

God is with us

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Α  ΧΝΟΣ

A GREEK ORTHODOX PERIODICAL



Ο Λυτρωτής

«Λύτρωσιν απέστειλε
Κύριος τω λαώ Αυτού»

Έρχονται Χριστούγεννα. Η γιορτή της χαράς και της αγαλλίασης. Ο υμνογράφος της Εκκλησίας μας ψάλλει με ενθουσιασμό: «Ευφραίνεσθε δίκαιοι, ουρανοί αγαλλιάσθε, σκιρτήσατε τα όρη Χριστού γεννηθέντος». Χαίρονται οι άνθρωποι και σκιρτούν από χαρά και τα κτίσματα της δημιουργίας στη γέννηση του Χριστού.

Και γιατί όχι; Ήλθε Εκείνος για τον οποίον μίλησαν αιώνες πριν από τη γέννησή Του, εκλεκτά πνεύματα του προχριστιανικού κόσμου. Όχι μόνο οι προφήτες του Ισραήλ, φωτισμένοι από το Άγιο Πνεύμα, αλλά και μεγάλοι ποιητές και σοφοί του αρχαίου ειδωλολατρικού κόσμου.

Ευχόταν εκείνος που τον περίμεναν με λαχτάρα, σε ανατολή και δύση, για να φέρει την αλλαγή, το φως, τη λύτρωση, τη ζωή. Η αποστολή Του ήταν συγκεκριμένη. Την σημειώνει ένας από τους μαθητές Του-ο αγαπημένος Του: «Εις τούτο εφανέρωθη ο υιός του Θεού, ίνα λύση τα έργα του διαβόλου» (Α΄ Ιωάν. 3:8). Για αυτό το σκοπό φανερώθηκε πάνω στη γη ως άνθρωπος ο υιός του Θεού, για να καταργήσει τα έργα του διαβόλου (Μετάφ. Παναγ. Τρεμπέλα). Ήλθε στη γη και έζησε ανάμεσά μας για να καταλύσει και να συντρίψει τα έργα του διαβόλου.

Ποιο το έργο του διαβόλου; Η εξαθλίωση των ανθρώπων. Η κατάπτωση της κοινωνίας, η καταστροφή του οποιουδήποτε δεχτεί να ακολουθήσει την πονηρή εισήγησή του. Η αιχμαλωσία και η υποδούλωση γενικά της ανθρώπινης προσωπικότητας. Μια υποδούλωση φριχτή και οδυνηρή, που δυστυχώς οι άνθρωποι όλων των εποχών φαίνεται να πέφτουν θύμα της. Η αιχμαλωσία και η δουλεία στο διάβολο. Η υποδούλωση σε πάθη ατιμίας. Το συνεχές, αφόρητο ψυχικό μαρτύριο του αμαρτωλού ανθρώπου. Γεμάτη η ιστορία των λαών από τέτοια φρικτά παραδείγματα.

Και όταν έφθασε στο απροχώρητο η ταλαιπωρία των σκλάβων ανθρώπων, και τα πάθη και η αμαρτία στο ζενίθ τους, τότε σήμανε η ώρα του Θεού. Ήρθε πια η στιγμή να μιλήσει ο Θεός και να χαρίσει τη λύτρωση και τη λευτεριά στη σκλαβωμένη γη. Γι' αυτό και ο άγγελος του ερχομού του Λυτρωτή στη γη κάλεσε τους πρώτους μάρτυρες του κοσμοϊστορικού αυτού γεγονότος ως εξής:



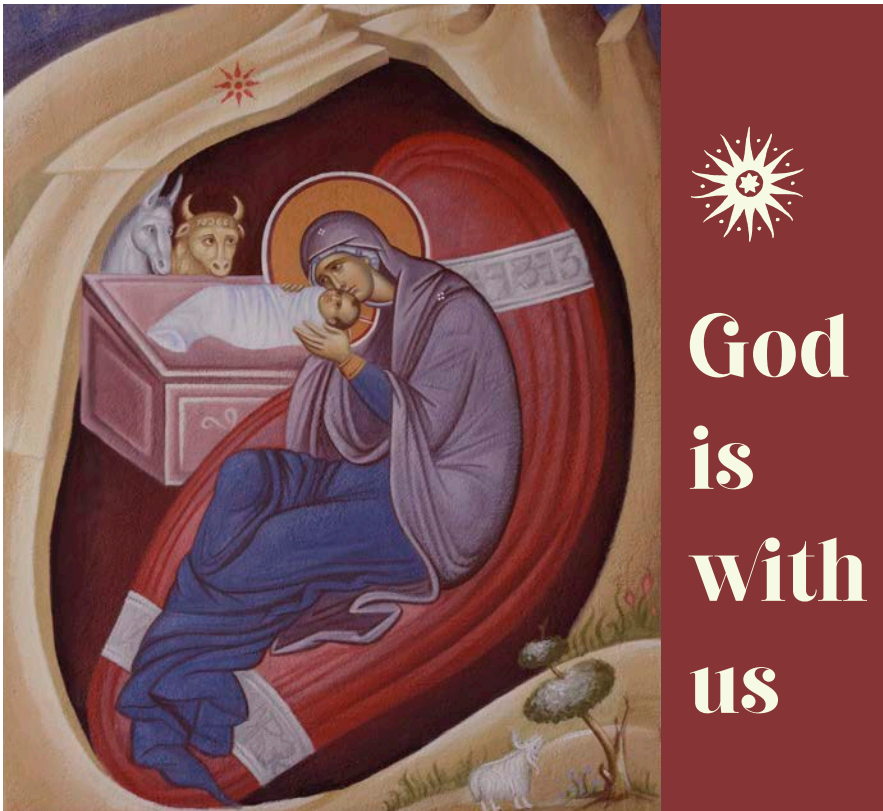
«Ευαγγελίζομαι υμίν χαράν μεγάλην ήτις έσται παντί τω λαώ, ότι ετέχθη υμίν σήμερα σωτήρ, ος εστί Χριστός Κύριος» (Λουκ. Β΄ 10-11). Με απλά λόγια, σας φέρνω το πολύ χαρμόσυνο μήνυμα: γεννήθηκε πια ο Σωτήρ και Λυτρωτής σας: είναι ο Κύριος και Θεός Ιησούς Χριστός.

