

JANUARY 2021



# Voice of St. George

SAINT GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH  
OF THE DESERT

74-109 LARREA ST., PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



## THE SACRED GIFT OF LIFE

I was blessed to have Fr. Stanley Harakas as my professor of Orthodox Christian Ethics at Holy Cross Seminary. He consistently taught that Orthodox Christian Ethics are centered on the sanctity of human Life. This is clearly evident as prayers are read for the "Blessing of Waters" for Epiphany, which are similar to those read at the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. We pray for the waters to be "a renewal of spirit...that in preserving the gift of Your Holy Spirit... [we] may attain unto the prize of our high calling, being accounted among the number of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven."

In the Prayer attributed to the Patriarch Germanos we hear : "You condescended to receive baptism in the Jordan,...so that, in sanctifying the nature of waters,... You might open the way for our rebirth by water and the Spirit, and thus restore our former freedom." This

"former freedom" is in fact *life with God*. In as much as water is the "material" for life, it is the Spirit of God Who actually gives us life. We have no right to destroy God's gift of life.

Nicholas Cabasilas, in his book, *The Life in Christ*, writes that both the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan and our own personal baptism in the Church are "Epiphany events," at which all three Persons of the Trinity are manifested: "The Father has set us free [from the consequence of sin --which is death], the Son was the ransom by which we were freed, but the Spirit is freedom, for St. Paul says, 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17).' The Father has re-shaped us; by means of the Son we were re-shaped; 'but it is the Spirit Who gives life' (St. John 6:63. )" (pg. 64).

Our Savior washed away our sins by absorbing them into His own hu-

manity, Himself still being sinless, and drowning them in the Jordan. Thus, He began His ministry leading to His life-giving Cross and Resurrection from the dead, through which we are granted Eternal Life, beginning here and now. Indeed, God so loves the world that He gives us His Only-Begotten Son so that we would not perish.

As we celebrate the Baptism of Christ our God in the Jordan and at the same time begin a new year, let us consider 2021 to be "A Year for Prayer," since one lesson of this Covid-19 pandemic is the need to cherish the life of others around us, as well as our own and to have sincere faith in God as we live the gift of our lives.

The Baptism and ministry of our Savior teaches us, as John Breck notes in his book, *The Sacred Gift of Life*, that, "Human life by its very nature is sacred... [and] all human lives

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Mailing Address  
**St. George Church**  
 P.O. Box 4755  
 Palm Desert, CA 92261  
 Tel: (760) 568-9901  
 FAX: (760) 568-9492  
 Email: [psaintgeorge@gmail](mailto:psaintgeorge@gmail.com)  
 Website: [www.go-stgeorge.org](http://www.go-stgeorge.org)  
 -Fr. Theodore Pantels, Pastor--  
 -Dcn. Euthym Kontaxis, M.D.

are of equal value, at whatever stage of their development from conception to death. This implies that all human lives have the same 'right' to life." (pg. 209).

+FR. THEODORE

### WELCOME YOUR GRACE, BISHOP SPYRIDON OF AMASTRIS

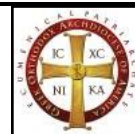
The parish of St. George welcomes **His Grace, Bishop Spyridon of Amastris**, who celebrated the Divine Liturgy at our parish on **Sunday, December 6th, the Feast of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker**. Fr. Ted, on behalf of the entire parish, welcomed His Grace to his new home in Palm Desert with a liturgical vestment (epigonation). **Rhonda Latkovic**, Philoptochos Chapter President, **Tina Veroulis**, Philoptochos Chapter Treasurer, and **Alexandra Dymond**, Philoptochos Chapter Board Member presented house-warming gifts to His Grace.

Fr. Ted noted that the epigonation is a gift given with a special spiritual purpose -- that being, so that parishioners of St. George could welcome His Grace into our parish family by exclaiming "Axios" for His recent ordination. Fr. Ted also noted that, since His Grace will be living in Palm Desert, St. George is His home "away from His house," where He can enter our church at will for His personal prayers and liturgical requests; research for any personal and/or Ecclesiastical projects that He will be undertaking in service for our Holy Archdiocese.



