

HOLY CROSS

CROSSROADS

Beloved Members and Friends of Holy Cross,

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Christ begins His public ministry with being baptized in the Jordan River by St. John. Christ affirms the ministry of His servant, John the Baptist, and impresses upon us the need for Holy Baptism. In the baptismal service we read from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans:

“Brethren, do you not know, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that in like manner, Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection; knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that from now on, we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we are dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, dies no more; death has no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He lives, He lives unto God. Likewise if we also are dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:3-11).

Christ the true Light has come into the world and grants il-

Continued pg. 4 →

JANUARY 2025

House Blessings

Every year, on the Feast of Epiphany, Orthodox Christians around the world have a blessing of the waters to celebrate the Baptism of Christ as well as the revealing of the Holy Trinity to mankind. We then received the blessing of this Holy Water to renew ourselves in Christ and to remind ourselves that through Christ all things are again made clean. We also extend that blessing to the homes in which we live, to wipe away temptations and attacks that might lead us away from Christ.

If you wish to have Fr. Michael come and bless your home, please complete this form and return it to the Church office at your earliest convenience. Please **PRINT** clearly.

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip _____

Please suggest THREE (3) dates and times for your house blessing
STARTING JANUARY 5TH

(You will receive a call confirming date and time of blessing.)

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Please prepare the following, to the best of your abilities, for the blessing:

- 1) Make an effort to have the entire family present.
- 2) Set out an Icon in a central area of the house where the prayer service will begin.
- 3) Write two lists of names, one of the living and one of the departed family members for whom you would like the Priest to pray during the house blessing.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to fill out and return this form, either in the basket in the narthex or to:

Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church
123 Gilkeson Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15228



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123 Gilkeson Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15228

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Under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and His Eminence Metropolitan SAVAS of Pittsburgh

The mission of Holy Cross is to keep and proclaim, pure and undefiled, the Orthodox Christian faith and traditions in conformity with the doctrine, canons, worship, discipline and customs of the Church.

Fr. Michael Kallaur, Presiding Priest

Fr. Daniel Korba, Presbyter

Dn. Frank Dickos, Deacon

Elias Diamond, Pastoral Assistant

Nena Jovonovich, Secretary

Website: holycrosspgh.org

Office (412) 833-3355 FAX (412) 833-3357

Community Center Phone:(412) 854-6001

Office Hours Monday-Friday 9am-5pm

Organizations & Committees

Church School	Elias Diamond	(412) 833-3355
Philoptochos Pres.	Thea Manos	(412) 600-8640
Phil. Membership	Adrienne Dickos	(412) 833-4980
Circle of Angels	Carol Halkias	(412) 276-5002
	Christine Peters	(724) 693-9290
Landscaping	Dina Hartlep	(412) 720-9383
	Frank Kalogeris	(412) 855-4155
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	Dena Yamalis	(412) 343-8355
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Senior Dance	Rachel Facaros	(412) 323-6298
Choir		
First Steps	Sophia Alfarns-Melainis	(412) 251-3209
JOY	Elias Diamond	(412)413-7427
Young Adults	Elias Diamond	(412)413-7427
GOYA	Denise Melis	(412) 341-9264
Golden Club	Cynthia Kostelnik	(412) 833-9423
	Rene Koett	(412) 831-3142
Bookstore	Mary Portellos	(724) 941-8699
House Committee	Constance Zotis	(412) 736-7145
Building Comm.	Michael N. Zervos	(412) 833-6843
Sts. Mary & Martha	Adrienne Dickos	(412) 833-4980
Interior Design Committee	Eva Elderkin	(412) 969-1479

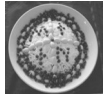
*Services:

Sundays:	8:15am Orthros
	9:30 am Divine Liturgy
Mondays:	6:30pm Paraclesis
Wednesdays:	7 pm Bible Study and via Zoom
Weekdays:	8:30am Orthros
	9:30am Divine Liturgy
Saturdays:	Vespers 5pm

*See monthly calendar for all services.

Funeral/Memorial information:

For **Kollyva**, you may bring your own or contact Denise Melis directly (412) 341-9264.



Use of the Community Center is available for parishioner funeral lunches at no charge. Parishioners may contact any caterer they choose to purchase and prepare their **Makaria** (Mercy Meal).

Parish Council 2025

Nick Ambeliotis
 Anthony Cuneo
 Bryan Elderkin
 Rachel Kartofilis
 George Liadis
 Eleni Maneta
 Sophia Milinkovic
 Tom Mourtacos
 Jim Mustakas
 Jordan Nicholas
 Ted Sofis
 Sadie Stang
 Stephen Yamalis
 Socrates Zacharias
 Constance Zotis

Coffee Hour fellowship is an extension of our Divine Liturgy! Please gather with family, koumbari or friends to sponsor/prepare one Sunday. See the calendar on website for open dates, and call the church office to confirm.



lumination to all. Christ, who is above all purity is baptized with us; He brings sanctification to the water and it becomes cleansing for our souls. That which is outward and visible is earthly; that which is inwardly understood is higher than heaven. Salvation comes through washing, and through water and the Spirit. By descending into the waters, we ascend to God. Wonderful are Your works O Lord, glory to You! (Matins of Theophany)

Our Lord came in the flesh to save us. He gives us the pathway to salvation through Holy Baptism. We are then anointed with the Holy Chrism as followers of Christ (the Anointed One); sealing us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are then sustained throughout our life with the food of eternal life, the Body and Blood of Christ. These sacred moments transcend time and space. They are actions that belong to the eternal Kingdom of God. They are recorded in the "Book of Life." (Rev. 21:27)

The words of the Lord have not changed throughout history. Listen to the words of God given to us by the Prophet Isaiah 700 years before Christ came in the flesh (Is. 1:16-20):

"Thus saith the Lord: Wash yourselves, and make yourselves clean, put away the evils from your souls before Mine eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek judgment and redeem the wronged. Defend the orphan and justify the widow. Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord. Although your sins are like crimson, I shall make them white like snow, and although they are as scarlet, I shall make them white like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good things of the land. But if you are unwilling and disobedient, you shall be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Washing and making ourselves clean is not a one time event. Baptism is a one time event, however, it is the beginning and foundation of our journey to God, not the end in itself nor a magic spell. We are constantly soiling our baptismal garment in sin. The only way to cleanse ourselves after baptism is through Holy Confession and Holy Communion. They go together. Confession is often referred to as a second baptism. We wash away our sins through the tears of repentance. The obedience that God asks of us is an obedience of love. Love God with all your soul, mind, heart, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. These are the directives of our Lord. A sacrificial, self-giving love that places the other person above our own desires and wants, this is the type of love that God asks of us. This is made manifest most perfectly on the Cross. Christ offered Himself up for the life and salvation of the world. Before Christ made this journey to the

Cross, He had to be born in the flesh, reveal Himself to us as the God-man, teach us about the Holy Trinity - His Father, Himself (the Son), and the Holy Spirit, and show us the way salvation, ultimately through His own example, and then fulfill His mission on the Cross. From the Cross, Christ descended into Hades (the place of the dead) and released the souls bound by sin and offered salvation to all in His glorious resurrection from the dead. ALL OF US WILL MAKE THIS JOURNEY, but will we make it united to Christ or will we prefer "the darkness of this world (that is sin) to the light of Christ." (John 3:19)

As we enter a new calendar year, let us humbly approach the great mercy and love of our Lord to help us, cleanse us, and renew in us His great glory. There is still time to accomplish much for the glory of God, let us not hesitate to do good wherever and whenever possible.

