

## THE HOLY FOREFATHERS OF CHRIST

**T**he Sunday before our Lord's Nativity is a unique day in the liturgical life of our Orthodox Church. We look AHEAD to the great Mystery that is about to occur: GOD BECOMING MAN. At the same time, we look BACK over the centuries, remembering the patriarchs, prophets and other devout people who eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah. This day is commonly referred to as the SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FOREFATHERS.

As we contemplate the hymns and readings prescribed by the Church for this day, one word is placed before us again and again: FAITH. The Epistle lesson for today is taken from St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews. In it, St. Paul skillfully traces the history of the Hebrew nation, pointing out the great faith possessed by their prominent leaders of the past. "By FAITH, ABRAHAM, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. By FAITH, ISAAC, blessed Jacob and Esau. By FAITH, JACOB, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph." Others are mentioned such as Moses, David and Samson.

The message on this day is a clear one. We are about to celebrate the culmination of centuries of anticipation. The faith of the Holy Forefathers is about to be rewarded. Soon, we will rejoice along with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as we bear witness to the Birth of Christ. We will ". . . run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our FAITH." (Hebrews 12:2)

The spirit of this jubilant day is captured wonderfully by today's Troparion: "Through faith, You justified the patriarchs, and through them, You made a commitment to a church with gentiles. The saints in glory rejoice, because from the seed of these forefathers has come forth the blessed fruit which gave birth to You without seed."

The Orthodox Weekly Bulletin . . . . . Vestal, Cliffwood, New Jersey . . . . . Litho in U.S.A.

## ABOUT COMMUNION

*We are happy that you have joined us today. Indeed, we pray for the "unity of the Faith" for the day when all of Christianity are united as ONE and can share a common Chalice. However, this is not the case as yet. Please note that Holy Communion, the actual Body & Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, is only for Members of the Orthodox Church who have prepared themselves through prayer, fasting, and confession, & arrived before the Gospel reading. However, everyone is welcome to partake of the blessed bread and receive a blessing from the pastor at the dismissal. If you are interested, you may inquire with the pastor how you can become a member.*

*If you are a guest or otherwise not a regular communicant, please give your baptismal name when receiving.*

-:- Holy Forefathers -:-  
Abraham, Isaac & Jacob



They lived in hope & with  
the promise of God's Faithfulness



# St. Anthony The Great Antiochian Orthodox Church

4031 Aurora Rd.; Melbourne, Florida  
Mailing address : P.O.Box 267, Melbourne, FL 32902  
Very Rev. Fr. Elia Shalhoub, Pastor & Dean of South Florida Deanery  
Phone: (305) 812-4940 , E-Mail: [elia\\_shalhoub@yahoo.com](mailto:elia_shalhoub@yahoo.com)

## WELCOME TO ST. ANTHONY'S

Where people from around the world come together to serve God and our community. We are glad you are worshipping with us today! This Church is one community of many in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The Church of Antioch belongs to two thousand years of evangelization, teaching, history, and tradition which expresses the continued commitment of its members to the Orthodox Christian faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

St. Anthony Church is a Pan-Orthodox community, under the omophorion of His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X within the Self-ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

If you are a first time visitor, please fill out the guest form located on the literature table.

We want you to feel at home in prayer and worship. Please submit your names to the ushers and introduce yourself to Fr. Elia at the end of the service so he may welcome you personally.

Following services, please join us for sharing of fellowship, coffee, and food.

## DIVINE LITURGY VARIABLES ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2024 HIEROMARTYR ELEUTHERIOS, BISHOP OF ILLYRIA & SUNDAY OF THE FOREFATHERS (ANCESTORS) OF CHRIST

MARTYR ANTHIA, MOTHER OF ELEUTHERIOS; VENERABLE PAUL OF LATRA

~ During the Little Entrance, after the verses of the Third Antiphon, chant the Apolytikion of the Entrance of the Theotokos. The Eisodikon (Entrance Hymn) is "O come, let us worship... save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead..." After the Little Entrance, chant these hymns in the following order:

### RESURRECTIONAL APOLYTIKION IN TONE EIGHT

From the heights Thou didst descend, O compassionate One, and Thou didst submit to the three day burial, that Thou might deliver us from passion; Thou art our life and our Resurrection, O Lord, glory to Thee.