Θα μπορούσε να πει πολλά περισσότερα ο άγγελος, όπως: Αυτός θα συντρίψει τον πονηρό, θα σας αρπάξει μέσα από την καταστροφή και τη δουλεία των πονηρών πνευμάτων. Θα είναι ο Λυτρωτής σας που θα δώσει «την ψυχήν Αυτού, λύτрон αντί πολλών». Με τα λόγια Του, τη ζωή Του, και προπαντός με τη θυσία Του, θα σας χαρίσει την πραγματική λύτρωση και μαζί τη χαρά και την ειρήνη, «επί γης ειρήνη, εν ανθρώποις ευδοκία».

Χριστούγεννα, 2024. Νιώθουμε ακόμη πιο πολύ την ανάγκη της λυτρώσεως που χαρίζει ο αιώνιος Λυτρωτής. Γιατί, παρά τις δύο χιλιετίες χριστιανισμού στον κόσμο, πολλοί σήμερα παραμένουν δούλοι της αμαρτίας, και όχι μόνο: επιμένουν να προβάλλουν τη ζωή της αμαρτίας σαν νόμιμο τρόπο ζωής. Επιλέγουν την υποδούλωση στα πάθη τους και αγνοούν πως στην ουσία υπηρετούν τα ζωώδη ένστικτά τους και πως η ελευθερία τους δεν διαφέρει σε τίποτα από την ελευθερία των αλόγων ζώων: «Ωμοιώθησαν τοις κτήνεσι τοις ανοήτοις» (Ψαλ. 48:12). Έγιναν όμοιοι με τα ανόητα ζώα.

Πολλοί και οι λαοί στην οικουμένη σήμερα που δεν γνώρισαν ακόμα τον Λυτρωτή, τον Ελευθερωτή. Και γίνονται αφορμή πολέμων, αδικίας, καταστροφής, φόβου και τρόμου. Ευχή και πόθος θερμός όλων μας είναι να βασιλεύσει στις καρδιές ο Κύριος και Λυτρωτής μας. Γιατί μόνο τότε είμαστε πραγματικά ελεύθεροι. Ελεύθεροι από το άγχος και το φόβο. Λυτρωμένοι από τα πάθη που ταλαιπωρούν την ψυχή.

Είθε το κοινωνικό της γιορτής: «Λύτρωσιν απέστειλε Κύριος τω λαώ Αυτού», να το εγκολπωθούμε και να κινήσει με ευγνωμοσύνη τις ψυχές μας στη δόξα του Λυτρωτή μας.



God is with us

We remember not just a historic event two millennia ago. Instead, the Church hymns proclaim in the present tense: "*Christ is born; glorify Him! Christ is come from heaven; go and meet Him*". Christmas is also the celebration of Christ's re-birth in our hearts today. Christ remains with us now, meaning that nothing in this earthly life can trouble us (for "*If God is for us, who can be against us*" – Romans 8:31).

And so, we must ask: "*what shall we offer you, O Christ, because you have appeared on earth as a man for our sakes?*" (Nativity Vespers). Christ does not need our materialistic presents or our large gatherings; instead, the best gift of Christ we can offer is a "*broken and humbled heart*" (Psalm 50:19) full of repentance and the desire to renew ourselves in His love.

Or, as St John Chrysostom says:

Since therefore all rejoice, I too desire to rejoice. I too wish to share the choral dance, to celebrate the festival. But I take my part... holding in my arms the cradle of Christ. For this is all my hope, this my life, this my salvation, this my pipe, my harp. And bearing it I come, and having from its power received the gift of speech, I too, with the angels, sing: "Glory to God in the Highest; and with the shepherds: and on earth peace to men of good will."

May the miracle of our Lord's Nativity fill all our hearts with love for Him so that He may be born into all our hearts, and may He grant us a very blessed and merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Christ is born! Glorify Him! So begins the well-known and triumphant hymns of Christmas which command us to joyously celebrate and "*rejoice in the Lord*".

In the Vesperal Liturgy of Christmas Eve, we read in the Prophecy of Isaiah that "*the Lord God is with us*" (Isaiah 8:10). Not "*with us*" metaphorically in our hearts, or "*with us*" symbolically in our minds. But physically "*with us*" – taking on the human body with all its challenges and frailties and walking the Earth with us. On Christmas, we celebrate the pre-eternal God who created all things, whom even the highest Archangels cannot bear to look at, choosing to be born in a humble manger and being "*with us*" until the ages for the salvation of the world!

If we pause to carefully reflect on what this means, we have no choice but to be amazed and wonder at the glory of God. The Church hymns describe the

miracle of Christmas as being that Christ, "*the exact Image of the Father*", took "*the form of a servant*" and "*undergoes no change*". At Christmas, Christ "*remained what He was, true God; and He took up what he was not, becoming human in His love for humanity*". What a miracle – the celebration of celebrations!