"O faithful, seeing the Master of all coming divinely to baptism, let us sing to Him and prepare with love the paths of our hearts, wiping away the dirt of deadly sin. Behold, He is coming to save the human race in the streams of the Jordan."
(Matins - Fore-feast of Theophany)

Wishing you and your families much joy, health, and strength in the new (civil) year - 2025.

With love in Christ,

Fr. Michael

On the Feast of Theophany by St. John Maximovitch
(one of the bishops who will be depicted on our Church walls)

*"Today You appeared to the world, and Your light, O Lord,
has left its mark upon us."*

The feast of the Baptism of the Lord was called in ancient times "the Day of Lights".

The Baptism of Christ is the beginning of our enlightenment - the appearance of Christ to the world, the revelation of the Holy Trinity to people.

"Why," the Golden-mouthed Teacher asks, "not the day on which He was born, but the day on which He was baptized, is it called the Theophany? Because now He has manifested to the world."

Although, when Christ was secretly born in a cave, the star revealed it to the magi and the angels announced it to the shepherds, but before the time set for His manifestation, Christ seemed to be hiding from the rest of the world, sometimes hiding and running from Herod, sometimes not standing out among the surrounding people while staying in the house of what appeared to be His father Joseph. And now Christ

appears to the world, from this time He begins to openly teach, perform miracles, and is coming to suffer for the human race, preaching and working out our salvation.

The manifestation of Christ and the beginning of His ministry is connected with the manifestation of the Holy Trinity: "The Trinity was manifested in the Jordan." The Old Testament Scripture only vaguely and covertly proclaimed it. Now the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity clearly are manifest.

John the Baptist was sent by God to serve Christ on this great day and prepare the way for Him. With his preaching, he aroused the hearts of people in the land of Israel to a particularly tense expectation of the Messiah. He prepared His first disciples. He also announced to people that the Messiah had come and indicated Him, saying: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29, 27).

John pointed to the high dignity of the coming Savior of the world: "I am not worthy to bow to Him to loosen the strap of His boots" (Mark 1:7), he said. With these words he expresses his humble reverence for Him, to prepare the way for Who was sent. But at the same time, understanding those words in a figurative spiritual sense, it points to the combination of divine and human nature in Christ that surpasses reason. The Son of God put on human nature and walked the earth in human flesh. But how much more excellent a man is than the shoes he wears, God surpasses His creation even more. However, it is easy for a person to put on and take off his shoes, but now human nature is inseparable from the Divine in the Son of God. Unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably they united.

But how was this Divine Mystery accomplished? How this mystery took place is incomprehensible to the human mind: "The manner in which you conceived was most glorious, O Theotokos. The manner in which you gave birth is beyond all thought, O Virgin" (Dogmatika 7th tone). Approach with reverence, whoever wants to theologize about this. Do not dare to argue more than you should, but learn humility from the Greatest of those born of women and, bow down, try to understand and teach only what God has revealed.

When the time came, Christ came to John.

Although they were close relatives, John did not know Jesus, for until that day Jesus did not come into the wilderness, where John constantly dwelt.

God foretold to John that by the Spirit descending upon the Messiah, he would recognize Him. But as soon as Jesus approached, John felt reverence and awe: "It is fitting for me to be baptized by

you, and are you coming to me" (Matt. 3:14-15), he said to the Comer.

"Let it go now, so it behooves us to fulfill all righteousness," Christ answered.

What truth? Fulfill that which by the will of God is predetermined for our salvation. To fulfill the truth that by humility, and not by pride and self-exaltation, that by obedience to the will of God, and not by self-will and one's own art, God is known, eternal salvation is acquired, the palaces of heaven are reached.

John submits and baptizes Jesus. Humbly the King of heaven bowed His head under the right hand of His servant, the Creator bowed before His creation.

Jordan trembled, and with him all the watery nature. The heavens opened up, marking the opening of the way to God and the heavenly Abodes for people, the revelation of the truths of Divine Scripture. The voice of the Father thundered: "This is my beloved Son, I am well pleased with him" (Matt. 3:17). The Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended on the Son of God, as a man standing in the Jordan. What God foretold to John was fulfilled, there were no more doubts: before him stood the Messiah, the Son of God Himself.

Thus the Holy Trinity was revealed to the world. "The Trinity was revealed in the Jordan, for the Father, the all-divine Essence Himself, announced: 'This One Who is baptized is my beloved Son.' And the Spirit came upon Him Who was like unto Him, Whom the people bless and exalt supremely for all ages."

There were not many people there, only John the Baptist was the representative of the whole human race. He proclaims what he has seen and heard. He begins the sermon on the Holy Trinity and faith in It is affirmed and revealed more fully through the lips of the Son of God Himself and the revelations of the Holy Spirit.

The immersion of Christ into the Jordan and the appearance of the Holy Trinity there sanctified the waters of the Jordan, and with them the whole nature of water.

Water is the basis of the entire visible world. At the creation of the world, as the book of Genesis says, "the Spirit of God hovered over the waters" (Gen. 1:2). "For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water," writes the holy Apostle Peter (2 Pet. 3:5).

Everywhere there is water in one form or another, whether in the form of moisture or in the form of steam. Neither animal nor plant can live without water. There is moisture in solid stones, and in the depths of the earth, and in the air.

With the fall of man, all nature was defiled, became corruptible and bears the seal of sin.

Saving humanity, the Lord also prepares nature for cleansing from filth. Having sanctified the nature of water in the Jordan, the Lord gave him the power to revive a person in baptism and to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit during church sacred rites to heal human infirmities and drive away the power of demons. Together with water, all nature is cleansed and sanctified, preparing for the eternal Kingdom of God. While sin continues, "the whole creation groans and suffers together until now" (Rom. 8:22), says the apostle Paul, but she also hopes that "she will be freed from slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

That liberation began in the Jordan, when Christ poured sanctification into its waters.