### APOLYTIKION OF THE FOREFATHERS IN TONE TWO

Thou hast justified by faith the ancient Forefathers, and through them Thou hast gone before and betrothed unto Thyself the Church of the Gentiles. Let the saints, therefore, take pride in glory; for from their seed sprouted forth a noble fruit, and it was she who gave birth to Thee without seed. Wherefore, by their pleadings, O Christ God, save our souls.

### APOLYTIKION OF ST. ELEUTHERIOS OF ILLYRIA IN TONE FIVE

(\*\*Let us worship the Word\*\*)

Being comely adorned in thy sacred priestly robes \* and newly drenched with the streams of thy pure and sanctified blood, \* thou didst soar aloft to stand before thy Master, Christ; \* hence never cease to intercede \* for those honoring with faith thy mighty and blessed contest, \* thou overthrower of Satan, O wise and blessed Eleutherios.

~ Now sing the apolytikion of the patron saint or feast of the temple.

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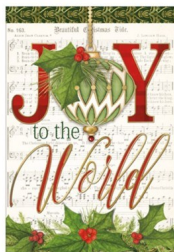
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**ST. ANTHONY ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

P.O. Box 267, Melbourne, FL 32902

Pastor's Phone: (305) 812-4940;

E-mail: Elia\_shalhoub@yahoo.com



**2024 CHRISTMAS**

**COMMUNITY CARD**

**IF YOU LIKE TO DONATE TOWARD THE COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS TO HAVE YOUR NAME LISTED IN THE CARD SO WE CAN WISH THE CHURCH MEMBERS AND FRIENDS A MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR, PLEASE FILL THE FORM BELOW AND MAKE YOUR DONATION TO ST. ANTHONY CHURCH EARMARKED "Christmas card"**

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**NO LATER THAN Dec. 15th, 2024**

**APOLYTIKION OF ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT**

Thou didst become like the zealous Elijah in his condition, and followed John the Baptist in his upright ways. Becoming a dweller in the wilderness, and an establisher of the universe by thy prayer O Father Anthony. Wherefore intercede thou with Christ our God to save our souls.

**KONTAKION OF PREPARATION OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY IN TONE THREE**

*(\*\*The original melody\*\*)*

On this day the Virgin cometh to the cave to give birth to \* God the Word ineffably, \* Who was before all the ages. \* Dance for joy, O earth, on hearing \* the gladsome tidings; \* with the Angels and the shepherds now glorify Him \* Who is willing to be gazed on \* as a young Child Who \* before the ages is God.

**THE EPISTLE**

(For St. Eleutherios)

*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saint.*

*What shall we render unto the Lord for all that He hath rendered unto us?*

**The Reading from the Second Epistle of St. Paul to St. Timothy. (1:8-18)**

Timothy, my son, do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God, Who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, Who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know Whom I have believed, and I am sure that He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit Who dwells within us. You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, and among them Phygelos and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphoros, for he often refreshed me; he was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me eagerly and found me. May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

**THE GOSPEL**

(For the Holy Forefathers)

**The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke. (14:16-24)**

The Lord spoke this parable: "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' But, one by one, they all began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.' For many are called, but few are chosen."


# Upcoming Events


<p><b><u>This Week</u></b></p> <p><b>Today</b>  <b>Matins Service—8:45am</b>  <b>Divine Liturgy—10:00am</b>  <b>Coffee Hour—guests always welcome</b>  <b>AMEN monthly meeting—after coffee hour</b></p> <p><b>Wednesday</b>  <b>Vespers—5:30pm</b>  <b>Choir Rehearsal—6:00pm</b></p> <p><b>Saturday</b>  <b>Great Vespers—5:30pm</b>  <b>Confessions</b></p>	<p><b><u>December</u></b></p> <p><b>Sunday, 12/22</b>—Christmas Play Talent Show, after Liturgy, Order of St. Ignatius Luncheon Fundraiser served by Sunday School</p> <p><b>Monday, 12/23,</b>          10:00 am: The Paramon of the Feast: Royal Hours          6:00 pm: The Vespersal Liturgy of St. Basil (pre-Christmas Celebration at 5pm)</p> <p><b>Tuesday, 12/24</b>—The Feast of the Nativity          5:00 pm: Festal Matins &amp; Christmas Liturgy at 6pm</p>
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**Ongoing**  
**Christmas Card Fundraiser (AWO)** Due 12/15 (today) *If you want your name printed on the Communal Christmas Card that will be sent to all Friends and Family of St. Anthony's, please fill out the Form attached.*