But what is the significance of God being with us on Earth?

St John Chrysostom explains that "*Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side, all things commingle*". The things of the Earth become heavenly and the feast of Christmas becomes the tuning point of our redemption and renewal. Through Christ becoming man, we ourselves might become like God. Thus, the Saint explains, in the message of Christmas "*the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked... truth has been brought back... a heavenly way of life has been implanted on the earth*".



You will soon go to the markets and will bake there and talk about a lot, about the many different dishes of the feast, or you will only care about how to decorate your body with festive clothes, but one thing is needed: the thought of how to delight your soul with a spiritual blessing on the upcoming feast, how to decorate it with bright thoughts, or in a few words, how to be more worthy to meet and spend the feast - this rarely comes to anyone's mind. Let us all take care that we have a worthy, spiritual meeting of the upcoming feast.

+ St John Kronstadt

CHRISTMAS 2024

Spiritual or Secular?

The Birth of the Son of God is the most significant event to occur in human history. For the faithful, Christmas is the anchor of human salvation, a spiritual and holy feast. It is the appearance of God in the flesh among us, which is the meaning of the term 'incarnation.' It is also His union with man, who is created in His image. And ultimately, the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross on Golgotha and His Resurrection. As we read in the Gospel of John 3:16 'that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life.'



Christmas for us faithful Christians is about our own spiritual recreation. We seek our own personal restructuring, from the decrepit condition which sin has led us, to a return to our previous undefiled self. We are called to celebrate Christmas spiritually – with the power of fasting, devoted prayer, confession and frequent Holy Communion during Advent. The Church celebrates the Divine Liturgy daily. With this preparation, the great purpose of the incarnation of God becomes clear, providing us a source of spiritual satisfaction and protecting us from the works of the devil.

It is a period of love. We see the clear love that God has for man. And we are called to show love toward others. We do this by giving, opening our hearts to our fellow man. We should give in this spirit. Giving things we no longer need. Give away money, if you have more than needed for a simple life. Visit the sick and the lonely. Support those who are going through troubles, and spread joy and optimism. There is happiness and pleasure in giving. Perhaps one day you may receive the newly born Jesus Christ in your heart, filling you with the blessings of Heaven. As we read in Acts 20:35, 'it is more blessed to give, than to receive.'

We also witness the secularisation of Christmas, which is a deep threat to the Christian world. We

see it mostly in the way Christmas is celebrated. The vast majority of Christians have transformed a spiritual and heavenly event into a worldly and material social holiday. In place of spiritual preparation, we see a different kind of anticipation. We see adorned windows, Christmas lights, richly decorated trees. Much time is spent on food and making a big impression – how to choreograph a fancy Christmas meal. The focus is on the present, material world. We witness a Christmas without Christ!

It is our duty to resist this sidelining of the significance of the birth of our God and Saviour. We do this by living this great event spiritually, first and foremost. We fast, we pray, we self-examine and confess, we participate in Holy Communion. We live repenting lives, in anticipation of this great feast. Our personal effort will help us develop a greater insight into the fact that God has arrived on earth to live among us and save us. It also acts as an example for those around us with goodwill, to do the same. Is there a greater gift we can offer to our Lord!



The Birth of the Son of God is the most significant event to occur in human history. Christmas is the anchor of human salvation. A spiritual and holy feast. It is a period of love. We see the clear love that God has for man. And we are called to show this love toward others.

Merry Christmas!





How should a Christian influence those around them?

An Orthodox Christian, a sincere and devout follower of our Lord Jesus Christ, will always be a positive influence on others around them, as affirmed by our Lord to His Disciples: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:13-16).

Wherever they are, and whatever they do, Christians, through their humility and love for others, attract the Grace of God and become a living and tangible witness of the saving power of our Lord. Which is why St Seraphim of Sarov once remarked: "Acquire the Spirit of Peace and a thousand souls around you will be saved!"

I once asked an Orthodox priest in Australia, how is your parish progressing? - to which he casually replied, "The parish is growing by God's grace. One would have to be an incompetent priest for his parish not to grow!" The same is true for any Orthodox Christian: the Christian life is so incomparably more beautiful, inspiring, fulfilling, truer than any other philosophy or made-made religion, that one would need to be completely incompetent in the Christian life to not positively influence others!

We must however be careful that we remain sensitive and loving to everyone around us, particularly those who may not fully accept our Christian way of life. St Paisios, the patron Saint of Australia, advised: "A Christian must not be fanatical; he must have love for and be sensitive towards all people. Those who

inconsiderately toss out comments, even if they are true, can cause harm... A truly humble person never behaves like a teacher; he will listen, and, whenever his opinion is requested, he responds humbly. In other words, he replies like a student. He who believes that he is capable of correcting others is filled with egotism."

Christians influence others not only through their example, but also through their heartfelt prayer. Saint Porphyrios would advise parents, for example, on how to influence their children: "You don't need to say a lot to children. Words hammer at the ears, but prayer goes to the heart. Prayer is required, with faith and without anxiety, along with a good example." The same advice is true for all those people around us.

St John Chrysostom, the golden-mouthpiece of our Orthodox Faith, summarises perfectly what our attitude should be to others: "Do not say, 'it is impossible for me to influence others.' If you are a Christian, it is impossible for this *not* to happen... It is easier for the sun not to give warmth or shine than for the Christian not to shed his light... The light of a Christian cannot escape notice. So bright a lamp cannot be hidden."

