

FEBRUARY 2021



Voice of St. George

SAINT GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
OF THE DESERT

74-109 LARREA ST., PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



ST. SYMEON'S INNER PEACE

Upon taking up the Christ Child in his arms, Symeon was moved to speak these words: "Now let Your servant depart in peace, Master, according to Your word; for, my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people - a Light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for Your people, Israel." (St. Luke 2:29-31). Then, he spoke this prophesy: "This Child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel...that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed." (vs. 34).

St. Symeon expressed the inner peace that he experienced upon taking up the Christ Child in his arms -- an inner peace with which to depart this present life, knowing that all is well for eternity, which is the definition of human salvation, granted by Christ our God.

The best way to analyze the concerns and events of this present life is from the perspective of God's

Eternal Kingdom. What we consider to be "good" may well be a temptation leading us to evil; what we may consider to be "bad" may well be a trial through which we find wisdom. Hence, we speak of the "fall" and "rise" of many in the context of what wells from within hearts and minds in relationship to the love of our Savior.

Those who worshiped false gods and idols sacrificed themselves in order to appease the gods. In the end, appeasing gods is more a matter of ego, like in the case of the Pharisee, who boasted about his piety, but fell from grace. Those who sacrifice themselves for Christ our God, find fulfillment for their lives. In other words, knowing that without Christ, we can do nothing, raises us up to sainthood through our humility and God's Divine Grace.

Indeed, the Bible does not exist so that we can condemn or hate those who sin.

Those who judge others fall into sins themselves. Instead, the Bible exists so that we can judge ourselves and condemn the sins that we commit, being no longer tasked with hiding our guilt, but finding inner peace through repentance and forgiveness, and acquire a truly peaceful life with God and neighbor.

Indeed, repentance is effort. Turning to Christ for help in our battles against temptation and sin, over time, produces a progression upwards towards sainthood, even though the progress may see setbacks, which, with faith in our Lord, are eventually overcome, as long as we never fall into despair.

Ironically, this Covid pandemic is teaching us about our need to repent of any of our self-centered ways, and to consider the needs of others in a spirit of love. Christ-centered energy for the care of others brings fulfillment to us

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as individuals and good will toward others. This inner peace is best known as “a clean conscience,” which St. Symeon experienced and foretold.

As Orthodox Christians, we celebrate the event at which our Savior was presented to the Temple and carried in the arms of the Righteous Symeon on **February 2nd**.
+FR. THEODORE

**STATEMENT REGARDING
DEVELOPMENTS IN MEDICINE:
COVID-19 VACCINES & IMMUN-
IZATIONS**



**– Joint Statement by the Orthodox Christian
Leading Hierarchs in America –**

Christ “came not to heal the healthy, but the sick; not to save the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17)

As the world continues to battle COVID-19, we are ever grateful to the frontline workers – including medical professionals, emergency responders, and scientists – for their unwavering dedication to making the world a better place.

In light of the same, given our clergy and lay faithful are seeking archpastoral guidance regarding developments in medicine, such as COVID-19 vaccines and immunizations, we offer the following guidance:

Scripture encourages us to respect and protect the body as the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19). At the same time, it discourages us from either tempting or testing the Lord (Matt. 4:7). And as your spiritual shepherds, we affirm and assure you that it is neither wrong nor sinful to seek medical attention and advice. In fact, we welcome interventions that provide us more time for spiritual renewal and repentance.

We therefore encourage all of you – the clergy and lay faithful of our Church – to consult your physicians in order to determine the appropriate course of action for you, just as you do for surgeries, medications, and vaccinations, in cancer treatments and other ailments. Indeed, while your own bishop, priest, or spiritual father remains

prepared to assist you with spiritual matters, your personal doctor will guide your individual medical decisions.

We trust that whatever course of action you and your doctor decide upon will also benefit the rest of the community. If we work together – in a spirit of sincere compassion and care for one another – we will soon be able to gather together as a *full* community in our churches once again. We miss you very much and eagerly await the day when we can *all* exchange the kiss of peace in the Divine Liturgy!

Conveying our paternal blessings with love in the Lord,

++ARCHBISHOP ELPIDOPHOROS,
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
++METROPOLITAN JOSEPH,
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of
North America
++ARCHBISHOP MICHAEL,
Orthodox Church in America
++METROPOLITAN GREGORY
Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of U.S.A.
++BISHOP IRINEJ,
Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and
South America
++METROPOLITAN NICHOLAE,
Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Beginning **Sunday, February 21st** our **St. George parish Sunday School students** will be participating in the Youth Religious Education Program offered by our Holy Metropolis of San Francisco. The Program and curriculum fall under the title, “*Lenten Journey to Great and Holy Pascha*.” We ask that all of our parish youth register for these lessons. Registration is free. This will be the main course of study for Sunday School throughout this year's Lenten Season, with lessons ending on Sunday, April 30th.

