

DECEMBER 31, 2017

ST. GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE DESERT

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# THE LADDER

SUNDAY BEFORE THE THEOPHANY

**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.*

**FANTASY VS. REALITY**

Egotism is based on the idea that we have no need of God and, consequently, we are "gods." Repentance begins through the personal will of each person, while living life continuously according to true virtues is accomplished through the grace of the Holy Spirit, provided we persevere in the effort to unite ourselves with God. Thus, spiritual life is defined as the effort to control our own desires and, instead, to do God's Will. To do God's work, egotism must disappear and humility needs to emerge.

Through humility every set-back in life is turned into a blessing, once we rely only on the love of God. God's love and humility are evident in the event of the Nativity of Christ our God in that He was born in a simple manger. Yet, this simple manger had become Paradise through the very presence of Christ. His presence today makes every home a "Paradise" for each of us. Herod, however, made his whole kingdom—i.e., his whole house— a vision of hell as a result of his rejection of God.  
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**HOW TO READ THE BIBLE** - "When reading Scripture, we are to listen in a spirit of obedience. The Orthodox Church believes in divine inspiration of the Bible. Scripture is a "letter" from God, where Christ Himself is speaking. The Scriptures are God's authoritative witness of Himself. They express the Word of God in our human language. Since God Himself is speaking to us in the Bible, our response is rightly one of obedience, of receptivity, and listening. As we read, we wait on the Spirit. But, while divinely inspired, the Bible is also humanly expressed...God does not abolish our individuality but enhances it. And so it is in the writing of inspired Scripture. The authors were not just a passive instrument, a dictation machine recording a message. Each writer of Scripture contributes his particular personal gifts. Alongside the divine aspect, there is also a human element in Scripture. We are to value both..." "Our approach to the Bible is not only obedient but ecclesial...We read the Bible personally, but [also] as the members of a family, the family of the Orthodox Catholic Church. When reading Scripture, we say not "I" but "We." We read in communion with all the other members of the Body of Christ, in all parts of the world and in all generations of time. The decisive test and criterion for our understanding of what the Scripture means is the mind of the Church. The Bible is the book of the Church."

– Taken from "How to Read the Bible," by Met. Kallistos Ware



Ο εγωισμός βασιλεύει στην ιδέα ότι δεν έχουμε ανάγκη από τον Θεό, και, συνεπώς, εμείς είμεθα <θεοί.> Η μετανοία και η συγχώρησης γίνονται δια του θελήματος του καθενός. Η εναρτη ζωή πραγματοποιείται δια της χάριτος του Αγίου Πνεύματος, όσο συνεχίζουμε τον αγώνα να ενωθούμε με τον Θεό. Ο πνευματικός αγώνας ορίζεται ως προσπάθεια για ελεγχούμε το δικό μας θέλημα, με σκοπό να κάνουμε το θέλημα του Θεού. Για να κάνουμε το θέλημα του Θεού, εξαφανίζεται ο εγωισμός μας και εμφανίζεται η ταπεινοφροσύνη.

Η ταπεινοφροσύνη βασιλεύει στην χάριν και την αγάπη του Θεού. Παρατηρούμε αυτό καθώς μελετούμε την Γεννησίον του Θεού μας Χριστού—αφού γεννήθηκε σε μια απλή φατνή. Αλλά η φατνή έγινε Παραδείσος δια της παρουσίας του Χριστού. Κατά αυτήν την πραγματικότητα, ακόμη το σπίτι του καθενός προορίζεται να είναι <παραδείσος.> Ο Ηρώδης έκανε την βασιλείαν του—το σπίτι του—<κολαση> επιδή έδιωξε τον Θεό, και, μαλιστα, ζούμε σε εποχήν μέσα στην οποίαν η κοινή <μοδα> είναι να διώξει ο κόσμος τον Θεό από τα σπίτια με ατιμές ιδεολογίες.