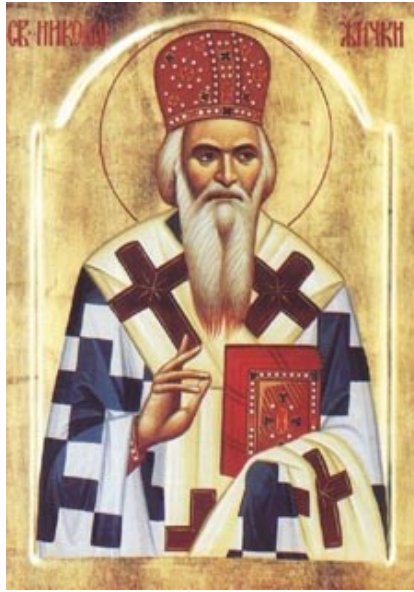
The enlightenment of the human race and at the same time the sanctification of it and of all nature will continue until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the flaming elements will destroy the present heaven and earth, and there will be new ones in which truth dwells.

That will not be a new creation, but a renewed nature cleansed from the consequences of sin, where the saved resurrected human race, enjoying the light of the Life-Giving Trinity, will glorify the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit with the angels.



Saint Nikolai of Zhicha

Commemorated on March 18



Saint Nikolai of Zhicha, “the Serbian Chrysostom,” was born in Lelich in western Serbia on January 4, 1881 (December 23, 1880 O.S.). His parents were Dragomir and Katherine Velimirovich, who lived on a farm where they raised a large family. His pious mother was a major influence on his spiritual development, teaching him by word and especially by example. As a small child, Nikolai often walked three miles to the Chelije Monastery with his mother to attend services there.

Sickly as a child, Nikolai was not physically strong as an adult. He failed his physical requirements when he applied to the military academy, but his excellent academic qualifications allowed him to enter the Saint Savva Seminary in Belgrade, even before he finished preparatory school.

After graduating from the seminary in 1905, he earned doctoral degrees from the University of Berne in 1908, and from King’s College, Oxford in 1909. When he returned home, he fell ill with dysentery. Vowing to serve God for the rest of his life if he recovered, he was tonsured at the Rakovica Monastery on December 20, 1909 and was also ordained to the holy priesthood.

In 1910 he went to study in Russia to prepare himself for a teaching position at the seminary in Belgrade. At the Theological Academy in Saint Petersburg, the Provost asked him why he had come. He replied, “I wanted to be a shepherd. As a child, I tended my father’s

sheep. Now that I am a man, I wish to tend the rational flock of my heavenly Father. I believe that is the way that has been shown to me." The Provost smiled, pleased by this response, then showed the young man to his quarters.

After completing his studies, he returned to Belgrade and taught philosophy, logic, history, and foreign languages at the seminary. He spoke seven languages, and this ability proved very useful to him throughout his life.

Saint Nikolai was renowned for his sermons, which never lasted more than twenty minutes, and focused on just three main points. He taught people the theology of the Church in a language they could understand, and inspired them to repentance.

At the start of World War I, Archimandrite Nikolai was sent to England on a diplomatic mission to seek help in the struggle of the Serbs against Austria. His doctorate from Oxford gained him an invitation to speak at Westminster Abbey. He remained in England for three short months, but Saint Nikolai left a lasting impression on those who heard him. His writings "The Lord's Commandments," and "Meditations on the Lord's Prayer" impressed many in the Church of England.

Archimandrite Nikolai left England and went to America, where he proved to be a good ambassador for his nation and his Church.

The future saint returned to Serbia in 1919, where he was consecrated as Bishop of Zhicha, and was later transferred to Ochrid. The new hierarch assisted those who were suffering from the ravages of war by establishing orphanages and helping the poor.

Bishop Nikolai took over as leader of Bogomljcki Pokret, a popular movement for spiritual revival which encouraged people to pray and read the Bible. Under the bishop's direction, it also contributed to a renewal of monasticism. Monasteries were restored and reopened, and this in turn revitalized the spiritual life of the Serbian people.

In 1921, Bishop Nikolai was invited to visit America again and spent two years as a missionary bishop. He gave more than a hundred talks in less than six months, raising funds for his orphanages. Over the next twenty years, he lectured in various churches and universities.

When Germany invaded Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, Bishop Nikolai, a fearless critic of the Nazis, was arrested and confined in Ljubostir Vojlovici Monastery. In 1944, he and Patriarch Gavrilo were sent to the death camp at Dachau. There he witnessed many atrocities and was tortured himself. When American troops liberated the prisoners in May 1945, the patriarch returned to Yugoslavia, but Bishop Nikolai went to England.

The Communist leader Tito was just coming to power in Yugo-

slavia, where he persecuted the Church and crushed those who opposed him. Therefore, Bishop Nikolai believed he could serve the Serbian people more effectively by remaining abroad. He went to America in 1946, following a hectic schedule in spite of his health problems which were exacerbated by his time in Dachau. He taught for three years at Saint Savva's Seminary in Libertyville, IL before he settled at Saint Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, PA in 1951.

He taught at Saint Tikhon's and also served as the seminary's Dean and Rector. He was also a guest lecturer at Saint Vladimir's Seminary in NY, and at Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, NY.

On Saturday March 17, 1956 Bishop Nikolai served his last Liturgy. After the service he went to the trapeza and gave a short talk. As he was leaving, he bowed low and said, "Forgive me, brothers." This was something unusual which he had not done before.

On March 18, 1956 Saint Nikolai fell asleep in the Lord Whom he had served throughout his life. He was found in his room kneeling in an attitude of prayer. Though he was buried at Saint Savva's Monastery in Libertyville, IL, he had always expressed a desire to be buried in his homeland. In April of 1991 his relics were transferred to the Cetinje Monastery in Lelich. There he was buried next to his friend and disciple Father Justin Popovich (+ 1979).

English readers are familiar with Saint Nikolai's *Prologue from Ochrid, The Life of Saint Savva, A Treasury of Serbian Spirituality*, and other writings which are of great benefit for the whole Church. He thought of his writings as silent sermons addressed to people who would never hear him preach. In his life and writings, the grace of the Holy Spirit shone forth for all to see, but in his humility he considered himself the least of men.

Though he was a native of Serbia, Saint Nikolai has a universal significance for Orthodox Christians in all countries. He was like a candle set upon a candlestick giving light to all (MT 5:15). A spiritual guide and teacher with a magnetic personality, he attracted many people to himself. He also loved them, seeing the image of God in each person he met. He had a special love for children, who hastened to receive his blessing whenever they saw him in the street.

