



THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

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QUICK NEWS



November 3, 2012: Holy Trinity children offer an enthusiastic welcome to His Eminence Metropolitan Savas at the Dinner-Dance. Want to see more scenes from the life and ministries of Holy Trinity Church? See the Community Life Photo Journal on pgs. 6-10 or visit our online photos and videos at www.HolyTrinityPgh.org.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!



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

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George Danis

Charles Petredis

George Dickos

Vasilios Scoumis

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Stephanie Sedor

Troy Geanopulos

Alex Trivilas

Louis Kort

Gerri Valliant

Ministries

Please visit the Holy Trinity website at www.HolyTrinityPgh.org for descriptions and contact information on Holy Trinity Church's ministries, including educations, youth, senior, family and cultural opportunities. There is something for everyone, so please get involved today!



EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING FROM YOU, THE FATHER OF LIGHTS.

(From the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrystom,
based on a passage from James 1.17)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Christ,

Well, here we are again at Christmas and it's time to think about GIFTS! Now, before you pull out your credit cards and super-sale coupons, this is not what it appears. No need to wake up at midnight, save ads or be one of the first 100 customers! Let's leave that to the merchants. Today, as we approach the Holy Nativity of Christ, I would like to walk the entire idea of gifts back into the scriptures and demonstrate that gift-giving is indeed a wonderful faith tradition, but it is one whose proper focus is on the One who offers only perfect gifts: our Gracious God. And in doing so, perhaps we can find out a bit more about what a "perfect" gift is. To do so, I would like to offer the first example of gift-giving in the Bible as an encouragement for us each to recapture the "perfect" spirit of giving from the Giver of "perfect" gifts, and thus maybe alleviate a bit of the stress that has led 45% of Americans in a recent survey to say that they would just rather skip Christmas all together due to the stress and financial strain it causes (see the top of page 14).

Did you know that the first mention giving a "gift" from one person to another is found very early in the Bible in Genesis 33? Please take a moment to open your Bible and take a look. It's the story of Jacob and Esau, brothers who were separated and at odds for 22 years. When Jacob decides to finally return to his homeland, he fears that Esau is still so angry with him for his betrayal years ago and that he might do something rash. So, directed by God to right this wrong and be reunited with his brother, he sends messages of reconciliation and a gift of hundreds of animals ahead of himself in hopes of a favorable reception. To Jacob's surprise, instead of being greeted with hostility, "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept" (Genesis 33.4). And when Esau tries to return the gift to Jacob (perhaps this is also the first biblical account of a gift return!), Jacob insists on Esau keeping it, saying, "I pray you, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favor have you received me. Accept, I pray you, my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough" (v. 10-11).

Imagine what our Christmas season would be like if all our gifts were of such godly purposes? And what would those purposes be? 1) to be reconciled with one another; 2) to recognize that God has been so gracious with us that we give out of the thanksgiving for that abundance; and 3) to see the face of God in our brother and be the face of God for him. That face is the face of unconditional love and forgiveness. That is the face of a previously unseen God that finally, with the coming of the Messiah and the incarnation of the Son of God, we can see in the face of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. That is the ultimate Gift of Christmas from the Giver of the Perfect Gift.

Please use the gift of time this year to do the same: reconcile, forgive and love. The things of this world will be consumed by moths and rust (Matthew 6.19). Every good gift is, indeed, from the Father of Lights. Enjoy them and share them while there is time. "From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory for ever. Amen" (Romans 11.36). Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Herald Personal Sponsor for this Issue:

"Spero the Orthodox Church Mouse"

For the health of Our Heavenly Father's Precious Children

WORSHIP LIFE

Weekday Services. December

Please take note of the following upcoming liturgical dates. Unless otherwise indicated, Orthros starts at 8:30 a.m., followed by Divine Liturgy at 9:30 a.m. and weekday services are held at the Saint George Chapel (SG), 8941 Ringesen Road, Allison Park.