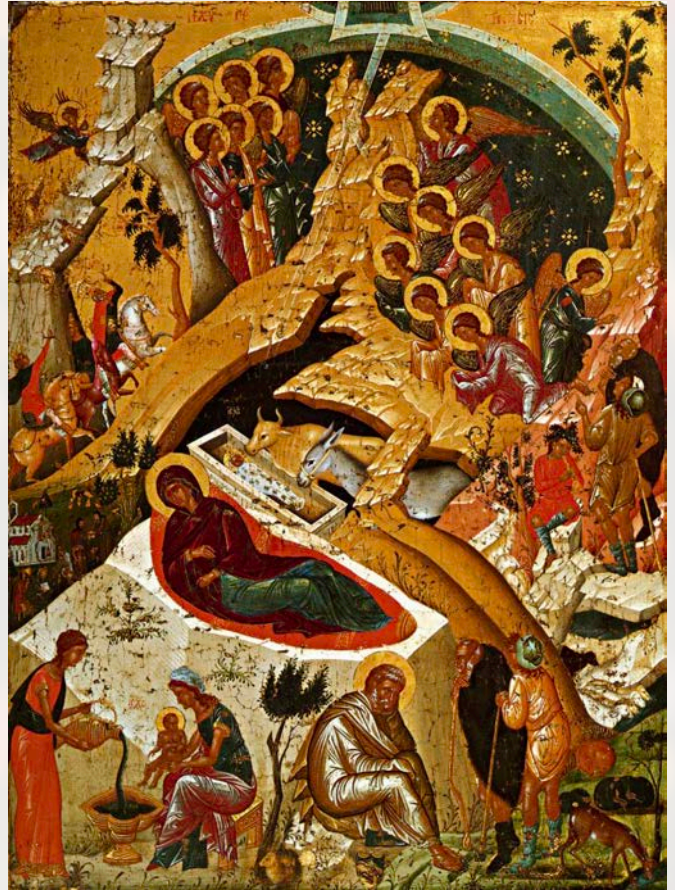
This light, of course, is not ours, but reflects the light of Christ, "the sun of righteousness" as we chant at Christmas, shining within us.

May the Lord abundantly bless all your efforts to glorify His holy name!



Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth peace, goodwill to all men!

Luke 2:14



With this cry, the angels of the Lord call out to the lowly shepherds and the heavenly host announces the coming of the saviour. It is no wonder then that this passage begins the Great Doxology, the "glorification", which heralds the end of the Matins service and the beginning of the Divine Liturgy.

It is a declaration of the end of the estrangement of Man from God; a cry to the coming dawn of Christ's light. The angels inform us that God has turned his face towards humanity not in wrath, scorn or judgement, but in love, peace and goodwill. St Gregory Palamas states that "On account of Him who is born today, shepherds stand in the same choir as angels, sing the same hymn, and strike up a melody together. The angels do not take the shepherds' pipes into their hands, but the shepherds, surrounded by the radiance of the angels' light, find themselves in the midst of the heavenly host and are taught a heavenly song of praise by the angels".

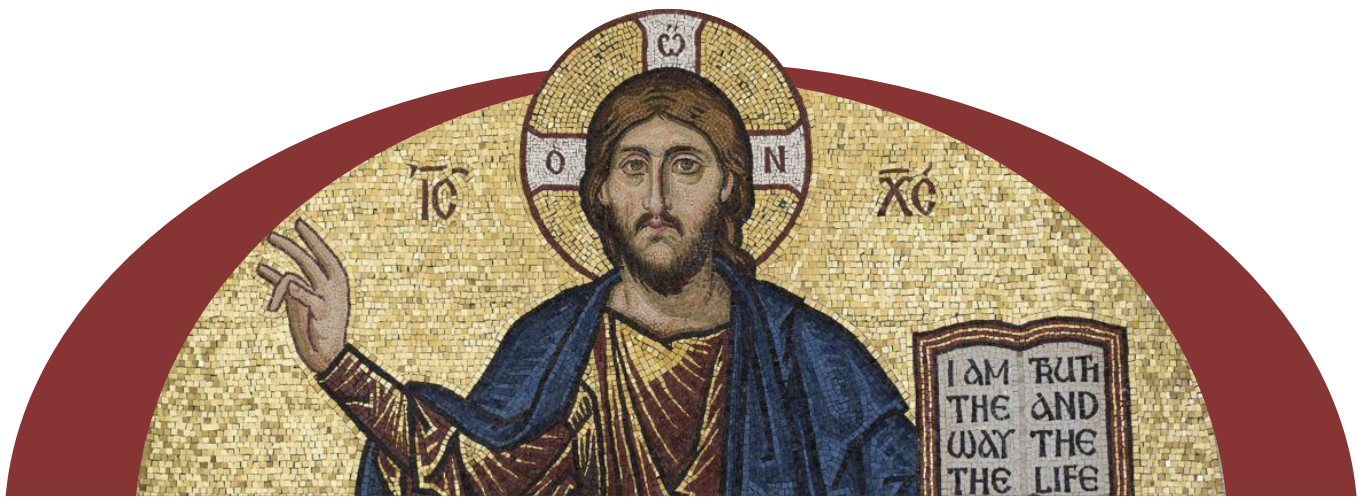
The use of "glory" is also laden with meaning. In ancient days glory was only held by the strong and powerful. It was only ever proven by feats of heroism and physical prowess. But in Bethlehem, in a cave, true and lasting glory is unveiled in the form of a poor child. The event represents a total upheaval of the world's order. Christ himself is the peace that has come to the earth, that peace which is foreshadowed in Psalm 71(72), "All the

Kings of the Earth shall worship him/All the Gentiles shall serve him" (Ps 71:11). Psalm 71 was written "for Solomon" for the name Solomon means "peace" and much of the Psalm is found throughout the various Nativity services.