**Poinsettia Forms** Due 12/15 (today) *for the flowers to decorate our Church for Christmas. If you wish the names of your loved ones to be mentioned/commemorated during Christmas Service, please fill out the Poinsettia Form. Both forms are due December 15.*

# Announcements

	<b><i>Epistle Readers</i></b>		
	December 15th	Holly Dick	St. Paul to Timothy (1:8-18)
	December 22nd	Stephanie Enstice	St. Paul to the Hebrews (11:9-10; 32-40)
	December 24th	Kh. Odette (Nativity)	St. Paul to the Hebrews (1:1-12)
December 29th	Tristan Riter	St. Paul to the Galatians (4:4-7)	


**THANK YOU AMEN**  
**FOR CONTRIBUTING TO TODAY'S COFFEE HOUR**  
 PLEASE SIGN UP ON THE CALENDAR IN THE NARTHEX  
 TO CONTRIBUTE FOOD TO A FUTURE COFFEE HOUR

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**2024 CHRISTMAS**

**POINSETTIAS**

**IF YOU LIKE TO DONATE TOWARD THE POINSETTIAS FLOWERS  
 FOR THE GOOD HEALTH OF YOUR FAMILY OR IN MEMORY OF  
 YOUR BELOVED ONES SO WE CAN DECORATE THE CHURCH FOR CHRISTMAS,  
 PLEASE FILL THE FORM BELOW AND MAKE YOUR  
 DONATION TO ST. ANTHONY CHURCH EARMARKED  
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DONATION AMOUNT (MINIMUM \$15.00 for Christmas Poinsettia) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**NAMES TO BE COMMEMORATED AT NATIVITY LITURGY**

LIVING: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

DECEASED: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO YULIYA OR ETHAN  
 NO LATER THAN Dec. 15th, 2024**



**THE ORDER OF SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH**  
**DECEMBER 15, 2024**

**Christ is in our Midst!**

During this Advent period of our Orthodox Faith, we are called to focus on our words, deeds, and thoughts. On behalf of the Order of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, we thank you for your selfless act in support of the Order's ministry. Your unconditional gift affects the lives of countless people within our Orthodox Faith, our Antiochian Orthodox community and beyond. Your gift creates a life-changing ripple effect that is immeasurable in its impact on individuals and families you will never come to know personally. Thank you and God bless you.

For almost 50 years, you, and those before you made a conscious decision to put the needs of others before your own. Your gift is not simply a donation deposited and forgotten. It is so much more than a check written or a charge on your credit card. It is an act of Faith in support of a life-changing ministry. Your gift ...

- Provides reassurance to our clergy during their golden years and expresses gratitude toward our beloved them for their years as our guide, comforter and welcomed friend during our times of sorrow, uncertainty and joy through the funding of the **Retired Clergy Fund**.
- Helps plant seeds of Orthodoxy, the True Faith, throughout North America through the support of the **Department of Missions and Evangelism**.
- Helps provide loving care, reassurance and comfort to children without families and parents. Letting those children know that someone they may never come to know, cares enough to help provide the basic needs we may take for granted in our everyday lives through support of organizations like **Project Mexico**.
- Educates our children in the Faith and strengthens their resolve in their Faith as they prepare themselves to become the future leaders of our parishes and Archdiocese through **Youth Ministry, Summer Camp Scholarships, SOYO Leadership & Youth Worker Training, Christian Education and College Conference**.
- Does so much more than provide summer camp scholarships for children that would otherwise not be able to attend camp due to financial reasons. It also provides know ledge, relationships and memories created in God-filled environments that are the essential tools to help our children overcome the challenges and deceptions in this world that will test their Orthodox Christian beliefs.

