

MARCH 2021



Voice of St. George

SAINT GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
OF THE DESERT

74-109 LARREA ST., PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



THE BABE LEAPED IN HER WOMB FOR JOY

At the center of the age-old debate between those who advocate the right to life and those who advocate the right to choose is the issue of whether *freedom* has priority over *life*. What is missing from popular thinking is the fact that the *purpose* of freedom -- our Free Will -- is to be able to *love*. Without life, it is impossible for one to love. In essence, then, life is the vehicle for love and love is the reason for freedom.

To choose for life sends the message that life is a gift from God and is, therefore, very precious -- and that includes one's own life. If freedom means that life can be "thrown away," the message is that the value of one's own life is up for debate and the value of an individual's welfare is secondary to the welfare of an entire community, regardless of the otherwise moral integrity of the community.

It is here that we see the contrast between the "throw-away" mentality and the mentality of the *sacrificial giving* of one's life for the freedom of others in the community. The presupposition behind *sacrificial giving* is that one freely sacrifices his or her life so that others are then free to love to others.

Both Jesus and St. John the Baptist sacrificed their lives for the salvation of humanity. If our Savior, being God Himself, was not physically born from the Ever-Virgin Mary, He would never have been present in our lives today so that we could love as God loves. Had St. John the Baptist never been born, the preparation to receive our Lord through repentance would not have been heralded.

Unfortunately, those who advocate for freedom of choice conveniently forget that human life begins in the womb at the time of conception. The *choice* that

one is free to make is not whether life exists in the womb, but whether or not to seek Holy Marriage as the sacred context in which sexual love is to be expressed. Indeed, to try to debate that human life does not begin at conception in the womb is to deny reality itself.

Babes in the womb do comprehend life. This is not only borne out by many who suggest that they can experience certain basic emotions in the womb such as "peace" or "anxiety," but it is proven by the Gospel passage that is read in the Orthodox Church when **the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary is celebrated on March 25th.**

Our Savior was conceived in the womb of the Ever-Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit when She willfully accepted the announcement from the Angel Gabriel. Upon visiting Her cousin Elizabeth, who already held St. John the

Inside this issue

- The Babe Leaped in Her Womb.....pg. 1*
- St. John Chrysostom Festival;
Great Lent.....pg. 2
- Spiritual Thoughts;*
Parish Council...*pg. 3*
- Church & Well-
ness; AHEPA....*pg. 4*
- Philoptochos;
Sunday School;
General
Assembly.....*pg. 5*
- 2021 March
Parish Calendar..*pg.6*

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
-Fr. Theodore Pantels, Pastor--
-Dcn. Euthym Kontaxis, M.D.

Baptist in her womb, Elizabeth proclaimed, "As soon as the voice of Your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy." (St. Luke 1:44).

Thus, it is the firm moral stand of the Orthodox Church that a "babe in the womb" is not simply a "biological object," but a human life that has the God-given right to freely live God's gift of life -- indeed -- for the love of God.

+FR. THEODORE

THE ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ORATORICAL FESTIVAL



The Christian Education Ministry and the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco are excited to announce the 2021 Saint John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival. This program provides a valuable educational opportunity for youth to express their faith, gain important skills in public speaking, and to deepen their knowledge about theology and its application in our world today.

"Even in a virtual setting, the Saint John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival remains one of the strongest and most impactful educational ministries for youth. I am always uplifted by the eloquence of our young people and the commitment to the Lord they demonstrate through their inspiring presentations," shared His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos. *"I encourage our youth to participate in the Oratorical Festival and continue to learn and grow in their knowledge of our Orthodox faith."*

In order to make this event a reality while still navigating through limitations brought forth by the pandemic, adjustments were necessary for the safety of all participants. Visit <https://sfatorical.net> for more details on how you can participate today!

NOTE: If any of our St. George students would like to participate in the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival, they are encouraged to contact our Sunday School staff for suggestions about topics and other details.

GREAT LENT: LOVE AND SACRIFICE

We all know that Easter—the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ — is the center and reality of Christ and our salvation. The impact of Easter is so great that I recall several people who were so inspired by the Resurrection Service, including myself, that, in time, they converted to the Eastern Orthodox Faith. In fact, the Resurrection Service is powerful enough to convert even one's thoughts to Orthodox spirituality. With me, it took a couple of years. For another, it took only six months.