- Dec. 4:** St. Barbara the Great Martyr (SG)
- Dec. 5*, 10:00am:** St. Savas the Sanctified
**Services for St. Savas held at the Metropolis Chapel*
- Dec. 5*, 7:00pm:** Great Vespers of St. Nicholas
- Dec. 6*, 10:00am:** Liturgy - St. Nicholas the Wonderworker
**Services for St. Nicholas held at St. Nicholas Cathedral*
- Dec. 11*, 7:00pm:** Great Vespers of St. Spyridon
- Dec. 12*, 10:00am:** Liturgy - St. Spyridon
**Services for St. Spyridon held at St. Spyridon, Monessen*
- Dec. 12, 6:00pm:** Monthly Paraclesis to the Theotokos (SG)
- Dec. 24/25:** The Nativity of Christ (see schedule below)
- Dec. 31:** Vesperal Liturgy for St. Basil the Great (SG)

Services for the Nativity of Christ

Please remember these festal celebrations for the Nativity of Christ and participate in them with your family. Please note the location of each: HT=Holy Trinity; SG=St. George.

Mon. Dec. 24, 10 am..... Royal Hours of the Nativity

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

Mon. Dec. 24, 6:30pm.....Vesperal Liturgy 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 abstain from food and drink from noon until the service. (HT)

Tue. Dec. 25. 8:30am Orthros/9:30am Liturgy.....The Nativity

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!* (HT)

New Year's Eve Liturgy



Want to start the New Year out "on the right foot?" Well, point that foot toward the Saint George Chapel and start your evening with the first Divine Liturgy of the New Year by celebrating the Feast of Saint Basil with Vesperal Liturgy at 6:30 p.m. Be sure to prepare as usual for an evening Liturgy, with no food or drink following your noon meal, and of course the appropriate prayers of preparation for Holy Communion.

There is no better way to sanctify yourself, your family and the entire New Year. "Kali Hronia!" Happy New Year to all!

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Christmas Pageant Rehearsals. Dec. 9, 15

This year's Christmas pageant will continue our exciting new "travelling" format from last year to take advantage of our interim facilities, so everyone will need to be there to find out what to do. It's going to be exciting, so please don't miss out!

Sun. Dec. 9: Rehearsal and room setup will take place for all grades following Divine Liturgy and Church School. Please plan on staying for a while after Liturgy to make sure everything is completed. Bring a change of clothes if you want.

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 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Please note: All grades are asked to be present at 9:00 a.m. for rehearsal. "Bonus" attendance credit will be given for all students who participate in the rehearsal.

Church School Christmas Pageant December 16

The Holy Trinity Church School ministry will be offering its annual Christmas Pageant this year 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. Also, please note: Coffee Hour that day is sponsored by the Holy Trinity Church School Alumni. Any alumni that would like to help, please contact Presvytera Becky.

No Church School Class Dec. 23, 30

Attention, parents: there will be no Church School class on December 23 and 30 due to the holiday celebrations, so please join together to worship as a family on those days.

Saint Lydia Women's Study December 13

The St Lydia Women's Study Fellowship is now in its 13th year! If you have missed out on this wonderful time with fellow sisters in Christ sharing, learning and growing in faith, maybe this is the year you can join in!

This year the ministry is studying selections of spiritual guidance topics from Elder Paisios of Mount Athos (+1994), one of the most read and beloved elders of the contemporary Orthodox world. His works have only recently been translated into English. The materials will be distributed at the meeting. As always, participants are also encouraged to bring an Orthodox Study Bible as well. All women of any age are welcome. If you can't make every session, don't worry. Each topic is independent. Please try to attend as many as you can!

Meetings are held on Thursday from 9:30 am-11:15 am at St. George Chapel, 8941 Ringeisen Rd., Allison Park. Before the study, the Chapel is open for quiet personal prayer time from 9:30-10:00, then the study begins promptly at 10:00 and goes until 11:15. The topic for the December 13 session is: "Too Many Worries Will Distance Us From God."

YOUTH MINISTRIES

HOPE & JOY Christmas Carols at Vincentian Dec. 7

The HOPE and JOY ministries will be visiting the Vincentian Home on the evening of Friday, December 7, to sing Christmas carols to the patients. Due to limited parking space at the facility, all those participating are asked to meet at the church (495 Browns Lane) at 6:00pm, where a car pool will be formed to transport the children and parents to Vincentian. Thank you for reaching out with Christmas joy to the elderly residents of the area. For information, contact Joanne Germanos at 412-252-3996 or 7germanos@gmail.com.