The Great Doxology itself is one of the oldest structured hymns found within the Church. Research places its providence as early as the mid fourth century as an established hymn. While some parts of the hymn were additions from later centuries, the beginning of the hymn "Glory be to you who showed the Light. Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, goodwill to all men" is the most ancient.

The Byzantine tradition from Constantinople involved a sole chanter exclaiming the phrase "Glory be to God in the Highest" before the rest of the piece was chanted together. The hymn was immediately followed by the Entrance into the Altar and the reading of the Holy Gospel, a practice which today is echoed by the chanting of the Trisagion hymn "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal..." immediately after the Great Doxology.





THE PROPHESED MESSIAH

The scriptures are filled with prophecies, images, and shadows that point to the coming of the Messiah. The term *Messiah*, is derived from the Hebrew word *mashiach* meaning “the anointed one” and is synonymous with *Christ*. It refers to a figure who would be chosen by God to bring salvation to all people and restore the relationship between God and humanity forever.

In the Old Testament, three key roles were established – the prophet, priest, and king. The Messiah was expected to fulfil these roles perfectly. Jesus embodied each of them, as the prophet who speaks God's word, the high priest who offers a perfect sacrifice for sin, and the eternal King who reigns forever.

Moses, a central prophet in Israel's history, serves as a type of Christ. Furthermore, Moses pointed to a greater figure who would not only declare God's will but embody it in every way. In Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Moses prophesied the coming of a prophet like himself, to act as a mediator between God and His people.

The Messiah is also portrayed as a priest of the order of Melchizedek - a mysterious figure from Genesis who is eternal, sinless, and able to offer a perfect sacrifice to atone for sins (Psalm 110:4). This reference is significant because the Messiah is described as both a king and a priest, foreshadowing His unique priesthood. The Epistle to the Hebrews affirms that Jesus Christ fulfils this role as High Priest, who mediates and offers Himself as the sacrifice for sin, fulfilling the priestly role of atonement.

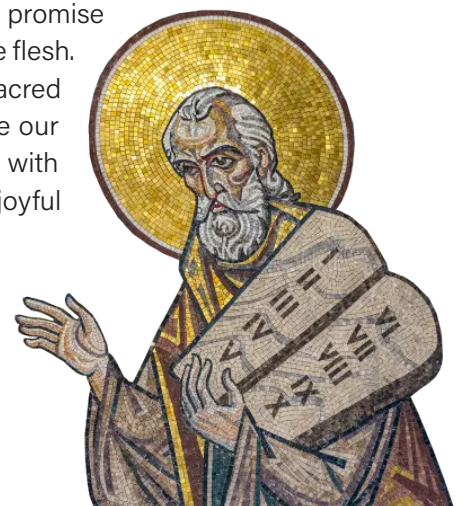
The third office of the Messiah as eternal King is described by the prophet Daniel in a vision where he beheld a divine figure called the “Son of Man” who received an everlasting kingdom.

This same imagery is used by Jesus when He was on trial. To questioning by Pontius Pilate, Jesus directly affirms His identity as the Messiah saying “Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). The use of this title by Jesus demonstrates that He understood Himself not only as an earthly Messiah but also as a divine figure with authority over heaven and earth.

The most compelling and well known prophecy is heard during the service of the Royal Hours on Christmas Eve. The prophet Isaiah foretells the Messiah “for to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders... he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

From the very beginning of the Old Testament through the writings of Moses, the prophets, and the law, the Scriptures foretold the coming of the Messiah. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is unmistakably revealed as this Messiah, as a prophet, priest, and a divine king that reigns eternally. On Christmas we celebrate His miraculous coming into the world, the moment when God's promise of salvation was made flesh. As we approach this sacred season, let us prepare our hearts to receive Him with awe, reverence, and joyful adoration.

Merry Christmas!





Galatians 4:4-7

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

This passage from the Epistle to the Galatians is read on the feast of the Nativity of Christ. Saint Paul refers to Christ's birth as the event by which God the Father redeems humanity and bestows on it His gift of adoption to become His children. He unites His own Son (our Lord Jesus Christ) with His creation (man) to deliver us from slavery. The Father delivered His own Son to us on Christmas to show us that we too are children of God and heirs of God – that we are able to become divine like God.

The Nativity is the groundbreaking event which united humanity with God. We do not merely reflect on it as a historical event. Rather, we experience this gift, every Christmas, in a personal way. Our Father sends His Son to us in order that we may become like Him; divine by His grace.

The message is mystical and powerful – impossible to be fully understood. How can we become like God? We can take the example of Jesus Christ who, human like us, had an earthly body and was subject to temptation. He lived humbly. He did not seek the praise of men. He helped the poor and sick. He fled from sin. He preached repentance. He was prayerful. He was subjected to a sham trial, mockery, persecution, torture and was unjustly lifted up on a cross where He died a terrible and humiliating death. He did not hate His persecutors but prayed for them. And, on the third day, He was raised from death which He defeated so that we too would no longer be condemned to it.