Pictured to the left, welcoming His Grace, Bishop Spyridon of Amastris to our St. George parish - from left to right: Fr. Ted, Alexandra Dymond, Tina Veroulis, Rhonda Latkovic,

### ENCYCLICAL FOR THE NEW YEAR



*O All-Good Master, by Your ineffable long-suffering You have vouchsafed us to enter into the New Year, bless this entrance with Your Divine Grace. (Prayer of the Doxology for the First of the New Year)*

Beloved Brethren in the Lord,

We are greeting the New Year of the Grace of our Lord, even as we share the longsuffering of our Lord that has strained our hearts and souls in the year that is behind us. We salute the New Year with faith, with hope for a brighter tomorrow. We welcome the New Year with the same confidence which knows that each passing day now possesses just a shard, just a hint of more light, even though the days of January seem darker than ever. Likewise, we know that the pandemic will come to an end, and that we shall return to our lives, but perhaps not as exactly as they once were. May this re-entry into our lives be blessed!

My dear Christians, the past year has prepared us for this New Year of 2021; that we might never again take our families and friends for granted, that we might think of the suffering of others above our own, that we might see in the midst of the obstacles to our way of worship, the light of Christ that lights our hearts, if we would but turn our attention there.

On this First Day of the New Year, eight days after the Nativity, we commemorate the Naming of the Lord, and Saint Basil the Great. The Lord was given the Name that is above every other name, Jesus, as was revealed by the Angel. This is the Name by which we have been appointed to be saved from sin, fear, and death. Saint Basil the Great reminds us that it is through manifest love for our fellow human beings and compassion for the suffering of others that our faith works unto this salvation in our hearts, and awareness in our minds. Thus, the Holy Archdiocese continues this saving work institutionally at the Saint Basil Academy, where love and compassion are extended to those in need.

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*ENCYCLICAL FOR THE NEW YEAR, Continued*

As we enter this New Year of the Grace of our Lord, may we truly be blessed by His love that we may be a blessing to others, and thus may we all be granted a healthy, safe and fulfilling New Year of 2021.

With paternal love in Christ Jesus,  
† ELPIDOPHOROS  
Archbishop of America

**CHURCH AND WELLNESS**

The Coronavirus pandemic of 2020 sparked in me an interest in Viktor Frankl's classic book entitled, *Man's Search for Meaning*. The fear and uncertainty that we have experienced under the cloud of the Coronavirus is greatly surpassed by the fear and uncertainty experienced by Jewish People imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps under Hitler. As a prisoner himself, Frankl found that the key to survival and sanity is for one to find *meaning* in his or her life -- even if that meaning is found in suffering for the dignity and welfare of others.

Our Christian martyrs, for example, found meaning in their lives by standing up for the truth that Jesus Christ is True God, Who loves every person born in the world. Life that is lived with such meaning and purpose attracts divine strength for survival and, ultimately, salvation.

In his experience in the Nazi concentration camp, Frankl saw in himself and in others that there is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: "*He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how'....Those who knew that there was a task waiting for them to fulfill were most apt to survive.*" (Pgs. 164-165).

Our Lord has already given us meaning in life -- the task to do His Will every day. Let us look forward to our recovery from the pandemic and the unrest of 2020 knowing that Christ God will help each of us to live so that we can do His Will, which is to share His love for others and to glorify Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

+FR. THEODORE

**SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS**

**By Deacon Euthym**

*"I admire your proposing questions not for the sake of testing, as many now do, but to discover the truth itself." — Basil the Great, On the Holy Spirit*

Very profound. How many of us actually ask to seek truth? Most of the time our questions are either to reaffirm what we already believe or to undermine another individual's point of view, rarely to we, with humility, seek truth. The test is whether we are asking out of humility. If so then we are honestly seeking the truth. Christ said, "*I am the truth, the way and the life*". So in all of our explorations if we truly want the truth, we seek the one God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit...who took flesh in the person of Jesus Christ and who is the icon of absolute truth, creator of all things out of nothing, the Holy Wisdom, the healer of body and soul and the Savior of the world. Let us stop and pause the next time we ask a question or search for an answer, what is my motive? Is it to truly seek truth in humility or to elevate ourselves in pride? Let us move forward as we take leave of the feast of the Nativity and approach this coming year as a newborn baby, innocent and humble, and make it the year of truth, remembering our vulnerabilities and utter dependence on God.

*"Do not claim to have acquired virtue unless you have suffered affliction, for without affliction virtue has not been tested" ...+ St. Mark the Ascetic*

We suffer as a result of the fall and man's separation from God, Who is the Source of peace and life. We do not suffer because God "punishes us". The world is off kilter due to sin and when we are in it, the fallen world will touch us in one way or another, even in the Church... Afflictions, if handled properly, will strengthen our faith, and lead us to a more virtuous path...Do not be shaken, hold steady and pray. The love of Christ will prevail as will the Church, for, "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*"

## ST. BASIL OF CAESAREA SETS THE TONE

This Saint is important to me since he really set the tone for the Church in an era that was in need of strong spiritual guidance. Not only that, but St. Basil showed me the direction I was going to take in my own life. St. Basil was indeed one of the **Three Hierarchs (Sts. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom)**. These three hierarchs of the Church are commemorated collectively by the Church on **January 30th** every year. **St. Basil's own Feast Day is on New Year's Day, January 1st.** Following his studies in Constantinople, including studies under Libanius, who was also a pagan, St. Basil devoted his life to God, and it changed his life. He wrote: *"Suddenly, I awoke as out of a deep sleep. I beheld the wonderful light of the Gospel truth and I recognized the nothingness of the wisdom of the princes of this world."* As a convert to Orthodox Christianity myself, I identify with his words.