GOYA Christmas Fireside Chat. December 9

The GOYA will hold its annual Christmas Fireside Chat on Sunday, December 9 from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the home of Nikki Hodge Please watch the GOYA Facebook page and email list for additional information on this annual seasonal teen ministry event.

NEW CHURCH PROJECT NEWS

Keep Up With Construction Progress Online!



Want to keep up with the construction progress of the new Holy Trinity Church? Simply visit our website, www.HolyTrinityPgh.org, and click the Gallery link for lots of photos. There are also links to up-close walking tour videos with descriptions about construction

progress and features of the new facilities. For direct access to the videos or to "Like" and post comments about them, visit Facebook.com/holytrinitypgh.

OPENING OF THE NEW CHURCH: JUNE 22, 2013!

It's still a while away, but when you start making your summer plans for 2013, keep the weekend of June 22-24 clear for the "Thyranoixia" (Official Opening) of the new Holy Trinity Church! His Eminence Metropolitan Savas will preside over a weekend including the Opening of the Doors service and Liturgy on Saturday and Pentecost Liturgy on Sunday. We will then continue with our first Feast Day Liturgy on the Monday of the Holy Spirit, June 24. Details will be forthcoming ... but save those dates!



Capital Campaign Reminder: We Still Need You!

With all the excitement of the new church progress, we are almost there but we still have a way to go. Please remember that without the continued stewardship of our members and on-going meeting of commitments to the Capital Campaign

for the new church, none of this would be possible. Please remember to maintain your designated contributions schedule so we can move forward as planned, and if you have still not made your Capital Campaign pledge, the time to do it is now! Thank you, good and faithful stewards!

COMMUNITY NEWS

Parish Council 2013-2014 Election Results & Installation

Thank you to all those whose names were submitted for Parish Council elections this year. The community has voted the following members on the Council for the 2013-2014 term: Joyce Athanasiou, George Danis, Andrew Janis, Leo Loomis, Charles Petredis, Stephanie Sedor and Gerri Valliant. Continuing on for the remainder of their two-year term through 2013 are: Dean A. Balouris, George Dickos, Jason Farmakis, Louis Kort, Marios Kritioris and Alex Trilivas. Many thanks to those completing their service to the Parish Council this year after numerous years of service: Chris T. Balouris, Troy Geanopulos and Vas Scoumis. Parish Council installation will be held on Sunday, January 6, followed by the election of officers. May God be our guide and strength in all things!

Holy Trinity Hospitality: Welcome to the Team!

Anyone attending Holy Trinity Church services in the past year could not have helped but notice the continual influx of visitors and guests, each one a potential new member! We are thankful for our active and constantly present Hospitality and Visitors Ministry as they stand ready to welcome these friends, introduce them to Holy Trinity Church and identify them with the now-familiar felt "Yellow Cross".

Welcoming these brothers and sisters into the life of Holy Trinity Church is, however, everyone's calling. Many people over the years have commented on the warmth with which they have been received, and many have also attributed their decision to remain here in great part to that hospitality. So, whether there are visitors from out of town, family members joining others here for worship or even soon-to-be members, please know that as a Holy Trinity parishioner you are called to share in welcoming them with open arms and hearts filled with the love of Christ. Find them at Coffee Hour and introduce them to the people and ministries of our parish. There is a place for everyone at Holy Trinity Church!

Holiday Hospitality Note: As the Christmas holidays approach—even just on a regular Sunday—please consider reaching out and having a new family join you for a meal or a family gathering. There is no better way to let them know they are an important part of the Holy Trinity family!

Christmas Holiday Office Schedule

The offices of the Archdiocese, Metropolis and Holy Trinity Church will be closed on Tuesday & Wednesday, December 25 & 26, in observation of the Nativity of Christ.

Sign Up For the Holy Trinity Email!

