

JANUARY 2016

Voice of St. George



**SAINT GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
OF THE DESERT**

74-109 LARREA ST., PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



THE TEMPTATIONS OF CHRIST

There is a connection between *forgiveness* and *temptation*. The Lord's Prayer says, "...*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and (therefore) lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*"

Forgiveness comes from love for God and neighbor and love is the mother of humility. Following the Baptism of Christ our God in the River Jordan, which we celebrate every year on January 6th, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. In essence, with the Baptism of Christ, not only is God united to us in the flesh, but He is united to us in the very circumstance of our lives in this world. Following His Baptism, whatever happens to Christ is whatever happens to each of us: temptations, pain, suffering, death and resurrection to life everlasting.

Temptations are not in themselves a sign of some psychological abnormality. They are part of our circumstance, in which our ability to love is to be expressed, or not expressed. Our Free Will allows us to love.

Christ our God, in His love for each of us, takes upon Himself the temptations that are common to us all. St. Paul states: "*He had to be made like His brethren in every respect... For, because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted.*" (Hebrews 2: 17-18).

Christ's encounter with the devil in the wilderness was an expression of His *extreme humility*, based on His *infinite love*. Hence, in turning to Christ in times of temptation, we are blessed with the spiritual tools required to conquer temptations — *humility and love*.

St. John Chrysostom provides us with an analysis of our Lord's temptations in the wilderness and he gives us instructions to overcome them: "*The tempter [i.e., the devil] came and said to Jesus, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.'* [Jesus answered: '*Man shall not live by bread alone.*'"] St. John notes how the demon begins to make people fall and how crafty he is! Remember how he cast out the first humans from Paradise? By appealing to the appetite—ultimately, an appeal to *self indulgence*. Our love for God can only be expressed by our will to give of ourselves "and to commend one another to Christ our God."

St. John continues: "*If You are the Son of God, cast Yourself down, for it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over You and in their hands, they will bear You up.'* [Jesus] reasons

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with him again from the Scriptures: 'You shall not tempt the Lord Your God.' This teaches us that we must overcome the devil, not by miracles, but by forbearance and long-suffering and that we should do nothing for vainglory...For of God's Son, no one requires such things as to cast one's self down. This is the part of the devil and demons. God's part is to raise up even those who are cast down." Depression and despair are of the devil, tricking us to give up on God, while at the same time expecting God to rescue us.

The temptation by the devil for Christ to worship him is the worst of all. The false-gods of the world are manifestations of our own human ego in our quest to have everything go our way, regardless of others. In addition, we must be careful not to be deceived by the devil to assume that worshiping Christ our God is the pathway to an easy, comfortable life of riches for ourselves. The Book of Revelation cautions us not to be deceived by the Anti-Christ, and fail to follow the True Christ. This last temptation of the devil is the most wicked. It appeals, not only to the appetite of having many things but also to our quest for *power*. St. John states: *"To me it seems that in mentioning this chief of all temptations, he had spoken of all, as though the rest too were included in these: to be a slave to the belly (our appetites); to do anything for vainglory; to be in subjection to the madness of riches...How then do we get the better of [the devil]? In the way which Christ taught us; by fleeing to God for refuge and to not be depressed in famine. Rather, we must believe in God Who is able to feed even with a word. Also, in whatever good things we may receive, let us not tempt Him Who gave them, but be content with the glory which is from above. Do not take into account whatever is popular among people in society. On every occasion let us reject what is beyond our need; for, greed makes us fall under the power of the devil, as longing for more and loving covetousness."* (*Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew: Nicene/Post Nicene Fathers, First Series, pgs. 81-83*).

Forgiveness is possible when we allow God to be in control; for, He loves us as well as all others. Our quests for *power and control* lead us away from God, closing the doors to forgiveness and opening the gates to temptations. Loving God and forgiving others "leads us not unto temptation."
+FR. THEODORE

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,



On this first day of the new year and the blessed Feast of our Father among the Saints, Basil the Great, we anticipate the abundant blessings and great works of God, and we continue to give Him honor and glory through our worship and faithful service to Him.

