

Peace on Earth and Goodwill Toward All

«ΛΥΧΝΟΣ ΤΟΙΣ ΠΟΙΗΜΟΥ Ο ΝΟΜΟΣ ΣΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΦΩΣ ΤΑΙΣ ΤΡΙΒΟΙΣ ΜΟΥ» ΨΑΛΜ 118, 105

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ΛΥΧΝΟΣ

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Η Γέννηση του Χριστού και η εποχή μας

Κάθε φορά που έρχονται Χριστούγεννα, οι χριστιανοί νιώθουν μια αλλιώςτική χαρά μέσα τους. Η καθημερινότητα της ζωής αλλάζει. Μια ατμόσφαιρα γιορταστική επικρατεί. Αισθανόμαστε πιο αδελφωμένοι με τους γύρω μας, όχι μόνο με τους δικούς μας αλλά και με τους ξένους.

Η Γέννηση του Κυρίου και Θεού και Σωτήρα μας, Ιησού Χριστού, συγκινεί τους ανθρώπους. Ξυπνά μέσα μας παιδικές αναμνήσεις, σαν να ξαναζούμε εμπειρίες που δεν ξεχνιούνται ποτέ. Βέβαια, για τους πνευματικά προχωρημένους, η γιορτή είναι κάτι ασύγκριτα μεγάλο και θαυμαστό. Ο Θεός έγινε άνθρωπος «ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν» (Μέγας Αθανάσιος). Ἦρθε να σηκώσει το βάρος των ασθενειών μας και να μας ξαναδώσει τη δυνατότητα της σωτηρίας.

Πιστεύουμε πως ο Χριστός γεννιέται κάθε χρόνο. Αυτό είναι το θαύμα της Θεότητας: να μην είναι ποτέ παρελθόν, αλλά πάντοτε παρόν. «Σήμερον γεννᾶται ἐκ Παρθένου» θα ακούσουμε στις Μεγάλες Ὁρες, παραμονή της γιορτής. Και ανήμερα της εορτής, η Εκκλησία μας θα ψάλει: «Ἐπεσκέψατο ἡμᾶς ἐξ ὕψους ὁ Σωτήρ ἡμῶν, Ἀνατολή ἀνατολῶν, καὶ οἱ ἐν σκότει καὶ σκιᾷ εὗρομεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν· καὶ γὰρ ἐκ τῆς Παρθένου ἐτέχθη ὁ Κύριος». Δηλαδή: μας επισκέφθηκε από ψηλά ο Σωτήρας μας, η μεγάλη Ανατολή, και όλοι εμείς που βρισκόμαστε στο σκοτάδι του ψεύδους και στη σκιά της άγνοιας, βρήκαμε την αλήθεια γιατί από την Παρθένο Μαρία γεννήθηκε ο Κύριος και Θεός μας.



Μπροστά σε όλα αυτά τα μεγάλα και θαυμαστά που η Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία μας παρουσιάζει μια εύλογη απορία γεννιέται: Είναι άραγε ο κόσμος σήμερα προετοιμασμένος για τη μεγάλη γιορτή; Ποια τα εμπόδια και ποιο το χρέος των χριστιανών;

Πρέπει να ομολογήσουμε πως στις μέρες μας οι άνθρωποι, ακόμη και πολλοί θρησκευόμενοι, — άνθρωποι της Εκκλησίας — δουλωμένοι καθώς είναι στις εξωτερικές δραστηριότητες, χάνουν τη σημασία της γιορτής. Απορροφούνται από τις επιφανειακές και εφήμερες απολαύσεις: (μεγάλα τραπέζια, κάρτες, δώρα) και οι καρδιές τους μένουν αδιάφορες και ψυχρές μπροστά στα θεία γεγονότα. Στέκονται μακριά από αυτά, όχι γιατί τα κοσμοσωτήρια συμβάντα απέχουν πολύ χρονικά, αλλά διότι οι καρδιές τους είναι μακριά.

Όμως, η Γέννηση του Χριστού δεν είναι μια τυχαία ιστορική πραγματικότητα. Είναι η έκφραση της Αγάπης, της Δύναμης και της Σοφίας του Θεού, που μπαίνει θεληματικά μέσα στην ανθρώπινη ιστορία για να αναπλάσει τη φθαρμένη από την αμαρτία φύση μας και να μας ξαναβάλει στον δρόμο που οδηγεί στην αιώνια Βασιλεία Του.

Γι' αυτό η γιορτή δεν πρέπει ποτέ να μετατραπεί σε διασκέδαση. Η διασκέδαση, όπως λέει και η λέξη, είναι σκόρπισμα. Σπατάλη της πνευματικής ουσίας του ανθρώπου. Ενώ η εκκλησιαστική γιορτή είναι ευκαιρία πνευματικής περισυλλογής.

Είναι αλήθεια. Ζούμε δύσκολες ώρες σε μια κοινωνία, μάλλον αποχριστιανισμένη. Εμείς όμως πιστεύουμε πως σε αυτόν τον άσωτο κόσμο εξακολουθούν να υπάρχουν άνθρωποι σωστοί και άγιοι που τον στηρίζουν. Είναι αυτοί που, παρά τις κακίες, τους φθόνους, τη διαφθορά και την ασέβεια γύρω τους, εξακολουθούν να πιστεύουν, να ελπίζουν και να προσεύχονται.

Όλοι αυτοί — και ελπίζω κι εμείς μαζί τους — παραμένουμε και ανυπομονούμε να έρθουν τα Χριστούγεννα, για να μας ανακαινίσουν εσωτερικά και να ξαναδούμε τον κόσμο με νέο βλέμμα. Να αντικρίσουμε τον συνάνθρωπό μας γεμάτοι αγάπη, να πλησιάσουμε τους αδελφούς και τις αδελφές μας με κατανόηση, με επιείκεια και με τη συγγνώμη που στάλαξε στις καρδιές μας η ενανθρώπιση του Θεού Λόγου.

