

DECEMBER 20, 2015

ST. GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE DESERT

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THE LADDER

SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

Mailing Address:

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– Fr. Theodore Pantels,
Proistamenos (Pastor)
– Deacon Euthym Kontaxis,
M.D.

Holy Communion Order

1. Please remain standing while following the directions of our ushers.
2. Ladies, kindly remove lipstick before receiving.
3. When receiving Holy Communion, make the Sign of the Cross, state your name (baptismal name), and naturally receive as if being fed.
4. Non-Orthodox Christians may not receive Holy Communion, but they may receive the Holy Bread at the end of the service.
5. All Orthodox Christians must be spiritually prepared to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Please see the priest if you have any questions.

GUIDING OUR YOUTH TO CHRIST

In his homily about the Nativity of Christ, St. John Chrysostom asks: *“Which is easier: For God to become Man, or for Man to become God?”* The ancient philosophers never studied this kind of puzzling question, because their gods had supernatural strength to do (or not to do) whatever people wanted. Still, the ancient Greeks understood that it is not possible for a man to become a god.

Only the Roman emperors considered themselves to be “gods,” until they were assassinated in some cases.

The True God created us in His own Image and Likeness. It is not impossible, therefore, that God could become a man in the flesh in order to save him from the snares of death. And yet, each person has the power to make the choice to

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Reading the Icon of Christ’s Nativity opens our eyes to a “great and marvelous mystery,” as is sung during the Orthros Service of Christmas Day. The “slum” quarters where the animals are stabled has become Heaven; on the Throne of the angels (depicted as a red “hammock”) is the Holy Mother of God. Yet, the angels are proclaiming Christ’s birth to the shepherds; the Holy Spirit is depicted as a green “life giving” ray of light (which is also revealed as the Guiding Star), telling us that Christ became Man by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. The three kings are bringing gifts; Joseph is a “lesser” figure, depicting both his humility and obedience, as well as humanity’s “lessening” status as a result of sin; the angel warns the shepherd not to return to Herod. The presence of animals tells us that they

recognize Christ as God. At the same time, the donkey and the ox represent the Chosen People & the Gentiles. Note that Christ’s swaddling clothes resemble burial garments, reminding us of His victory over death.



Ο Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος, στην ομιλία του περί της Γεννήσεως του Χριστού ερωτά: <Πιο είναι το πιο ευκολο; Να γίνει ο Θεός άνθρωπος, η να γίνει ο άνθρωπος Θεός;> Οι αρχαίοι δεν εμελετήσαν ποτέ μια τέτοια απορία, διότι οι θεοί των είχαν υπερφυσική δύναμη ώστε να κάνουν (η να μην κάνουν) τα θελήματα των ανθρώπων. Ακόμη οι αρχαίοι Έλληνες εκατάλαβαν ότι δεν είναι δυνατόν να γίνει ο άνθρωπος ένας θεός. Μόνο οι αυτοκράτοροι της Ρώμης εθεώρουσαν τους εαυτούς τους ως <θεοί.>

Ο Άληθινος Θεός επλάσσε τον άνθρωπον κατά Εικόνα και Ομοίωσιν Αυτού. Δεν είναι αδύνατον, λοιπόν, να γίνει ο Θεός άνθρωπος κατά σαρκάν, για να σώσει τον άνθρωπον από τα δίκτυα του θανάτου. Ακόμη έχει ο καθένας την εξουσίαν να πάρει την απόφασιν να λατρεύει τον Χριστόν η να μην τον λατρεύει. Οι Μαγοί ηλθάν από τις άκρες της γης για να προσκυνήσουν τον Χριστόν, ενώ ο Ηρώδης ηθέλε να σκοτώσει τον Χριστόν.

Ο αστήρ, ο οποίος οδηγεί τους Μαγούς προς τον Θεάνθρωπον Χριστόν στην φατνήν, μας υπενθυμίζει την αληθειάν ότι ο Θεός αγαπά όλην την ανθρωπότηταν. Οποίος αγαπά τον Θεόν είναι υποχρεωμένος να αγαπά όλους τους ανθρώπους, ασχετώς εάν αγαπάν τον Θεόν η όχι. Το έργον μας είναι να ειμεθα ως άτομα, ένα <αστέρι> για να φωτίσουμεν όλους ώστε να ζουν με την αγαπήν του Θεού. Η <εν Χριστώ> ζωή μας υποχρεώνει να διδασκούμεν τον Λόγον του Κυρίου σε όλους με αγαπήν.
+Ο ΠΑΤΗΡ ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ

worship Christ, or not to worship Him. The Magi made this choice to worship our Savior and came from the corners of the earth to do so, while Herod, on the other hand, wanted to kill Him.