Even more, through the generosity of our many Governing Council volunteers who give of their time, talents, and treasure, we are thankful to share that over **91%** of total annual revenue reaches the departments, projects and grant requests the Order of Saint Ignatius supports. This is only possible through the generosity of the Order's Governing Council members who cover all their own travel, lodging and various event sponsorships personally.

So, as you contemplate your support of the Order over the years or consider becoming a part of The Order's ministry for the first time, we leave you with what we believe should be in your heart. These words are what guide our work as a Governing Council and come from the teachings of St. Ignatius himself ...

*"Let no man's place, or dignity, or riches, puff him up; and let no man's low condition or poverty abase him. For the chief points are faith towards God, hope towards Christ, the enjoyment of those good things for which we look, and love towards God and our neighbor."*

In His service,

Roger J. David  
North American Chairperson  
The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch

**Dec 15 –Dec 29 Fasting Calendar**

**Abstain from: meat, dairy, eggs, fish,**  
**olive oil & wine: 12/16 – 12/19 & 12/23-24**

**Abstain from: meat, dairy, eggs & fish:**  
*Sun 12/15 & 12/20-22*

**No fast:** *December 25 – January 4*

View calendar at <https://tinyurl.com/AOCfast>

AOCfast

**December Birthdays**

- 02: Anastasia Gabbasova
- 03: Nolan Brown
- 05: Jenny Riter  
Spencer Wiltse
- 08: Oakley Bellinger
- 09: Maria Munoz
- 10: Sam Jacobs
- 14: Zac Ferrell
- 19: JouJou Najjar
- 21: Fr. Stephen Adili  
Ethan Packey
- 23: Kathy Hopper  
Jeff Bellinger
- 25: Jesus
- 30: Marco Lieberman



*May God Grant You Many Years!*

**Holiday Food and Bake Sale**

We had a very successful day yesterday.

Thank you to everyone who cooked, set up, helped to run the event.

Thank you to Michael Mooney

for wonderful Christmas music selection.

Please check out our left over treats, and buy your raffle tickets.



**2025 Calendars**

*They are here with beautiful iconography inside.  
Please make a donation of \$5 to Sunday School.*



*Thank you to Skewers Restaurant and Flames Restaurant for sponsoring our calendars!*



**Hear Ye, Hear Ye!**

Please join us next Sunday, December 22 for our Christmas Play Talent Show right after the Liturgy. Order of St. Ignatius Luncheon Fundraiser, served by Sunday School following the performance.

*There will be no Sunday School classes.*



**Please pray for the healing of** Father Elia and Kh. Odette, Debbie Thieme, Adriana Theodoropoulos, Michealle and Tyrone Carey, Beverly Delida, Alix Hall, Nina and Diogo Penas, Beth Manzini, John Archambeau, Alex & Soula, Nicholas Elliott, William Snell, Vasilika Yardines, Gregory Warner



## BELOVED IN CHRIST

The Church began its preparation for the Nativity of Jesus Christ (Christmas) on November 15th, with forty days of fasting, prayer, and the giving of our treasure to prepare us to receive the newborn Jesus Christ. This year, as we spend less time on the external celebrations of Christmas, maybe we can spend more time preparing to receive Christ.

Each Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening until the Feast of the Nativity, we will pray the Akathist Hymn of the Nativity or the Paraklesis of the Nativity at 5:30 PM.

Make an appointment for Confession. If you are shut-in, or unable to attend services, give me a telephone call and arrange for Confession and Communion.

Read the daily scripture lessons and spend more time in prayer.

In closing, some words on the meaning of the Nativity of Christ by Saint Antony the Great:

*"...and He humbled Himself, and by His stripes we all were healed. And by the word of His power He gathered us out of all lands, from one end of the world to the other end of the world, and raised up our hearts from the earth, and taught us that we are members of one another."*

**In Christ,**  
*Fr. Elia Shalhoub*  
**Very Rev. Fr. Elia Shalhoub, Pastor**

## **SAINTS AND FEASTS** **FOREFATHERS SUNDAY**



On the Sunday that occurs on or immediately after the eleventh of this month, we commemorate Christ's forefathers according to the flesh, both those that came before the Law, and those that lived after the giving of the Law.