Ευχόμαστε τα φετινά Χριστούγεννα: Να φέρουμε δώρα στον Χριστό (σαν τους μάγους) τις αμαρτίες μας. Να δοξάσουμε μαζί με τους απλούς βοσκούς τον Κύριο και Θεό μας. Και τέλος, η ειρήνη των Ουρανών να γίνει και δική μας.

Peace on Earth and



Goodwill Toward All

Christmas is a season when the words of the angels echo afresh:

*“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, goodwill
toward men!” (Luke 2:14).*

Yet as we look around our world today, the promise of peace seems elusive. Nations rage against one another, wars devastate communities, and enmity divides families and neighbours. Headlines remind us daily that the earth is not at peace. How then do we reconcile the angelic proclamation with the reality of a world that appears spiralling toward destruction?

The answer lies in understanding the nature of the peace Christ brings. The peace heralded at Bethlehem was not a political treaty, nor the cessation of conflict between nations. It was something deeper, more enduring, and infinitely more transformative: the peace of God that reigns within the human heart.

History is littered with attempts to secure peace through diplomacy, military might, or human ingenuity. Treaties are signed, alliances are forged, and yet wars continue to erupt. Even in times of relative calm, suspicion and rivalry simmer beneath the surface. The world's peace is fragile, temporary, and dependent on circumstances beyond our control.

Jesus Himself warned His disciples that *“wars and rumours of wars”* would persist until the end of the age (Matthew 24:6). The brokenness of humanity ensures that conflict will remain a feature of earthly life. To expect Christ's birth to usher in a utopian world peace is to

misunderstand His mission. He came not to change the political order, but to transform the human soul. Sin had estranged us from our Creator, but in Christ, the barrier was broken. The Prince of Peace entered our world not to silence the clash of swords, but to silence the guilt and fear that war within the human heart.

When the angels hymned of peace on earth and goodwill toward all people, they proclaimed the possibility of a peace in three ways.

First, peace through reconciliation with God through Christ who is born to cleanse us of sin and make us holy and acceptable to God. St Paul writes, *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1).

Secondly, the peace of God is not meant to be hoarded but shared. Just as we are called to experience reconciliation with God, in the same way we should extend forgiveness, compassion, and love towards others. In a world marked by hostility, Christians are to be ambassadors of goodwill. If we truly want to be called children of God we must be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). This means we aspire to imitate the character of Christ, to forgive offenses, to love our enemies and to do good to those who wish to harm us.

And thirdly, peace within ourselves. That is, stillness of mind and calmness of the heart by accepting God's Will and living with joy in His presence and simplicity. In Philippians we are reminded to not be anxious about anything, and to guard our heart and mind with peace by making our requests known to God *“by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving”* (Philippians 4:6-7).

Today, as wars rage in various corners of the globe, as families fracture under bitterness, and as societies polarize, the peace of Christ remains available. It is not fragile like worldly treaties, but eternal, beginning with His birth and secured by the cross and resurrection. It is found by surrendering our heart to the Savior who comes to remind us that peace is not the absence of war but the presence of Emmanuel — God with us.

*Merry Christmas
to all!*

THEOPHANY



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EPIPHANY AND 'APPEARANCE'

THE DIVINITY AND GRACE OF GOD SHINES FORTH

It can be safely said that in no other time in recorded history has there been such an emphasis on the appearance of things, of people, of objects, of places, of anything that can be discerned with the human eye. Much effort, and countless amounts of money, are put into capturing our collective and singular gaze as swiftly as possible. For example, across psychology research, attention-measurement studies, and guidance from major commercially driven social media platforms, the consensus is clear: viewers give about 1–3 seconds before deciding whether to keep watching or listening to something.

Immeasurable Grace. Truly, there is nothing in this world that can compete with the immeasurable Grace of God.

We have now moved beyond the ephemeral, a term from the Greek phrase, “for a day/of a day.” Our minds, our hearts, our souls, our thoughts, are being pursued and sought out in 3 second chunks. In this frenetically flashing existence, Our Church once more reminds and prepares us for the coming of the Only Timeless One, who is Inalterable, Unchanged and Unchangeable. Because, despite the worldly pursuits for our attention, sin remains the central problem for humans and 3 second TikTok shorts in all their number cannot solve it.

For about the first four centuries of the Christian Church, the Feast of Theophany on 6th January encompassed celebration of both the Birth of Christ as well as of His Baptism in the Jordan River. It was only during the beginning of the fifth century that most major

Christian centres had separated the feast into the form we celebrate today.

The Epistle reading of the Feast by Apostle Paul begins with the phrase, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.” (Titus 2:11-12)

In the translation, ‘appeared’ is used for the original Greek word ἐπεφάνη, which comes from the verb ἐπιφαίνω which means, to show forth, to become visible in the passive sense, to be shined upon, to receive from something giving forth light.

It is a different word to the usual Greek word for appear which is φαίνω or in the passive sense, ἐφάνη which means to appear, to be seen, exposed to view.

‘The love for mankind of the Giver,’ he says, ‘is enough to set everything forth.’ For whenever it is God’s grace, the grace has no measure.”

The Fathers of our church talk about this distinction, in reference to the Feast. St Hippolytos of Rome explains in his sermon on Theophany that, “He has shone forth, not merely “appeared.” For “to appear” is one thing, since in what “appears” the one who baptises (St John) has precedence (in time) over the one being baptised. For this reason, the Father from heaven sent down the Holy Spirit upon the One being baptised. For just as in the ark of Noah the “loving-kindness of God” was made known by means of a dove, so also now

the Spirit which came down in the form of a dove, as though bearing the fruit of an olive branch, took its stand upon the One who was being testified to. Why? In order that the certainty of the Father’s voice might be recognized, and the prophetic foretelling of many years before might be confirmed.”