Όταν έχουμε τον Χριστό μέσα στην ψυχήν μας και στις σκεψεις μας, ζούμε όπως μας διδάσκει ο Χριστός. Προσωποιοούνται στην πραγματικότητα η ταπεινώσις και η αγάπη—τα δώρα του Θεού. Ο Επίσκοπος Καλλιστός Ware λέγει: <Ο Ιησούς Χριστός ηνώσε τον άνθρωπον με τον Θεόν δια της Ενσαρκώσεως και ανοίξε για τον καθεναν την οδόν προς την προσωπικην ενώσιν του με τον Θεόν.> +Ο ΠΑΤΗΡ ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ

Indeed, in our own times, rejection of God from our homes is not uncommon. God is often replaced with unworthy ideals.

When we have Christ in our souls and thoughts, we live as Christ taught us when He appeared in the flesh. Humility and love are personified in reality. These are God's gifts to us. Bishop Kallistos Ware said, "Jesus Christ united humanity with God by way of His Incarnation and opened the way for each person's unity with God." (*The Orthodox Church*, pg. 225).

Unity with God is experienced in this life as it is to be forever in the next life. Paradise is a reality both "in heaven as on earth," as we pray in the Lord's Prayer. It is a *state of being* with God. While God's Kingdom is beyond this material world, it includes this present life, as well. Hence, wherever Christ is, that is where God's Kingdom exists. When Christ is in our lives, everything around us turns into a taste of eternal life with Him. This is the meaning behind the reason for consecrating our church edifices; blessing our homes; participating in the Holy Sacraments. This "heaven on earth" begins with the manger in which Christ our God was born and continues into our lives today.

Spiritual well-being depends on our proper understanding of fantasy versus reality. The presence of Christ is the reality. His Nativity and His Baptism in the River Jordan are the realities that we are to accept in our lives in order to maintain peace within our souls and within our homes. The message before us today, loud and clear, is that we need to repent - i.e., to continually change our mentality, or, in essence, our personality into one that is more and more God-centered, rather than self-centered. The Saints of our Church often speak about delusions, or fantasies, which arise from our self-centeredness - our pride. For the Saints to speak about this, it indicates that they also "fought the good fight" as did St. Paul (and as we all are called to do) and they experienced temptations and found themselves in need of repentance as is common to all of us. Hence, they warn against fantasies, noting that we are prone to plot, scheme, plan and do things that have nothing to do with God and everything to do with our own self-envisioned self-image. Living with delusions and fantasies is a recipe for future sorrows. Living with the reality of Christ's loving presence in our lives is a recipe for lasting, spiritual and wholesome joys. Should we plan and do things that have everything to do with God and less to do with our pride, we would find ourselves fulfilling the purpose for which God brought us into being. We bring upon ourselves sorrows when we forget God. To the contrary, we bring upon ourselves blessings when we remember God in everything.

+FR. THEODORE

**PRAY FOR THE SICK:** George Aeder, Adele Gallade, Constantine Papapetru, Erika Aguilar, Mary Mitsias, Tom Evans, Jim Alex, Nicholas Kyriakou, Chris Laskaris, J.J. Richards, Spiro Canakis (*Many faithful on the Prayer List face chronic or serious illness*).

**HYMNS FOR THIS SUNDAY'S CELEBRATION OF THE DIVINE LITURGY:**

**ANTIPHON I:** *"Tes presvies tis Theotokou..." (By the prayers of the Theotokos...)*

**Verse 1—** I will give thanks to You, O Lord, with my whole heart, in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

**Refrain:** *"Tes presvies tis Theotokou, Soter, soson imas."*

**Verse 2-** Great are the works of the Lord, sought out in all things with regard to His will.

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

**Verse 3—** Thanksgiving and majesty are His work, and His righteousness continues unto ages of ages. Holy and fearful is His name.

**Refrain:** *"Tes presvies tis Theotokou, Soter, soson imas."*

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

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

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**ANTIPHON II:** *"Soson imas Ie Theou..." (Save us, O Son of God...)*

**Verse 1-** Blessed is the man who fears the Lord; he will delight exceedingly in His commandments. His seed shall be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright shall be blessed.