As we dedicate the year and our lives to the holy will of God, it also is fitting at the beginning of this year 2016 that we commemorate the 25th anniversary of the ministry of His All-Holiness our beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. This is truly a significant event for our Holy Archdiocese and for Orthodox Christianity, as this time has included tremendous changes and challenges in our world. In the apostolic spirit of Saint Basil and many other Saints and Hierarchs, His All Holiness has provided spiritual guidance from a foundation of deep faith in God and a commitment to His will. He has offered compassionate pastoral leadership from his experience and understanding of the power of the grace of God. He has adeptly addressed critical issues using the great theological and liturgical heritage of our Orthodox Christian faith. Our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has led and continues to lead faithful around the world in offering a true witness of the blessed life we have in Christ and of an enduring hope that rests on the promises of God.

We give glory and thanksgiving to God for the apostolic ministry of our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. We also give thanks for all the offerings of our Hierarchs, Clergy, and Laity in addressing the needs and supporting the work of His All Holiness and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This has been a great contribution in sharing the Gospel, advocating for religious freedom, offering spiritual guidance on environmental issues, and helping those who need urgent assistance.

The ministry and leadership of His All-
(Continued on the next page - - - - ->

NEW YEAR-ENCYCLICAL, continued

Holiness reflects the compassion and faith that were exemplified by Saint Basil. This is also the witness of our beloved Saint Basil Academy. Led by our National Ladies Philoptochos Society and local chapters, it is our annual tradition on this day and during the month of January to offer prayers and support for this ministry. Each and every day of the year, the benefactors, directors, and staff of Saint Basil's are serving the needs of children and youth who need love, guidance, and the healing power of faith. This vital ministry has been supported for over sixty years by the Ladies Philoptochos Society through the annual cutting of the Vasilopita, and I ask that you give generously together with your prayers for Saint Basil Academy.

In the cutting and sharing of the Vasilopita at the inception of this New Year, may we also offer our prayers and support for His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and wish him many more years of faithful and dedicated service to Christ and His Church. And may the blessings of our Lord be upon each of you and your families for peace, health, and opportunities to share His love and the power of faith throughout the year.

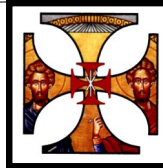
With paternal love in Christ,

†DEMETRIOS

Archbishop of America

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS

Happy New Year from Philoptochos! We hope you made your reservations for our **Taverna Night on Saturday, January 9, 2016**. The deadline for paid reservations is **Sunday, January 3, 2016**.



As the philanthropic arm of the Church, we make many charitable donations. We last informed you of Philoptochos' donations and activities at the beginning of Fall. We now want to recap our donations and activities through the end of 2015.

October and November

National Donations:

1. Ecumenical Patriarchate – \$309 from tray collection and \$100 commitment.
2. National Sisterhood of Presvyteras – \$200
3. UNICEF – \$25

4. General Medical Fund – \$200

Metropolis Donations:

1. St. Nicholas Ranch – \$300
2. Bishop Anthony's Fund – \$500
3. Light the Path – \$240
4. Seminarian Student's School Expenses – \$1,000

St. George Church:

Sponsored the November Ladder – \$100

December National Donation:

St. Nicholas Memorial & National Shrine:
\$1,000

Local Donations:

1. Coachella Valley Rescue Mission – \$500
2. Salvation Army – \$500

Activities:

We continue to visit our parishioners in homes, hospitals, rehabs and assisted living facilities. We send words of encouragement, get well, thinking of you and sympathy cards.

Our **Christmas Bake Sale** was successful with our Chairperson, **Lula Valissarakos**, heading the baking with our volunteers and her team members, **Susan Clark and Linda Petalas** taking orders each Sunday.

The **Christmas Luncheon** was a hit! We had 53 reservations and the service and food were wonderful. The Palm Springs High School Singers sang Christmas Carols and they really got us in the Christmas spirit. Our Chairperson, **Angie Dyer**, and her team members, **Susan Clark and Linda Petalas** did a superb job.

Again, we want to thank you for your generous donations and support in 2015.