He was a man of compunctionate prayer, and possessed the gift of tears which purify the soul (Saint John Climacus, LADDER, Step 7). He was a true pastor to his flock protecting them from spiritual wolves, and guiding them on the path to salvation. He has left behind many soul-profitting writings which proclaim the truth of Christ to modern man. In them he exhorts people to love God, and to live a life of virtue and holiness. May we also be found worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven through the prayers of Saint Nikolai, and by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory forever. Amen.

Saint John [Maximovitch],
Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco
Commemorated on July 2



Our Father among the Saints John (Maximovitch), Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco (1896-1966), was a diocesan bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) who served widely from China to France to the United States.

Saint John departed this life on June 19 (O.S.) / July 2 (N.S.), 1966, and was officially glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad on July 2, 1994. His glorification was later recognized for universal veneration by the Patriarchate of Moscow on July 2, 2008.

Life

The future Saint John was born on June 4, 1896, in the village of Adamovka in Kharkiv province to pious aristocrats, Boris and Glafira Maximovitch. He was given the baptismal name of Michael, after the Holy Archangel Michael. In his youth, Michael was sickly and had a poor appetite, but he displayed an intense religious interest. He was educated at the Poltava Military School (1907-14); Kharkiv Imperial University, from which he received a law degree (in 1918); and the University of Belgrade (where he completed his theological education in 1925).

He and his family fled their country as the Bolshevik revolutionaries descended on the country, emigrating to Yugoslavia. There, he enrolled in the Department of Theology of the University of Belgrade. He was tonsured a monk in 1926 by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kharkov (later the first primate of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia). Metropolitan Anthony later in 1926 ordained him hierodeacon. Bishop Gabriel of Chelyabinsk ordained him hieromonk on November 21, 1926. Subsequent to his ordination he began an active

life of teaching in a Serbian high school and serving, at the request of local Greeks and Macedonians, in the Greek language. With the growth of his popularity, the bishops of the Russian Church Aboard resolved to elevate him to the episcopate.

Hieromonk John was consecrated bishop on May 28, 1934, with Metropolitan Anthony serving as principal consecrator, after which he was assigned to the Diocese of Shanghai. Twelve years later he was named Archbishop of China. Upon his arrival in Shanghai, Bishop John began working to restore unity among the various Orthodox nationalities. In time, he worked to build a large cathedral church that was dedicated to Surety of Sinners Icon to the Mother of God, with a bell tower and large parish house. Additionally, he inspired many activities: building of churches, hospitals, and orphanages among the Orthodox and Russians of Shanghai. He was intensely active, constantly praying and serving the daily cycle of services, while also visiting the sick with the Holy Gifts. He often would walk barefooted even in the coldest days. Yet to avoid the appearance of secular glory, he would pretend to act the fool.

With the end of World War II and the coming to power of the communists in China, Bishop John led the exodus of his community from Shanghai in 1949. Initially, he helped some 5,000 refugees to a camp on the island of Tubabao in the Philippines, while he travelled successfully to Washington, D.C., to lobby to amend the law to allow these refugees to enter the United States. It was while on this trip that Bishop John took time to establish a parish in Washington dedicated to Saint John the Forerunner.

In 1951, Archbishop John was assigned to the Archdiocese of Western Europe with his cathedra in Paris. During his time there, he also served as archpastor of the Orthodox Church of France, whose restored Gallican liturgy he studied and then celebrated. He was the principal consecrator of the Orthodox Church of France's first modern bishop, Jean-Nectaire (Kovalevsky) of Saint-Denis, and ordained to the priesthood the man who would become its second bishop, Germain (Bertrand-Hardy) of Saint-Denis.

In 1962, Archbishop John was assigned to the Diocese of San Francisco, succeeding his long time friend Archbishop Tikhon. Archbishop John's days in San Francisco were to prove sorrowful as he attempted to heal the great disunity in his community. He was able to bring peace such that the new cathedral, dedicated to the Joy of all Who Sorrow Icon of the Mother of God, was completed.

Deeply revering Saint John of Kronstadt, Archbishop John played an active role in preparation of his canonization.

He reposed during a visit to Seattle on July 2, 1966, while accompanying a tour of the Kursk-Root Icon of the Mother of God. He was laid to rest in a crypt chapel under the main altar of the new cathedral.



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
ARCHEPISCOPAL ENCYCLICAL

Archebiscopal Encyclical on the Feast of Christmas

December 25, 2024

Unto the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Pious Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils, Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Members of Leadership 100, the Day and Afternoon Schools, Philoptochos Societies, Youth, Greek Orthodox Organizations, and entirety of the Christ-loving Plenitude of the Sacred Archdiocese of America:

And the [star] led the Magi to You, who worshipped You in faith; have mercy upon them and upon us.

(Troparion, Plagal of the Second Mode)

Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ,

This Christmas, let us manifest a special joy and appreciation that even secular society acknowledges the Birth of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is often difficult to keep the Feast of the Nativity as pure as we would like to, with the seemingly endless commercialization that surrounds it. Nevertheless, even with all the tinsel and sparkle, the Name of the Lord is spread abroad by the world's imperfect regard for Christmas. We can agree with Saint Paul who says: *Christ is preached! More in every way, whether by pretext or by truth. And at this, I rejoice! And I shall rejoice more!* (Philippians 1:18). We should also share in the same joy, because as inadequate as secular and commercial observances of Christmas may be, at least people are exposed to the name and narrative of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Magi (from whence the word “magician comes), who were led to worship the Newborn Babe of Bethlehem by a Star, were astrologers watching the heavens for signs and wonders. They were not Jewish, but rather Persian, likely Zoroastrians, an ancient religion founded by Zoroaster (Greek: Ζωροάστρης), six centuries before the Birth of our Savior. They found their way to Bethlehem by following an exceptional Star that had arisen in the western night sky — a Star that had been prophesied in ways we do not fully understand. Their path to Christ may not have followed the Hebrew Prophets, but it still led them to Him.

There are so many in this world — Christian and non-Christian alike — whose connection to the Lord comes only through the Nativity and the many cultural traditions that have arisen around it. And perhaps, one day, like the Magi, a spiritual Star will arise in their hearts and lead them to the continuing Bethlehem, (which means the House of Bread), that is our Holy Orthodox Church.

This Christmas Season let us take joy and not begrudge the journey of others. Let us be willing to find an understanding and even an admiration for all those who — like the Magi — observe with some degree of faith and recognition the Birth of our Savior. For He was born in a cave and laid in a manger for the sake of every human being, and indeed, for all creation.