The Star which guided the Magi to the Christ Child in the manger, reminds us of the fact that God loves all of humanity. Whoever loves God is, therefore, obligated to love all people, regardless of whether or not other people love God. Our job as individuals is to be a "star," enlightening others so that they can live with God's love. The spiritual way of life—the "life in Christ" - obligates us to teach the Word of the Lord to everyone, as we express our love for them.

For the so-called "baby-boomers," we grew up with "movie stars," - T.V. heroes who were role-models in the fight against evil. The role of every Christian in real life is to be "stars" for the glory of God. As in the case of the Holy Apostles, we certainly cannot force the whole world to change to please us...and we cannot find ourselves changing our ways to the ways of the world. It is vital to make every effort to teach our children and grandchildren about the true meaning of Christ's Nativity, known also as Christmas Day. Let us begin by understanding the words of the Bible; by learning the message of our icons; by knowing the lives of the Saints and living the Liturgy.

Christmas has in some ways become as stressful time for families, because I feel we are beginning to confuse "family values" with "Christian values." Parents strive frantically to make sure that their children have a truly joyful Christmas by showing them all the things we buy for them in proving to them that we love them. However, in reality, it is a time for children to be happy because God loves them. It is a time to teach them to give their best gift to Christ—the gift of self-offering for His glory, precisely because they are in themselves people of great worth. They are indeed *worth* God's love, as are all people in the world. Fr. Anthony Coniaris relates a story of a mother who bought many toys for her three boys. She asked each of them to let her know which toy they treasured the most. She then asked each of them to wrap it up and address it to a child who was less fortunate. It was a Christmas gift of love for one's neighbor. It was a lesson for her sons to learn what it must be like for God to give us His best gift, that is, His Only-Begotten Son. (See Coniaris' book, *Making God Real in the Orthodox Home*, pg. 186.)

+FR. THEODORE

PRAY FOR THE SICK: Yvonne and George Flessas, George Aeder, Adele Gallade, Kathy Ligeros, Aryroula Krespis (Nick Krespis' mother), Bob Maverick, John Kouletsis (Mary Mitsias' brother), Robert Fleming (Rhonda Latkovic's father), Debbie Vawter, Skip Lewis, Doris Elmo, Anne Boukidis-Michas (*Many of the faithful on our Prayer List face chronic or serious illness*).

HYMNS FOR THIS SUNDAY'S CELEBRATION OF THE DIVINE LITURGY

ANTIPHON I:

Verse 1: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and everything within me, bless His holy name.

Response: "Tes presvies tis Theotokou, Soter, soson imas."

Verse 2: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His rewards.

Response: "By the prayers of the Theotokos, Savior, O save us."

Verse 3: The Lord prepared His throne in heaven, and His Kingdom rules over all.

Response: "Tes presvies tis Theotokou, Soter, soson imas."

Chanter(s): "Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen".

Response: "By the prayers of the Theotokos, Savior, save us."

ANTIPHON II:

Verse 1: Praise the Lord, O my soul! I shall praise the Lord while I live; I shall sing to my God as long as I exist.

Response: "Soson imas Ie Theou, o Anastas ek nekron, psallontas si: Allilouia."

Verse 2: Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob; his hope is in the Lord his God.

Response: Save us, O Son of God, Who arose from the dead, we sing to You: Alleluia.

Verse 3: The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Response: "Soson imas Ie Theou, o Anastas ek nekron, psallontas si: Allilouia."

Chanter(s): "Doxa Patri ke Io, ke Ayio Pnevmati, ke nin ke ai ke is tous eonas ton eonon. Amin."

People: O Monogenis Ios ke Logos tou Theou... (O Only-Begotten Son and Word of God...)

ANTIPHON III: *This is the day the Lord made; let us greatly rejoice and be glad therein.*

Resurrection Hymn: *To fedron tis anastaseos kirygma [Tone 4]...(When the tidings of the resurrection from the glorious angel were proclaimed unto the women disciples and our ancestral sentence also had been abolished, to the Apostles with boasting did they proclaim that death is vanquished forever more and Christ our God has risen from the dead and granted to the world His great mercy.)*

Hymn for the Sunday Before Christmas: *Etimazou Vithlehem...(O Bethlehem prepare, Eden is opened to all. And be ready, Ephrata, for the Tree of life has in the grotto blossomed forth from the Virgin. Indeed Her womb is shown to be spiritually a Paradise, in which is found the God-planted Tree. And if we eat from it we shall live and shall not die, as did Adam of old. Christ is born so that He might raise up the formerly fallen image.)*