When Christ was baptised in the Jordan, He did not simply ‘appear’, nor did the Holy Trinity in the voice of the Father nor the Image of the Dove representing the Holy Spirit. The Divinity and Grace of God shines forth. This is why this Feast is also called the Feast of Lights.

St John Chrysostom gives us a sense of the constancy and certainty of this Grace in his commentary on the opening passage of the Epistle reading: “Truly the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation. But for what reason, O blessed Paul, have you passed over so many great achievements with a single word? Reveal the grace to me; tell me the ocean of the gifts. ‘The love for mankind of the Giver,’ he says, ‘is enough to set everything forth.’ For whenever it is God’s grace, the grace has no measure.”

Immeasurable Grace. Truly, there is nothing in this world that can compete with the immeasurable Grace of God.

Let us look to this coming feast of Theophany to take our hearts and minds away from the worldly pursuit of things which seek to capture us within three seconds and instead turn our souls towards the only true constant that, the source of immeasurable grace and unending love of God, ‘the only Lover of humankind.”



Q & A

WITH Fr G. L.

Why do we ask the priest to bless our homes?

In Orthodox tradition, the blessing of homes is not a superstition or merely a “nice custom”. It is something deeply theological. It is something that speaks about why Christ came, what He did, and what we believe about the world.

Home blessings can occur at any point in the year — but we focus especially on January, around the great Feast of the Theophany (Epiphany), the Baptism of Christ. So: why then?

From the beginning, God made creation good: “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). Matter, the physical world, our bodies, water, air, the whole environment — all of this is God’s gift. But with sin — not only individual sins like lying or anger — but with humanity’s fall, the physical world itself is affected. St Paul says that creation “was subjected to futility” (Rom 8:20). Sin leads to estrangement from God, and this estrangement wounds the creation itself. Grace becomes obscured. What God intended as a place of communion becomes, at times, a place of fear, sickness, fragmentation.

The Incarnation is God’s answer to this tragedy. St Athanasius writes that the Word “became man that we might become god” (On the Incarnation 54). Christ’s taking of flesh allows humanity to be healed, restored, saved.

But more: when Christ entered the waters of the Jordan,

something happened cosmically. Prior to Christ, water cleansed the one immersed in it. But in Christ’s case, He cleansed and renewed the water — and all creation with it — by His divine presence.

This is why the Great Blessing of the Waters on Theophany is not symbolic theatre. It is a participation in that same Baptismal mystery. This is why Holy Water (Αγιασμός) is a real miracle — not a metaphor. We keep it on our icon stands all year and it does not rot. St Luke of Simferopol — a modern surgeon and bishop — explicitly encouraged people to drink Αγιασμό for the sake of physical health.

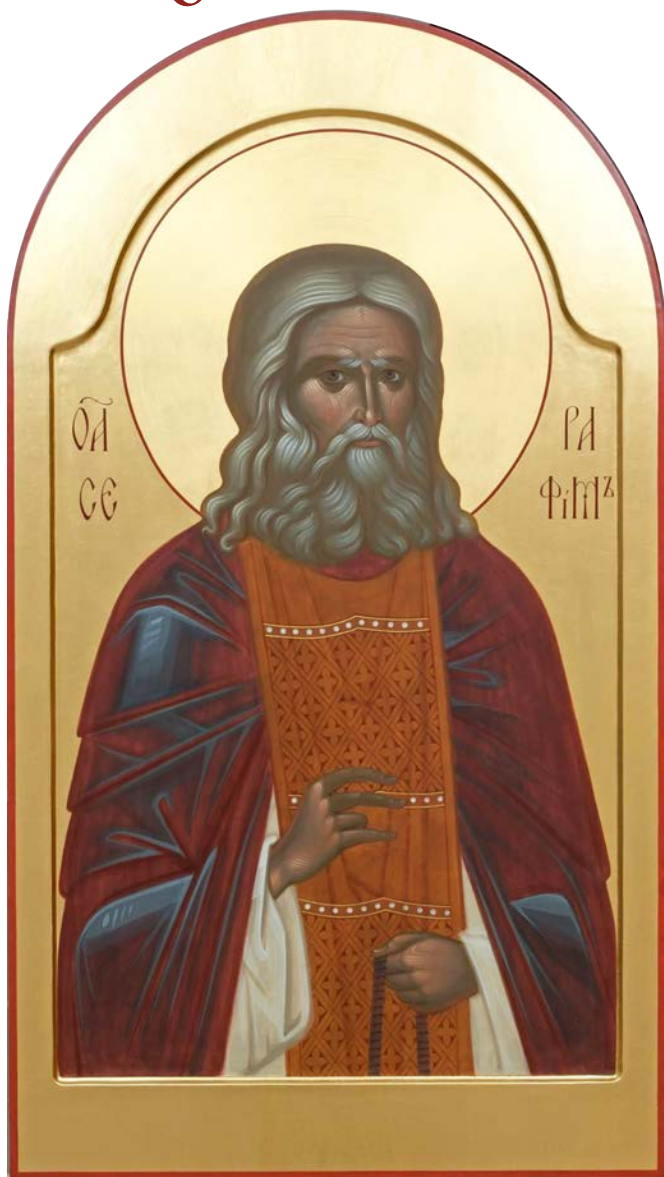
Therefore Holy Water has true power — the real, tangible, grace-filled presence of God.

So when we invite the priest to visit our home at Theophany — we are inviting this blessing into the walls, rooms, corners, and heart of our dwelling. It is a renewal of creation in the place where we actually live our lives. We are also inviting the priest himself — a spiritual father — to step into our life, our family space, our concerns. This also renews our connection with the Church.

In short: Christ came to renew creation. House blessing is one way that renewal becomes personal, local, embodied — a foretaste of the Kingdom already in our homes.



St Seraphim of Sarov



*“Acquire the Spirit of
Peace, and a thousand souls
around you will be saved.”*

Perhaps one of the most famous sayings of a modern father of the Orthodox Church, and made by one of her most radiant saints. St Seraphim was born Prokhor Moshnin in 1754 in Kursk, Russia. From his youth he showed boundless love for God, and after entering the Sarov Monastery he embraced the monastic life with obedience and humility. His early years were marked by illness and physical weakness, yet he accepted every

trial with thanksgiving, trusting completely in the mercy of the Lord.

