 11*, 7pmVespers of St. Spyridon

Wed. Dec. 12*St. Spyridon the Wonderworker

** All services for St. Spyridon held at St. Spyridon in Monessen.*

Wed. Dec. 12, 6:00 p.m.....Paraclesis

Christmas/Theophany Services December/January

Please remember these festal celebrations for Christmas and Theophany and participate in them with your family:

Mon. Dec. 24, 10 amRoyal Hours of the Nativity

This special service offers readings, prophecies and hymns which point to and interpret the Divine Incarnation.

Mon. Dec. 24, 7pm.....Vespers of the Nativity

This service "opens the liturgical day" and begins the celebration of the Nativity. This is a combination of Great Vespers and the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil. Those wishing to receive Holy Communion should prepare by abstaining from food and drink from noon until the service.

Mon. Dec. 25.....Divine Liturgy of the Nativity of Christ

9:00am Orthros/10:00 am Liturgy. This is the main service of the Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Open the best gift first by attending Liturgy with your family and receiving the Holy Mysteries together! Make it a family tradition to keep the most important thing about Christmas the most important thing in your home!

Mon. Dec. 31Vespers of St. Basil the Great

This will be a Vespers Liturgy for January 1, held the evening of the feast at 6:00 p.m., prior to the New Year's Eve celebration.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Christmas Gift Tree Tags Now Available in Coffee Hour

The Holy Trinity Philoptochos is once again sponsoring the Christmas Gift Tree project. This popular annual appeal provides us with a direct way to help poor and needy children of the area enjoy not just presents, but the knowledge that someone cares enough about them to go out of the way for a special act of love. The gifts will be offered to the Auberle Home for Children. Both provide help for children who are needy, abused or in some other type of situation where they would not otherwise receive gifts or attention at the holidays. Over the years, Holy Trinity Church has provided literally hundreds of gifts through this project and the agencies we have helped have always marvelled at the generous outpouring of love from our parishioners. Please look for the tags on the tree at Coffee Hour. There is either an indication of what type of gift to buy or what age and gender the child is. Thank you and God bless you!

Saint George Chapel Items Still Available

The newly-produced brochure on the Iconography Master Plan and Ecclesiastical Items List for the Saint George Chapel at Holy Trinity Cemetery was included in the last issue of the *Herald*. If you or your family are interested in donating one or more items, please review the brochure and return the form on the back page as soon as possible. Various items are still available, including many of the liturgical items listed on the back page. Also, the iconographer is scheduled to begin his work this month.

Please understand that many items are needed and all donors will be appropriately acknowledged. If your first choice for a donated item has already been offered by someone else, please either consider choosing another item or allowing your gift to be applied wherever it is needed. In this way, all our offerings are made with the common goal of completing this sacred work to the glory of God and in honor of those laid to rest at our holy cemetery. The brochure is also available on our web site at www.HolyTrinityPgh.org.

Year-End Stewardship Matters

The Stewardship Committee and Parish Council thank all our Holy Trinity Stewards for their pledges and contributions this year and ask that everyone brings their offerings up to date for 2007. Please take note that all offerings you would like listed as received during the 2007 tax year (Jan. 1-Dec. 31) for tax deduction purposes must be received at the church by Dec. 31. This is an IRS regulation. You may indicate the offerings to apply for either your 2007 pledge (to pay the balance) or the 2008 pledge (to pay ahead) and your pledge balance will be accurately calculated no matter when the offering is made. Year-end statements will be sent out at the end of January. Thanks! Also, 2008 Holy Trinity Stewardship Pledge Cards will be distributed on Sunday, December 16.

Give a Gift of Love This Christmas



As your family prepares for the Feast of the Nativity, please remember your brothers and sisters in need. The feast of Christmas is for all people as it ushers in new hope and new life. The good news first announced by the Angel to the shepherds can continue echoing this Christmas as we exchange these gifts of love with the "least of our brethren."

Your support of IOCC brings life-sustaining programs to children and families suffering from war, poverty, disease, man-made and natural disasters. May you and yours enjoy the true nature of the Christmas feast this year. Please share it with others by supporting the work of IOCC.



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INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES



Youth & Family Hayride October 27, 2007



Oct. 27: Holy Trinity Church hosted its annual Youth and Family Hayride at Reilly's Summer Seat Farm in Wexford. Two wagons full of fall fun ended with a campfire, snacks and the story of St. Euphrosynos the Cook.