Want to receive the Sunday Bulletin directly via email? Want to keep up to date with the latest Holy Trinity news or weather cancellations? Sign up at www.HolyTrinityPgh.org.

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

DECEMBER 2012 – THE VOICE OF THE GOSPEL



Father John Androutsopoulos

My Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ: Rejoice in the Lord always!

**Glory to God
Christ is Born!
Glorify Him!**

Glorify Him at Christmas

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to

The experience carried over into their subsequent lives. They glorified and praised God.

The suggestion here seems to be that they glorified God in the way they performed their ordinary tasks of shepherding. They were different Shepherds because Christmas was a religious experience for them.

Christmas should do that for all of us, for its observance ought to be primarily a religious experience. When it is, its value will be felt in our lives in the days after Christmas. We will then glorify God in the ordinary daily tasks.

Glorify Him By Serving Others

God is glorified when our thoughts and deeds bring blessings to others. When we can face ourselves in good conscience and happily, God is glorified. This happens often when the true Christmas spirit possesses us.

Our "glory to God" hinges upon our "good will towards men." When that good will is all-inclusive, it springs not from our own goodness but from our becoming hosts to God's personal Christmas Gift.

Let us keep Christ always in our hearts, so that peace on earth may spell glory to God.

As shepherds and Wise Men of old sought the Christ Child that they might worship and honor Him, let us also draw near to Him. Let us express our love for Him by glorifying His name in all that we do.

Let us thank God our Father for the gift of His Son who came to earth to redeem mankind from the selfish and worldly. May our lives be spiritualized by His birth in us, that we may daily glorify Him in our works, in our homes and foremost in His Holy House.

May we all have a blessed and Merry Christmas!



all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10-11.

At His birth, Jesus was worshipped and honored by angels, shepherds and Wise Men. As the Nativity of our Lord and Savior draws near, we need to remind ourselves again that the true heart and essence of Christmas is worshipping and honoring Him who was born for our salvation.

Millions of persons join in ascribing to Him glory and honor, majesty and might at Christmas time. He is worthy of all praise and adoration that the combined millions of heaven and earth have bestowed upon Him.

We glorify God by our glorification of His Son. Our desire is to glorify Christ our Savior on the day of His Nativity, and at all times. We acknowledge Christ as our only hope of salvation and we follow Him as our Lord and Master. We are ever thankful for Him and for the work He has given us to do in His name.

Glorify Him Every Day

"They (the shepherds) came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." Luke 2:16.

Christmas came for the shepherds. They went to Bethlehem to worship the Babe in the manger. Christmas was for them a deep religious experience, and its value was not lost.

"KALA XRISTOUGENNA!" "Καλά Χριστούγεννα!"

*With His love,
Rev. Fr. John H. Androutsopoulos, Protopresbyter*











November 28, 2012: Parents and children from the HOPE and JOY ministries gathered at Holy Trinity Church to prepare a meal for the FOCUS Pittsburgh center in the Hill District, then delivered and served the food to the poor and needy of the area. Pictured below left is the serving crew, along with Father Radu and FOCUS Pittsburgh Director Paul Abernathy. Want to get involved and offer a meal? Contact our Outreach Ministry coordinator Mike Kritiotis at 412-766-5001 to find an available outreach date. There are many dates available for 2013.



November 25, 2012: GOYAns gather on the field at our interim location for the annual GOYA Turkey Bowl flag football game. They even allowed a few adults (Father Radu, Presvytera Becky and Jim Balouris) to join in the fun this year! Afterwards, the teens enjoyed refreshments and fellowship. Have teens? Be sure to include them in the fun and fellowship of the GOYA ministry!



November 17, 2012: Holy Trinity teens gather at the Metropolis GOYA Retreat at Camp Nazareth. One of the speakers was our own seminarian, Andrew Athanasiou (above).