Desiring greater stillness, he withdrew deep into the forest near Sarov, where he lived for many years as a hermit. There he cultivated ceaseless prayer, long vigils, and simplicity of heart. He kept only the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers, and he fed the wild animals with gentleness, showing the peace that reigned in his soul.

During these years of solitude he undertook a most demanding ascetical labour: standing upon a stone for a thousand days, he prayed, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner,” seeking nothing but the grace of the Holy Spirit. Having nothing but divine consolation, St Seraphim acquired the spirit of peace. For Saint Seraphim, peace was not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of God Himself dwelling in the heart purified by repentance. He taught that when a Christian keeps this inner peace, others are drawn naturally to Christ.

After many years in the forest, the saint returned to the monastery and began receiving the countless pilgrims who sought his guidance. Though he lived in poverty and his body was worn from fasting and past injuries, he welcomed each person with extraordinary warmth. His customary greeting was the Paschal proclamation: “Christ is risen!” and addressed every visitor as “my joy”. He offered this greeting throughout the entire year, for in his heart the joy of the Resurrection never faded.

Many accounts describe miraculous healings, prophetic insight, and the profound consolation people experienced simply by being near him. One such well-known instance is his conversation with Nicholas Motovilov, during which Saint Seraphim characteristically expounded that the whole purpose of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. As they spoke in the snowy forest, Motovilov saw the saint shining with uncreated light, confirming the truth of his words.

Saint Seraphim’s life reminds us that holiness is not unreachable. He lived simply, gently, and with deep compassion, and yet through faithfulness and patience he became a vessel of divine grace. His constant “Christ is risen!” teaches us to let the Resurrection illumine every moment of life. The possibility of acquiring the Spirit of Peace is an invitation for us to cultivate prayer and humility so that Christ’s light naturally shines forth from us to those around us.



THE GENEALOGY OF CHRIST



Every year on the Sunday before Christmas, the Church reads the genealogy of Christ from the Gospel of Matthew (1:1-17).

Her "yes" brought salvation into the world.



To many, it can sound like a 'boring' part of the Bible - being a long list of names, some of whom we've never heard of, always "begetting". But nothing in Scripture is meaningless. This passage reveals the heart of God's plan for our salvation and has a message deeply relevant to our lives today.

So what does this mean for us today? First, it shows that our ancestry matters. Each of us inherits both strengths and weaknesses from those before us. On Mount Athos, the monks say, "A monk heals his family for seven generations." The same is true for anyone who turns to Christ in repentance and prayer, as holiness transforms not only us, but those around us.



The genealogy begins with Abraham and moves through Isaac, Jacob, King David, and all the generations down to Joseph, the betrothed of the Theotokos. It shows that Christ entered human history not as a stranger but as one of us. He took on our triumphs, our failures, and even our sins. The people in His ancestry were far from perfect. Abraham doubted, Jacob deceived, David sinned greatly. Yet God worked through all of them to bring about the Incarnation.

Second, the genealogy reminds us that history matters. Christ came into real time and space. The God who created the universe entered human history to redeem it from within. That means our own daily lives, our routines, our struggles, our family histories, are not meaningless. Every moment is part of God's unfolding story of salvation.



The women named in the genealogy remind us of God's mercy. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba each had complicated stories. They were marked by sin and suffering. Yet through them came the line of the Messiah. Finally, the genealogy leads us to the pure and humble Panagia, who freely accepted God's will and became the Theotokos.

Finally, this Gospel reading proclaims that God's promises never fail. Despite human weakness, the Lord fulfilled His promise to Abraham and sent His Son to save us. As St John Chrysostom said, "Christ was born in the flesh that you might be born in the Spirit."



So on that Sunday, when you hear that long list of names in the Liturgy, remember that behind every name is a story of repentance and hope. We who are listening are called to be part of that same story.





THE APOLYTIKION OF NATIVITY



Your Nativity, O Christ our God, has made the light of knowledge dawn upon the world, for thereby those who adored the stars were taught by a star to worship you, the Sun of justice, and to know you, the Dayspring from on high. O Lord, glory to you!

- Apolytikion Tone 4

The sacred hymnographers of our church drew upon their poetic inspiration and deep faith to compose hymns for the feast of Christmas which convey to us the mystery of our Lord's incarnation.

The dismissal hymn, or apolytikion, begins by proclaiming the beginning of a new reality. Our world was plunged into darkness after the expulsion of our first-formed ancestors from paradise. In distancing himself from God, man experienced the effects of sin. His mind became scattered and ignorant, and he began to worship the creation rather than the Creator.

The hymn shows us the descent of God to earth was the beginning of a new global reality. The birth of Jesus Christ dawned like the sun, casting light upon the whole world. This light is the knowledge and experience of God.

Those who are referred to in the hymn as worshipping the stars are the Magi described in the second chapter of the

Apostle Matthew's gospel. These were truly the wise men of their time; scholars, priests, interpreters of stars and dreams, who had knowledge of the messianic prophecies. Their observations of the stars had led them to an

important conclusion: the King of the Jews has come into the world.

Even in the small details, God's compassion and love can be seen. He uses a star, which the Magi worshipped in their ignorance, in order to elevate them and bring them to the knowledge of God. Indeed, Christ is then worshiped by these foreign Magi as a King and God, while his own countrymen plot to kill him.