Χριστός Γεννᾶται! Δοξάσατε! Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

† ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America

PATRIARCHAL ENCYCLICAL FOR CHRISTMAS
+ BARTHOLOMEW

BY GOD'S MERCY ARCHBISHOP OF CON-
STANTINOPLE-NEW ROME AND ECUMENI-
CAL PATRIARCH

TO ALL THE PLENITUDE OF THE CHURCH
GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE

FROM THE SAVIOR CHRIST BORN IN BETHLEHEM

Most honorable brother hierarchs and blessed children in the Lord,

With the grace from above, we have once again this year arrived at the festal day of the Nativity in the flesh of God the Word, who came into the world and dwelt among us "out of his ineffable loving for humankind." We honor with psalms and hymns as well as with inexpressible joy the great mystery of the Incarnation, which is "newer than everything new, the only new thing under the sun," through which the way is opened for us to deification by grace and the entire creation is renewed. Christmas is not the experience of emotions that "come rapidly and depart even more rapidly." It is the existential participation in the whole event of Divine Economy. As testified by the Evangelist Matthew (ch. 1. 18-2.1-23), the leaders of the world sought to obliterate the divine infant from the outset. For us faithful, along with the cry that "Christ is born" in the feast of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God the Father, as well as the mournful bells of His passion, we also hear the cry that "Christ is risen," the good news of the victory over death and expectation of the common resurrection.

The words "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace" are heard once more in a world filled with violence, social injustice and dissolution of human dignity. The stunning progress of science and technology does not reach the depth of the human soul, because human beings are always more than what science can comprehend or to which the advancement of technology aspires. The gap between heaven and earth in our human existence cannot be scientifically bridged.

Today there is much talk about "the metahuman" and praise of artificial intelligence. The dream of "the superhuman" is of course hardly new. The concept of "the metahuman" is based on technological progress and his equipment with means

previously unimaginable to human experience and history, through which humankind will be able to transcend currently valid human measures. The Church is not technophobic. It approaches scientific knowledge as “a divinely granted gift to human beings,” without however overlooking or suppressing the

John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, PG 94.984.

dangers of scientism. The Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Crete, 2016) also emphasizes the contribution of Christianity “to the healthy development of secular civilization,” since God “established human beings as stewards of sacred creation and His coworkers in the world.” Moreover, it also highlights: “The Orthodox Church sets against the ‘man-god’ of the contemporary world the ‘God-man’ as the ultimate measure of all things. “We do not speak of a man who has been deified, but of God who has become man (John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* iii, 2 PG 94.988).”²

The answer to the crucial question—namely, how can we preserve the “culture of personhood,” the respect for its sacredness and emphasis on its beauty, until the final “eighth day” in the face of the titanism and prometheanism of the technological culture, its evolution and transmutation, in the midst of anthropotheistic changes and exaggerations of humankind—has been given once for all in the mystery of Divine Humanity. God the Word became flesh, the “truth has come” and “the shadow has passed.” For human beings, speaking the truth will forevermore be associated with their relationship to God as the response to God’s descent toward them and as the expectation and encounter of the coming Lord of glory. This living faith supports the human struggle to respond to the contradictions and challenges of earthly life, to life “by bread” (Mt 4.4), to survival as well as social and cultural development. Nevertheless, nothing in our life can thrive without reference to God, without the horizon of “the fullness of life, the fullness of joy and the fullness of knowledge” of His Kingdom.³

Christmas is an opportunity for us to become conscious of the mystery of divine freedom and the great miracle of human freedom. Christ knocks on the door of the human heart, yet only human beings honored with such freedom are able to open that door. “Clearly, without Him, without Christ,” as the late Fr. Georges Florovsky writes, “man cannot do anything. But there

is something that only man can do—namely, respond to God’s call and welcome Christ.”⁴

By saying “Yes” to this calling from above, Christ is revealed as “the true light” (Jn 1.9), “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14.6), the answer to the ultimate questions and pursuits of the intellect, to the desires of the heart and the hopes of humankind, but also to the “whence” and “whereto” of creation. We belong to Christ, in Whom all things are united. Christ is “the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 22.13). In His voluntary incarnation “for us men and for our salvation,” the Word of God “did not dwell in a single human being, but embraced human nature in its entirety with His hypostasis,”⁵ thereby establishing the common eternal destiny and unity of humanity. He does not liberate one people, but the entire race of humankind; He does not savingly divide only history, but renews the whole creation. Just as for history, so too for the universe, “before Christ” and “after Christ” holds definitively and determinately valid. Throughout its journey in the world, in history and through it to the Eschata, to the day without setting in the heavenly Kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Church that is “not in the world” witnesses to the truth and performs its sanctifying and spiritual work “for the life of the world.”

²*Encyclical*, § 10.

³Alexander Schmemmann, *I believe* (Athens: Akritas Editions, 1991), 129 [from the Greek]. ⁴Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras Editions, 1983) [from the Greek]. ⁵Nicholas Cabasilas, *Nine Unpublished Homilies* (Thessaloniki, 1976), 108.

Brethren and children in the Lord,

With a spirit of devotion, we kneel before the Mother of God who holds the infant and humbly worship “the Word from the beginning” who assumed our form, and we wish to all of you a blessed and holy Twelvetide and a favorable, healthy, peaceful and fruitful in good deeds new year of the Lord’s favor, filled with spiritual joy and divine gifts, in which the entire Christian world concelebrates and honors the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

Christmas 2024

+Bartholomew of Constantinople Fervent supplicant of you all before God

Scenes from Church School



We are extremely grateful for the outpouring of love and support for our

Holy Cross Iconography project!

Thank you to the many who have pledged partial and full support to the icons. All our efforts today are in preparation for this tremendous project to take place July 2025.

We prayerfully ask you to consider supporting this project and creating a legacy for your family. No gift is considered small and can be fulfilled over three years (2024, 2025 & 2026).

May you and your family be blessed for what you can offer this project. All donation amounts are appreciated and can be contributed to the overall project or join with others for a specific icon.

Icons still available include:

The Four Evangelists: St. Mark*

The Old Testament symbols for each evangelist:

Eagle ● Ox ● Lion ● Young Man

Saints:

St. Haralambos

St. Andrew of Crete*

St. Cyril of Alexandria

St. Gerasimos of Abydos*

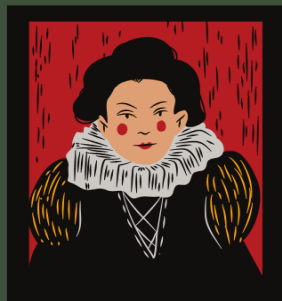
St. Nicholas Velimirovich

St. Innocent of Alaska

St. Raphael of Brooklyn*

Large Icons: Pentecost

Please contact Vasso Paliouras
at vassopaliouras@gmail.com
or 412-606-4314 with any
questions or specific requests.