The beginning of the Triodion Season shifts our thoughts to repentance and inner change. With "Forgiveness Sunday," March 14th this year, repentance is placed before us as the chief of things to do to change our lives. The day after "Forgiveness Sunday" is "Clean Monday," when Great Lent actually begins, as we each do our best to maintain the Lenten fasting regimen.

The first Sunday of Great Lent is the "Sunday of Orthodoxy" on March 21st with the message that icons are images of passages from the Bible and the events in the lives of our Lord and the Saints. As tools for prayer, icons are to be venerated in the same way that we venerate the Bible and the Holy Cross.

The Sunday following the "Sunday of Orthodoxy" is dedicated to the commemoration of St. Gregory Palamas, on March 28th, who pointed out to us the mystical theology of the Church. He is one of the greatest theologians of the Orthodox Church and championed the practice of unceasing prayer by calling upon the Name of Jesus.

We know in Lent that Christ gave His life for all of us. What do we do? Lent is the time and season for sacrifices in love through our spiritual life in Jesus Christ. Lent is the time for us to make our sacrifices for the glory of our Lord May the Lord's great sacrifice for all of us be repeated and made real in our own lives.

--MATTHEW DAVIS

SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS

by
Deacon Euthym

"In the mercy of God, the little thing done with humility will enable us to be found in the same place as the saints who have labored much and have been true servants of God."...+St. Dorotheos of Gaza

Salvation is not measured in amounts or volumes of accomplishments. It is above all a direct result of a humility in every little thing we do. It is a lack of criticism; it is a concern for feelings and the wounds of others; it is seeing ourselves as no different than anyone else, in that we are all at the mercy of God. Humility is the leaven that rises the bread that is our salvation. It opens the door for Christ to enter our hearts, it allows the Holy Spirit to operate in our lives and gives us grace. Humility is soil of our hearts that allows works to bloom which glorify God. We must not look to what we did or accomplished, rather we need to look at the attitude we had when God used us to accomplish any good thing. If we think it is us, we act in vain. If we open the door for humility we become instruments of the Creator of the Universe, being filled with His love.

"Let your prayer be completely simple. For both the tax-collector and the Prodigal Son were reconciled to God by a single phrase."...+ St. John Climacus

The Publican cried "Lord have mercy" and the Prodigal "I have sinned." If we are aware of our daily spiritual state, this is all we can say. Together it is the ultimate prayer of repentance...the Jesus Prayer, or the prayer of the heart. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Repeated over and over again by monastics, it becomes a prayer that burns into a person's heart and transforms one into a constant state of repentance. If we can say this simple prayer during our day, every day, at every obstacle we face, with every sin we fall into, at every temptation that pokes at us, and with every encounter we have with those around us who also are suffer-

ing, then our hearts can be transformed as well. This prayer brings us to mind the Publican and the Prodigal who along with the thief on the cross cried to the Lord for mercy. This rule of prayer can sustain us daily and keep us under the grace of the living God. Let us enter this Lenten period with an effort to kindle our desire for God, and make this prayer part of our subconscious so we live in a constant state of repentance.

PARISH COUNCIL REPORT



The Parish Council met on **Thursday, February 11, 2021** to discuss the following matters:

1. Stewardship as of January 31, 2021 was at \$70,940 pledges from 53 members, with \$13,160 received. An updated report will be presented at the **Spring General Assembly Meeting on March 14, 2021.**
2. This month, the Parish Council applied for and received the monies of the government stimulus program (approximately \$18,400) which helps considerably in light of the cancellation of this year's Greek Festival.
3. As of February 9, 2021, the St. George Endowment Fund had \$432,365. **A complete treasurer's report was mailed out to our parish members on Thursday, February 25th in preparation for the Spring General Assembly Meeting.**
4. The Parish Council gave a down-payment to reserve the **Desert Willow Golf Resort** in Palm Desert for our **St. George Golf Tournament**, which will be held on **September 25, 2021**. Everyone is asked to save the date.
5. Report was given that the **Metropolis Clergy-Laity Conference** will take place on **Friday and Saturday, April 16-17, 2021** in a "Zoom" (Virtual) format. Registration deadline for Parish Council delegates is **Monday, April 5, 2021.**

CHURCH & WELLNESS

The Value of Intercessory Prayer

Throughout the year, and especially during Great Lent (beginning on March 15th) our Church addresses the Most Holy Theotokos, asking Her to pray for us. In doing so, we come to understand Her role in our life and, through Her example, our role in each other's lives.

