



CHURCH of the LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN
“ZODOCHOS PEGHE”
GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
ΙΕΡΑ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ ΑΜΕΡΙΚΗΣ
314 North Fifth Street Martins Ferry, OH 43935
Telephone: (740) 633-3707

My brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Nativity Season is a time of joy and many blessings. It is customarily a season when families come together. If not physically, then still we remember those whom we love but are not near. It is a time for sharing. It is a time for giving. Sadly, that impulse to give and share has been grossly commercialized in our country today. Let us remember that the shepherds in their simplicity and poverty were just as much praising the Nativity of the Lord, just as much valued, as the wise men from the east with their gold and frankincense. As Christ gave Himself to the world, let us also give of ourselves to one another.

It has been some years, five I am told, since the parish had a general Assembly. It is important that we come together both for the election of the parish council members and to consider as a family and community the current health and future of our parish. It is important that we maintain and strengthen our traditions, enjoy the Light, and share the Good News. This is for our well-being and not merely to satisfy Diocesan administrative requirements. After the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, December 13th, we will have the election of the parish council and the General Assembly. It will be a time for the parish council and for me to discuss with all of you the future of our community in Christ. I know that some people dread such meetings. This year, this is not going to be a place of discord or trouble. I believe that this is an opportunity for realistic hope and harmony. Life-Giving Fountain is your community, our community. The priest cannot build a church alone. Will you come together and help me in this and allow me to help you? The Assembly will not drag out; none of us like long dreary meetings.

The first Sunday of month is December 6th, St. Nicholas. The Epistle reading is from Hebrews chapter 13. “May the God of peace ... equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.”

The second Sunday is December 13th, which so happens to be the Feastday of St. Herman of Alaska, the first saint of North America. He wrote, “And I, a sinner have been trying to love God for more than forty years, and cannot say that I perfectly love Him. If we love someone we always remember him and try to please him; day and night our heart is occupied with that object.”

This year, as last year, we will celebrate the Nativity of our Lord with the special Vespers Divine Liturgy on December 24th starting at 6:00 PM. It is a special evening Liturgy, celebrated just after dark. We will receive the Christ Child, receive Holy Communion, and then take the Light of Christ out into the darkened world which needs it so much.

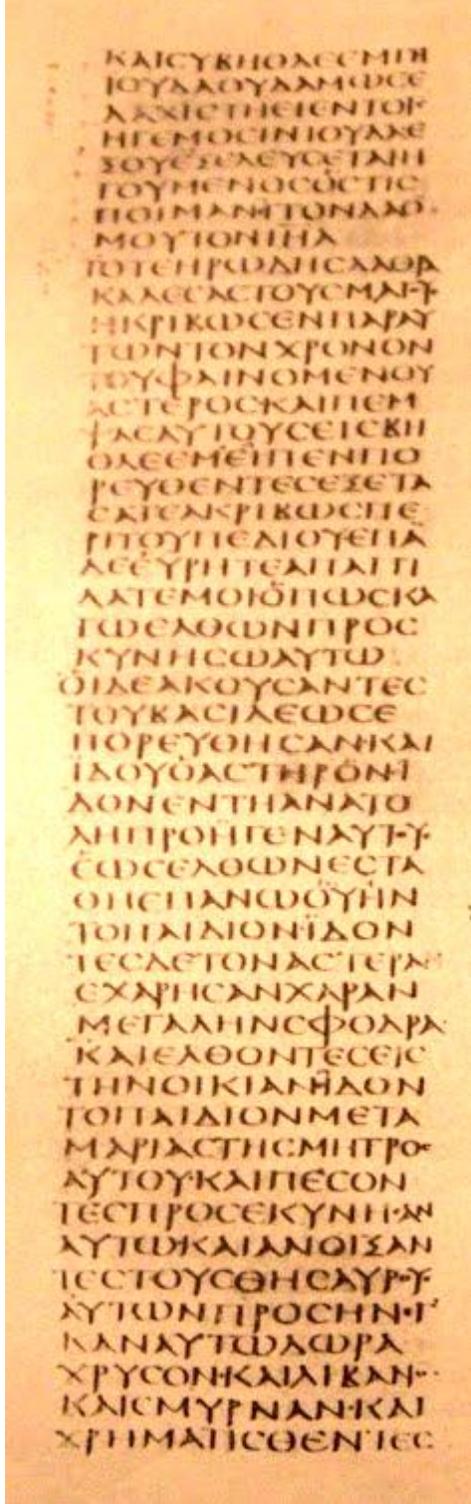
“Since the Lord Jesus was born of the holy Virgin, the universe has been illumined.”