– LINDA KALLIS,
Philoptochos President

AHEPA NEWS



AHEPA Chapter 528 participated in the effort on behalf of our entire parish to raise funds in support of the construction of the Archdiocese St. Nicholas National Shrine in New York City. Over the past two years, St. George parishioners contributed \$1,025 in this effort. This year's fundraiser for the St. Nicholas National Shrine was held on Sunday, December 6th — the Feast Day of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker.

Contributions given in support of the AHEPA 528 Fr. T. P. Theophilos Memorial Scholarship Fund are always appreciated. To send contributions contact our AHEPA 528 website at: www.ahepa528.org.

Members of our AHEPA Chapter are looking forward to participating in this year's Greek Festival—the 20th Anniversary of consecutive Greek Festivals held in support of our St. George Greek Orthodox Church of the Desert. We ask all of our brothers to help with our AHEPA booth and with any other matters involving the set-up for this Festival. Contact Chairman George Argyros to volunteer or to offer a sponsorship.

Finally, we are planning to have representation at the AHEPA District 20 Mid-Winter Conference, hosted by the San Pedro Neptune Chapter 233 on January 23, 2016. Details for participation in this event will be discussed at the next AHEPA Chapter 528 meeting on Monday, January 11th.

FESTIVAL NEWS



2016 Festival Meeting will take place on Monday, January 4th at 7:00 p.m.

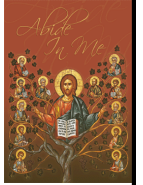
Now is the time for everyone to give and obtain **ads for the Festival Program publication**. The deadline for ads is **January 18th**. Please see the enclosed Festival Ad Form. Return this form and check to the parish office or give them to **Presvytera Petula**.

Menu preparations for the Festival begin on **Monday, January 11th**. Volunteers are needed for all

aspects connected with our Festival success. Contact Festival Chairman, **George Argyros** to volunteer! Anyone who knows vendors who are interested in participating in the Festival are to contact **Nick Kaperonis**.

The Festival will be a great success with everyone's help and participation.

STEWARDSHIP



Sunday, January 17, 2016 is Stewardship Sunday! 2016 St. George parish **Stewardship Cards** will be distributed and collected following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and a special "Stewardship Sunday Prayer Service." For more information regarding Stewardship, contact **Rhonda Latkovic**.

We thank God for all those who became Stewardship members of St. George in 2015. A complete list of 2015 Stewardship members will be posted in the February 2016 *Voice of St. George* newsletter, along with those who contribute toward their 2016 Stewardship commitment.

Our Holy Archdiocese offers the following note of encouragement to all Orthodox Christians: "**An Orthodox Christian Steward** is an active participant in the life of the Church. The parish encourages all who accept the Orthodox Faith to become practicing Stewards. Each year the Steward is expected to carefully review his or her personal circumstances and make a commitment of time, talent, and treasure to support the Parish and her Ministries, which in turn support the National Ministries of our Archdiocese, Metropolises, and institutions."

The more Orthodox faithful contribute to their parish in the form of Stewardship giving, the less work is needed for fundraisers and the greater the opportunity to sponsor fundraisers for local, Metropolis and national charities.

PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE



Parish Elections

We are most grateful to God for the efforts of our St. George Election Committee for this year's successful Parish Council Elections. The members of the Election Committee are: **Angie Dyer, Annette Lewis** and **Eve Meek**. Those elected to serve as members of the Parish Council beginning in 2016 are:

Linda Kallis

Nick Kaperonis

Nick Krespis

Tina Veroulis

The total membership of the Parish Council as 2016 begins consists of the following (in alphabetical order):

Jim Christopoulos

Anna Prineas

Linda Kallis

Tasia Richards

Nick Kaperonis

Lula Valissarakos

Nick Krespis

Mike Vawter

Tillie Lockshire

Tina Veroulis

Decisions made by the Parish Council at the December meeting:

1. \$4,600 will be paid for two new food warmers which are needed for the Festival dinner line.
2. Pursuant to the General Assembly's decision to allow the Parish Council to make the best choice of bidders for the landscaping project (approved by the General Assembly in November), the Parish Council voted to proceed with this project with the Valley Wide Landscaper company at a cost of \$15,000.
3. The Parish Council voted to accept a restricted donation of \$10,000 offered by Nick Demetropoulos for a St. George Byzantine Chant Fund to educate Orthodox faithful in the area of our Church's precious Byzantine Music Tradition. **Michael Kontaxis**, along with **Deacon Euthym** and the parish priest, (regularly updating the Parish Council), along with the Metropolis of San Francisco will lead in this project.