GOYA Retreat November 9-11, 2007

Nov. 9-11: Holy Trinity GOYAns gathered with other teens from around the Metropolis during the 2007 Fall Metropolis GOYA Retreat at Antiochian Village in Ligonier, PA. Below the group gathers for Divine Liturgy in the St. Ignatius Chapel. At right is the Holy Trinity crew.





October 28, 2007: Our newly-active "Young Adult Ministry" (YAM) gathered at the home of Nicole Fiedler for some planning, some food and just good fellowship.

November 25, 2007: The rest of this page features photos from the annual GOYA Turkey Bowl Flag Football Game, played according to tradition on Thanksgiving Sunday. This year the event also featured HOPE and JOY with soccer and lots of other fun activities.



"Turkey Bowl" November 25, 2007

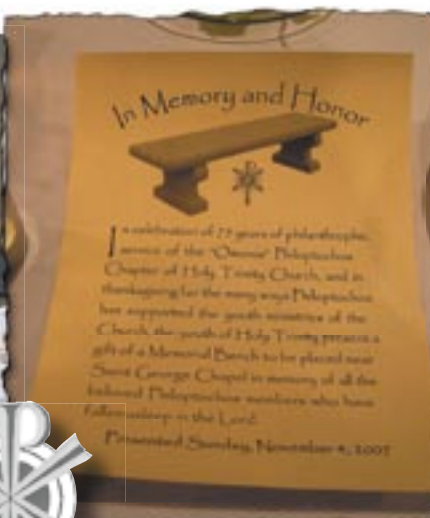


Our Holy Trinity "Omonia" Chapter of Philoptochos celebrated its 75th Anniversary on Sunday, November 4, 2007, with Philoptochos Sunday events and an Anniversary Luncheon. Our own members were joined by members of the Metropolis Philoptochos as well. Congratulations, ladies, on 75 years of God-inspired philanthropy and labors of love for the Holy Church and the people of God!



Philoptochos members attend Divine Liturgy together on Philoptochos Sunday and a memorial service is offered for all the departed members of the organization.

Holy Trinity Philoptochos Officers for the new term are installed following the Divine Liturgy on Philoptochos Sunday.



Holy Trinity Philoptochos Past Presidents are honored during the 75th Anniversary Luncheon with an icon presentation.



The youth of Holy Trinity present Philoptochos with a Memorial Bench at the Saint George Chapel at Holy Trinity Cemetery in honor of the departed Philoptochos members.



Hello to All My Precious Children!



One of my favorite stories during the Christmas season is "The Little Drummer Boy." But did you know that there is also a story about a girl who also wanted to honor Baby Jesus? It's "The Little Shepherd Girl" by Juliann Henry.

Every day Sarah would ask her father, "Tonight, Father, may I go out into the field with the flock? Please, may I go tonight?" And every day the answer from her father was the same: "No, Sarah, only the sons can protect the flock from the wolves. You are mean for weaving and making bread."

Young Sarah wanted to be a shepherd more than anything, even though usually only the boys were allowed to tend the sheep. But with a family full of girls, what was a father to do? So one day when she was a little older, Sarah's dreams came true when her father allowed her to go into the fields with her boy cousins. Her cousins were not so nice about it. They told her that being a shepherd was a job for a man, not for a girl.

On her first night out, however, she had a surprise that nobody expected. Instead of being scared by being attacked by wolves, they were overwhelmed when a host of heavenly angels surrounded them and announced the birth of a baby named Jesus! After hearing this exciting news, her cousins ran to Bethlehem to find the mysterious baby, and she tried to follow them, but she could not keep up with them. Read the book to see what happens next! It's in my library with lots of other good stuff!

Yiayia says that the Bible tells us about the visit of the angels to the shepherds in Luke 2.20, where it says, "the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." Yiayia also says this story