The Gospel of Matthew 2:6-12, read on Christmas Day

Codex Sinaiticus (oldest known text)

Printed Greek

English



Καὶ σὺ, Βηθλέεμ γῆ Ἰούδα,
οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη εἶ ἐν
τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰούδα· ἐκ σ
οῦ γὰρ ἐξελεύσεται ἡγούμε
ενος, ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν
λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ.
7 Τότε Ἡρώδης λάθρα κα-
λέσας τοὺς μάγους ἠκρίβ
ωσεν παρ’ αὐτῶν τὸν χρό-
νον τοῦ φαινομένου ἀστέ
ρος, 8 καὶ πέμψας αὐτοὺς
εἰς Βηθλέεμ εἶπεν· Πορευ-
θέντες ἐξετάσατε ἀκριβῶς
περὶ τοῦ παιδίου· ἐπὰν δὲ
εὔρητε, ἀπαγγείλατέ μοι,
ὅπως καὶ γὼ ἐλθὼν προσκυ-
νήσω αὐτῷ. 9 οἱ δὲ ἀκού-
σαντες τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπο
εῦθησαν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ὁ ἀστήρ,
ὃν εἶδον ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ
προῆγεν αὐτοὺς ἕως ἐλθῶν
ἐστάθη ἐπάνω οὗ ἦν τὸ π
αιδίον. 10 ἰδόντες δὲ τὸν ἀσ
τέρα ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγ
άλην σφόδρα. 11 καὶ ἐλθό-
ντες εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν εἶδον τὸ
παιδίον μετὰ Μαρίας τῆς
μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ πεσόντ
ες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ,
καὶ ἀνοίξαντες τοὺς
θησαυροὺς αὐτῶν
προσῆνεγκαν αὐτῷ δῶρα,
χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον καὶ
σμύρναν. 12 καὶ χρηματισ
θέντες

‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’” Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” ⁹When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²Then, being divinely warned



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Today the Virgin is on her way to the cave where she will give birth to the eternal Word of God in an ineffable manner. Rejoice, therefore, O universe when you hear this news, and glorify with the angels and the shepherds, Him who shall appear as a young child, being God from all eternity.

God is Glorious in His Saints

December is the season of the Nativity of the Lord. The beginning of the month commemorates several important saints. On December 4th the Church remembers St. Barbara the Great Martyr and St. John of Damascus. In Damascus John was a minister in the government of the Caliph and a fervent defender of the veneration of icons by Christians. Slandered by the iconoclast Emperor Leo the Isarian, the Caliph cut off John's right hand. John prayed before an icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos who restored and healed his hand. Although forgiven by the Caliph, John left the royal court and became a monk at St. Savas Monastery where he wrote many hymns which are still sung in our churches today.

On December 5th we remember St. Savas the Sanctified. He is called “Sanctified” because he was a priest, which was uncommon among monks in the 6th century. This is the nameday of our Metropolitan Savas on Pittsburgh.

On December 6th the Church remembers St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, a very popular saint, patron of sailors and travelers and those in financial trouble. There is an icon of him on the left side of our iconostasis.

On December 9th we remember the Conception of the Theotokos by Sts Anna and Joachim. In the 19th century the Roman Catholic Church created a dogma of Mary being conceived free from the guilt of original sin. Since the Orthodox do not have this idea that we are each guilty of the first sin of Adam, nor indeed the understanding that sin is primarily a matter of guilt for violations, the Orthodox has never held this late western doctrine. However, the Orthodox do affirm the purity of Mary and accord her an honor only less than her son. She is only important because of who her Son is, and therefore she is very important indeed.

On December 12th the Church remembers St. Spyridon of Cyprus.

The week from December 20th to the Nativity of the Lord on December 25th should not be a time of maximum party but of relative quiet and prayerful preparation for the Feast. This is the time, both symbolically and literally that the Light, Emmanuel, God with us, comes into the world. On December 27th we commemorate St. Stephen the first martyr.