SUNDAY SCHOOL



Sunday School classes will resume on **Sunday, January 10, 2016**. Please note the change in schedule (a return to last year's schedule):

Orthros-8:30 a.m.

Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Sunday School-10:30 a.m. (following Holy Communion).

We remind all parents that Sunday School is the only opportunity that our youth have to learn about the Bible and our precious Orthodox Christian Faith. Classroom instruction **needs to be supplemented by parental instruction in the home**. Lessons taught in Sunday School are best learned when parents are involved in the religious education of their children and provide positive re-enforcement regarding the lessons offered.

We look forward to the rest of this school year with increased parental support and interest in the spiritual development of their children.

ST. GEORGE GOLF TOURNAMENT—Save the date for our annual St. George Golf Tournament—**Friday & Saturday, May 6 & 7, 2016** at **Desert Willow Country Club!** To offer time, talent and treasure towards the success of this event, contact Golf Tournament Chairman, **George Argyros**.

ST. GEORGE BOOK STORE—*Orthodox Study Bibles are available!* Every Orthodox Christian must have an *Orthodox Study Bible*, which provides the interpretations of the Bible passages issued by early Christian Saints of our Church. In addition, we have kits offering **Greek Language Courses** for both children and adults. Visit our parish book store which features a variety of icons and Orthodox greeting cards!

HOUSE BLESSINGS—Those wanting their homes blessed through the "House Blessing Service" by the priest as we begin the New Year are asked to contact Fr. Ted at: (760) 880-5869 to arrange for an appointment.

OUTREACH PROGRAM - BIRTH CHOICE BABY BOTTLE DRIVE

Parish Motto: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" Phil:4:13."*

Many blessings to all to gave for the Birth Choice Baby Bottle Drive to help mothers give birth to their babies and live with God's blessings:

Donors:

Mr. Spiror Astmos
 Mr. & Mrs. William G. Barringer
 Mr. Michael Carroll
 Mrs. Josie Desnoyers
 Dr. Robert Gannan
 Mrs. Krisann Kontaxis
 Mr. Nick Krespis
 Mrs. Rhonda Latkovic
 Matushka Gloria Lehman
 Mrs. Annette Lewis
 Dr. John Manesis
 Ms. Eve Meek
 M& Mrs. Stavros Olympios
 Mr. Leon Pano
 Ms. Joan Panopoulos
 Ms. Bessie Pressett
 Ms. Alice Pulos
 Mr. & Mrs. Angelo Veroulis
 Mrs. Kalitsa Xitco
 Mr. Diane Young
 Mr. & Mrs. Timothy Hector
 Mr. & Mrs. George & Emily Tcharos
 Mr. & Mrs. Jim Christopoulos
 Fr. Ted & Presbytera Petula Pantels
 Ms. Carol Speliopoulos
 Mrs. Susan Clark
 Dr. & Mrs. Michael Long
 Mrs. Tomasine Maverick
 Ms. Linda Kallis
 Mr. Michael Zafiroopoulos

— LOUISE DOBBS BARRINGER
 Missions & Outreach Chairperson

SAINT OF THE MONTH- ST. EUTHYMIOS THE GREAT



This Saint, who was from Melitene in Armenia, was the son of pious parents named Paul and Dionysia.

He was born about 377. Since his mother had been barren, he was named Euthymios -- which means "good cheer" or "joy" - for this is what his parents experienced at his birth.