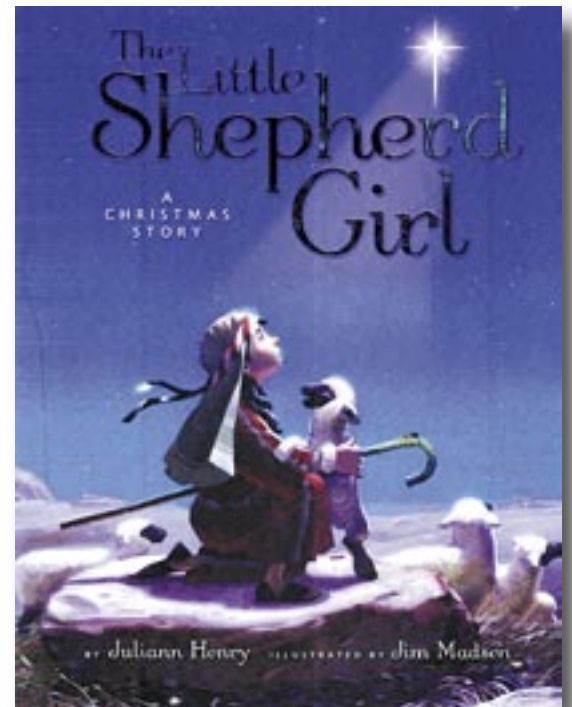
about a little shepherd reminds her of the story of the boy David, who was a shepherd before he became the King of Israel in the Book of Samuel. And you know what? This was not the first girl shepherd in the Bible, either! Before she married Jacob, guess what Rachel was? That's right - a shepherd! (Genesis 29.9).

This is someone's imagination about some of the things that might have happened that wonderful night. These and other folk tales help us imagine what it might have been like. But the most important things for us to know are what God actually said, and Yiayia says they're in

the Bible. So, I'll see you in church during the Christmas celebrations so we can have the really exciting stuff together!

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Love in Christ,
Spero



Part of a regular series of contributions by our resident "Gheronda" (respected elder clergy), Father John Androutsopoulos



Father John Androutsopoulos

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

Glory to God!

"And the angel said unto them (the shepherds), 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.'" (Luke 2: 10-11)

How much happiness this day of the Nativity of Jesus Christ holds! It is the day when we celebrate our deliverance from the darkness of sin and from our estrangement from God. For on this day, our Deliverer, our Redeemer, was born. What a great and awesome event!

Christmas comes and we hear announcement of the birth of Jesus given to the shepherds. We listen to the songs of the celestial messengers as they sound over the hills: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." We see the bright star over Bethlehem.

Inspired by the true meaning of Christmas, we feel that we are present in the humble cave of the city of David, there to see the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ our Savior. We see God in the face of the new-born Babe. In awe, we realize the depth of the love of the Father, Who is offering His Son to us for our redemption. Should not this be the spirit in which we celebrate this Great and Holy Day of our Savior's Birth?

Are You Ready For Christmas?

"She gave birth to her first Son, wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in a manger; there was no room for them to stay in the inn." (Luke 2:7).

Are you ready? "But I am not ready for Christmas!" "I have not bought all the gifts." "I have a lot of cookies to bake." "I am not ready!"

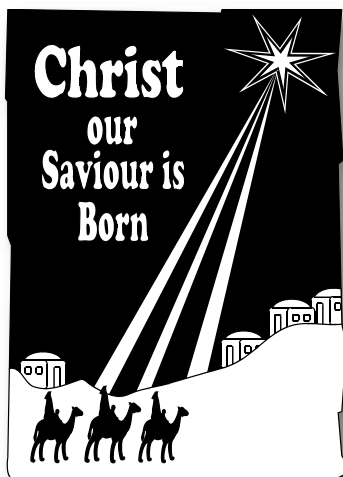
Is anyone ever ready for Christmas? We wonder. What does it take to be truly ready for Christmas? Is Christmas to be found in reindeer and Santa Claus? Is it a festival of lighted trees and candled windows? Is Christmas merely the joy of giving and receiving gifts, the spirit of friendliness and good will?

No, Christmas is an event in time and place, when God invaded the world with the birth of a baby. For "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son..."

(Galatians 4:4).

For the Christian, the Nativity of God's Son is the celebration of the way God has come into the world for all times and to all men. God in a decisive act entered the world as a man. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14).

God took centuries to get ready for Christmas. Yet how few were ready for Him the night Jesus Christ was born? The little town of Bethlehem was not ready. The innkeeper in the city of David was not ready. King Herod was not ready. The religious leaders of the time were not ready. They longed for a Messiah who would come in kingly glory with the scepter of David in his hand, but they were too obsessed with rites and ceremonies, with prestige and position, to be concerned about the birth of a child. "He came unto His own and His own receive Him not" (John 1.11).



"When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son..." but so few were ready for Him. Only a few simple shepherds watching their flocks on the Judean hills were ready. They, when they heard the glad good news of the angels, hastened to find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Only wise men from afar who dared to follow their star of hope in the faith that it would bring them to the new-born King.