**Refrain:** *"Soson imas Ie Theou, O ek Parthenou techtheis, psallontas si alleluia."*

**Verse 2 -**Glory and riches shall be in his house, and his righteousness continues unto ages of ages.

**Refrain:** *"Save us, O Son of God, Who was born of a Virgin, we sing to You, Alleluia."*

**Verse 3 -** For the upright, light springs up in darkness, for he is merciful, compassionate, and righteous.

**Refrain:** *"Soson imas Ie Theou, O ek Parthenou techtheis, psallontas si alleluia."*

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**ANTIPHON III-** *The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies the footstool of Your feet." The Lord shall send forth the rod of Your power from Zion, and rule in the midst of Your enemies.*

**Sunday Resurrection Hymn—** *Ton synanarchon Logon [Tone 5]...(Let us, the faithful, praise and worship the Word, coeternal with the Father and the Spirit, Who for our salvation was born of a Virgin for He willed to be lifted up bodily upon the Cross, to endure death and to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection.)*

**Hymn of the Nativity of Christ:** *Ee ghenissis Sou Christe o Theos... (Your nativity, O Christ our God, has caused the light of knowledge to rise upon the world. For therein the worshippers of the stars were by a star instructed to worship You, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know You as Orient from on high. Glory to You, O Lord.)*

**Hymn for the Holy Ancestors -** *Evangelizou Iosif... (Annunciate the miracles to David the ancestor of God, O Joseph. You saw the Virgin pregnant. You glorified with the shepherds. You worshipped with the Magi. And you were warned by an Angel. Entreat Christ God to save our souls.)*

**Hymn for St. George—** *Os ton echmaloton eleftherotis... (Since you are a deliverer of captives and a defender of the poor; a physician for the sick and a noble attendant to kings, O Great among the Martyrs and Glorious 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 gives birth to the Super-essential. To the Unapproachable, earth is providing the grotto. Angels sing and with the shepherds offer up glory. Following a star the Magi are still proceeding. He was born for our salvation, a newborn Child, the pre-eternal God.)*

**READINGS:** *Epistle—2 Timothy 4: 5-8 / Gospel—St. Mark 1: 1-8*

**Instead of Axion Estin, the following is sung:** *Meghalinon psychi mou... (O my soul, magnify the ever-virgin Maid who from the curse has redeemed us. Easier for us is from fear to love silence, free of any peril as it is, O Virgin; whereas to weave stirring hymns out of longing in earnest, is difficult. Therefore, O Mother, give us strength to match our volition, we pray you.)*



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**PHILOPTOCHOS - Happy New Year.** We hope you have a healthy and wonderful 2018. Our next Board Meeting will be on Thursday, January 11 at 1100 a.m. We need sponsors for our Coffee Hour on Sundays after Church. See **Pat Dalkas**. Don't forget to check you calendars to see what days you are available to help us prepare the Festival food starting on Monday, January 8. See **Stacy or Lula**.

**2018 GREEK FESTIVAL - Note: Festival preparations begin on Monday, January 8th.** Please see **Stacey Argyros** or **Lula Valissarakos** for more information. Festival fliers are available and ready to be delivered to friends, neighbors and businesses. Next Festival Meeting: Monday, January 8th at 7:00 p.m.

**VASILOPITA** - The Annual Vasilopita celebration is scheduled to take place next Sunday, January 7th, following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

## WEEKDAY CALENDAR

Monday, January 1st.....THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR  
ST. BASIL THE GREAT  
Orthros-8:30 a.m.  
Divine Liturgy of St. Basil- 9:30 a.m.  
*HAPPY NEW YEAR!*

Tuesday, January 2nd.....Bible Study - 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, January 4th.....Choir Practice - 1:00 p.m.

Friday, January 5th.....EVE OF THEOPHANY  
Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great-9:30 a.m.  
Great Blessing of the Waters - 10:45 a.m.

Saturday, January 6th.....THE FEAST OF THEOPHANY -THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST OUR GOD  
Orthros-8:30 a.m.  
Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.  
Great Blessing of the Waters - 10:30 a.m.

*The Ladder for December 2017  
is sponsored by:  
Rhonda & Nicholas Latkovic*

**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.**