Reflections in modern Greek on the Feast of the Nativity of Christ. Excerpted from the periodical, "Pros Ti Niki"



Voula Hareras

ΦΩΣ ΜΕΓΑ

Φως! Ό πρώτος λόγος του Δημιουργού Θεού, ή πρώτη Του θέληση κι απόφαση, ήταν για τό φώς. Γενηθήτω φώς είπε, κι έλαμψε τό φώς. Υποχώρησε τότε τό σκοτάδι πού τύλιγε τό σύμπαν. Κι όλα έγιναν όρατά, όλα φωτεινά. Αρχισε πλέον ή ζωή. Μέσα στό υπέροχο αυτό δώρο του Θεού, τό φώς,

μέσα στή φωτιστική καί θερμαντική του παρουσία έγιναν όλα όσα θέλησε ό Δημιουργός Θεός. Εγινε ό πανέμορφος κόσμος μας. Δημιουργήθηκε κι ό άνθρωπος, πού μπορούσε νά βλέπει καί νά χαίρεται καί ν'άπολαμβάνει τά θαυμάσια του Θεού.

Ηρθε όμως καί ή τραγική ώρα. Η ώρα τής παρακοής στή θεϊκή έντολή, από τούς πρώτους ανθρώπους. Αδάμ καί Εύα, στόν Κήπο τής Εδέμ. Καί μετά...Μετά άπλώθηκε σκοτάδι, ένα άλλιώτικο σκοτάδι, πνευματικό. Εχασε τή Χάρη του Θεού ό άνθρωπος. Κι άρχισε νά πλανιέται άναζητώντας νόημα καί σκοπό στή ζωή του. Ποιός μπορούσε νά διαλύσει αυτό τό σκοτάδι, Μεγάλα ανθρώπινα πνεύματα πάσχισαν νά ρίξουν κάποιον φώς. Ομως καί οί πιό μεγάλες έμπνεύσεις τους, τά πιό μεγάλα πετάγματα του νου τους ήσαν άδύναμα. Ησαν φώτα, χίλια φώτα - όπως τό 'πε στοχαστικά ό ποιητής - μά δέν ήτανε τό φώς! Κι ό άνθρωπος άναζητούσε φως, περισσότερο φως.

Μέσα σ' αυτό τό άδιέξοδο κι όταν τό σκοτάδι έγινε πολύ βαθύ, ότε ήλθε τό πλήρωμα του χρόνου, έξαπέστειλεν ό Θεός τόν Υιόν αυτού. Καί τότε, όπως τό είχε προφητεύσει ό Ησαΐας,ό λαός ό καθημενος έν σκότει είδε φώς μέγα καί τοίς καθημένους έν χώρα καί σκιά θανάτου φώς άνέτειλεν αυτοίς. (Ματθ. δ'16). Ανέτειλε τό Φώς τό Μέγα. Ο Ηλιος τής Δικαιοσύνης, Χριστός ό Θεός, ό ένανθρωπήσας Θεός ήμών.

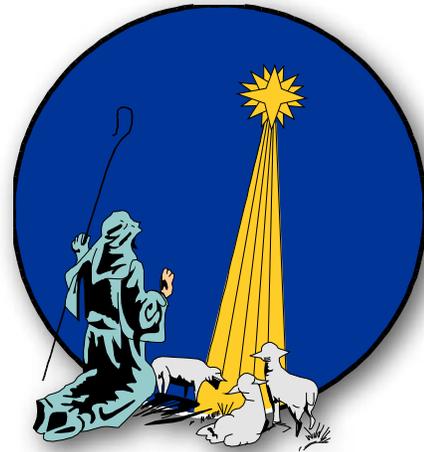
Φώς Μέγα άνέτειλε, από τή Φάτνη τής Βηθλεέμ, από τό Θείο Βρέφος, πού γεννήθηκε ταπεινά, για νά πλησιάσει τόν άνθρωπο, νά ζήσει τή ζωή του καί νά του τήν αλλάξει. Νά του δώσει τή δύναμη νά πετύχει τό σκοπό πού του όρισε ό Δημιουργός του: Νά όμοιάσει στό Θεό.