How to Prepare for the Nativity

Is anyone ever ready for Christmas? Will we ever be ready? The answer is yes.

You will find the answer in this column in last month's Herald: "Repetition is the mother of knowledge."

During the Fast of the Nativity (Advent Season) we should think about this wonderful thing that God has done for us. Through prayer, fasting, Scripture reading and almsgiving, especially these coming "Holy-Days," and the coming of a cold winter, we will prepare our hearts and minds to be ready for the day when we will celebrate His Birth.

Also, let us not neglect our "Second Baptism," the Sacrament of Holy Confession, and let us receive Holy Communion, which is the spiritual food for our souls.

May the love of the New-Born Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ be born anew in our hearts this Christmas Day, and every day!

Χαρούμενα Χριστούγεννα! Merry Christmas!

With the love of the Newborn Savior,

Rev. Fr. John K. Androutsopoulos





Voula Hareras

ΤΑ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΓΕΝΝΑ ΜΑΣ ΑΝΕΒΑΖΟΥΝ ΚΑΙ ΜΑΣ ΠΡΟΣΓΕΙΩΝΟΥΝ

Ετοιμαζόμουν νά γράψω κάτι γιά τό δελτίον τής έκκλησίας, όταν ξεφυλλίζοντας ένα περιοδικό τό μάτι μου έπεσε σέ ένα πολύ ωραίο καλογραμμένο άρθρο. Πού τό έγραψε ό κύριος Ν.Ροδινός, ό όποιός γράφει πάντοτε ωραία άρθρο, ετσι σκέφτηκα νά τό αντίγράψω γιά νά έχετε καί έσεις τήν εύκαιρία νά απολαύσετε κάτι ωραίο καί ωφέλιμο. Καί τώρα τό άρθρο....

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΓΕΝΝΑ

Τά Χριστούγεννα είναι ή γιορτή πού μάς ανεβάζει δυναμικά καί ταυτόχρονα μάς προσγειώνει ομαλά. Μέσα στό θόρυβο, στήν παραζάλη, στήν επιδεικτική άλαζονεία καί τήν έγωιστική μας αύτάρκεια, μέσα στήν άκόρεστη δίψα μας γιά αχαλίνωτη πολυτέλεια καί σπατάλη, έρχεται ταπεινά καί άθόρυβα τό Θείο Βρέφος νά μάς έπαναφέρει στήν τάξη. Καί παράλληλα νά μάς άνοίξει τό δρόμο πρós τόν ούρανό.

Καί τούτο, γιατί έκεί στήν τότε φτωχή Βηθλεέμ, τήν αίματοβαμμένη καί τόσο παραγμένη σήμερα—συνέβησαν έδώ καί δυό χιλιάδες χρόνια πρωτόγνωρα καί παράξενα πράγματα, Πρωτόγνωρα καί γιά τήν δική μας έποχή.

Εξηγούμε, δανειζόμενος τήν εικόνα από τόν ιερό Χρυσόστομο, ό όποιός σέ μιάν όμιλία του έλεγε, [Όταν πρόκειται νά μπει σέ κάποια πόλη ό Βασιλιάς ύψώνουν λάβαρα καί ανάβουν λαμπάδες, όσοι κατέχουν άξιώματα καί τίς έξουσίες τόν συναντούν μέ χαρούμενη, έπίσημη έμφάνιση, καί ύπάρχουν αύλοί, καί φλογέρες, καί κιθάρες καί κάθε είδος μουσικής, καί λαμπρές στολές καί τιμές καί μεγάλη έπίσημότητα] Αύτά τότε, παράλληλα όμως καί σήμερα όταν ύποδεχόμαστε τόν άρχηγό ενός Κράτους.

Όμως κι έδώ είναι πού τά Χριστούγεννα μάς προσγειώνουν, όταν ήλθε στήν γή [ό Βασιλεύς τών Βασιλευόντων καί Κύριος τών κυριευόντων] δηλαδή ό Βασιλιάς τού ούρανού καί τής Γής, δέν συνέβη κάτι τέτοιο. Συνέβησαν όλα τά αντίθετα. Τόν ύποδέχτηκε μιά σπηλιά καί μιά φάτνη, τόν κράτησε στήν άγκαλιά μιά νεαρή Μητέρα άγνωστη στόν φαντασμένο κόσμο τών πλουσιών καί τών άρχόντων τής κοινωνίας, μέ φτώχεια πολλή καί στέρηση μεγάλη. Καί όμως άν ό Βασιλιάς τών ουρανίων καί τών έπιγείων καί τών καταχθονίων ήθελε, μπορούσε νά 'ρθεί όλόλαμπρος σείοντας τόν ούρανό, τρανάζοντας τήν γή, αφήνοντας άστραπές καί βροντές καί συνοδευόμενος από τίς μυριάδες ουρανίων άγγέλων....