Register Today! Deadline for registration is Friday, February 5, 2021. To register, go online to: Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco at: <https://sanfran.goarch.org/>.

THE PUBLICAN & THE PHARISEE

This year, the **Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee is February 21st**. With this Sunday, the liturgical season known as *The Triodion* begins. The Triodion is a three week season that prepares us spiritually for Great Lent, with themes surrounding the gift of God's forgiveness, leading up to "Forgiveness Sunday," March 14th -- the day before Lent begins.

The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee is based on the Parable of Jesus about the two men -- the Publican and the Pharisee -- who went before God to pray. The Pharisee, as a follower of the Law, boasted to God about how he observed the Law by not being like the Publican and others who were thieves and adulterers. He boasted to God about his own self-righteousness. The Publican was a tax collector. In contrast to the Pharisee, he prayed with a bowed head in sincerity, asking God to have mercy upon him, as he confessed his sins for cheating against his own countrymen.

Truly, to the Pharisees, Christ's reaching out to tax collectors and other sinners was a scandal. The Pharisees did not wish to offer God's forgiveness to such "sinners."

By contrasting the Publican and the Pharisee, the message is that it is not things like career or profession that places us close to God. Rather, it is our awareness of how far away our thoughts are from God. Ironically, the further we believe we are from God, because of sin, we may often find ourselves drawing closer to God in our awareness of the need for God to be merciful to us. The fact that the Publican prayed with a sincere heart, not even daring to lift up his eyes to heaven, indicates that his prayer for forgiveness and mercy is truly sincere. Prayer must be sincere!

Let us ask that God overlook our sins and count us among the Saints. We can humble ourselves and trust in the mercy of Christ our God and be His friend. In this, we can be our own friends, as well.

--MATTHEW DAVIS

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS



Our St. George Ladies Philoptochos will be hosting our **Sunday parish Coffee Hour** on the "Zoom" format beginning **Sunday, February 7, 2021**. Our virtual Sunday Coffee Hour gatherings will take place on a once-a-month basis: **February 7th; March 7th; April 4th; May 9th; June 6th**. To join the Coffee Hour gathering click here: <https://www.zoom.us/join>. Enter the ID number: 864 9984 9746. Then enter the Passcode # 45970. Both the ID number and the Passcode will be the same for each Coffee Hour gathering up until June. See the enclosed flier.

St. George Philoptochos Board Meeting: Monday, February 8th at 11:30 a.m. - "Zoom" format.
Philoptochos General Members Meeting: Monday, February 15th at 11:30 a.m. Plans are to hold this meeting with social distancing and all other Covid-19 safety requirements in place outdoors on our parish patio, with a "lunch package" offered. See the St. George Philoptochos *Philo Strong* newsletter, for **February 2021** for confirmation and details, or contact members of our Philoptochos Board of Directors. Topics of discussion will involve fundraising ideas for 2021 and the annual Philoptochos Membership drive.

Our **Philoptochos Kindness Committee Chairperson** and **St. George Sunday School teacher, Athena Snarskis** is leading the effort to create a joint ministry of our Philoptochos and our Sunday School, called "Kindness Counts." The service project for February is to thank our local health care professionals at Eisenhower Hospital who are working tirelessly to help those recovering from COVID. Our Philoptochos Chapter will be delivering Girl Scout cookies to all the ICU units this month. The packages of Girl Scout cookies will include handwritten notes expressing thanksgiving for the dedication and sacrifices that our courageous health care professionals make in order to care for the welfare of others in need.

CHURCH & WELLNESS

The Value of Liturgical Hymns

With February, we draw near to the 1 year mark of our Church choir's silence. For those who remember, our choir has always sung and chanted the hymns of our Liturgy with genuine love for Christ – a love that radiated through the notes that we heard in our souls.

The Covid/CDC atmosphere has forced the absence of our choir from Sunday Services. But, this has only helped us to appreciate all the more the melody of our Church Hymns. Many parishioners share with me how they find themselves humming or singing our liturgical hymns as they drive along through traffic, pushing themselves through their everyday chores and errands .

Hymns to God are a form of prayer. The Psalms of King David serve as examples. Our Church not only includes the Psalms in worship, but rests in the value of singing praise to God, taking the example found in the Old Testament, in 1 Kings 16:23: *"So whenever the evil spirit was upon Saul, David would take a harp and play it and Saul would become well refreshed and the evil spirit would depart from him."* The purpose of our Orthodox hymnology is summed up in Psalm 107: *"My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready. I will sing and give praise in my glory. Awaken, lute and harp; I shall awaken early in the morning. I will give thanks to You among the peoples, O Lord."*

Indeed, Orthodox hymns are true prayer, because they contain the correct doctrines concerning our personal relationship with our loving God, as expressed in the Bible and in Apostolic Tradition. In this, they remind us of the Personhood of God as Holy Trinity; our salvation in Christ our Savior; our gratitude for His salvation and great mercy, through the Grace of the Holy Spirit. They are words of prayer and truth set to melody which soothes the soul and enlightens the mind.