Ο Χριστός είναι τό Φώς. Κι όσοι πιστεύουμε δυνατά ότι είναι Φώς έκ Φωτός, Θεός Αληθινός, όπως διακηρύτουμε στό Σύμβολο τής Πίστεώς μας, μπορούμε νά έχουμε άπλετο φώς στίς στρατες τής ζωής μας. Νά βλέπουμε καθαρά ως τό βάθος του όρίζοντα τής ζωής. Νά γεμίζουμε μέ τήν αισιοδοξία καί τό θάρρος, πού δίνει τό φώς. Νά πολεμάμε καί τά σκοτάδια, πού άπλώνει γύρω μας ό σκοτεινός διάβολος.

Αυτό τό Φώς τό μοναδικό, τό άίωvιο καί ζωοποιό, άς πλησιάσουμε καί τά φρετινά Χριστούγεννα. Βρίσκεται στήν Εκκλησία καί τά Ιερά Μυστήρια. Αυτό τό Φώς, ό Χριστός, θά κάνει καί μάς - καί καθένα πού Τόν πλησιάζει - φωτεινούς, όλόφωτους.

Καλά Χριστούγεννα!

Προς Την Νίκηv



Η ΜΕΓΑΛΗ ΠΑΡΑΜΟΝΗ

Χριστούγεννα, χαρά μου παιδική,
μυρτιές καί κάλαντα γεμάτη
καί στό μικρό καλύβι του φτωχού
καί στό ψηλό, τρανό παλάτι.

Τά σπίτια, οί δρόμοι, τά καμπαναριά
όλα πλημμύρισαν μαγεία.
Πλημμύρισ' όλ' ή γή φώς ίλαρό
κι έγιν' ούράνια πολιτεία!

Ακου τά σήμαντρα τής έκκλησίας:
Ντάν! Ντάν! γεμίζουν τόν άγέρα.
Τί κι άν πολέμου άκούγεται βουή
κι άτομοβόμβα καί φοβέρα,...

Χριστός γεννάται! Μέσ' στήν ταπεινή
τή φάτνη σταματά ή ματιά μου.
--Πές μου, δέν είν ή δύναμη τής γής
όλη δική σου, Βασιλιά μου,

Η χάρη πού στόν κόσμο σου σκορπάς
δέν είν' εϊρήνη κι ευδοκία,
Κοντά σου, τάχα, ποιός θά φοβηθεί
μέσα στού κόσμου τήν κακία,...

Υμνους μάς φέρνει άπόψε άπ' τή Βηθλεέμ
καί μοσχολίβαν' ό άγέρας.
Πέρ άπ' τούς λόγγους της, τίς ρεματιές,
Τόν ήχο τής γλυκιάς φλογέρας...

Χριστούγεννα, χαρά μου παιδική,
Θρονιάσου στό ψηλό παλάτι,
καί στό μικρό καλύβι του φτωχού
μυρτιές καί κάλαντα γεμάτη.

Χλόη Αχαϊκού

*Εύχομαι σέ όλους σας Χαρούμενα Χριστούγεννα καί
εύτυχισημένος ό Νέος Χρόνος!*

Βούλα Χαρερά

Hello, my Precious Children!



Happy Christmas to all my precious children!! Yes, it is me, Spero, enjoying another one of my favorite holidays. That's so for a lot of reasons, but one of them is that my family has been there from the beginning. Yes, that's right, we've been around since the Birth of Jesus! This makes it a truly special holiday for my family. I love Baby Jesus and give thanks for His birth everyday.

My precious little ones do you know what bird is considered the "Christmas Bird?" Well, I have a holiday book in my library that tells you all about this special bird. The name of the book is "The Christmas Bird", by Sallie Ketchan. It tells a story of an ancient Christmas legend about courage, kindness, and love. It was a frosty Palestinian evening a small brown bird returned to her stable home

to discover a new born baby in a manger. The bird, moved by the infant laying in the cold, inches toward a tiny fire flickering beside the manger. She begins to beat her wings slowly and then faster until the sparks blaze into a flame. At last, satisfied and exhausted, the bird settles beside the manger. To show thanks for this kindness, the infant's mother, blessed the small bird with a marvelous gift. The little bird's plain brown feathers on his chest are now deep red, as red as any pomegranate. Do you know guess what kind of bird is the Christmas bird? If you think that you know the answer come to the library and tell the Head Mouse-keeper because she wants to know too!