Αλλά δέν ήρθε έτσι, γιατί ήθελε νά σώσει, γιατί ήθελε νά καταπατήσει τήν ανθρώπινη άλαζονεία, νά εξαλείψει τήν ανθρώπινη ματαιοδοξία. Γι' αυτό δέν έγινε μόνο άνθρωπος κατά πάντα όμοιος μέ μάς, χωρίς τήν άμαρτία. Έγινε ή μάλλον ήλθε ως άνθρωπος άδύνατος καί άγνωστος. Διάλεξε μιά μητέρα όλότελα άγνωστη στήν ύψηλή κοινωνία, ένα κατάλυμα προορισμένο γιά άλογα ζώα, ανεχόμενος από τήν ώρα τής γεννήσεώς Του τό έσχατο όριο φτώχειας, διότι ποιά γυναίκα κι ή πιό φτωχή δέν έχει ένα στρώμα γιά ν' απιθώσει

τό νεογέννητο τής. Ωστόσο ό Κύριος τού ούρανού καί τής Γής δέν ξάπλωσε σέ κρεβάτι παρά μόνον πρόχειρα σέ φάτνη μέ στρώμα τό σανό τών ζώων.

Καί ούτε σέ κατάλυμα αλλά σέ σπήλαιο γεμάτο δυσσομία,.... τέτοια ήταν ή άρχή τής εισόδου του στό κόσμο μέ τέτοιου είδους λαμπρότητα καί τέτοιου είδους δόξα....

Ετσι μάς άνοίξε τόν δρόμο πρós τόν ούρανό, γιατί μέχρι τότε ή άλαζονεία κι ή ματαιοδοξία βασίλευαν στόν κόσμο. Τίς είχε διδάξει ό έχθρός τής ψυχής μας, πού ήταν καί είναι έχθρός τού Θεού. Καί τό φοβερό είναι πώς ό διάβολος δέν ήταν από τήν άρχή τέτοιος ήταν άγγελος άγαθός όλωφύτεινος, έγινε όμως διάβολος καί άρχοντας τών σκοτεινών δυνάμεων καί από τότε έχθρεύεται τόν Θεό, καί τόν άνθρωπο, γιατί τόν έκαμε τέτοιον ό έγωισμός καί ή άλαζονεία του. Τό είπε ωραία ό Άπόστολος Παύλος συμβουλευόντας τόν μαθήτή του, Τιμόθεο νά προσέχει όταν χειροτονεί Έπίσκοπο τής έκκλησίας—Πρόσεχε τού έγραψε, νά μήν χειροτονήσεις κάποιον πού είναι νεοκατήχητος καί ό όποιός μόλις πρόσφατα έγινε μέλος τής έκκλησίας, γιά νά μήν περηφανευθεί καί πέσει στήν ίδια καταδίκη τής ύπερηφάνειας καί τής μάταιης δόξας, πού έπεσε ό διάβολος.

Καθώς λοιπόν ζούμε σ' έναν κόσμο πού μαστίζεται από τό πάθος τής άλαζονείας, τής έγωιστικής επιδείξεως, τής πρόσκαιρης καί μάταιης δόξας, όλα αύτά έχουνε κοινή ρίζα τήν όποία ό ιερός Χρυσόστομος όνομάζει—άπόνοια—καί λέει ότι αύτή έγινε—αίτιον πάντων τών κακών—τά Χριστούγεννα μάς προσγειώνουν. Η έκκλησία γιορτάζοντας τή γέννηση τού Σωτήρος καί προβάλλοντας τό σπήλαιο, τή φάτνη, τό Θείο Βρέφος, τήν Παρθένο, τόν Ιωσήφ, τούς ποιμένες, ούσιαστικά μάς καλεί νά σταματήσουμε νά δουλεύουμε στόν άπληστο άφέντη, πού άκούει στίς έντολές τού άνθρωποκτόνου καί πού λέγεται άλαζονεία, γιατί αύτή είναι τό πιό επικίνδυνο καί επιζήμιο από τά ανθρώπινα πάθη. Επειδή τό πάθος αύτό δέν ίκανοποιείται μέ τίποτε δέν σταματάει ποτέ καί πουθενά. Κρατάει τόν άνθρωπο σέ μιά συνεχή ταραχή, καθιστώντας τή ζωή μας άγχωτική, πυρετική καί δραματική. Διότι μάς δένει όλόένα καί πιό σφιχτά μέ τό χώμα, μέ τήν Γή, μάς άναγκάζει νά λατρεύουμε τήν κούφια δόξα κινηγώντας χίμαιρες.