Intercessory Prayer is one's personal prayer for other people. Praying for others is critical to our ability to forgive one another; to empathize with one another, and to offer needed spiritual and practical help to one another.

This, in turn, provides us with purpose and meaning in life and it helps us to remain faithful to Christ-like virtues through which we become better people, and maybe even saints of God. It's been said before that the picture of excellent mental and spiritual health is an icon of a saint of our Church, each one of whom prayed for others.

As we read this enclosed prayer to the Theotokos, let us say these words as coming from within our own hearts, while inscribing in our minds the names of those who have hurt us and of those who love us. Let us pray for their salvation as we pray for our own. We will find that our prayers for them, will be answered as will be their prayers for us, through the intercession of the Chief of all Saints, the Most Holy Theotokos.
+FR. THEODORE

O all-holy Virgin, Mother of the Lord of the hosts on high, Thou Queen of heaven and earth and almighty Defender of our country, accept from us Thine unworthy servants this song of praise and thanksgiving and bring our prayer up to the throne of Thy God and Son, that He be merciful towards our unrighteousness, and extend His grace to those who honor Thy name and venerate with faith and love Thy wonder-working ikon. Hear us who pray to Thee: overshadow us with Thine almighty veil and ask from Thy God and Son zeal and vigilance for our shepherds, wisdom and strength for the souls of those who govern our cities, righteousness and impartiality for our judges, understanding and humility for our leaders, love and

concord for the married, obedience for our children, patience for those who have been offended, the fear of God for those that offend, stoutheartedness for the afflicted, restraint for those that rejoice, and for all of us the spirit of understanding and godliness, the spirit of mercy and meekness, the spirit of chastity and truth. Yea, O all-holy Lady, be merciful towards Thy people: gather together the dispersed, guide on the right way those that have gone astray, uphold old age, make the young pure, bring up the children and look down upon all of us with the care of Thy merciful protection. Raise us from the depth of sin and enlighten the eyes of our hearts to see salvation. Be merciful to us both here and yonder, during our wandering in the land of this earth and at the Last Judgement of Thy Son: and make our fathers and brothers who have departed this life live the eternal life with the angels and all the saints. After God, Thou art the hope and Defender of all who flee to Thee with faith. We then pray to Thee and to Thee as our almighty Helper, do we commend ourselves and one another, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

--Taken from "The Akathist Hymn to the Protection of the Theotokos"

AHEPA NEWS



March 10, 2021 is the date for our next AHEPA 528 meeting. The meeting will be conducted in the "Zoom format," beginning at **6:30 p.m.**

Applications for the **AHEPA 528 Fr. T. P. Theophilos Memorial Scholarship** awards are now available online at: www.ahepa528.org. Applications postmarked **after May 1st** cannot be considered. Please allow ample time to gather all necessary documents related to this application. Those who want to donate directly to our AHEPA 528 Scholarship Fund are asked to make their checks payable to: **AHEPA Chapter 528 Scholarship Fund**. Contributions can be mailed to: AHEPA Chapter 528 Scholarship Fund, 42-215 Washington St., Suite A-154, Palm Desert, CA 92211-8031.

Our AHEPA Chapter is combining efforts with our parish Philoptochos to help feed the hungry. Volunteers are needed to load food boxes into

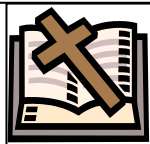
Continued on next page - - ->

AHEPA NEWS, Continued

cars. To sign up as a volunteer, go online to: <https://app.vomo.org/org/southwestchurch>. The organization that we are working with is "The Narrow Door" at: <https://www.thenarrowdoor.org/>. St. George Philoptochos supplies the food, we are asked to supply help in giving it. Southwest Church at the corner of Washington and Fred Waring is where food is loaded into the cars of those in need. Those who cannot help with physically loading the food into cars are asked to help in many other ways: 1) donate food items to the Philoptochos Food Drive, and/or, 2) give monetary contributions for the purchase of food to be given to "The Narrow Door" for distribution for the hungry.