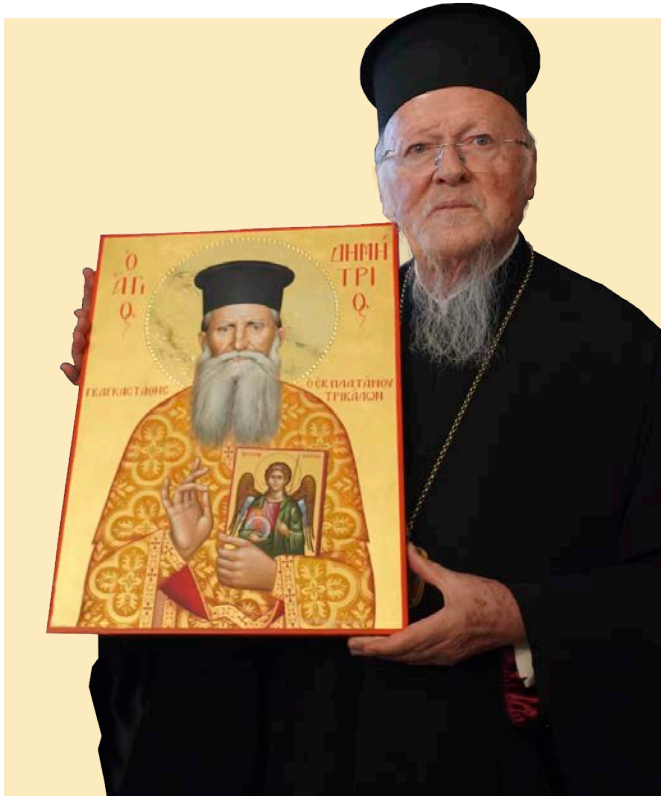


Our Lord is referred to as the sun of Justice, and the Dayspring from on high. The light of knowledge which has established our relationship to God is not an invention of human reasoning or philosophy, but a revelation freely given from above. Man's salvation could never come from this world. Our fallen race could never be saved by social progress, technological advancement, or invented moral systems.

Our salvation is only the result of God's love for man, who chose to reveal himself to us. For this reason, we pray that the Lord, the sun of Justice, will also dawn his light upon us individually, driving away the darkness of sin and despair.

May we continue to worship the Lord in faith, glorifying him for the extreme love which he has shown our human race.





Saint Dimitrios Gagastathis

The Most Recent Saint of Our Church

Among the turmoil and pain of our modern world, there always exists the temptation for the Orthodox Christian to look around and exclaim, 'Surely, holiness cannot be found today!' However, as Elder Ephraim of Arizona writes, 'the providence of God arranges that there will be heroes in every generation so that there will always be inspiring examples.' On 30 August 2025, the newest spiritual hero and saint of our Church was officially announced: **Father Dimitrios Gagastathis**.

While it is impossible to do justice to his life in only a few paragraphs, it is worth giving some biographical background on our new saint. St Dimitrios Gagastathis was born in the village of Platanos in the area of Trikala, Greece, on 1 August 1902 to devout parents. On 10 April 1921, he was drafted into the army in Asia Minor. He also served in several places in Macedonia. In February 1928, he married Elisabeth Koutsimpiris and three years later, in 1931, he was ordained first to the diaconate and then to the priesthood by Bishop Polycarp of Trikki.

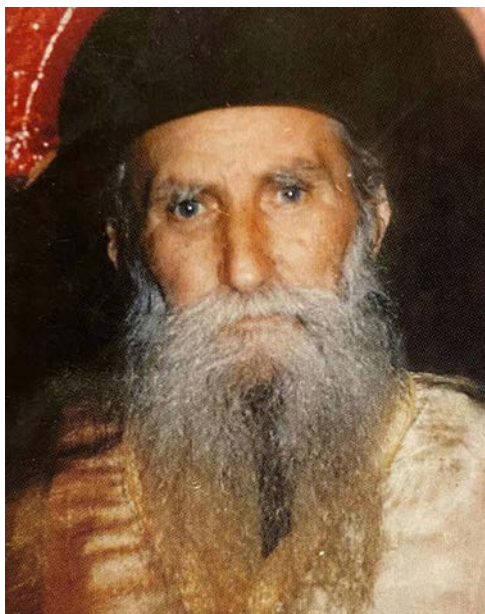
Through his marriage, Fr Dimitrios and Presvytera Elizabeth were blessed with nine daughters – the youngest of whom became a nun and is still alive to this day. For forty-two years, Fr Dimitrios served as the parish priest of his village in the church of the Archangels. A pious and simple man, he cared deeply for his flock and

for Christ. He saw the world through a spiritual lens that is unfortunately rare in this age. Indeed, he would say, *'Miracles happen every minute, but we don't perceive them because we are stone-hearted. Soft-heartedness and simplicity are what are needed.'*

During his life, St Dimitrios also cultivated relationships were many other modern spiritual giants of the Church, including St Ephraim of Katounakia, St Amphilochios of Patmos, Elder Philotheos Zervakos (the spiritual child of St Nektarios) and Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra, who wrote a eulogy for St Dimitrios upon his repose.

Father Dimitri was diagnosed with colon cancer in 1969 and in 1973 it was found to have spread to his liver – a terminal prognosis. Yet even in the hospital he continued his daily prayers, standing next to his bed each evening for over an hour to pray the service of Compline. He remained cheerful and welcomed all who came to him. His doctor recorded:

"No matter how tired he was, he would never turn away anyone who came to see him. He always had a kind word and a piece of advice for everyone. He would also share, while tears flowed from his eyes, the stories surrounding the miracles of his life experience, each time giving glory to God and repeating, 'Our Faith is alive, my children, our religion is alive.'"



He peacefully fell asleep in the Lord, at home, on January 29, 1975 and was buried behind his beloved parish church of the Archangels in Platanos.

Perhaps, one small thought to draw from the life of St Dimitrios is this: we are all called to sainthood – not just monastics and bishops. St Dimitrios was a married man. Indeed, if one reads further into his life, they will see that his family was not some perfect ideal, untouched by struggle. They faced real difficulties, challenges and trials. The defining factor, however, was that St Dimitrios approached all these problems and difficulties with a humble reliance and unwavering trust in Christ. This is something that, although challenging, is possible for everyone to do through the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

Let us then seek to imitate St Dimitrios Gagastathis, a modern day Saint who lived in the world but ultimately transformed everything around him – his family, his village, his spiritual children – through his great love for our Lord and Saviour.