Νά θυσιάζουμε στή ματαιότητα καί στή φθορά πού καλλιεργεί μέ άσθματικούς ρυθμούς καί μέ άκόρεστη δίψα ό άποστάτης κόσμος. Αύτός πού πασχίζει νά μάς μαγνητίσει καί νά μάς κλείσει τό δρόμο πρós τόν ούρανό. Η πού σάν 'αγριος ώκεανός άπειλεί νά μάς πνίξει. Ενας κόσμος πού γιά νά θυμηθώ τόν Πασκάλ, είναι πολύ ματαιόδοξος γιατί δέν βλέπει τήν ματαιοδοξία του, Γιά τήν όποία ό ιερός Χρυσόστομος λέει πώς είναι τό πρώτο πάθος πού φυτρώνει στήν ανθρώπινη καρδιά καί τό τελευταίο πού ξεριζώνεται μόν μέ τόν θάνατο. Εύλογημένη ή ώρα πού θά καταλάβουν οί έγωιστές άφέντη πού δέν έπιτρέπει άλλους κυρίαρχους δίπλα τους. Καί ό όποιός τελικά δέν κάνει τίποτε άλλο από τού νά τούς έξουθενώνει καί νά τούς κλείνει τό δρόμο πρós τήν άληθινή καί αιώνια δόξα τού Ούρανού. Τό Θείο Βρέφος τής Βηθλεέμ μάς στέλνει μέ τήν Γέννησή του κι' αύτό τό μεγάλο καί σωτήριο μήνυμα. Όλοι μας νοσταλγούμε μιά μόνιμη, άληθινή δόξα σέ μιά κοσμογονία, μπορούμε όμως νά τήν βρούμε με μόνον στήν παλιά [Τήν διά Χριστού] κοσμογονία πού είναι όπως έγραψε κάποιος—ή νεότερη κοσμογονία κάθε νέας κοσμογονίας—

N. Ροδινός

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No Ordinary Life: The Only-Begotten Son of God

As man he was baptized, but he absolved sins as God; he needed no purifying rites himself—his purpose was to hallow water. As man he was put to the test, but as God he came through victorious—yes, bids us be of good cheer, because he has conquered the world. He hungered—yet he fed thousands. He is indeed “living, heavenly bread.” He thirsted—yet he exclaimed: “Whosoever thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” Indeed he promised that believers would become fountains. He was tired—yet he is the “rest” of the weary and the burdened. He was overcome by heavy sleep—yet he goes lightly over the sea, rebukes winds, and relieves the drowning Peter. He pays tax—yet he uses a fish to do it; indeed he is emperor over those who demand the tax.... He weeps, yet he puts an end to weeping. He asks where Lazarus is laid—he was man; yet he raises Lazarus—he was God. He is sold, and cheap was the price—thirty pieces of silver; yet he buys back the world at the mighty cost of his own blood. A sheep, he is led to the slaughter—yet he shepherds Israel and now the whole world as well... He is weakened, wounded—yet he cures every disease and every weakness. He is brought up to the tree and nailed to it—yet by the tree of life he restores us. Yes, he saves even a thief crucified with him; he wraps all the visible world in darkness... He surrenders his life, yet he has power to take it again. Yes, the veil is rent, for things of heaven are being revealed, rocks split, and dead men have an earlier awakening. He dies, but he vivifies and by death destroys death. He is buried, yet he rises again. He goes down to Hades, yet he leads souls up, ascends to heaven, and will come to judge quick and dead, and to probe discussions like these. If the first set of expressions starts you going astray, the second set takes your error away.

Excerpted from The Five Theological Orations of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, 4th century

Scripture of the Month: “The Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.” (1 John 4.14)