Our AHEPA Chapter is leading the way for the City of Palm Desert to declare March 25th this year as: **Palm Desert Celebration of 200 Year Anniversary of Greek Independence**. Many thanks to brother **Nicholas Latkovic** for meeting with the Palm Desert Mayor to have this proclamation made.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

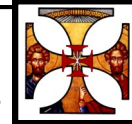


Throughout this season of preparation for Great Lent and Great Lent itself, our Sunday School students are joining 500 other Sunday School students throughout our Metropolis of San Francisco for the Metropolis-Wide Sunday School Program: *A Lenten Journey to Great and Holy Pascha*.

Registration is still open for all students who have not yet enrolled. There is a "rolling registration link" that is available. Contact **Fr. Ted**, or **Dr. Jim Christopoulos** for assistance if needed.

The "spiritual project" that Sunday School students are asked to participate in is called "40 items/40 days," whereby students are asked to collect 40 of their own items in good condition (one item per day) to give to the poor over the 40-day Lenten Season.

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS



Our St. George Ladies Philoptochos Chapter expresses gratitude for all who donated funds and food toward the success of their "Feeding the Hungry Food Drive," which was held from February 21st to February 28th. Our Philoptochos received 185 pounds of food that was delivered to "The Narrow Door" along with more food that was purchased from generous cash donations from several other parishioners. Food gathered through this effort was delivered on **Tuesday, February 23rd** by **Rhonda Latkovic, Debbie Pausen, and Margarita Paoulatos**. Since the pandemic began last March, St. George Philoptochos donated a total of 4,500 pounds of food for the hungry! This is **18,000 meals** we have provided to our local community families in need!

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The St. George 2021 Spring General Assembly Meeting will take place on **Sunday, March 14, 2021**, following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. This meeting will be **conducted outdoors in our parish courtyard**, with **social distancing and all the Covid safety requirements in place**. Of course, those who attend are required to cooperate in maintaining the Covid-19 safety guidelines. As we will be setting up the area to accommodate those who would be in attendance, everyone is asked to indicate their intention to attend this General Assembly meeting by **Friday, March 12, 2021** so that ample accommodations can be made. To participate fully in this General Assembly Meeting a **2021 Stewardship Pledge** and up-to-date contributions toward one's pledge is necessary. Parish membership in good standing includes Stewardship participation, as well as participation in the Church's Sacramental Life.

The printed copies of the minutes of the previous General Assembly and parish reports were sent out to the households of our parish Stewardship members. Please call Fr. Ted at (760) 880-5869 to indicate the intention to attend the meeting, as well as to have any questions addressed.

PARISH CALENDAR - MARCH 2021

Tuesday, March 2nd.....Bible Study - 10:00 a.m. (in-person format at the patio of our parish hall)

Saturday, March 6th.....SATURDAY OF SOULS - Orthros-8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Sunday, March 7th.....MEATFARE SUNDAY - Orthros 8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Tuesday, March 9th.....Bible Study - 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, March 10th.....AHEPA Meeting - 6:30 p.m. ("Zoom" format)

Thursday, March 11th.....Parish Council - 2:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 13th.....SATURDAY OF SOULS - Orthros-8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Sunday, March 14th.....CHEESEFARE SUNDAY- Orthros-8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.
Spring General Assembly Meeting - 11:00 a.m. (in person format at the patio of our parish hall)

Monday, March 15th.....Clean Monday (First Day of Great Lent) - Compline Service - 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, March 16th.....Bible Study- 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, March 17th.....PRE-SANCTIFIED DIVINE LITURGY - 6:00 p.m.

Friday, March 19th.....PRE-SANCTIFIED DIVINE LITURGY - 9:00 a.m.
SALUTATION SERVICE (First Stanza) - 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, March 20th.....SATURDAY OF SOULS - Orthros-8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Sunday, March 21st.....SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY (Procession of Icons)
Orthros-8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Tuesday, March 23rd.....Bible Study-10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, March 24th.....GREAT VESPERS— 6:00 p.m.

Thursday, March 25th.....ANNUNCIATION OF THE HOLY THEOTOKOS
Orthros-8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Friday, March 26th.....PRE-SANCTIFIED DIVINE LITURGY - 9:00 a.m.
SALUTATION SERVICE - 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, March 28th.....SUNDAY OF ST. GREGORY PALAMAS
Orthros-8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Tuesday, March 30th.....Bible Study-10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, March 31st.....PRE-SANCTIFIED DIVINE LITURGY - 6:00 p.m.