Saint Dimitrios with Presvitera Elisabeth

Teachings of Saint Dimitrios

On Prayer

Prayer comes first in the [throat], then goes up to the brain and then to the heart... It's true that in the beginning, you'll have difficulties. You'll try to pray and at times you won't be able to, at times you'll have wandering thoughts and temptations, and at other times you won't be able to wake up at night. But you must insist. The Lord, seeing your disposition, will uphold you and deliver you from all temptations. We must not waste the whole night sleeping, because then Satan does whatever he wants with us.

On Living Faith

Indeed our Faith is alive, but we don't want to follow it, because it's a bit heavy and requires some commitment from our part. People want freedom and a descending slope so that they don't get tired and sweat, but they don't know that this descent leads to a bad end. The way of perdition looks initially good, happy and easy. It offers artificial delights and pleasures, but all this vanishes quickly.

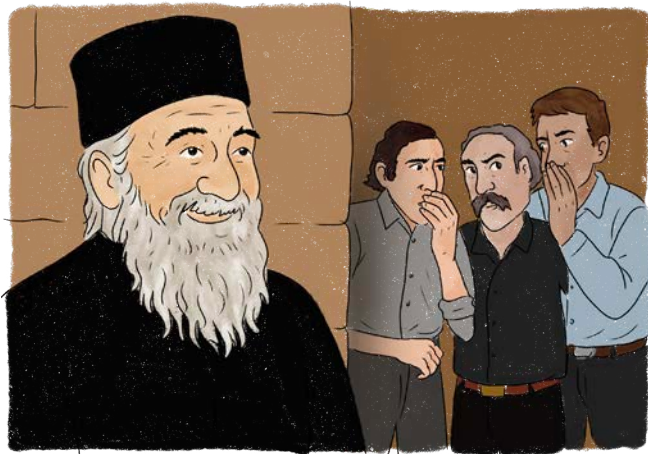
On Humility and Obedience

We cannot have boldness before God when we are not obedient, humble. Our heart must be simple in order to receive the Word of God. No selfishness of hard-heartedness. Simplicity of heart makes us similar to God and to the saints. Everything is simple. The simple man is neither wicked nor can he think something wicked. He is restless. He is like a child. His prayer is readily received. He prays for the others and for his sins.

Teachings quoted from <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2011/01/papa-dimitri-gagastathis-life-and.html>

A STORY ON HUMILITY

It is said of a certain elder that he showed special affection for those who despised him and in any way dishonored him.



These are our friends, because they lead us to humility. Those who honor and praise us do injury to our souls.



Answers to The Quiz

1. Matthew and Luke
2. Gold, frankincense and myrrh
3. Joseph, 8 days after His birth, as foretold by an angel
4. Egypt
5. Luke
6. Matthew
7. Do not be afraid
8. St Wenceslas, in the carol "Good King Wenceslas"
9. The first ever census of the Roman Empire
10. Isaiah, Chapter 1, Verse 3.
11. The Nativity of our Lord; The Veneration of the Magi; and the Memory of the Shepherds who saw the Lord
12. B) Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar
13. "What shall we offer You, O Christ, now that You have appeared on earth as a man for our sake? For every creature fashioned by You offers you thanksgiving. The angels, a hymn; the heavens, a star; the Magi, gifts; the shepherds, their wonder; the Earth, a cave; the desert, a manger; and we, a Virgin Mother."

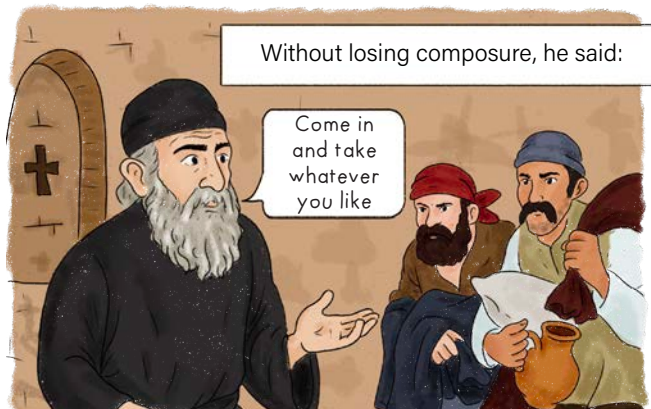
A STORY ON TRUE GENEROSITY

One night thieves went to a certain hermit.

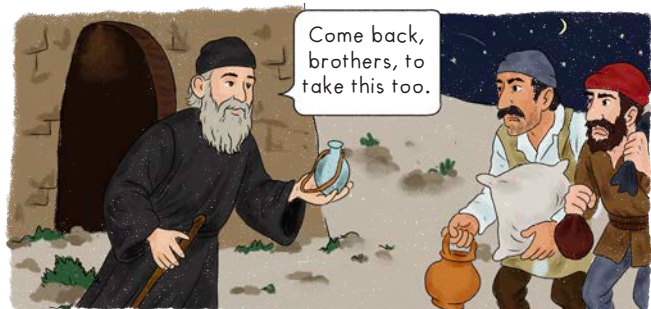


Without losing composure, he said:

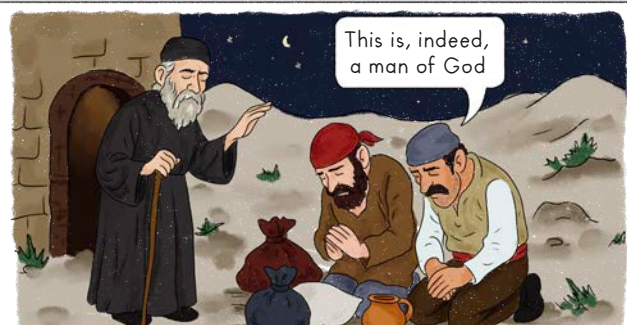
Come in and take whatever you like



They emptied his poor hut of every last thing and left hurriedly. They forgot, however, to take a small flask that was hanging from a beam of the roof. The hermit took it down and, running behind the robbers, shouted for them to listen and to stop.



