

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

(301) 638-5035 Church

4419 Leonardtown Road

Waldorf, MD 20601

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor

(703) 532-8017

fredgington@gmail.com

www.apostlethomas.org

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

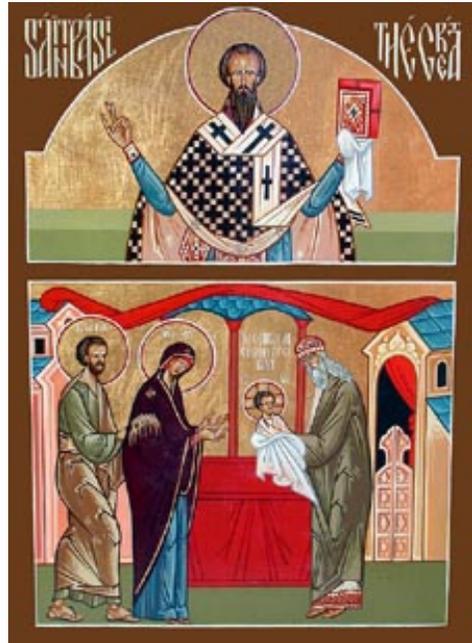
Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

January 1, 2017 – Sunday After Nativity | Circumcision of the Lord | St. Basil the Great | Sunday Before Theophany

On the eighth day after His Nativity, our Lord Jesus Christ was circumcised in accordance with the Old Testament Law. All male infants underwent circumcision as a sign of God's Covenant with the holy Forefather Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17:10-14, Lev. 12:3).

After this ritual the Divine Infant was given the name Jesus, as the Archangel Gabriel declared on the day of the Annunciation to the Most Holy Theotokos (Luke 1:31-33, 2:21). The Fathers of the Church explain that the Lord, the Creator of the Law, underwent circumcision in order to give people an example of how faithfully the divine ordinances ought to be fulfilled. The Lord was circumcised so that later no one would doubt that He had truly assumed human flesh, and that His Incarnation was not merely an illusion, as certain heretics (Docetists) taught.

In the New Testament, the ritual of circumcision gave way to the Mystery of Baptism, which it prefigured (Col. 2:11-12). Accounts of the Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord continue in the Eastern Church right up through the fourth century. The Canon of the Feast was written by Saint Stephen of the Saint Sava Monastery (October 28 and July 13).



In addition to circumcision, which the Lord accepted as a sign of God's Covenant with mankind, He also received the Name Jesus (Savior) on the eighth day after His Nativity as an indication of His service, the work of the salvation of the world (Mt.1:21; Mark 9:38-39, 16:17; Luke 10:17; Acts 3:6, 16; Phil 2:9-10). These two events, the Lord's Circumcision and Naming, remind Christians that they have entered into a New Covenant with God and "are circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Col. 2:11). The very name "Christian" is a sign of mankind's entrance into a New Covenant with God.

Saint Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, "belongs not to the Church of Caesarea alone, nor merely to his own time, nor was he of benefit only to his own kinsmen, but rather to all lands and cities worldwide, and to all people he brought and still brings benefit, and for Christians he always was and will be a most salvific teacher." Thus spoke Saint Basil's contemporary, Saint Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium.

Saint Basil was born in the year 330 at Caesarea, the administrative center of Cappadocia. He was of illustrious lineage, famed for its eminence and wealth, and zealous for the Christian Faith. The saint's grandfather and grandmother on his father's side had to hide in the forests of Pontus for seven years during the persecution under Diocletian.

Saint Basil's mother Saint Emilia was the daughter of a martyr. On the Greek calendar, she is commemorated on May 30. Saint Basil's father was also named Basil. He was a lawyer and renowned rhetorician, and lived at Caesarea.

Ten children were born to the elder Basil and Emilia: five sons and five daughters. Five of them were later numbered among the saints: Basil the Great; Macrina (July 19) was an exemplar of ascetic life, and exerted strong influence on the life and character of Saint Basil the Great; Gregory, afterwards Bishop of Nyssa (January 10); Peter, Bishop of Sebaste (January 9); and Theosebia, a deaconess (January 10).