St. Basil's parents were known for their Christian piety; his sister, Macrina the Younger, and two brothers, Peter of Sebasta, and Gregory of Nyssa, are also honored as Saints of the Church. By 365 A.D., St. Basil was ordained a priest and, when the local bishop died in 370, he was chosen to succeed him and he was consecrated Bishop of Cappadocia in 370.

St. Basil worked hard to offer spiritual guidance to the people throughout the areas of Pontus and he was generous and sympathetic. He gave away his wealth from his personal family inheritance to benefit the poor of his Diocese. He lived in a civilization that was still under the influence of ancient Greek philosophy and the reverence for idols such as Zeus and Athena. St. Basil worked to combat the Arian heresy and to unite Cappadocia's Christians behind belief in the Nicene Creed.

Among St. Basil's many writing are: *On the Holy Spirit* (his work on Scripture and the Trinity); *Six Days of Creation* (where he showed that the days of creation were not 24-hour days, but an era or period. Another contribution is the Liturgy that bears his name: *The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the*

*Great* (celebrated during Great Lent; the eve of major Feast Days, and on his own Feast Day).

--MATHEW DAVIS

## KINDNESS COUNTS GREETING CARDS

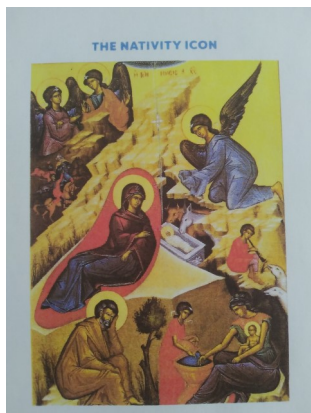


**Athena Snarskis**, who serves our parish as Sunday School teacher and Philoptochos Vice-President, enlisted our Sunday School students to work with our Philoptochos on our parish "Kindness Counts" Project. The students completed posters about what kindness means to them and their families in order to help give encouragement to others. These posters were made into greeting cards for this special Feast Day season. The greeting cards (pictured here in two pictures) are now available at our church office and will be presented to parishioners for sale as we begin the New Year. A Set of 12 greeting cards is available for \$20.00 per set payable to St. George Philoptochos.

## AMAZON SMILES CHARITY

The process of setting up an Amazon Smiles Charity program for our St. George parish has met with complications. Due to the Covid pandemic, working with officials in charge of providing us with necessary forms of application has become cumbersome. Therefore, our Amazon Smiles Charity program will not be ready to roll out as we start the New Year. However, we look forward to rolling it out in the months ahead. Do not worry about signing up for our Amazon Smiles Charity program until the roll out is distributed with the necessary directions for signing on included.

## ST. GEORGE SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PROGRAM



This year, the Sunday School Christmas Program was held in-house through "Zoom" on **Sunday, December 20th**. Efforts are being made to produce a visual copy of the program for presentation to our parishioners in the parish hall (with required social distancing and masks) by way of our big screen T.V. More information will be sent out later on this matter.

The Sunday School Christmas Program was focused on the Icon of the Nativity. Students used "cut-out-figures" to put together their own icon, following the example of one of our parish Icons of the Nativity. (See the two illustrations above.) In assembling their own personal icon, students were reminded of the events leading to the Incarnation of Christ. The universe, through the star and the animals surrounding the Christ Child, acknowledges the Divinity of Christ. The Angels, shepherds, and Magi are all depicted, consistent with the Gospel narratives. Of course, the Ever-Virgin Mary and the Christ Child (in swaddling clothes), along with Joseph the Betrothed are depicted, as well. The ideas of our students learning more about the iconography of our Church, along with the art of the iconographer were also presented.

As the students made their Christmas "cookie and milk" treats during the program, the idea of encouraging them to learn how to make prosforo for Sunday worship services was also discussed.

**Jim Christopoulos**, our Sunday School Superintendent; our teachers, **Athena Snarskis** and

**Melissa Hawkins**, along with **Fr. Ted** and **Philoptochos President, Rhonda Latkovic**, were also participants in this special "Zoom" Sunday School Christmas Program. **Santa Claus** (provided by Wynn Storton) made a special, heart-warming appearance for the students, as well.

## PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS



**Philoptochos Christmas Baskets:** On Wednesday and Thursday, December 16th and 17th, members of our St. George Ladies Philoptochos Society prepared and delivered Christmas baskets to those of our St. George parishioners who have been unable to attend Church Services or meetings throughout this year -- especially due to this Covid pandemic. A total of 28 Christmas baskets were prepared for delivery. Pictured above are: **Linda Bozigian** (left) and **Rhonda Latkovic** (right). Those who also participated in the preparation and delivery of the Philoptochos Christmas baskets are: **Debbie Pausen, Tina Veroulis, Linda Petalas**.

Our St. George Philoptochos members also provided joy to needy children this year through their **Christmas Season Toy Drive**. It was tremendously successful this year. In addition, our Ladies Philoptochos Chapter donated **\$250 worth of gift cards** for children who have been **victims of human trafficking** and who are being cared for at the **Safe House of the Desert**.

**AHEPA NEWS**

The next AHEPA Chapter 528 meeting will be held via the "Zoom" format on **Wednesday, January 13, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.**

The meeting will feature updates on the **AHEPA District 20 Mid-Winter Conference**, scheduled for later this month. In addition, discussion will include the status of our campaign to garner financial support for the AHEPA Chapter 528 **Fr. T. P. Theophilos Memorial Scholarship Fund**. Those who contribute toward this scholarship fund will receive a complimentary bottle of our local **AHEPA 2019 Vintage Merlot California Wine**. For a \$20

donation to the AHEPA 528 Scholarship Fund, a 750 ml cork-sealed bottle of Vintage Merlot California wine, will be given as a "thank you." This is a first-time offering, produced and donated by Brother **Nicholas Latkovic**. **It is not for resale**. To make a donation to our Scholarship Fund, go online: <https://ahepa528.org/scholarship.htm>. Donations can be made to: **AHEPA Chapter 528; Scholarship Fund; 42-215 Washington St., A-154, Palm Desert, CA 92211-8031**.

Our Chapter members are encouraged to update their AHEPA membership as we begin the New Year.

**STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY -- St. George 2021 Stewardship Cards** are now available. On **Sunday, January 31, 2021**, following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, a special prayer will be offered for all of our St. George parishioners, asking our Savior to bless them in their efforts to support our parish through their annual Stewardship contributions to our parish. As always, we ask that everyone offer according to their love for the Church, as well as according to their means.

**HOUSE BLESSINGS - Those who want the House Blessing Service to be performed in their homes this year are asked to make an appointment with Fr. Ted throughout this month. Due to Covid-19, only one house blessing service will be conducted by Fr. Ted per day. Call Fr. Ted at - (760) 880-5869.**

*In accordance to local Covid-19 guidelines, everyone is asked to contact our parish office or Fr. Ted at (760) 568-9901 or (760) 880-5869 each week in order to indicate intentions to attend Church Services on Sundays or Feast Days. On behalf of our Parish Council; our ushers, and our In-Person Worship Chairman, Peter Snarskis, we express our **sincere gratitude** to all of our parishioners for adhering properly to the Covid-19 safety requirements: wearing a mask during worship; sanitizing hands upon entering the church, and practicing social distancing.*

**PARISH CALENDAR FOR: JANUARY 2021**

**Sunday Worship (Jan. 3, 10, 17, 24 & 31)- Orthros-8:30 a.m./ Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.**

**Bible Study- Tuesdays (Jan. 12, 19, & 26)-10:00 a.m. ("Zoom" format).**

**Sunday School- Every Sunday- 11:30 a.m. ("Zoom" format)**

Tuesday, January 5th.....**Eve of Epiphany** - Royal Hours-8:30 a.m./D. Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Blessing of the Waters-10:45 a.m.

Wednesday, January 6th...**Great and Holy Epiphany**- Orthros-8:30 a.m./D. Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Blessing of the Waters-10:30 a.m.

Thursday, January 7th...**St. John the Baptist** - Orthros-8:30 a.m.

Monday, January 11th...Philoptochos Board Meeting - 11:30 a.m. ("Zoom" format)

Wednesday, January 13th...AHEPA Meeting -6:30 p.m. ("Zoom" format)

Thursday, January 14th.....Parish Council Meeting - 2:30 p.m.

Monday, January 18th.....**St. Athanasios the Great**-Orthros-8:30 a.m./D. Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Philoptochos General Members Meeting - 11:30 a.m. ("Zoom" format)