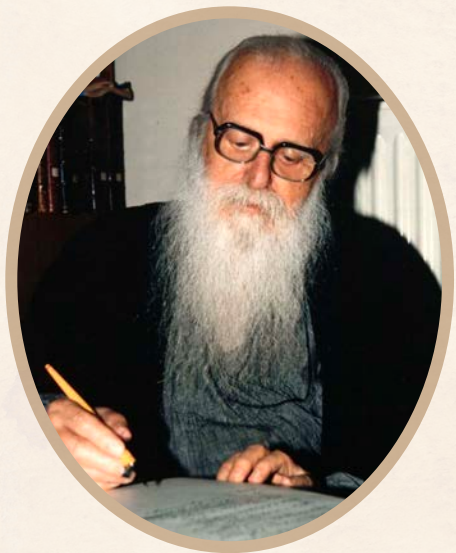
These teachings, events and examples are reminders to us to change our way of life, to imitate Christ. We are called to embrace the love of our Father who has promised to us that we can inherit, if we want, His promise of holiness. If we have the will, with God's help, we can leave behind our earthly cares and be united with our heavenly Father. This can happen each day of our lives, but we must be open to developing a relationship with God. By this we can 'receive adoption as sons'.

The incarnation of Christ provides us with many messages. Let us reflect on the reading's most powerful message – that if we remove the shackles of sin that tie us to this world and walk in a new life, we too can be 'heirs of God through Christ'.

It is God's holy plan to save us from our slavery to sin. He seeks our salvation to restore our place as rightful heirs of His royal house. Who would reject this inheritance? Only one who prefers to live outside the house of God, away from God's Grace in a life of sin.

This Christmas, may we all remember our calling to live holy lives so that, just as Christ became human, we may in turn become like God through His grace.





Saint Gerasimos the Hymnographer

December 7th

Saint Gerasimos the Hymnographer was born in Epirus in 1903, later moving to Athens where he often attended the liturgies presided by the Metropolitan of Pentapolis, Nectarios. He was studious and showed promise in his studies. At the age of 20, he left for Mt Athos, becoming a novice at the Skete of Small Saint Anne's. A year later, he was tonsured a monk and given the name Gerasimos. Not long after his tonsure he experienced a great personal tragedy; his elder Meletios left Mt Athos and the young monk was left alone in the arid, sharp and barren Skete.

In this period of abandonment and loneliness, which would last around two years, the monk Gerasimos suffered harsh temptations and demonic attacks, which he struggled to endure with 'monastic patience,' as he put it. He would recall how he lived each day as if it

was his last; his only comfort found in prayer and the study of the holy fathers.

At this time, he had a vision of Christ, shining brighter than the sun.

The Lord said to him: "What is the matter, my son? I have not abandoned you, I am here with you. I tested you and now it is all gone."

Saint Gerasimos, who only spoke about this experience towards the end of his life, said regarding the aftermath of the vision: "Since then I've experienced great joy in the Lord and I strive according to my strength to save myself."

He was known for his hospitality, and his counsel was often sought out. Prudent in his responses, he systematically avoided untimely discussions and chatter; he always sought silence, which he considered "the mother of wise concepts".

Furthermore, the young monk was granted the gift of hymn-writing, which he did not possess before his earlier spiritual experiences as a monk. He applied his gift for hymnography studiously. He wrote over two thousand sacred services in his life.

Amongst his most familiar compositions are his services to Saint Nectarios of Pentapolis (whom he had known in his youth), Saint Sophia and her three daughters, Saint Kosmas Aitolos, Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, and Saint Dionysius of Aegina. He was later distinguished with the office of Hymnographer of the Great Church of Christ by Patriarch

Athenagoras of Constantinople, composing divine services for many saints who had been canonised in the 20th century.

Once, the saint was asked how he wrote hymns:

"Elder, do you read and study the life of the saint extensively before you write their service?"

"I do read the life of the saint when preparing to write their service", the elder responded.

"But the truth is, unless I sit at night in prayer with my prayer rope producing 'flames', I am not able to write anything. I can only write with prayer."

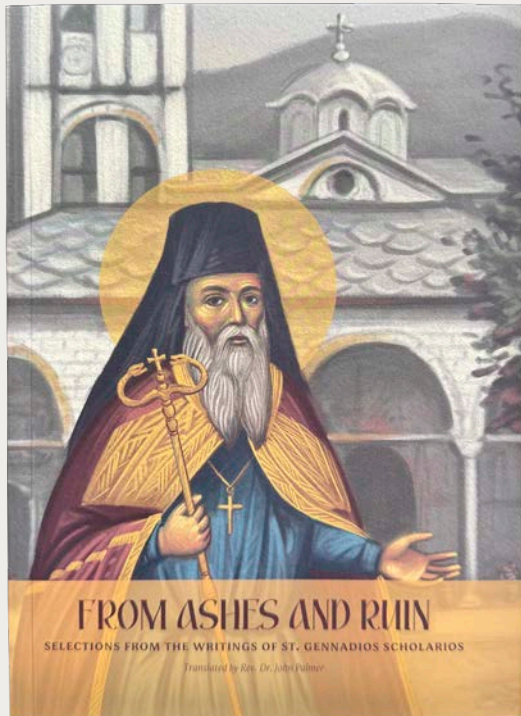
As a monk he also performed obediences for the wider community of Saint Anne's Skete. He served as typicaris for the main church, directing the order of the services, as well as librarian for the church library. As librarian he was able to preserve and catalogue many handwritten codices that proved extremely valuable to scholars. He himself wrote valuable studies and articles.

Saint Gerasimos the Hymnographer passed away in peace in the year 1991. He did not experience any significant problems with his health, and was still writing until his death at the age of 86.