Many blessings to all who celebrate their Nameday this month.



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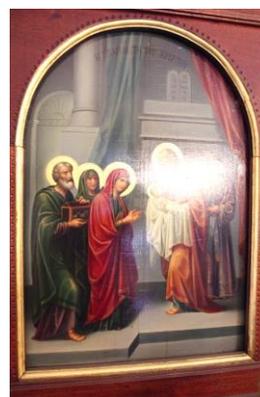
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The iconostasis at the front of our Church of the Life-Giving Fount was mostly painted in the early 1920s at the Kelli of the Joasopheoi in Kafsokalyvi Skete on Mount Athos. In the October issue of this magazine we looked at the main row of icons across the bottom of the iconostasis. The November issue looked at the top row, identifying the 12 Apostles who are depicted there. Now let us consider the middle row with the Great Feasts of the Church Year. Interestingly, our series does not start with the Nativity of the Theotokos as is customary, but with the entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple. Clearly Mary was born, and the Church commemorates this on September 7th, but we do not have that icon on our iconostasis.

The Tradition of the Church follows the narrative of the Gospel of James, which is not included among the standard canonical books of the New Testament – but there are obviously many things which are true but not recorded within the limits of the standard Scriptures. Clearly many things happened during the life of Jesus before the baptism in the Jordan that are not recorded in the Gospels, for example. The Tradition is that at the age of three Mary’s parents Joachim and Anna brought her to the Temple in Jerusalem where she then lived until at the age of 13 or so she was betrothed to Joseph. This is the first icon of the left in the second row of our iconostasis and the Church celebrates it on November 21st.

Next to that is the icon of the Annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive a son who would be Christ, her Creator. This is recorded in the Gospel of Luke and celebrated on March 25th, nine months before Christ’s birth.

The third icon is that of the Nativity of the Lord according to the flesh. This is celebrated in all Orthodox Churches on December 25th. Because of the use by the Serbian and Russian Churches of the Old Julian Calendar, December 25th corresponds to January 7th on the civil calendar which is in general use in Europe and America. However, the Church hymn books used in those parishes will read December 25th on the day of the celebration.

The fourth icon in our iconostasis is that of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple as recorded in Luke 2:23-38 and celebrated by the Church on February 2nd, 40 days after Nativity. This is when Symeon received Christ in his arms, saying his famous prayer, “Now Master You dismiss Your servant in peace according to Your word, for my own eyes have beheld the Your Salvation, which You have prepared before all peoples, a Light of revelation to the nations and the glory of Your people Israel.”



The fifth icon in our iconostasis is the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan River, the Feast of Theophany or ‘*Ta Phota*’ the Lights. Celebrated on January 6th at the close of the 12 days of Christmas it commemorates the Appearance of Christ, God Incarnate, in the world. For this reason the church prescribes the blessing of Holy Water on Theophany and then the blessing of our homes and lives with that Holy Water. Christ goes down into the waters and sanctifies them and with them the whole world.

The sixth icon in our iconostasis is the Entrance into Jerusalem, Palm Sunday, as recorded in Matthew 21 and elsewhere. “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest.”

Directly over the Royal Doors in our iconostasis we find the Mystical Supper or Last Supper painted in a style that imitates the famous fresco by Leonardo Da Vinci.



The seventh icon, now on the right of the Royal Gate, is again the Mystical Supper, the Last Supper in the upper room when the Lord instituted the Eucharist. This is recorded in Matthew 26 and Luke 22.

The eighth icon in our iconostasis portrays the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. In this icon the emphasis is on Jesus coming out of the tomb, with the two angels nearby. In more traditional icons, as we see for example on the Gospel Books, we find Christ breaking down the Gates of Hades and bringing Adam and Eve out with Him. The real point of this is that Christ is the first-born from the dead and His whole ministry and mission was to bring humanity back to eternal life.



The ninth icon in our iconostasis is the Ascension of Christ, Forty Days after the Resurrection. This is recorded in Acts 1:9-11. On the Mount of Olives, across Kidron Valley to the east of Jerusalem, Christ promised the disciples that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then He “was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” This is what is referred to in the Creed when we affirm that Christ ascended into heavens and is seated on the right hand of the Father. Our human nature is raised from the difficulties of the earth and united to God.