Saint Basil spent the first years of his life on an estate belonging to his parents at the River Iris, where he was raised under the supervision of his mother Emilia and grandmother Macrina. They were women of great refinement, who remembered an earlier bishop of Cappadocia, Saint Gregory the Wonderworker (November 17). Basil received his initial education under the supervision of his father, and then he studied under the finest teachers in Caesarea of Cappadocia, and it was here that he made the acquaintance of Saint Gregory the Theologian (January 25 and January 30). Later, Basil transferred to a school at Constantinople, where he listened to

eminent orators and philosophers. To complete his education Saint Basil went to Athens, the center of classical enlightenment.

After a four or five year stay at Athens, Basil had mastered all the available disciplines. "He studied everything thoroughly, more than others are wont to study a single subject. He studied each science in its very totality, as though he would study nothing else." Philosopher, philologist, orator, jurist, naturalist, possessing profound knowledge in astronomy, mathematics and medicine, "he was a ship fully laden with learning, to the extent permitted by human nature." At Athens a close friendship developed between Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzus), which continued throughout their life. In fact, they regarded themselves as one soul in two bodies. Later on, in his eulogy for Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian speaks with delight about this period: "Various hopes guided us, and indeed inevitably, in learning... Two paths opened up before us: the one to our sacred temples and the teachers therein; the other towards preceptors of disciplines beyond."

About the year 357, Saint Basil returned to Caesarea, where for a while he devoted himself to rhetoric. But soon, refusing offers from Caesarea's citizens who wanted to entrust him with the education of their offspring, Saint Basil entered upon the path of ascetic life.

After the death of her husband, Basil's mother, her eldest daughter Macrina, and several female servants withdrew to the family estate at Iris and there began to lead an ascetic life. Basil was baptized by Dianios, the Bishop of Caesarea, and was tonsured a Reader (On the Holy Spirit, 29). He first read the Holy Scriptures to the people, then explained them.

Later on, "wishing to acquire a guide to the knowledge of truth", the saint undertook a journey into Egypt, Syria and Palestine, to meet the great Christian ascetics dwelling there. On returning to Cappadocia, he decided to do as they did. He distributed his wealth to the needy, then settled on the opposite side of the river not far from his mother Emilia and sister Macrina, gathering around him monks living a cenobitic life.

By his letters, Basil drew his good friend Gregory the Theologian to the monastery. Saints Basil and Gregory labored in strict abstinence in their dwelling place, which had no roof or fireplace, and the food was very humble. They themselves cleared away the stones, planted and watered the trees, and carried heavy loads. Their hands were constantly calloused from the hard work. For clothing Basil had only a tunic and monastic mantle. He wore a hairshirt, but only at night, so that it would not be obvious.

In their solitude, Saints Basil and Gregory occupied themselves in an intense study of Holy Scripture. They were guided by the writings of the Fathers and commentators of the past, especially the good writings of Origen. From all these works they compiled an anthology called Philokalia. Also at this time, at the request of the monks, Saint Basil wrote down a collection of rules for virtuous life. By his preaching and by his example Saint Basil assisted in the spiritual perfection of Christians in Cappadocia and Pontus; and many indeed turned to him. Monasteries were organized for men and for women, in which places Basil sought to combine the cenobitic (koine bios, or common) lifestyle with that of the solitary hermit.