Hymn for the Holy Ancestors: *Megala ta tis pisteos...(Magnificent are Faith's accomplishments! The three holy Youths exultingly stood in the fountain of fire as if beside the still waters of rest. And Daniel the Prophet was shown to be a shepherd of lions. At their entreaty, O Christ God, save our souls.)*

Hymn to St. George: *Os ton ehmaloton eleftherotis... ("As the one who sets the captives free and the protector of the poor; as physician to the sick and the champion defender of kings, bearer of trophies are you, O Great Martyr George, intercede with Christ our God that He may save our souls.")*

Kontakion Hymn for this Sunday: *Ee Parthenos simeron...(On this day the Virgin Maid goes to the cave to give birth to the Pre-eternal Word in an ineffable manner. Dance for joy all the inhabited earth as you hear of this. Glorify along with the Angels and the shepherds Him Who willed that He appear as a newborn Child, the Pre-eternal God.)*

READINGS: Epistle: Hebrews 11: 9-10; 32-40 / Gospel: St. Matthew 1: 1-25

Megalynarion (Hymn to the Theotokos): Axion Estin... (Divine Liturgy Book, Pg. 51)

Communion Hymn: *Enite ton Kyrion ek ton ouranon...* (Divine Liturgy Book, pg. 64)

*"Above all else,
guard your heart, for
it is the well-spring
of life" Proverbs 4:23*



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ushers: Tasia Richards; Tim Hector

Greeter: Melissa Hawkins

Coffee Hour Hostess: Susana Cox

ALTAR FLOWER BOUQUETS – The beautiful poinsettias adorning our Holy Altar Gates today were sponsored by the following:

Matushka Gloria Lehman and sons Alexis, Andrew and Nicholas in honor and memory of Fr. Charles Lehman, loving husband, father and spiritual guide!

Mr. and Mrs. William G. Barringer in loving memory of our parents George and Velma Barringer; Ed and Lenar Dobbs. May their memories be eternal!

Please visit the bulletin board to check your Altar Flower commitment date(s) for January 2016 and other Sundays. Make your check payable to **St. George Greek Orthodox Church** and in the memo indicate the following: **“Altar Flowers: (and the date)** and submit it to the office staff.

PHILOPTOCHOS – Thank you for supporting our Christmas Bake Sale. Pick up your orders today in the Church Hall. Taverna Night is coming! Don't miss out on your reservation; see **Susan Clark at the Philoptochos Table. Taverna Night is Saturday, January 9, 2016. If you no longer drive at night and would like to go to **Taverna Night**, let Susan know and we will make arrangements to pick you up. Everyone had a great time at our annual Christmas Luncheon. We had great food and the Palm Springs High School Singers sang Christmas Carols and put us in the Christmas Spirit! **Angie Dyer, Susan Clark and Linda Petalas** did a wonderful job arranging the luncheon. May you have a Blessed Christmas.**

2016 CHURCH CALENDARS ARE AVAILABLE – Following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy today, Stewardship members of our parish are invited to pick up a **2016 Church Calendar** which are available in our parish hall.

CHRISTMAS OFFERING ENVELOPES – Christmas Offering Envelopes are available in the Narthex of our church. Please consider giving a special “Christmas Gift” to our parish today (Sunday Before Christmas), Christmas Day and next Sunday (Sunday After Christmas).

CHRISTMAS EVE CHURCH SERVICES TEXTS – Texts of Church Services will be provided for parishioners who want to follow the Christmas Eve Services. Texts will be printed upon request. Requests are to be made by contacting Fr. Ted no later than Tuesday, December 22nd.

BABY BOTTLE DRIVE – Thank you St. George for your gifts to this worthy project. We exceeded our goal of 1K by doubling it. Since monies are still coming in, we will give a full report in January 2016. Again, it could not have happened without your generous support. Louise Dobbs Barringer, Outreach Chairperson.

WEEKDAY CALENDAR

Tuesday, December 22nd.....No Bible Study

Thursday, December 24th... ..EVE OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST (CHRISTMAS EVE)
Royal Hours-8:30 a.m. / Divine Liturgy-9:45 a.m.

Friday, December 25th.....**THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD GOD & SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST**
Orthros-8:30 a.m. / Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Saturday, December 26th..... THE SYNAXIS OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS
Orthros-8:30 a.m. / Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m./Vespers-5:00 p.m.

*The Ladder for December 2015 is sponsored by:
Matushka Gloria Lehman*

We encourage all of our parents to sit in the church with their entire family as they participate in the beauty and mysteries of the Divine Liturgy. For those with young children, feel free to sit near an aisle so that you may easily take your children for a break, as needed. If necessary, we have a “crying room” in the narthex for your use. God Bless.