Holy Cross Art Auction

To support our iconography project, we will have an online art auction in March! We'd love to showcase the many talented artists in our community. To learn more, contact Vasso Paliouras:

Contact:

412-606-4314
Vassopaliouras@gmail.com



**Greek School
Christmas Party**





**Greek School
Christmas Party**

Saints Mary & Martha Women's Fellowship 2024-2025

God's Plan For Creation

Tuesday, January 21, 2025

The whole creation in travail, waiting for its redemption. Romans 8:19-22

Speaker: Fr. Nick Ferencz

Hostess: Pres. Joanna Ferencz 1028 Francis Rd, Castle Shannon, PA 15234

RSVP 724-953-1091

Tuesday, February 25, 2025

Creation in the End Times

Speaker: Fr. John Chakos

Hostess: Dsa. Adrienne Dickos, 1840 Kent Road, Upper St. Clair, PA 15241

RSVP 412-400-4290

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Man's Relationship to the Created World

Speaker: Fr. George Callas

Hostess: Irene Zotis, 76 Woodland Drive, Pgh PA 15228 RSVP 412-721-0146

Tuesday, April 29, 2025

Ecology and the Orthodox Church

Speaker: Elias Diamond

Hostess: Vasso Paliouras, 114 Hoodridge Dr Pgh PA 15228 RSVP 412-606-4314

Tuesday, May 20, 2025

Created Matter and Worship. How the two go together.

Speaker: Fr. Michael Kallaur

Hostess: Pres. Eleni Kallaur, 3100 Eastview Road Bethel Park PA 15102

RSVP 412-443-5873

NOTES:

7pm Fellowship

7:30-8:30 Program

8:30-9pm Fellowship

All above subject to change.

Thank you.

Thanksgiving is November 28, 2024.

Pascha is April 20, 2025.

Adrienne Dickos, Chair

412-833-4980 call

412-400-4290 text

akdickos@verizon.net



Thank you to Greg Frommeyer who shared his incredible talent and once again designed the beautiful Christmas Card we all got to enjoy!



Wishing you a blessed Christmas and a joyful New Year filled with love, light, and abundant blessings.

Fr. Michael, & Holy Cross Church family - We are SO grateful for your ministry partnership over the last year. Thank you! Hoping you have a Very Merry Christmas!

LIGHT OF LIFE *Loi*



Circle of Angels for Christmas Outreach



THANK YOU to all who donated, baked or helped pack treats!




Carol, Christine and Dina



Holy Cross

Sun	Mon	Tue
<p>29 Sunday after Nativity 8:15am Orthros 9:30am Divine Liturgy</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31 4pm Great Vespers 5pm Matins 6pm Divine Liturgy of St. Basil</p>
<p>5 Eve of Theophany Blessing of Water 8:15am Orthros 9:30am Divine Liturgy First Water Blessing <i>No church school</i> Noon-1pm GIRLS GOYA Basketball 5pm Vespers</p>	<p>6 Theophany 8:15am Orthros 9:30am Divine Liturgy 2nd Blessing of Water</p> <p>HOUSE BLESSINGS</p>	<p>7 St. John the Baptist 8:15am Orthros 9:30am Divine Liturgy 7pm GOYA Meeting</p>
<p>12 8:15am Orthros 9:30am Divine Liturgy Vasilopita Church School resumes Noon-1pm GIRLS GOYA Basketball</p>	<p>13  8pm YAL Basketball</p>	<p>14</p>
HOUSE BLESSINGS		
<p>19 8:15am Orthros 9:30am Divine Liturgy</p> <p>GOYA BB York, PA</p>	<p>20 *GOYA Ad Book Deadline* 6:30pm Paracletes</p>	<p>21 <i>7pm Sts. Mary & Martha</i></p>
HOUSE BLESSINGS		
<p>26 8:15am Orthros 9:30am Divine Liturgy 4pm YAL Gathering  see p. 24</p>	<p>27 6:30pm Paracletes</p>	<p>28 7:30pm YAL Pickleball</p>
HOUSE BLESSINGS		

January 2025

Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 	2	3 11am Royal Hours for Theophany	4 5pm Vespers
8 4:30PM GREEK SCHOOL 6:45pm GOYA BBall NOBIBLE STUDY	9 7PM CATECHISM CLASS	10 <i>St. Gregory of Nyssa</i> 10am First Steps of Christ	11 5pm Vespers
15 4:30PM GREEK SCHOOL 6:45pm GOYA BBall NOBIBLE STUDY	16 7PM CATECHISM CLASS	17 <i>St. Anthony</i> 8:30am Orthros 9:30am Div. Liturgy	18 <i>Sts. Athanasius & Cyril</i> 8:30am Orthros 9:30am Divine Liturgy 5pm Vespers
GOYA BB York, PA			
22 4:30PM GREEK SCHOOL 6:45pm GOYA BBall 7PM BIBLE STUDY	23 7PM CATECHISM CLASS	24	25 <i>St. Gregory the Theologian</i> 8:30am Orthros 9:30am Divine Liturgy
29 4:30PM GREEK SCHOOL 6:45pm GOYA BBall 7PM BIBLE STUDY	30 <i>Three Hierarchs</i> 8:30am Orthros 9:30am Div. Liturgy 7PM CATECHISM CLASS	31	1 February 6:30pm Vespers @ Ypapanti



Philotochos Wreath-making







“The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.” This is a saying of Christ that we find in Mark’s Gospel, and although we don’t hear it in the passage we heard earlier from the Gospel of Luke, that saying encapsulates one of the major lessons we can derive from today’s reading. We heard of a woman who had an affliction of eighteen years, suffering from a condition which caused her to be crippled. She approaches Christ while He teaches in a synagogue, having mercy upon this poor, faithful woman, He heals her – a good action, right?

Unfortunately, the ruler of the synagogue takes issue with this, as the healing happens to take place on the Sabbath day. Now, for context, the Sabbath day is a day on which the Jewish law forbid work being done – just as God rested on the 7th day of the week after creating the world, so too were observant Jews expected to refrain from work on the Sabbath day. Yet, in the time of Christ, there were many who took this to an absurd extreme, such as the ruler of the synagogue who condemns Christ in the Gospel passage for even working a healing miracle on the Sabbath day. Christ rightly rebukes this hypocrisy, saying “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?”