During the reign of Constantius (337-361) the heretical teachings of Arius were spreading, and the Church summoned both its saints into service. Saint Basil returned to Caesarea. In the year 362 he was ordained deacon by Bishop Meletius of Antioch. In 364 he was ordained to the holy priesthood by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea. "But seeing," as Gregory the Theologian relates, "that everyone exceedingly praised and honored Basil for his wisdom and reverence, Eusebius, through human weakness, succumbed to jealousy of him, and began to show dislike for him." The monks rose up in defense of Saint Basil. To avoid causing Church discord, Basil withdrew to his own monastery and concerned himself with the organization of monasteries. With the coming to power of the emperor Valens (364-378), who was a resolute adherent of Arianism, a time of troubles began for Orthodoxy, the onset of a great struggle. Saint Basil hastily returned to Caesarea at the request of Bishop Eusebius. In the words of Gregory the Theologian, he was for Bishop Eusebius "a good advisor, a righteous representative, an expounder of the Word of God, a staff for the aged, a faithful support in internal matters, and an activist in external matters."

From this time church governance passed over to Basil, though he was subordinate to the hierarch. He preached daily, and often twice, in the morning and in the evening. During this time Saint Basil composed his Liturgy. He wrote a work "On the Six Days of Creation" (Hexaemeron) and another on the Prophet Isaiah in sixteen chapters, yet another on the Psalms, and also a second compilation of monastic rules. Saint Basil wrote also three books "Against Eunomius," an Arian teacher who, with the help of Aristotelian concepts, had presented the Arian dogma in philosophic form, converting Christian teaching into a logical scheme of rational concepts.

Saint Gregory the Theologian, speaking about the activity of Basil the Great during this period, points to "the caring for the destitute and the taking in of strangers, the supervision of virgins, written and unwritten monastic rules for monks, the arrangement of prayers [Liturgy], the felicitous arrangement of altars and other

things.” Upon the death of Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea, Saint Basil was chosen to succeed him in the year 370. As Bishop of Caesarea, Saint Basil the Great was the newest of fifty bishops in eleven provinces. Saint Athanasius the Great (May 2), with joy and with thanks to God welcomed the appointment to Cappadocia of such a bishop as Basil, famed for his reverence, deep knowledge of Holy Scripture, great learning, and his efforts for the welfare of Church peace and unity.

Under Valens, the external government belonged to the Arians, who held various opinions regarding the divinity of the Son of God, and were divided into several factions. These dogmatic disputes were concerned with questions about the Holy Spirit. In his books *Against Eunomios*, Saint Basil the Great taught the divinity of the Holy Spirit and His equality with the Father and the Son. Subsequently, in order to provide a full explanation of Orthodox teaching on this question, Saint Basil wrote his book *On the Holy Spirit* at the request of Saint Amphilochius, the Bishop of Iconium.

Saint Basil’s difficulties were made worse by various circumstances: Cappadocia was divided in two under the rearrangement of provincial districts. Then at Antioch a schism occurred, occasioned by the consecration of a second bishop. There was the negative and haughty attitude of Western bishops to the attempts to draw them into the struggle with the Arians. And there was also the departure of Eustathius of Sebaste over to the Arian side. Basil had been connected to him by ties of close friendship. Amidst the constant perils Saint Basil gave encouragement to the Orthodox, confirmed them in the Faith, summoning them to bravery and endurance. The holy bishop wrote numerous letters to the churches, to bishops, to clergy and to individuals. Overcoming the heretics “by the weapon of his mouth, and by the arrows of his letters,” as an untiring champion of Orthodoxy, Saint Basil challenged the hostility and intrigues of the Arian heretics all his life. He has been compared to a bee, stinging the Church’s enemies, yet nourishing his flock with the sweet honey of his teaching.

The emperor Valens, mercilessly sending into exile any bishop who displeased him, and having implanted Arianism into other Asia Minor provinces, suddenly appeared in Cappadocia for this same purpose. He sent the prefect Modestus to Saint Basil. He began to threaten the saint with the confiscation of his property, banishment, beatings, and even death.

Saint Basil said, “If you take away my possessions, you will not enrich yourself, nor will you make me a pauper. You have no need of my old worn-out clothing, nor of my few books, of which the entirety of my wealth is comprised. Exile means nothing to me, since I am bound to no particular place. This place in which I now dwell is not mine, and any place you send me shall be mine. Better to say: every

place is God's. Where would I be neither a stranger and sojourner (Ps. 38/39:13)? Who can torture me? I am so weak, that the very first blow would render me insensible. Death would be a kindness to me, for it will bring me all the sooner to God, for Whom I live and labor, and to Whom I hasten."