The tenth icon in our iconostasis is the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, celebrated on August 6th. This is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and Mark. Even before the Cross and Resurrection Jesus Christ is revealed as truly God and truly man, contrary to what some non-Orthodox believe. He is the fulfilment of the law and the prophets represented by Moses and Elijah. The Light that shines is not any created light but the Uncreated Light of direct experience of God. This is what we are each called to: direct experience of God in our lives.

The eleventh icon in our iconostasis is the Dormition of the Mother of God, celebrated on August 15th. The Lord’s Mother died, as we all die. The Lord immediately received her soul to be with Him and her body was buried just outside Jerusalem. But the Lord also received her body which three days after the burial was not found in the tomb. Because of her close connection with her Son, she is the first of humanity to be raised before the general resurrection.

The twelfth icon, at the far right of our iconostasis is the Exaltation of the Holy Cross celebrated on September 14th. This commemorates the finding of the Cross in Jerusalem by St. Helen. The inclusion of the Last Supper and the Resurrection omits the Nativity of the Theotokos and Pentecost, which are normally included among the Twelve Great Feasts of the Church Year.

The end of the world does not signify the world’s annihilation, but rather its transformation. St. John Maximovitch of San Francisco



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Metropolitan Savas at the “Inheritance” Fund Raiser for Saxonburg Monastery, 2015

I’m thinking of one of the sayings of one of the great early fathers of the Church, St. Ignatius of Antioch. He wrote this while waiting for martyrdom. About to be transported from Asia Minor, he was an elderly man, who had been arrested for the crime of sedition. He was unwilling to acknowledge the supremacy of the state in the person of the emperor. He had another emperor. He had an emperor in Christ. So he had to be made an example of. He was arrested in his see of Antioch, dragged up to the north coast of Asia Minor, to a city called Troas. I used to be the bishop of that city before I became the bishop of Pittsburgh. He wrote letters from Troas to the communities that he had passed through, that had shown him hospitality along the way. He gave them reminders of what was central to the faith. And talking about the bishop he said that it was better to be and not speak than to speak and not be. I’d rather just be and not speak, rather than speak from lack of experience. But it’s part of my responsibility as a bishop to teach; that’s what supposedly sets me apart.

So I do want to say a few words. First of all I want to give my heartfelt thanks to everyone who made this evening possible. ... Fr. Josiah who managed to praise both states, without sacrificing the dignity of either. It’s a tough thing. We’re kind of an either/or culture. We like to oppose things. The Church is more of a both/and. It’s not about making hard divisions; it’s about finding connections. Just saying “monastic community” is kind of an oxymoron. What does that mean? Monastic, that comes from the Greek word *monachos*, one who is alone. A community of loners? But that is what we’re talking about. A Cenobium is a bunch of monks, loners, living together. We ought not to try to force our minds. We talk about monks as bearers of the sacred Tradition. They are that. But they are also the avant-garde of the Church. They’re not just a wall of defense; they’re pushing the Church forward. They’re the front ranks. We call it a prophetic life. They live the life of the future; they live the angelic life. They’re supposed to live a life that bears witness of the life to come. They’re kind of the beachheads of the Kingdom. They’re to remind us that our life is not about food and drink; it isn’t about acquisition; it’s not about material pleasures. It’s not about that. It’s got to be about something else. Those things don’t last. Those things disappoint. Those things don’t last. Where you’re treasure is there your heart will be. Those things aren’t worth your heart. The monks and nuns point us in the direction of (the things that are worthy).

You know, today’s Gospel was a very appropriate Gospel. When Peter kept his eyes on Christ, Peter could do impossible things. It was when Peter noticed that he was doing impossible things, when he became self-conscious. When he said ‘how is it possible that I am doing such things when the waves are so rough, when the winds are so strong? This can’t be happening.’ He began to sink. But he could walk the walk if he kept his eyes on Christ. As long as it is Christ

that we are working towards, that we are reaching out towards. Paul says, I forget what lies behind, I stretch out towards the goal. The past doesn't concern me. Which is not to say that we are not to revere the past. But you know, the roots don't produce the fruit. The fruit is above ground. We don't have to fetishize the stuff that came behind us. The stuff that came behind us in order to push us forward. We transferred roots from overseas in order that those roots gain purchase here and go down deep and come up and be fruit-bearing. So we're very grateful.