His feast day is celebrated on the 7th of December, the date of his death.

Book Review

From Ashes and Ruin



After Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, Orthodoxy was in a state of crisis. In the decades prior, there were attempts to unite with Roman Catholics on their terms. Now, they were under Muslim rule, a minority without a political and spiritual leader, as both the Emperor and Patriarch had died.

Enter St Gennadios Scholarios, who was elected Ecumenical Patriarch by the Holy Synod and appointed by Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror as “ethnarch” over the Orthodox minority of the Ottoman Empire. St Gennadios safeguarded Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire, and

From Ashes and Ruin provides us with insight into the spiritual calibre of this vastly underappreciated Saint.

The book is comprised of many short treatises and homilies on Orthodox spirituality. While written in a Byzantine style that is similar to many church fathers, the translator of this book has done well to translate the book into English that a 21st-century reader wouldn't balk at. The messages contained inside lead the reader to a greater understanding of the intricacies of the spiritual life.

From Ashes and Ruin contains many of the pastoral writings of St Gennadios. Their depth, along with how St Gennadios draws on the Scriptures to outline how Orthodox faithful should live, serves as an excellent guide. This is a book that shouldn't be consumed all at once like an all-you-can-eat buffet, but slowly, paragraph by paragraph to draw out the wisdom contained therein.

The topics covered span the entire spectrum of Orthodox life, with the first part offering a more practical, but nevertheless Patristic, interpretation of Christ's ministry directed towards laypeople. The writings of St Gennadios included in *From Ashes and Ruin* also discuss virtues, sin and repentance, prayer, and holiness. Quite relevantly for the modern world, there is also a reflection on happiness, though it's worth noting that it's framed as a philosophical poem, which may not be the easiest to read.

Importantly for us, living in similarly post-Christian times, this book demonstrates that even in times of crisis, it is possible to achieve a level of holiness that radiates well into the future. It shows us that despite radical changes in the world around us, we can not only survive but also lead others to Christ, both now and in the years to come, if we “seek first the kingdom of heaven”.

**Wishing
you a Merry
Christmas
& a Blessed
New Year**



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Halki Theological School

In Ottoman times, the Ecumenical Patriarchate faced a challenge. How would it train and spiritually form its next generation of priests and hierarchs? It was clear that they needed some education in theology, but there was nowhere Orthodox within the Byzantine Empire where this could be done. Sending students to the best universities of the age in Italy, France and Germany was also fraught with issues. There was the cost, for a start, as well as differences in theology.

The Halki Theological School (Ἡ Θεολογικὴ Σχολὴ τῆς Χάλκης) was formed to respond to this pressing need. Consecrated on September 13, 1844 by Patriarch Germanos IV, it is nestled atop the serene Hill of Hope on the island of Halki (Heybeliada in Turkish), in the Sea of Marmara near Istanbul.

The school became a central hub for training priests and theologians. The school was not merely an academic institution; it was a

spiritual one, operating under the direct guidance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. By the time it closed in 1971, Halki had educated 950 students, many of whom went on to become bishops, patriarchs, and theologians across the Orthodox world.

Halki's tranquil atmosphere provided students with the ideal environment for prayer, reflection, and study, away from the hustle of urban life in nearby Istanbul. The school's buildings, most notably the main seminary building, are elegant examples of 19th-century architecture. The Monastery of the Holy Trinity, where the school was housed, forms the spiritual heart of the complex. Alongside classrooms and dormitories, students had access to the school's vast library, which houses invaluable theological manuscripts and books, some dating back centuries.

The monastery also contains the church dedicated to the Holy Trinity, where daily services were

celebrated. Students participated in a disciplined liturgical life, developing the rhythm of prayer that would guide their future ministries. This combination of intellectual study and spiritual nourishment created a well-rounded Orthodox education, shaping not just the minds but the hearts of future Church leaders including Ecumenical Patriarchs Bartholomew and Athenagoras, and Archbishop Stylianos of Australia.

The professors, many of whom were hierarchs and distinguished theologians, played a crucial role in the students' formation, serving not only as academic instructors but as spiritual guides and mentors.

In 1971, following a Turkish law banning private higher education institutions, the Halki Theological School was closed. This decision was a profound blow to the Orthodox Church, depriving the Ecumenical Patriarchate of its primary centre for educating clergy. Despite its closure, Halki remains



a symbol of hope, and calls for its reopening have been a consistent plea from both Orthodox and other religious leaders worldwide.

Efforts to reopen the school have been supported by international advocacy campaigns, including by Pope Francis, U.S. presidents, and the European Union. Despite these efforts, the Turkish government has yet to lift restrictions, and the school remains closed. However, there may be progress in reopening the school following recent comment by Turkish Minister of National Education, Yusuf Tekin, during his visit there in May 2024.

Many of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's conferences are held there, notably the Halki Summits focusing on the environment, and sessions of the Holy and Sacred Synod often meet there during the summer months in the *synodikon* (Synod chambers) contained within the premises.

For Orthodox Christians, Halki



represents a golden era of theological education, where faith, scholarship, and pastoral care were harmoniously integrated. The reopening of Halki would restore a vital centre of learning and send a powerful message about the resilience of the Orthodox Church. While we pray for Halki's reopening, we also commit to nurturing future Orthodox leaders (lay and ordained) with the same spirit of faith and learning that defined the Halki for over a century.



Write to us.

Do you have a question for our clergy about our Orthodox Faith? Is there a topic you would like to know more about? We would like to hear your suggestions and feedback as we head into the new year.