They were amazed by his forgiving nature and returned, not to take the flask, but to offer repentance and to return all of his things.



BOOK REVIEW:

When the Silent Speak *A Novel*

Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra once said:

"Beginning from childhood, most people spend a lot of time reading. And today, in the age of science, literature and progress, you have to read a lot. If you don't, it's like being blind.

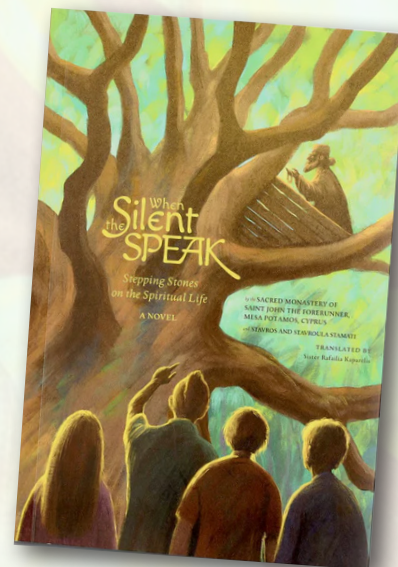
Your child, if he goes to school, will read to cultivate his mind. This is useful. But it is not enough.

There are books which are required reading, because we need them on our journey to heaven. When you read these books, you sense at once that God is speaking to you. They are tools for the spiritual life, and without them it is impossible to find paradise. We call these 'spiritual books'.

These are books in which you don't read human thoughts, human criteria or human logic, but rather encounter the judgement and the logic of God, the Spirit of God.

You open them up, and right away you realise that God is talking to you. You feel at once the beating of the Spirit's wings. You feel God answering your questions. You see him dispersing your darkness, clearing away old obstacles, opening up new pathways. Then, filled with joy, you cry out, "Behold, I have begun to speak to the Lord" (Gen. 18.27)."¹

The book we are discussing today is just such a book. "When the Silent Speak" is about four teenagers who are certainly in darkness. They have never heard of, much less acted on, the teachings of the Church. They believe that Christianity has nothing to do with the realities of everyday life, or rather, that their lives are incompatible with Christ's teachings. Where is Christ in trauma, grief, divorce, drugs, step-families, pushy parents or even young love? Yet, when these teenagers come face to



face with Christ's love through a mysterious monk in the forest, it melts away every resistance, and dispels their darkness. This book is filled with wisdom, hope, and the love of Christ for all teenagers who are searching for direction.

"When the Silent Speak" was produced by the Holy Monastery of St John the Forerunner of Mesa Potamos, Cyprus. This monastery is closely connected to Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol. The Monastery wrote a beautiful message accompanying the book which states that although it is not a "true story" it is nevertheless entirely true, as many people who are living or have lived similar situations come to the Monastery every day, hoping for Christ to resurrect their souls.

At Christmas time, we search for gifts to bring happiness and delight to our loved ones. What better gift can we offer than something to "dispel darkness," as Elder Aimilianos so beautifully said. This book is for those young adults who are "wrestling" with God; grappling with the role of the Church in their life, their place in the world or even their own family; for those who have unanswered questions. Spiritual books such as this one allow God to speak to us directly. What better gift can there be?

¹ Elder Aimilianos, sermon on "Spiritual reading", 1971, Church of St Nicholas in Trikala. As recorded in the book "The Church at Prayer."

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ΟΙ ΜΙΚΡΟΙ ΠΡΟΦΗΤΕΣ

Ο ΑΜΩΣ

Τέσσερεις προφύτες προφύτησαν στο βασίλειο του Ισραήλ: ο Ηλίας, ο Ελισσαίος, ο Όσιέ και ο Αμώς. Ο Αμώς και ο Όσιέ ήταν σύγχρονοι. Ο Αμώς έζησε τον 8ο αιώνα και προφύτησε από το 795 – 754 ΜΧ.

Το όνομα Αμώς σημαίνει βάρος. Οι Ραβίνοι νόμιζαν ότι ήταν βραδύς στη γλώσσα όπως ήταν ο Μωυσής, ο Ησαΐας και ο Ιερεμίας. Άλλοι νόμιζαν ότι ήταν επιβαρυνμένος λόγω της φτώχειας του. Η ταπεινή καταγωγή του φαίνονται από τη περιγραφή που δίνει για τον εαυτό του και το περιβάλλον του, και το ότι δεν αναφέρεται το όνομα του πατέρα του, σε αντίθεση με τους άλλους προφύτες.

Γνωρίζουμε από το πρώτο στοίχο του βιβλίου του ότι βοσκούσε πρόβατα σε ένα μέρος που λεγότανε Θεκουέ, κάπου 18 χιλιόμετρα νότια από τη Βηθλεέμ. Γνωρίζουμε επίσης από τον έβδομο στοίχο ότι καλλιεργούσε συκομουριές κάπου 20 χιλιόμετρα ανατολικά από τη Θεκουέ προς τη Νεκρά Θάλασσα.

Αυτή η συγκεκριμένη εποχή ήταν πολύ φωτεινή για το Ισραήλ. Ο Ιεροβοάμ Β είχε αποκτείνει τα σύνορα του βασιλείου του. Οι Ισραηλίτες είχαν μαζέψει πολύ πλούτο γιατί είχαν έλεγχο στο εμπόριο και στους οδούς του εμπορίου. Με το πλούτο αυτό είχε δημιουργηθεί αριστοκρατία.