And by the way, that's how God works His miracles. This catastrophe resulted in Orthodoxy coming to the New World. So we don't really know the fullness of the story. We won't know the fullness of the story until the fullness is revealed to us in the age to come.

So let's not be too quick to think we have all the intricacies of the plot. By the way, I just want to note that those were heartbreaking photos that we saw; they really really were. And what's really heartbreaking, it would be sad enough if that happened a hundred years ago, but it's happening right now. It's happening right now. How are we responding to those people who have been uprooted, who are looking for a new home? Looking for a safe Harbor? We remember the pain that our forefathers went through, but other people are experiencing that same pain. So be aware of that, and do something about it. If you can't do anything materially – By materially I mean assist agencies like the IOCC – or write letters to your congressman to put this on the agenda and consciousness of the world stage – if you can't do that, at the very least you can suffer with them in prayer. Just hold them up in prayer. Just know that if one member of the body suffers, we all suffer.

And lastly, I am not the pessimist that Fr. Demetri occasionally fears that all hell will break loose. If all hell breaks loose, bring it on. The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. We don't have to win the victory; the victory has been won! All we have to do is be true to the commander. All we have to do is claim that victory. Christ Himself said, and I want you to take this home with you, to have it in your hearts: "In this world you will have tribulation." He didn't say, 'you might'; He didn't say, 'moan about it' "You will have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have conquered the world." I don't want you to have long faces. You know, long faces didn't win the world. What won the world was the joy with which the martyrs offered themselves. If they had died like everybody else dies, yelling and screaming about their fate, they wouldn't have changed any hearts or minds. But they died with joy, because they knew that nothing could harm them. That whether to live or to die – Christ was all that mattered. And people who saw that said, "What do they know that I don't know? How can they die like that? I've got to find out."

That's how they turned the world up-side-down. Not by moaning and complaining, but by rejoicing in tribulation. So you know, don't act surprised when it's happening. That's what the book of revelation is all about, isn't it? It's to tell you, "These things will happen." But the end – God's in control. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. All this other stuff, don't stress it. Bad things happen to good people. Don't let them change you. He who endures to the end shall be saved. The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. That's what sets us apart, people, That's what sets us apart. We're people of the resurrection. So, I think that's a good place to end.



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The Earth is the Lord's

CREATION CARE AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE: Patriarch Bartholomew Oxford

Many of you will no doubt be surprised that a religious leader concerned with “spiritual” or pastoral values has been involved with “secular” or political issues. After all, what does preserving the planet have to do with saving the soul? It is widely assumed that climate change and the exploitation of natural resources are matters concerning scientists, technocrats and legislators.

Yet, the preoccupation of the highest spiritual authority in the Orthodox Church, namely the Ecumenical Patriarchate, with the ecological crisis demonstrates that we cannot have two ways of looking at or responding to the world: religious on the one hand and worldly on the other. We cannot separate our concern for human dignity, human rights or social justice from concern for ecological protection, preservation and sustainability. These concerns are forged together, comprising an intertwining spiral that can either descend or ascend.

If we value each individual made in the image of God, and if we value every particle of God's creation, then we will care for each other and our world. In religious terms, the way we relate to nature and the biodiversity of creation directly reflects the way we relate to God and to our fellow human beings.

The role of religion in our world

Dear friends, the first point that we would like to emphasize to you this evening is that religion has a positive and profound role to play in our world. There is a vital sign of our times at the beginning of this new millennium, and that is what we might call “the return of God” – that is to say, the reevaluation of the function and responsibility of religion in the public square. Religion today comprises a central dimension of human life, both on the personal and the social levels. No longer can religion be relegated to a matter of individual preference or private practice.

We are nowadays facing a worldwide economic crisis and its social consequences are evident on a global scale. Ultimately, we regard this crisis as a “crisis of solidarity.” Yet, our Church has historically sought to build bridges of interfaith dialogue, ecological awareness and the culture of solidarity between diverse faiths and cultures, as well as between humanity and the natural environment. We are convinced that the future of humanity is related to the establishment of the culture of solidarity.