Special commemoration is made of the Patriarch Abraham, to whom the promise was first given, when God said to him, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). This promise was given some two thousand years before Christ, when Abraham was seventy-five years of age. God called him and commanded him to forsake his country, parents, and kinsmen, and to depart to the land of the Canaanites. When he arrived there, God told him, "I will give this land to thy seed" (Gen. 12:7); for this cause, that land was called the "Promised Land," which later became the country of the

## **O Silent Night**

[Verse 1] Silent night, holy night!  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child  
Holy Infant so tender and mild  
Sleep in heavenly peace  
Sleep in heavenly peace

[Verse 2] Silent night, holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight  
Glories stream from heaven afar  
Heavenly hosts sing 'Alleluia!  
Christ the Savior is born  
Christ the Savior is born

[Verse 3] Silent night, holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace  
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth  
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The candle is **Purple** to signify Repentance.

The service begins with the lighting of the first five candles by a member of the family.

**FATHER:** The fifth candle reminds us of our duty to repent before we can meet the coming Christ.

"Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

**VERSE:** *We light Five Advent candles today, And pray that Jesus take our sins away, For he showed us his love on the cross, So that our immortal souls would not be lost.*

**SCRIPTURE:** Preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah through repentance (St. Mark 1:1-8, 14 and 15)

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You." "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ' Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.' John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in The Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

**CAROL:** "Silent Night"

**PRAYER:** Lord, help us make straight the way for You to come to us this Christmas. Grant us your grace that we may smooth out the ruts of sin and remove the roadblocks of pride.

Give us the second baptism, the baptism of tears, that we may return to You and, embraced like the Prodigal Son, be restored to full Sonship.

**DISCUSSION:** Discuss the meaning of repentance. Then let us prepare ourselves with a thorough self-examination and agree on a time to go to confession as a family.

Hebrew people, and which is also called Palestine by the historians. There, after the passage of twenty-four years, Abraham received God's law concerning circumcision. In the one hundredth year of his life, when Sarah was in her ninetieth year, they became the parents of Isaac. Having lived 175 years altogether, he reposed in peace, a venerable elder full of days.

### ELEUTHERIOS THE HOLY MARTYR, BISHOP ILLYRIA AND HIS MOTHER ANTHIA

This Saint had Rome as his homeland. Having been orphaned of his father from childhood, he was taken by his mother Anthia to Anicetus, the Bishop of Rome (some call him Anencletus, or Anacletus), by whom he was instructed in the sacred letters (that is, the divine Scriptures). Though still very young in years, he was made Bishop of Illyricum by reason of his surpassing virtue, and by his teachings he converted many unbelievers to Christ.

However, during a most harsh persecution that was raised against the Christians under Hadrian (reigned 117-138), the Saint was arrested by the tyrants. Enduring many torments for Christ, he was finally put to death by two soldiers about the year 126. As for his Christ-loving mother Anthia, while embracing the remains of her son and kissing them with maternal affection, she was also beheaded.



### ADVENT: PREPARING FOR HIS COMING AGAIN

*Ancestral Sin by Abbot Tryphon*

Ancestral Sin vs. Original Sin The fact that we Orthodox do not accept the doctrine of original sin as espoused in the West, does in no way suggest that we do not need to be born again (born anew). We believe, as did the Early Church Fathers, that we inherit only the results of Adam's sin, not his guilt. This is known as ancestral sin because the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, resulted in our inheritance of death, sickness and an inclination toward evil. Christ's death on the cross has its power, not in an atonement sacrifice, but in the conquering of the power of death. Death is trampled down by death. It is by Christ's resurrection that a way was made for us to be transformed by contact with the Living God, thus becoming his children by adoption. Although we do not refer to ourselves as "saved", as do Evangelical Christians, we nevertheless believe that we are in need of salvation. (We believe salvation is a process.) Our understanding of sin in an ancestral way, which is distinct from the concept of original sin and the hereditary guilt that required, consequently, a substitutionary atonement-type of sacrifice, separates us doctrinally from Western Christianity. Had there not been a fall, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Logos (Word) would still have incarnated into the flesh and taken on our nature. For it is by this condescension by our Creator God to take on the nature of that which He created that we are given the opportunity of being deified (Saint Paul said we shall become as gods). Our journey into the heart culminates in theosis, whereby we are joined in everlasting communion with the very God Who created us. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria said, "The Son of God became man, that we might become god." In II Peter 1:4, we read that we have become "... partakers of divine nature." Saint Athanasius further says that theosis is "becoming by grace what God is by nature."