Το κακό ήταν ότι με την εξουσία και το πλούτο οι Ισραηλίτες ξέχασαν το Θεό τους και άρχισαν να ζούνε μια ανήθικη ζωή. Οι Ισραηλίτες είχαν στήσει και προσκυνούσαν ένα άγαλμα του Γιεχωβά που ήταν σε μορφή χρυσής αγελάδας. Επίσης οι



ανώτερες τάξεις κακοποιούσαν τις κατώτερες τάξεις. Νόμιζαν ότι ο Θεός είχε κάνει συμφωνία μαζί τους αρκεί να Του προσφέρανε θυσίες. Έτσι ο Αμώς υπάκουσε την κλήση του Θεού και πήγε στο βόρειο βασίλειο για να προειδοποιήσει τους Ισραηλίτες να μετανοήσουν. Επιτίθεται με πολύ δυνατό τρόπο εναντίον της θρησκευτικής και ηθικής διαφθοράς.

Το βιβλίο του Αμώς αρχίζει με μια μεγάλη εισαγωγή στην οποία αναφέρονται τα εγκλήματα και των γειτονικών λαών και τις τιμωρίες που θα υποφέρουν. Οι λαοί αυτοί ήταν οι Φιλισταίοι, οι Αμωνίτες, και οι Μωαβίτες. Αλλά μιλάει επίσης και για τους Ιουδαίους και τους Ισραηλίτες. Το δεύτερο μέρος αποτελείται από τρεις προφητικούς λόγους όπου προλέγει την καταστροφή του Ισραήλ και τα βάσανα που θα υποφέρουν με την εξορία. Το τρίτο μέρος αποτελείται από πέντε συμβολικά οράματα που προμηνούν την καταστροφή του βασιλείου του Ισραήλ. Και το τέταρτο μέρος αναφέρεται στην αποκατάσταση του Ισραήλ στη χρυσή εποχή του Μεσσία.

Η μεγαλύτερη προφητεία το Αμώς, στο ένατο κεφάλαιο, είναι η αποκατάσταση του Ισραήλ σε άλλη εποχή, στο βασίλειο του Θεού. Περιγράφει την επιστροφή των εθνών και της αιωνίας αποκατάστασης του Ισραήλ. Αυτή η προφητεία εκπληρώνετε με το Χριστό και την εκκλησία Του. Βλέπουμε στους στίχους αυτούς το Χριστό; ότι κατέβηκε στον Άδη, κατάστρεψε τη δαιμονική εξουσία, αγίασε τη δημιουργία με το νερό της βάφτισης, αναλήφθηκε στον ουρανό, αποκατέστησε την εκκλησία Του στη γη, επανάφερε και τα έθνη στη πίστη και μετέβαλε το κρασί σε ευχαριστία.

Παρόλου που οι προφητείες του Αμώς είναι τρομακτικές, στο τελευταίο κεφάλαιο βλέπουμε την ελπίδα που δίνει στο λαό και σε όλους τους πιστούς στους αιώνες.

Γιορτάζεται στις 15 Ιουνίου.

The *Christmas* QUIZ

1. Which Gospel writers mention the story of Christmas?
2. What three gifts were given to the infant Christ?
3. When was Jesus named, and who named Him?
4. To which country did Christ's family escape because of the persecution of King Herod?
5. Which Gospel author refers to the shepherds?
6. Which Gospel author refers to the Magi?
7. What were the first words that the angel said to the shepherds?
8. According to a classic Christmas carol, which Orthodox saint went out "on the feast of Stephen" to help a poor man?
9. The birth of Jesus Christ coincided with which historic event for the Roman Empire?
10. Which book of the Bible contains this prophecy of Christmas: "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib".
11. Which three holy events are commemorated by the Orthodox Church on 25th December?
12. According to Church tradition, what were the names of the Three Magi who visited Christ?

A) Shadrach, Mesach & Abednego
B) Melchior, Caspar & Balthazar
C) Eliphaz, Bildad & Zophar
D) Abraham, Isaac & Jacob
13. Mix and match. According to a beautiful hymn of our Church, which we sing at Christmas Vespers, all the elements of Creation offered Christ a gift at His birth. Match the elements of Creation with the right gift.

Angels
Heavens
Magi
Shepherds
Earth
Desert
Humanity

Star
Cave
Virgin Mother
Manger
Hymn
Wonder
Gifts

Answers to The Quiz on page 12

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

News & Events



Annual Kyklo Ladies Retreat

With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, the Greek Orthodox Ladies Group (Kyklo), held their annual retreat at Deer Park Conference Centre at the Royal National Park, Sydney. The retreat took place from October 24th to 26th and gathered over 110 women.

This retreat has become a treasured Kyklo tradition, offering women of all ages an opportunity for spiritual renewal and a time to pause, reflect, and strengthen their relationship with Christ and with one another. The weekend program offered a variety of activities, including communal prayers and the chanting of the Paraklesis, spiritual talks and Bible study sessions. Participants also enjoyed quiet moments for spiritual reading, the "hour of friendship", and games. The highlight was the Divine Liturgy celebrated by Geronda Eusebios, Abbot of Pantanassa Monastery.



1955-2025: Photograph Exhibition & Documentary Screening

A Photograph Exhibition marking 70 Years of the missionary work of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society in Australia was launched on Saturday 1st November. The Exhibition was followed three weeks later by the screening of a Documentary for the anniversary "Our Journey in Christ" on Saturday 22 November.

Attended by all ages and in the presence of the co-founder of the Society, Professor Michael Anthony, both events were occasions for reflection and an opportunity to express gratitude for our predecessors and to offer thanksgiving to God for all the blessings. Each image depicted a moment in history of faith, service and dedication to the Church. The photos and videos were a bridge of memory and an inspiration to live the Church and pass on the treasure of our Faith.



The Life of the Mother of God in Hymns

On Tuesday 18th November, the Sydney School of Byzantine Chant held its annual End of Year Concert. The concert observed the feasts of the Theotokos as they are celebrated in the Church calendar – from the Conception of the Theotokos through to the Dormition, with the chanting of hymns from each feast.

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/



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