The most serious contemporary threat against such a culture of solidarity is the prevailing economy – what we might call, the fundamentalism of market and profit. We are not qualified economists, but we

are convinced that the purpose of economy should be for the service of humankind. It is not by coincidence that the terms economy and ecology share the same etymological root. They contain the Greek word oikos (household). Oikonomia (or "economy") involves the care or management of our household; oikologia (or "ecology") implies the study and appreciation of our home; and, by extension, oikoumene (or our "ecumenical" imperative as churches and faith communities) demands maintaining and sustaining our world as a place where we can all live in harmony and justice.

True faith does not release us from our responsibility to the world. On the contrary: it strengthens us to give a witness of reconciliation and peace. Thus, we reject any form of "economic reductionism," the reduction of the human being merely to homo oeconomicus. In brief, we resist the transformation of society into a gigantic market, the subordination of the human person to the tyranny of consumerism, as well as the identification of "being" with "having" in society.

The solution of the ecological problem is not only a matter of science, technology and politics but also, and perhaps primarily, a matter of radical change of mind, of new values, of a new ethos.

For the Orthodox tradition, sin has a cosmic dimension and cosmological impact. The theology of the Orthodox Church recognizes the natural creation as inseparable from the identity and destiny of humanity, inasmuch as every human action leaves a lasting imprint on the body of the earth. This means that human attitudes and behavior towards other people directly impact on and reflect human attitudes and behavior toward creation.

This is why we use the term metanoia, which signifies a shift of mind, a total change of heart, to determine the transformation of our attitudes and actions toward our world.

The future is open; the choice is ours

Dear friends, the future is open; and the choice is ours, yours. On the one hand, our world is indeed in crisis. Yet, on the other hand, never before in history have human beings had the opportunity to bring so many positive changes to so many people and to the global community. There has never been so much turmoil on our planet; but equally so, there has never been greater opportunity for communication, cooperation and dialogue.

Interfaith dialogue, environmental awareness and the culture of solidarity are responsibilities that we owe not only to the present generation. Future generations are entitled to a world free from fanaticism and violence, unspoiled by pollution and natural devastation, a society that is a place of solidarity. This is the role and responsibility of religion.

It is not too late to act, but we cannot afford to wait; we certainly cannot afford not to act. We all agree on the necessity to protect our planet's natural resources, which are neither limitless nor negotiable. We are all in this together. People of faith must practice what they preach; citizens of the world must clearly voice their opinion; and political leaders must act urgently and decisively.

All the saints conceive in themselves the Word of God similarly to the Mother of God, and give birth to Him, and He is born in them and they are born in Him; and they are His sons and brothers and mothers. St. Symeon the New Theologian



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President’s Message – December 2015

Dear Church Family,

I hope you enjoyed a delicious Thanksgiving dinner and were able to spend quality time with your family and friends. If you are a Black Friday shopper, I hope you found some great deals and kicked off your Christmas shopping season. Can you believe it’s December already, and we are in the last month of the year 2015? I can’t wait to start decorating and to put up our outdoor lights and Christmas tree. My indoor cat “Lucky” also loves this time of the year. His wildest dreams are fulfilled. There is actually a tree in the house. He loves spending countless hours hiding and sleeping underneath the Christmas tree, basking in the heat from the lights, and waiting for a bird to appear!

Our finances to date are as follows:

Month	Revenue	Expenses
January	\$11,910.00	\$ 6,971.00
February	6,145.00	11,364.00
March	8,131.00	6,892.00
April	8,521.00	7,439.00
May	33,343.00	8,785.00
June	4,547.00	7,267.00
July	2,908.00	12,388.00
August	3,107.00	7,037.00
September	4,425.00	7,999.00
October	6,344.00	8,598.00

As you can see from the numbers above, the church budget continues to be a challenge. Please offer your time, talent and treasures to help our parish continue to survive. Remember all that we are and all that we have are a gift from God.

With the ending of the calendar year 2015, remember to fulfill your pledge. In this mailing, I am also including the new pledge card for calendar year 2016. This card is very important for budgeting purposes. While you have it in your hand and it’s fresh in your mind, please take the time to complete the form and return it to church. I want to extend a special thank you to those who are not in the area but continue to support our church financially.

Our next board meeting is scheduled for December 8th. If you have any items which you would like the board to discuss, please contact me so that I can add it to our agenda.