There is a lesson for us here, one that concerns our own religiosity, for there are people in this world, like the ruler of the synagogue, who will be so blinded by a rigid dogmatism and a desire to condemn others that they will fail to uphold the spirit of the law itself and neglect the greatest commandments to love God with all their heart, soul, and mind and to love their neighbors as themselves. Religion is not a tool to be used as a bludgeon, a weapon wielded against others. Rather, we should remember that religion is a vehicle of sorts, an ark of salvation, by which we journey ever closer to Christ. Our faith is about our inner transformation, but too often, people will use the commandments and regulations of the Church to censure and shame others, completely failing to turn inwards to face their own shortcomings. This is not to say that we should ignore the statues of the Church, or that we turn a blind eye to a brother or sister going astray, but if we correct another, we must do so in a deep spirit of love, with the desire to correct and with an equally deep awareness of our own sinfulness.

As I considered this, I considered the fact that by this time next year, our iconography in this beautiful church will be greatly expanded. Icons are windows to heaven, connecting us to Christ and the saints, but they should also remind us of the fact that we are all icons of Christ, all of us made in the image of God. Part of the transformation that we should experience through our faith is growth in our ability to recognize that image of God in all those we encounter, a change in consciousness which allows us to see the divine spark in each and every person we come across. If the ruler of the synagogue had this perspective, if he had been able to truly recognize that woman as an icon of God, I’d guess he wouldn’t be so quick to condemn what was clearly a miraculous blessing from God Himself. This passage, like so many others in the Gospels, reminds us of the dangers of hypocrisy as evidenced by the Pharisees. Let us strive against their distorted understanding, and instead strive to follow after Christ above all.

~Elias Diamond

BISHOP OSIOS ORDAINS HIS FIRST PRIEST FOR THE HARVEST

December 18, 2024 by [Father John Chakos](#) ·

On December 15, 2024, the San Andres Seminary celebrated its first ordination to the priesthood of one of its graduates- Antonio Pata (now Father Elias). Bishop Osios of Sasima, himself ordained to be an auxiliary hierarch of the Metropolis of Mexico on October 13, 2025, officiated at this his first ordination. Father Elias grew up in the small agricultural village of Javali, on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala. From harvesting sugarcane in the fertile volcanic soil that favors this crop, he was called to serve the Guatemalan Orthodox Church whose fields are also ripe for harvest. His inspiration came from his two uncles, the late Father Antonio Pata and His Grace Osios, both of whom grew up under the tutelage of the late Father Andres Giron, who led a mass movement of thousands into the embrace of the Orthodox Church.

With this ordination, the Guatemalan Church, in a sense, has come full circle in the realization of its potential. An indigenous bishop now raising up one of his own from among the people for Holy Orders completes the icon of what a church should look like, making it into a true Eucharistic community. In the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch (December 20), “Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”

Now begins the awesome challenge for Fr. Elias, not only to protect the deposit of grace received from the hands of his bishop, but also to disseminate it into the fertile mission fields of Guatemala. Let us pray that he will be worthy of this calling.

Continued pg. 16→



1 -Deacon Elias receives blessing of Bishop Osios during his ordination.



2 -Deacon Elias is vested with priestly robes.

3 -Deacon Elias holds the Body of Christ as its guardian.

4 -DIGNO and AXIOS shouts the Bishop to the approval of the faithful.





**Deacon Elias escorted to the Bishop's throne
before many hundreds.**

Christmas Pageant









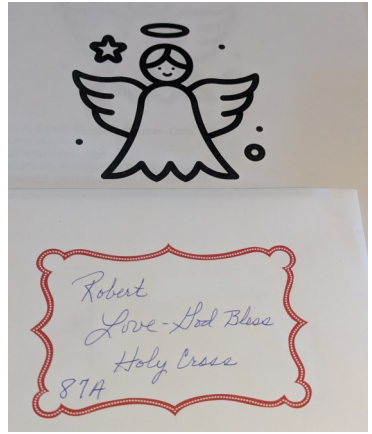




Community Outreach

We would like to say a special **Thank You** to all of the Holy Cross parishioners who provided Christmas Angel gifts for the Neighborhood Resilience Project (NRP). **100 beautifully wrapped gifts** were delivered from our parishioners with love to the NRP building on Wednesday, December 11th. We appreciate your generosity and kindness!

~Grace Myers & Steph Kladakis



FIRST MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH

**Monday,
January 13**

Basketball in the
Community Center gym
from 8 pm to 9:30 pm

Fellowship and food at
Primanti's in Mt. Lebanon
starting at 9:30 pm

YAL New Year's
Gathering



Christmas
in January

Sunday, January 26
4pm

@ Diamond
Residence

Community Outreach



Youth Christmas Caroling





GOYA Christmas Party

ATTENTION HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS and PARENTS:

The application for the Popi Hagelios Memorial Philanthropy Award of the Philoptochos Society of Holy Cross Church is available on Sunday, November 17 in the narthex, Elaine Sofis, esofis@comcast.net or Denise Melis, dmelis@comcast.net electronically. The application is due by Sunday, March 16, 2025. **NO EXCEPTIONS!**

The award is available to a PLEDGED 2025 Holy Cross family member who is a 2025 graduating high school senior. A similar application is available from Mt. Lebanon High School. You may apply to both philanthropy awards, but will only be eligible for one \$1500 award.

ARE YOU READY FOR SOME BASKETBALL??

HOLY CROSS GOYA IS HONORED TO HOST THE 2025 GOYA REGIONAL BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT ON FEBRUARY 21, 22 & 23

This year, there will be over 400 GOYAns and their parents, coaches and chaperones participating in our tournament. Hosting a Diocese basketball tournament is truly a community effort. Much help and many items are needed. Please choose to help in whatever way you can. In doing so, you will not only be supporting our youth, you will be helping Holy Cross be the best we can be in welcoming the GOYA community from across the Diocese!

THANK YOU IN ADVANCE FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Sponsorship Opportunities:	\$200– Saturday Night Beverages
\$275—Friday Night Social Event Snacks	\$200-Saturday Night Decorations
\$175—Friday Night Paper Products	\$250–Concession Stand
\$200—Friday Night Beverages	\$300-Sunday Breakfast
\$300–Saturday Night Event Snacks	\$150-Sunday Beverages
\$200–Saturday Night Paper Products	\$200-Coffee Supplies

For those of you desiring to make a substantially larger donation...know that there are various opportunities for underwriting larger costs of renting gyms, paying referees, buying trophies and providing the DJ for the dance. Contact Denise Melis for more information: dmelis@comcast.net or 412-855-5661.

ALL DONORS WILL BE ACKNOWLEDGED IN THE TOURNAMENT AD BOOK!