He studied under Eutroius, the Bishop of Melitene, by whom he was ordained and entrusted with the care of the monasteries of Melitene. Then, after he had come to Palestine about the year 406, he became the leader of a multitude of monks. Through him, a great tribe of Arabs was turned to piety, when he healed the ailing son of their leader Aspebetos. Aspebetos was baptized with all his people; he took the Christian name of Peter, and was later consecrated Bishop for his tribe, being called "Bishop of the Tents." Saint Euthymios also fought against the Nestorians, Eutychians, and Manichaeans. When Eudocia, the widow of Saint Theodosius the Younger, had made her dwelling in Palestine, and had fallen into the heresy of the Monophysites which was championed in Palestine by a certain Theodosius, she sent envoys to Saint Symeon the Stylite in Syria (see Sept. 1), asking him his opinion of Eutyches and the Council of Chalcedon which had condemned him; Saint Symeon, praising the holiness and Orthodoxy of Saint Euthymios near whom she dwelt, sent her to him to be delivered from her error (the holy Empress Eudocia is commemorated Aug. 13). He became the divine oracle of the Church, or rather, "the vessel of divine utterance," as a certain historian writes. He was the instructor and elder of Saint Sabbas the Sanctified. Having lived for ninety-six years, he reposed in 473, on January 20.

SPIRITUAL RETREATS

Voyage to St. Anthony's Monastery- March 16 & 17, 2016 (to be confirmed)

Plans are being made to coordinate a spiritual visit to **St. Anthony's Monastery**. The proposed dates are: Tuesday, March 16th and Thursday, March 17, 2016 (to be confirmed in the near future). Our local AHEPA Chapter 528 is working with Fr. Ted to coordinate this spiritual journey. Those who are interested in joining in this spiritual experience are asked to inform Fr. Ted and offer suggestions regarding specific travel arrangements.

Annual St. George Parish Lenten Retreat- Saturday, April 22, 2016

Saturday, April 22, 2016 – the Saturday preceding the beginning of Holy Week. The theme will be: **"Communicating Through Icons."** The day will begin with Morning Prayers; "keynote" sermon; lunch and presentations pertaining to the theology of icons, followed by Lenten prayers.

Men's Rally-Saturday, May 14, 2016

We have the honor of hosting a community **Christian Men's Rally on Saturday, May 14, 2016**, a spiritual retreat for the men of our community. The theme is: *"Once You Are Right With God, You Are Right With the World."* Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy will come together to share their inspirational thoughts with young adult and adult men who are seeking to make their homes and livelihoods Christ-centered. Topics will include: *Responsibility to worship God at Church and in the home; Health care, disabilities and stress (dealing with pain, suffering, temptations, drugs and alcohol); Raising children in today's world.*

As a keynote speaker, Mr. Blaine Mack, a World War II veteran will present inspiring thoughts dealing with veterans' mental health conditions and how they can be helped.

More details will be provided in the months ahead.

COLORING BOOK PROJECT

The Coloring Book Project sessions that take place at the St. George parish hall in the middle of every month have proven to be a great opportunity for good Christian fellowship and to reduce stress. Tentatively the next meeting will take place at the parish hall on Wednesday, January 13th (the date to be confirmed in the Sunday, January 10th *Ladder*) at noon. Lunch is provided and \$5 is requested to help defray costs. Contact our parish office or Rhonda Latkovic for more details.

MANY BLESSINGS TO THOSE WHO SPONSORED THE LADDER & THE VOICE OF ST. GEORGE IN 2015

We are grateful to God for those who contributed as sponsors to help defray costs of printing the weekly parish bulletin, *The Ladder*, and the monthly parish newsletter, *The Voice of St. George* throughout the year 2015. Those wishing to sponsor either *The Ladder* or *The Voice of St. George* throughout 2016 are asked to sign up on the designated "sign-up" sheets posted on the bulletin board in the parish hall.

2015 Sponsors of *The Ladder*

January – Vilma Chantiles
February – Matushka Gloria Lehman
April – Susan Clark
May – Anna Prineas
June – Louise Dobbs Barringer
July – Angie and Hugh Dyer
August – Presvytera Petula Pantels
September – Annette and Skip Lewis
October – Harry Psaltis
November – Ladies Philoptochos Society
December – Matushka Gloria Lehman

2015 Sponsors of *The Voice of St. George*

September – Rhonda and Nicholas Latkovic
October – Louise Dobbs Barringer
November – Matushka Gloria Lehman
December – Ann and Richard Dixon