The official was stunned by his answer. "No one has ever spoken so audaciously to me," he said.

"Perhaps," the saint remarked, "that is because you've never spoken to a bishop before. In all else we are meek, the most humble of all. But when it concerns God, and people rise up against Him, then we, counting everything else as naught, look to Him alone. Then fire, sword, wild beasts and iron rods that rend the body, serve to fill us with joy, rather than fear."

Reporting to Valens that Saint Basil was not to be intimidated, Modestus said, "Emperor, we stand defeated by a leader of the Church." Basil the Great again showed firmness before the emperor and his retinue and made such a strong impression on Valens that the emperor dared not give in to the Arians demanding Basil's exile. "On the day of Theophany, amidst an innumerable multitude of the people, Valens entered the church and mixed in with the throng, in order to give the appearance of being in unity with the Church. When the singing of Psalms began in the church, it was like thunder to his hearing. The emperor beheld a sea of people, and in the altar and all around was splendor; in front of all was Basil, who acknowledged neither by gesture nor by glance, that anything else was going on in church." Everything was focused only on God and the altar-table, and the clergy serving there in awe and reverence.

Saint Basil celebrated the church services almost every day. He was particularly concerned about the strict fulfilling of the Canons of the Church, and took care that only worthy individuals should enter into the clergy. He incessantly made the rounds of his own church, lest anywhere there be an infraction of Church discipline, and setting aright any unseemliness. At Caesarea, Saint Basil built two monasteries, a men's and a women's, with a church in honor of the Forty Martyrs (March 9) whose relics were buried there. Following the example of monks, the saint's clergy, even deacons and priests, lived in remarkable poverty, to toil and lead chaste and virtuous lives. For his clergy Saint Basil obtained an exemption from taxation. He used all his personal wealth and the income from his church for the benefit of the destitute; in every center of his diocese he built a poor-house; and at Caesarea, a home for wanderers and the homeless. Sickly since youth, the toil of teaching, his life of abstinence, and the concerns and sorrows of pastoral service took their toll on him. Saint Basil died on January 1, 379 at age 49. Shortly before his death, the saint blessed Saint Gregory the Theologian to accept the See of Constantinople.

Upon the repose of Saint Basil, the Church immediately began to celebrate his memory. Saint Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium (November 23), in his eulogy to Saint Basil the Great, said: “It is neither without a reason nor by chance that holy Basil has taken leave from the body and had repose from the world unto God on the day of the Circumcision of Jesus, celebrated between the day of the Nativity and the day of the Baptism of Christ. Therefore, this most blessed one, preaching and praising the Nativity and Baptism of Christ, extolling spiritual circumcision, himself forsaking the flesh, now ascends to Christ on the sacred day of remembrance of the Circumcision of Christ. Therefore, let it also be established on this present day annually to honor the memory of Basil the Great festively and with solemnity.”

Saint Basil is also called “the revealer of heavenly mysteries” (Ouranophantor), a “renowned and bright star,” and “the glory and beauty of the Church.” His honorable head is in the Great Lavra on Mount Athos.

In some countries it is customary to sing special carols today in honor of Saint Basil. He is believed to visit the homes of the faithful, and a place is set for him at the table. People visit the homes of friends and relatives, and the mistress of the house gives a small gift to the children. A special bread (Vasilopita) is blessed and distributed after the Liturgy. A silver coin is baked into the bread, and whoever receives the slice with the coin is said to receive the blessing of Saint Basil for the coming year.