The second recommended reading is "A Cat in the Stable," by Benrei Huang. When her beloved cat dies, Sophie asks her mommy "Will Muffin come back?" Despite her mother's answer, Sophie prays to our Heavenly Father to bring Muffin back to her. As Christmas nears, Sophie's teacher talks about the miracle of Baby Jesus being born anew each year. So, Sophie writes a letter to God asking for another Christmas miracle. She would like God to please bring Muffin back. So, that day when Sophie was walking home after school she stopped in front of church and slipped her letter to God underneath the hay in the Nativity Scene. Surely she thought, He would answer her prayer, for it was the Christmas season. On Christmas morning, she had all but given up hope, because Muffin was not under the tree or in her Christmas stocking. However, when she went to church, Sophie discovered how Our Heavenly Father did answer her prayer and in a surprising and wonderful way. It truly was a Christmas miracle, and to find out what happens next, you must read the book, and you can find it, of course, in my library!

Jesus still gives us miracles we just need to look closer and pay attention to our everyday surroundings. Have Blessed, Happy, and Merry Christmas!

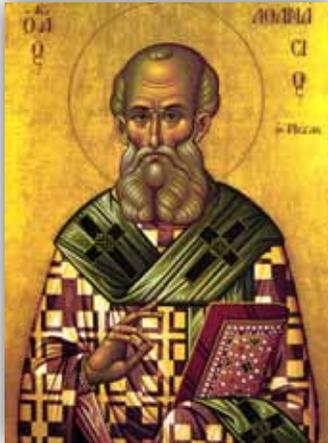
Love in Christ,
Spero and Zoe

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As generations pass and cultures change, traditions and teachings about Christmas - the Nativity of Jesus Christ - have been reduced, diluted and even replaced by various secular and commercial approaches, all of which point to something other than the gift of salvation we find in the incarnate Savior. A recent survey even found that the financial strain of the secularly-promoted Christmas season of gift-giving has resulted 45% of those surveyed saying they would rather skip Christmas altogether! As Orthodox Christians living in the midst of such a secular world, we must be always ready to celebrate the joy of this glorious feast without losing sight of its eternal and life-saving character. In order to re-focus us on the central theme of the Incarnation of the Son of God, the following questions were put together in an "interview" format we have been using for the "Ask the Elders" column. Here, instead, we "Ask the Fathers," in this case one of the greatest Fathers of the early Church on the issue, Saint Athanasius. The answers were taken from his 4th century work, "On the Incarnation." Christ is born - Glorify Him!



Saint Athanasius
4th Century

Why was the Incarnation of the Son of God necessary?

It was our sad situation that caused the Logos [Logos = "The Son" or "The Second Person of the Trinity"] to come down. Our transgression invoked His love for us, so that He made haste to help us and to appear among us. It is we who were the cause of His taking human form, and for our salvation that in His great love He was both born and manifested in human form. The Word of God came in His own person because

it was He alone, the image of the Father, Who could recreate man made after the Image.

Why did God bother with us in our sinful state?

It would, of course, have been unthinkable that beings which had once shared the nature of the Word should perish and turn back again into non-existence through corruption. It was impossible, therefore, that God should leave man to be carried off by corruption, because it would have been unfitting and unworthy of Himself. What, then, was God to do? What else could He possibly do, being God, but renew His Image in mankind so that through it mankind might once more come to know Him?

The Word of God came in His own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father Who could recreate man made after the Image. In order to effect this re-creation, however, He had first to do away with death and corruption. Therefore He assumed a human body, in order that in it death might once for all be destroyed, and that men might be renewed according to the Image.

What was the effect on humankind of the Lord of all becoming a man?

Through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection. You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honored, and enemies and robbers cease to attack it.

So it is with the King of all. For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Savior of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death.

This great work was, indeed, supremely worthy of the goodness of God. A king who has founded a city, so far from neglecting it when through the carelessness of the inhabitants it is attacked by robbers, avenges it and saves it from destruction, having regard rather to his own honor than to the people's neglect. Much more, then, the Word of the All-good Father was not unmindful of the human race that He had called to be; but rather, by the offering of His own body He abolished the death which they had incurred, and corrected their neglect by His own teaching. Thus by His own power He restored the whole nature of man.