Please email us:
editor@lychnos.org

The Icon of The Three Hierarchs

The Feast of the Three Hierarchs, celebrated on 30 January, honours three of the most remarkable figures in the history of Orthodox Christianity: Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom. All three lived in the 4th century and are known for their theological wisdom, pastoral care, and contributions to the life of the Church. This feast day and icon represent unity in both doctrine and the spirit of Christian brotherhood.

The Feast of the Three Hierarchs originated from an ecclesiastical controversy. In the 11th century, a debate arose in the Byzantine Empire over which of these three saints was the greatest. Supporters of each saint highlighted different theological and pastoral achievements.

The admirers of St Basil praised his asceticism, writings on monasticism, and contributions to the Nicene Creed. St Gregory's

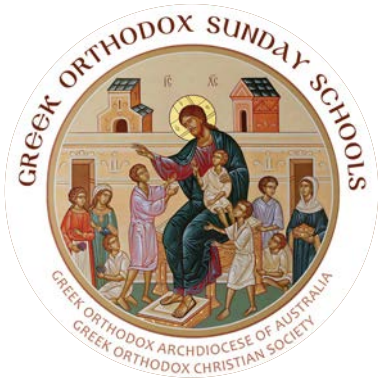
followers emphasised his deep theological insights, particularly his formulation on the Trinity. Those who followed St John referenced his extraordinary homilies and pastoral dedication to caring for the faithful. Rival factions emerged as 'Basilians', 'Gregorians', and 'Johannites'.

St John Mauropus of Euchaita (Oct 5) had a vision that would heal this division, in which the three saints appeared together. They assured him that they were one in Christ, their equal status before God was certain, and they urged the faithful to end the rivalry. Following this vision, the saint declared a single day when all three hierarchs would be honoured equally. This event serves as a reminder to Christians that their unique contributions all work to build up the Body of Christ. One traditional style of icon shows them all holding a Gospel book or scroll, vested as bishops and blessing with their right hands. This emphasises their unity in Christ.

The Gospel book symbolises their roles as teachers of the faith and their contributions to the liturgical life of the Church. The scroll represents their theological writings and reflections on divine mysteries. Their vestments as bishops emphasise their roles as preachers, pastors and hierarchs. Thus, the icon illustrates the harmonious balance of asceticism, theology, and pastoral care, which stand as cornerstones of the Orthodox Christian tradition.

The Feast of the Three Hierarchs is celebrated not only to honour these saints but also as a reminder of the importance of unity in faith. Their combined contributions continue to guide the spiritual lives of Orthodox Christians, offering wisdom, humility, and dedication to God through their example. Through their legacies, the Church has been enriched by their teachings, each uniquely contributing to the ultimate purpose of the salvation of all.





Sunday School End of Year Concerts 2024

With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia and under the direction of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society, the Sunday Schools of New South Wales have been holding their annual end-of-year concerts for 2024 throughout the last two months.

These concerts provided an opportunity for the children to present a variety of plays, poems, and songs with meaningful spiritual messages, reflecting the lessons they learned throughout the year.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the parish priests, parish committees, parents, and children for their unwavering support and dedication to our Sunday Schools this year. We pray that our Lord continues to bless this important work in the year ahead.

For more information about Sunday School, contact your parish priest, Sunday School coordinator, email us at: sundayschool@greekorthodoxchristians.com or visit our website:

sundayschool.lychnos.org



News & Events



Sacred Hymnody Through the Ages

On Tuesday, 19 November 2024, the Sydney School of Byzantine Chant held its annual concert, 'Sacred Hymnody Through the Ages', in the presence of His Grace Bishop Iakovos of Miletoupolis. The concert was a chronological history of the sacred art of Byzantine music, with students chanting a selection of hymns composed by renowned hymnographers spanning from the 4th to the 20th century. The program included reflections on the lives and contributions of some of the most celebrated figures in Byzantine hymnography, such as St. John of Damascus, St. Theodore the Stoudite, and St. Kassiani. After congratulating the students and conferring certificates to the graduates, His Grace addressed those gathered and emphasised that the thread running throughout the entire history presented was the holiness and prayerfulness of each saintly composer.

Classes will resume in February 2025. To enrol in Byzantine Chanting courses for 2025 or the Sunday School Children's Choir, please visit:

lychnos.org/expression-of-interest/

50 Years since the invasion of Cyprus

On November 30 2024, the Greek Orthodox Christian Society held a special commemorative event for the 50 year anniversary of the invasion of Cyprus. On 20 July 1974, Turkish troops invaded the Republic of Cyprus near the northern port city of Kyrenia, seizing control of 36% of the island. The effects were calamitous –over two hundred thousand to lost their homes and over one thousand five hundred missing. The effects are felt to this day with the enduring division of the island and the injustice of the invasion unaddressed.

To commemorate and remember these events in our history, the Greek Orthodox Christian Society prepared a solemn program focusing on the historical, personal, social and legal consequences of the invasion. The indescribable suffering of the Greeks was laid bare. A moving presentation from members of our own community, Presbytera Thekla Kokkinos and Mrs Dimitra Stylianou, on their experiences during the invasion showed that the events of 1974 are still with us today. A special interview with Mr Yiangos Thoma, participant in the freedom movement EOKA, was yet another demonstration of the Christian foundation that provided strength to many of those who persevered during this dark period of Cypriot history.

The event was a reminder that in times of darkness, we seek strength from God and His enlightenment. We continue to pray for His mercy to be on the suffering people of Cyprus and for a just resolution to the tragic events of 1974.



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