Also commemorated today is Martyr Basil of Ancyra, who lived in the time of Julian the Apostate (331-363), and confessed his faith in Christ before the governor Saturninus. He was tortured in Ancyra, then sent to Constantinople, where he was suspended from a tree, stretched on a rack, beaten, then stabbed with red-hot needles. He was also thrown into a fiery furnace, but was not harmed. He was sent to Caesarea and was torn to pieces by lions in the arena. This saint, a layman, should not be confused with the other Saint Basil of Ancyra, who was a priest (March 22). (*from oca.org*)

Today’s Epistle Lesson – St. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians 2:8-12

Brethren, beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 2:20-21, 40-52

At that time, the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know *it*; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among *their* relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – 107: Gifts



“ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believed in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3: 16 RSV)

What a gift God has given us, **eternal life!** Glory to God! Eternity is a long time, certainly much longer than our current life, and we can be with Him - or perhaps not. It is our choice to make.

God gave us this time, here and now, to prepare us for eternal life in His kingdom. He gave us **TIME!** He also gave us skills, abilities, and talents, so that we could not only find our way to Him but to provide assistance to others - to love others.

Have you ever wondered why God gave us such extraordinary talents? Do you believe it was so that we could amass wealth and live in the “lap of luxury?” Or are our talents destined for a more useful purpose?

What is our purpose here on earth? I recall once hearing in a past homily, “There are two important days in your life, the day you were born and the day that you found out why!” Do you know why you were born? Do you know why God blessed you with life, gave you skills unique to only you, and made you so unique that there is nobody quite like you?

I believe that God made us unique and gave each of us special talents so that we have to help others develop their skills, and they may also help others, etc. Help others do what? Obtain eternal salvation through Jesus Christ! That is our only purpose here in this life, to attain Theosis, continuous communion with God. We were not given our life and talents to squander on earthly things. When we do that, we fall into the passion of self-love, loving material things before loving God.

Does that mean that we cannot possess material things and enjoy life? Absolutely not! God wants us to enjoy the fruits of our labors as we read in both the Old and New Testaments. But, He does not want us to become slaves to the material passions of this world, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”* (Matthew 6: 24 RSV).

God has blessed each and every one of us with TIME and extraordinary TALENTS. Let us give back to God in proportion to what He has so graciously given us. Let us give to the church ministries at a very minimum ten percent of our free time and the talents we possess by the grace of God. Let us prepare ourselves for the greatest gift God has for us, **eternal life!** (*from acrod.org*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The dispensation of our God and Savior concerning man is a recall from the fall and a return from the alienation caused by disobedience to close communion with God. This is the reason for the sojourn of Christ in the flesh, the pattern life described in the Gospels, the sufferings, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection; so that the man who is being saved through imitation of Christ receives that old adoption. For perfection of life the imitation of Christ is necessary, not only in the example of gentleness, lowliness, and long suffering set us in His life, but also of His actual death. So Paul, the imitator of Christ, says, “being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” (Phil. 3:10-11) How then are we made in the likeness of His death? In that we

were buried with Him by baptism. What then is the manner of the burial? And what is the advantage resulting from the imitation?

First of all, it is necessary that the continuity of the old life be cut. And this is impossible unless a man is born again, according to the Lord's word; for the regeneration, as indeed the name shows, is a beginning of a second life. So before beginning the second, it is necessary to put an end to the first. For just as in the case of runners who turn and take the second course, a kind of halt and pause intervenes between the movements in the opposite direction, so also in making a change in lives it seemed necessary for death to come as mediator between the two, ending all that goes before, and beginning all that comes after.

How then do we achieve the descent into hell? By imitating, through baptism, the burial of Christ. For the bodies of the baptized are, as it were, buried in the water. Baptism then symbolically signifies the putting off of the works of the flesh; as the apostle says, you were "circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with him in baptism." (Col. 2:11-12) And there is, as it were, a cleansing of the soul from the filth that has grown on it from the carnal mind, as it is written, "You shall wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." (Ps. 50:9) On this account we do not, as is the fashion of the Jews, wash ourselves at each defilement, but own the baptism of salvation to be one. For there the death on behalf of the world is one, and one the resurrection of the dead, whereof baptism is a type. For this cause the Lord, who is the Dispenser of our life, gave us the covenant of baptism, containing a type of life and death, for the water fulfils the image of death, and the Spirit gives us the earnest of life.

Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, our liberty to call God our Father, our being made partakers of the grace of Christ, our being called children of light, our sharing in eternal glory, and, in a word, our being brought into a state of all "fulness of blessing," both in this world and in the world to come, of all the good gifts that are in store for us, by promise hereof, through faith, beholding the reflection of their grace as though they were already present, we await the full enjoyment.

– St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* §15.35-36

A PASTORAL ENCYCLICAL FOR THE NEW YEAR

My beloved brethren, ... From Orthodox theology we know that time is closely linked to space, and the two, space and time, are creations of God. Time is the action that distinguishes beings and therefore not a simple movement of the stars, but it is the movement of all beings, especially living beings. And of course time

is associated with created existence and indeed that which is mortal. Saint Gregory the Theologian aptly says that an age is time when it stops moving, and time is an age measured by movement. This means that as long as man lives in this life he is connected with time, and when he leaves this world then he enters another dimension of time called an age. Unfortunately contemporary people equate time with the eternal, or rather, they live biological life as if they are going to live forever, which is why they absolutize everything associated with material goods, pleasure and refreshment, and others despise this life completely, expecting everything only in the next life. However, when we completely identify time with eternity, when we exhaust the life of the future age in the herein, then this is called secularism. The Holy Apostles constantly lived with the feeling of the impermanence of things of this life, and nostalgia for eternal life, which they lived in this life. Indeed the Apostle Paul writes: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

The time of each of our lives is very limited and small in relation to eternity. We will not live forever on the earth. We are patient through the various trials of our lives, because we believe that the way we live our relationship with God and with others, will determine our way of life after our departure from this life. Because, though our life will end at some point, there life will not end, since there is life also after death, after the departure of the soul from the body.

Unfortunately many Christians nowadays have turned their attention to dates, to time, and they turn away from the eternal and the exalted, and do not seek to acquire the knowledge of God. Relevant are the words of the Apostle Paul: "But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and impoverished elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain" (Gal. 4:9-11). It is terrible to observe the changes of time and not to be inspired towards the true purpose of our lives.

The Apostle Paul recommends: "Let us redeem the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). We must strive not to buy shares in the stock market, but for the time market, for only then will we find it before us in the future eternal life. We observe, however, that in our life there is the so-called "pollution of time". Just like contemporary people pollute areas with the products of their passions, so they pollute time, since they spend it on unnecessary things, and even worse is that they squander it on sinful acts, actions that constitute the denial of the will of God. Although our era wants to be called modern and mature, it is rather full of old philosophical and ideological streams that increase the agony of humanity.

But how can paganism and messianism and modernism and postmodernism and religion and demonic systems fill modern man? Fortunately the Church today, on the first of the year, celebrates two great events. The first is Christ's circumcision in the flesh, which shows not only the philanthropy of God to the human race, but also the need to circumcise our passions from our lives. We must be purified and transformed, and to transform our passions because the energy of the passions makes our lives unbearable and disgusting. The second event is the commemoration of Basil the Great, this great personality, who "set in order a rule of life for man" by his teachings and works and even by his repose. His memory remains alive in the consciousness of the people. We need figures like Basil the Great in our difficult times, where neo-paganism, fanaticism, ambitionism, amorality, and the absence of an ecclesiastical ethos and an Orthodox mindset prevails.

We have entered a new year and many will celebrate it. Unfortunately, if one carefully observes modern life, they will see that many people are possessed by old habits, old manners and customs and a pagan mentality, even though they are called Orthodox Christians. Two thousand years after Christ and still many people in our day live like the time before Christ. Certainly in terms of science we have progressed, but in terms of character and conduct we are far behind. Many contemporary people behave as if Christ has not come to the world, as if they are not awaiting the resurrection of the dead and the future life.