Giving your time:

Step up and clean up: Thursday at 6pm, Saturday at 5pm, Sunday after breakfast

Monitor Gyms: Spend 2 hours at a gym during games to represent Holy Cross Church to make sure all goes as planned

Score Keepers: Two people are needed on the bench keeping the book & running the clock

Holy Cross GOYA Basketball Tournament

February 21-23, 2025

Ad Book DEADLINE—January 20, 2025

Please email all artwork to: AdGoya2020@gmail.com

Instructions for ad: _____

Name: _____

Name of Business (if different): _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Questions?

Contact Samantha Murphy

412-414-6536

or

AdGoya2020@gmail.com

Circle one:

\$10 Patron page

\$25 Quarter Page

\$50 Half Page

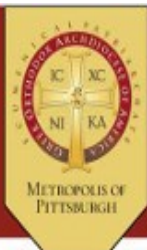
\$100 Full Page

Check: make payable to: "Holy Cross GOYA"

and mail to Holy Cross Church, 123 Gilkeson Road

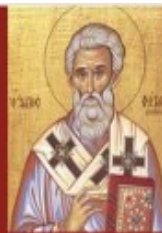
Pittsburgh, PA 15222 (put "ad book" in memo line) - OR -

Venmo: @Samantha-Murphy-8 (6536 last 4 digits)



A Good Word - Λόγον Αγαθόν

NEWSLETTER OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX
METROPOLIS OF PITTSBURGH



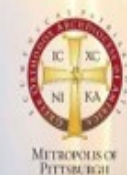
NEW METROPOLIS CENTER CONSTRUCTION UPDATE



Please consider a pledge or donation towards this worthy campaign that will benefit all! To donate please scan the QR code. Thank you as always for your support!



To learn more about the New Metropolis Center campaign please visit <https://www.pittsburgh.goarch.org/project-updates>



Save the Date



2025 St. Photios Awards Banquet

Saturday May 3 2025
Doubletree by Hilton Pittsburgh Cranberry
pittsburgh.goarch.org





2024 Metropolis of Pittsburgh St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival

Please consider donating to the Metropolis Scholarship Fund so that we may continue to offer scholarships to our talented youth. To donate please scan the QR code. Thank you!



Junior Speech Division - "The Prodigal Son"

Theophany Goudas Ksenyak from Sts. Constantine and Helen Cathedral, Cleveland Heights, OH

Your Eminence Metropolitan Savas, Reverend Fathers, Distinguished Judges, Fellow Speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Morning.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son. A parable many of us have heard, but one that not many of us have looked into. It starts in Luke 15 with three people: a father and two sons. Throughout this story, I want you to think of the father as God and the sons as us. Going on, the younger son comes to his father and asks for his inheritance early. With his newfound riches, he heads off and parties, blowing all the money. Just when he was down to his last penny, there was a large famine. To earn money, he found a job as a pig farmer. The urge for food was so strong for him that he would pay anything to eat the same food that pigs were eating.

I want to make one thing clear: repentance can involve a large number of stages given the circumstances, but The Parable of the Prodigal Son happens to have three. Here is where the first stage of repentance falls, which is contrition. In short, this is feeling remorse or sorrow for our actions. To help you relate, imagine the last time you got into a large argument with someone. In the heat of the moment, you are just trying to prove your point and get an edge over the other person. No matter what the topic of the argument, in the end, you are likely to feel sorry for your actions. This is exactly what contrition is, and you didn't even know you were doing it. The son was also regretting his decision. Next, the son comes to a realization. The Bible highlights this by saying, "He came to himself" in Luke 15:17. This point in time is known as the second stage of repentance, which is the decision to return. One interesting aspect of this is he acknowledges that everything that has happened to him is his fault and no one else's. Let's jump back to that argument I mentioned earlier. After you realize the bad things you said or how the other person is feeling, you decide it is a good time to forgive them. You don't forgive them just yet, but you decide you are going to. When you do this, you are completing a part of the second stage of repentance. When the son makes his way back home, he apologizes to his father and is scared that his father will dislike him. "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" This highlights the final stage of repentance, which is known as your actions. One key aspect of the final stage is that there has to be a struggle to return and avoid going down that path again. Many of us miss this part, and this part directly ties in with my example of repentance, concerning an argument. After you have forgiven your peer, you are halfway done with the final step. The last part that everyone cannot seem to finish is to not do it again. Let's say a few weeks pass after your last argument. Then tension starts to grow between you and this person. For most of us, it is extremely easy to fall into the trap and start the repentance cycle over again by beginning to argue. On the flip side, it is extremely hard to prevent the argument. Although your brain is telling you to prove your point, you should listen to your heart and finish the final stage of repentance to ultimately end the cycle.

To complete the story, the son is expecting a harsh welcome. Surprisingly, the father throws a party, kills the fattened calf, and does anything he can to make the son feel welcome. The father is reacting as if the son had died and was raised from the dead! Wait, that sounds familiar. The parable echoes this phrase twice throughout the story: "For this, my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Many times you can be at an all-time low, make a bad decision, and now you feel miserable. Remember how I said, "Think of the father as God and the son as you?" In this miserable time, God is worried about you; he cannot sleep at night and is up all day waiting for you to return. And when you do return, God will not be upset; he will rejoice for your return, just as the father did in the parable. This exemplifies that our relationship with God should be one of trust and knowledge, not one of uncertainty. So there is one thing I want everyone to take home today. When you are feeling down, upset, or frustrated, think of God as your father. He will do anything for you to come back, which is why you should go back to your father in heaven. I want to end with a quote from Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica that ties everything together, along with a message to take with you: "Repentance is the renewal of life. This means we must free ourselves from all our negative traits and turn toward the absolute good. No sin is unforgivable except the sin of unrepentance."



PLEASE SUPPORT OUR METROPOLIS MINISTRIES!

It costs approximately \$1,000 per day to operate our Metropolis - including Metropolitan Savas's Archpastoral visitations, preparations for summer camp and GOYA retreats, our vital registry, and more.

Please consider sponsoring a day in the life of the Metropolis:

Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh, 5201 Ellsworth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15232

412-621-5529 (Main) 412-465-0460 (Camp) 412-621-8543 (Youth)

pittsburgh.gocath.org info@pittsburgh.gocath.org



HOLY CROSS GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
123 GILKESON ROAD
PITTSBURGH, PA 15228

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Sunday, January 5

Eve of Theophany

8:15am Orthros

9:30am Divine Liturgy

First Water Blessing

5pm Vespers

Monday, January 6

Theophany

8:15am Orthros

9:30am Divine Liturgy

2nd Blessing of Water



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