We have not come together as a community to have a general assembly since October of 2010. On Sunday December 13th after our church services, we will have a general assembly and election of board members. Please plan on attending.

On Sunday, December 20th, Santa Claus will be making his annual visit to our church. If you have children who will be coming, contact one of the Sunday school teachers (Marlene Koucoumaris or Fanny Stambolis) or Kathy in the church office so we can be sure that Santa will have a gift for your child. Loukoumades will also be available during coffee hour. These are the best honey drenched fried puffs of dough you will ever eat!

As I look at my calendar, I see some noteworthy dates in December and will talk a little about them:

- * National Pearl Harbor Day is observed annually on December 7th. The day is set aside to remember and honor those who died in the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by Japan on December 7, 1941. Traditionally in the United States, flags are flown at half-staff until sunset in honor of dead patriots. More than 2,400 Americans were killed and 1,100 were wounded during the attack.

The day after the attack, the United States declared war on Japan and entered World War II. President Franklin Roosevelt, in a speech to congress, stated that the bombing of Pearl Harbor is “a date which will live in infamy”.

- * December 22nd is the first day of winter; it is also known as the winter solstice. The winter solstice marks the shortest day and the longest night of the year. The sun appears at its lowest point in the sky, and its noontime elevation appears to be the same for several days before and after the solstice. Following the winter solstice, the days begin to grow longer and the nights shorter.

- * Christmas Eve, the day before Christmas, occurs on December 24th and is considered one of the most culturally significant celebrations in the Western World. It is widely observed as a full or partial holiday in anticipation of Christmas Day. One reason celebrations occur on Christmas Eve is that the traditional Christian liturgical day starts at sunset. This practice is based on the story of creation in the Book of Genesis: “And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day”. Many churches still ring their church bells and hold prayers in the evening. Since tradition holds that Jesus was born at night, services are celebrated on Christmas Eve, traditionally at midnight, in commemoration of his birth.

- * Christmas Day, December 25th, is an annual commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ to the Virgin Mary and is celebrated by millions of people of numerous faiths around the world. According to popular tradition, the birth took place in a stable, surrounded by farm animals. Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. Shepherds in the fields

surrounding Bethlehem were told of the birth by an angel and were first to see the child. The wise men visited Jesus in the manger and brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They followed a mysterious star, commonly known as the Star of Bethlehem.

The modern celebratory customs associated with Christmas include: giving gifts, Christmas music and caroling, an exchange of Christmas cards, church celebrations, a special meal, and the display of various Christmas decorations including Christmas trees, lights, nativity scenes, garland, wreaths, mistletoe, and holly. Santa Claus (Saint Nicholas) is associated with bringing gifts to the children.

The traditional colors of Christmas are red, green, and gold. Red symbolizes the blood of Jesus which was shed in his crucifixion; while green symbolizes life, and in particular, the evergreen tree which does not lose its leaves in the winter; and gold is associated with Christmas as one of the three gifts of the wise men (Magi) and symbolizing royalty.

* Boxing Day is traditionally December 26th, the day following Christmas Day. This is when servants and tradesmen would receive gifts from their bosses or employers known as a “Christmas Box”.

* New Year’s Eve, the last day of the year, is on December 31st. New Year’s Eve is celebrated at evening social gatherings where people dance, eat, drink alcoholic beverages, and watch or light fireworks to mark the New Year. One of the most prominent New Year’s celebrations in the country is the “ball drop” held in New York City’s Time Square. The tradition began in 1907 and was inspired by the time balls that were formally used as a time signal. At 11:59 p.m. ET, an 11,875 pound, 12-foot diameter Waterford crystal ball located on the roof of One Time Square is lowered down a 141-foot high pole reaching the roof of the building one minute later to signal the start of the New Year.

The island nation of Kiribati and Samoa are the first to welcome the New Year while Honolulu, Hawaii is among the last.

During this holiday season, remember the less fortunate and the saying, “It is better to give than to receive”. If you can help someone who is struggling whether it is financially, emotionally or spiritually, it will warm your heart.

In closing, I would like to extend a thank you to all who are committed to keeping our faith and traditions of Zoodochos Peghe alive for the future. I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

With love in Christ,



John S. Koucoumaris