## **The Nativity and Almsgiving, Part One**

*By His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)*

The hymn of the angels at the Nativity of Christ is the key verse to the practical meaning of this feast. The angels of heaven sing: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men' (Luke 2:14). God is always glorified in the highest, and through His presence, peace is achieved on earth and goodwill enters the hearts and souls of mankind.

If the glory of God in the highest, the peace on earth, and the goodwill among men are interconnected, then the responsibility for achieving them falls primarily on the believers. The incarnation of the Lord Jesus teaches us to be messengers of peace and apostles of joy. This great responsibility is not fulfilled by excessive concern for the appearances of the holiday, but by working seriously to make the Lord ever present in and directing our lives.

Hence, this feast gains priority among believers in knowing how Jesus Christ was born in their souls. If they remain during the feast and after it as they were before, this means that the feast has not achieved its goal inside of them. Church feasts are stations for self-examination, and new beginnings to a more advanced extent in the life of virtue and the fruition of the Holy Spirit.

Today, Christmas is an essential moment to think about bringing joy to the hearts of despondent, sad, displaced and suffering people all around us. Unfortunately, their population is on the rise. The most important question is: How do we bring them joy? The answer is simple: by giving – morally, spiritually, emotionally and materially. Reviewing the customs associated with this feast is necessary and essential for all believers. On this feast, let us invite each other to activate our participation in bringing joy to our brothers and sisters in God.

How do we return the customs of this feast to their origin? Consider the popular tradition of exchanging gifts and distributing alms to the needy on this blessed holiday. The origin of this tradition goes back to the Christian belief that God has presented humanity the greatest gift at Christmas, the second person of the Holy Trinity, His Word, His Son, in order to save it. Therefore, believers offer gifts to one another as a token of gratitude to God for His greatest gift: Jesus Christ.

Like everything transcendent, the concept of giving is distorted by sinful humans and diverted from its original meaning. In like manner, this tradition has become disfigured with excessive consumerism where exchanging gifts is now a mere imposed seasonal tradition. Anyone can see the excess in this area. Gifts should not be exchanged between people just because "it is Christmas," regardless of the receivers and their needs. Nevertheless, it remains a beautiful custom, although it needs more spirituality and personalization.

Believers first present themselves as pure offerings to the Lord. The Lord came to us to save us, so we, in turn, present ourselves to Him pure and clean with sincere repentance and a noticeable change for the better.

Then, we present to our brothers, sisters, loved ones and friends a simple, thoughtful and joyful offering. Hence, it has become customary on the eve of this feast for all family members to gather for Christmas dinner.

The most important thing is for believers to visit the grieving, the needy, and the neglected, bringing whatever they can provide them during the Nativity Fast.

This feast is an occasion to practice giving. God gave us Himself, so we give Him ourselves. God visited us with His great mercy, so we visit others with our love derived from His love.

## **2025 PLEDGE DRIVE**

**(Our Goal for 2025 is \$125,000.00)**

The Pledge Form for 2025 is available for you.

A copy has been emailed.

Please sign one and turn it in ASAP

**Thank you to the following Parishioners  
who already signed their pledge card:**

Armstrong, Samuel  
Bobrovsky, Michael & Natalie  
Brown, Kevin  
Carey, Michealle  
Doda, Alina  
Dragu, Ionica & Marcel  
Ferrell, Zachary  
Good, Eric & Marsha  
Hall, Alix  
Holland, Michael & Skylla  
Jackson, William & Sheree  
Lieberman, Michael & Alyssa  
Mooney, Michael  
Morales, Tito  
Riter, Tristan & Jennie  
Shalhoub, Fr Elia & Odette  
Singleton, Steven & Traci  
Skaff, Paul & Bobbi  
Spinola, Priscilla  
Thieme, Deborah & John  
Trainham, Jarrod  
Vaughn, Isaac

**Total from 22 Pledges General Fund      \$72,150.00**