How could God in His purity enter into the sinful condition of man without becoming corrupted?

This is the wonder! As man He was living a human life, as the Word. He was sustaining the life of the universe and as the Son He was in constant union with the Father. Not even His birth from a virgin, therefore, changed Him in any way, nor was He defiled by being in the body. Rather, He sanctified the body by being in it. Just as the sun is not defiled by the contact of its rays with earthly objects, but rather enlightens and purifies them, so He Who made the sun is not defiled by being made known in the body.

Did the eternal Son of God actually become a *real* human being in the flesh, or was it simply the *appearance* of a real body?

You must understand that when writers on this sacred theme speak of Him as eating and drinking and being born, they mean that the body, as a body, was born and sustained with the food proper to its nature, while God the Word, Who was united with it, was at the same time ordering the universe. From such ordinary acts as being born and eating food, He was recognized as being actually present in the body. But by the extraordinary acts which He did through the body He proved Himself to be the Son of God. Invisible in Himself, He is known from the works of creation; so also, when His Godhead is veiled in human nature, His bodily acts still declare Him to be not man only, but the Power and Word of God.

If you were to distill these ideas down to the most basic summary, what would it be?

There were two things which the Savior did for us by becoming Man. He banished death from us and made us anew; and He became visible through His works and revealed Himself as the Word of the Father, the Ruler and King of the whole creation.

Saint Athanasius the Great

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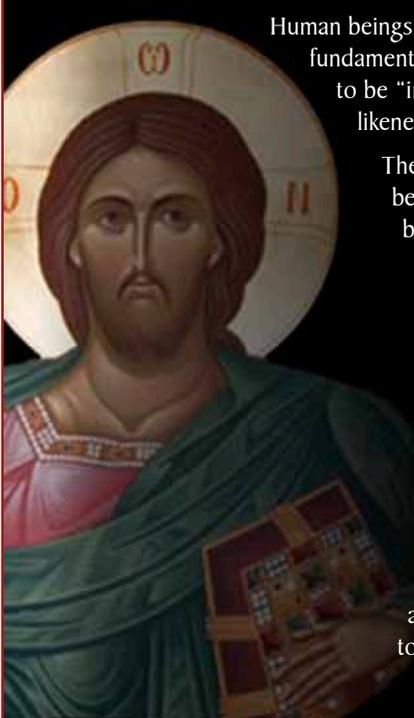
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RESTORING THE IMAGE



Human beings, male and female, are made in the image and according to the likeness of God. We are human because our fundamental and essential property is to be the most perfect created expressions of God's being and life. We are made to be "imitators of God" and "partakers of the divine nature" (Eph. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:4). To be made in the image and likeness of God is to be both a spiritual and material being.

The cause of all sadness and sorrow is that human beings have failed to be—and therefore endlessly to become—what God has made them to be. In the ultimate sense, they have failed to love. They corrupt their being, distorting the divine image within them and losing their likeness to God.

Orthodox Christians affirm that Jesus Christ has come to restore God's image and likeness in human beings. He enabled them to be what they were created to be in the beginning. Christ restores the image of God in human beings, being Himself God's uncreated and eternal image, by becoming a real human being, the "last" and "final" Adam, the "man from heaven."

As the second and final Adam, Jesus does everything that the first and original Adam was called—but failed—to do. He obeys God. He honors His Name. He delights in His Presence. He adores His Divinity. He gives thanks for His gifts. He speaks His words. He does His works. He accomplishes His will. And so He fulfills Himself in a human manner as one made in God's image and likeness.

This is the message of Christmas. There is a new Adam. There is a restored image of God. It is the restored image of the Image Himself, God's Son and Word, Jesus Christ. In Him humankind has found its fulfillment and perfection. In Him human beings can live. In Him all people can complete themselves as creatures made to be by God's grace all that God Himself is by nature. In Him all people can be human.

Excerpted from "The Winter Pascha" by Father Thomas Hopko

Scripture of the Month: "Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God." (Ephesians 4.24)