For this reason, this year we will be given the ability on behalf of the Church, both Local and Ecumenical, to see the greatness of Christianity, the value of apocalyptic discourse, the importance of the life of the gospel, the prospect of the future age, but at the same time our failure to live according to the spirit of the Gospel and the Orthodox life. So, the entire time of this year is an occasion for hope and repentance, optimism and self-criticism, hope and resurrection. With these thoughts I wish you all a blessed new year and that God will fill you with heavenly and earthly gifts. With fatherly prayers and blessings, THE METROPOLITAN † of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou HIEROTHEOS (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Giving Good Gifts

In this Nativity season, we have an opportunity to help establish a young family in their first apartment. So, if you have beds, couches, chairs, tables, TVs, microwaves, and other working furniture and household items, please let us know who you are and what you have on the sign-up sheet in the social hall. The need is imminent so don't delay! Please contact Dennis Thomidis at (443) 975-1247 or thomidg@comcast.net if you need items picked up. If you can bring the items to the Church anytime during the week, Dennis will meet you at the Church.



ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR THE NATIVITY

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

Dear Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On this glorious Feast of the Nativity of Christ we celebrate a truly a wondrous event in which God, in His infinite and marvelous grace, became man bringing us enduring hope, newness of life, and eternal salvation. The Son of God, the Lord of Glory and King of kings who upholds the universe by His word of power, became man so that we human beings might be redeemed, renewed, united with Him, and become fellow citizens with the Saints and members of God's kingdom.

The magnitude and depth of the event of the Nativity of Christ are impossible to grasp, but the message is clear and true. It is a message of grace, hope, and salvation to all humanity and to all the created order. It is a message which we both celebrate and share on this sacred day, an invitation to "come and see" what our loving Creator and God has done for us.

On the night of the Nativity, the angels appeared in the glory of God and announced the birth of Christ to the Shepherds. In response they said, "Let us go...and see this thing that has happened." Accepting the invitation to participate in this glorious event, they came and saw the newborn Christ, and becoming amazed by what God had done for our salvation, went away glorifying and praising Him for all that they had seen and heard (Luke 2:8 – 20).

Following the Nativity, Wise Men in the East saw a mysterious star and following it came seeking the King who was born in Judea. Upon learning of the place of the birth of the Lord, they came and saw the Christ child, offered Him gifts, and worshipped Him. Responding to the invitation presented to them in the sign of the star, they came and encountered the One who would be a great ruler of His people as foretold by the prophets (Matthew 2:1 - 12).

As the Shepherds and Wise Men received the invitation to "come and see" the superb miracle of the Incarnation of God, we are also invited to "come and see" Christ and the great work He has done for our salvation. On this day we "come and see" the bright light of truth and life shining through the darkness and despair of our violent and war torn world. On this day we hear a message of hope, grace, and peace. We come to Christ and see justice, holiness, and love.

Today may all of us, Priests, Panis, Deacons, Sub-Deacons, Readers, Parish Officers, Parishioners, Friends, and Supporters of our God-protected American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese experience the joy and wonders of the Shepherds and the awe and respect of the Three Wise Men at the arrival of the Messiah, our new born King. Christ is Born! Greetings from Johnstown with much love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bishop Gregory". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+Bishop Gregory of Nyssa

Troparion for the new year, Tone 2

O Master of all created things, You have established seasons and years by your power. Bless this New Year with Your bounty: Preserve this land and its people in peace, and save us through the prayers of the Theotokos.

Parish News

We will celebrate the Theophany of the Lord with the Great Blessing of Water on Thursday evening, January 5, at 7:00 PM. Please observe at least a three hour fast if you plan to receive holy communion. Due to the service Thursday evening, our regularly scheduled Friday morning service is canceled this week.

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Cary Cooper, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, Alex Holthus, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Deanna Jarrett, Tucker Karl and family, Robert Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Alex & Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, John Sparks, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectaros and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)