It is spiritually and emotionally healthy to recall our choir members singing hymns of the Divine Liturgy and to draw from within us these liturgical hymns of prayer as we go through our day.

+FR. THEODORE

SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS

by

Deacon Euthym

"I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, 'What can get through from such snares?' Then I heard a voice saying to me, 'Humility'"...St. Anthony the Great

"A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him, saying, 'You are mad; you are not like us.'" ...St. Anthony the Great

These thoughts are intertwined. Both are from St. Anthony the Great, whose humility, simplicity, and ascetic life led to holiness. The first, reminds us that humility is what helps all of us navigate the trials and tribulations of the world. Pride and arrogance further ensnare us. As Christians we may not feel like we belong, like outsiders – we may feel uncomfortable in the world. However, this is the fallen persecuting those who are struggling not to fall. "You are mad, you are not like us" say those who have gone mad who accuse the sober and sane. If we have humility, even this accusation will not bother us. Take for examples the saints who are fools for Christ. Humility keeps us close to Christ, freed from the need for approval of others, willing to suffer false accusations for the salvation of all.

"Christianity is an entirely new way of being human" ...St Maximus the Confessor

We are called to "put on Christ", to elevate ourselves to our original calling, created in the image and likeness of God. Here, St. Maximus reminds us of the transformational essence of Christianity. We are called to be holy, to become divine, not through our own efforts, but by God's grace working on our desire to unite with Him. The fruit of this union are the works of God... service, charity toward others, generosity, and ultimately, love of others...an entirely selfless existence, a new way of being human. I would add, a return to what being "human" was originally intended by our Creator, with Christ as our model. Let us imitate Him in all we do.

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“They are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions”..
1 Timothy 6

It is so important that we catch ourselves when pride overtakes us and we begin to take extra (unhealthy) interest in controversial topics (Politics, Genealogies, Cultural Issues, etc.). We get off track, argue, get paranoid, distrust others, judge and fight, all out of conceit and pride. We lose the focus of our life...Jesus Christ. We become mini-judges, dishing out harsh punishments with our words and thoughts. Where is love? Where did humility go? Where is our desire for everyone to be saved? When did we turn off our light, given to us by God, and darken ourselves toward our fellow man? Let us begin to understand ourselves enough to know when the wheels are coming off. Pride clouds this thinking so there must be a daily review in our rule of prayer, frequent confession, participation in the Sacraments (particularly the Eucharist) with proper preparation, and finally having those who love us be honest with us (the purpose of marriage, children and friends). Salvation and communion with God is the goal and our focus in life and is reflected in our interest and how we spend our time.

AHEPA NEWS



Sunday, February 7, 2021 is the date for our AHEPA 528 annual **Super Bowl Party**. This year's Super Bowl Party will be a "virtual" event. Contact AHEPA 528 President, **Wynn Storton** for help in setting up the necessary computer streaming mechanisms in order to join in the festivities. All proceeds from this year's Super Bowl Party will go to the **AHEPA 528 Fr. T. P. Theophilos Memorial Scholarship Fund**.

The **AHEPA 528 February meeting** will be held on **Wednesday, February 10, 2021** at **6:30 p.m.** in the "Zoom" format. The meeting's invited guest is **Past-Supreme Governor, Peter Triantafyllos**. We will also welcome our newest reinstated/transferred member, AHEPAN since 2003, **Ramsay Seikaly**.

ST. GEORGE GOLF TOURNAMENT

Save the Date: September 25th

At: Desert Willow Golf Resort, Palm Desert, California.

Details will be provided throughout the upcoming months leading to the event itself.

St. Sophia Philoptochos Deutante Presentation Ball-2021:

Plans are underway for the SAINT SOPHIA PHILOPTOCHOS DEBUTANTE PRESENTATION BALL to be held on **Friday, September 3, 2021** at the **Four Seasons Beverly Wilshire Hotel**. Interested young ladies who will be high school juniors (aged 16) and older should contact the **Presentation Ball Chair, Trish Mentas** by calling **(562) 472.7485**, or send an email inquiry to: saintsophiadebball@gmail.com. An orientation tea will be held at the **Saint Sophia Cathedral Huffington Center** on **Sunday, May 22, 2021** **by reservation**. These dates are subject to change.

STEWARDSHIP

Many, many thanks to God for those who contributed toward our parish Stewardship program for 2020 and who submitted their 2021 Stewardship Pledge Cards on Stewardship Sunday, January 31st.

Truly, the level of Stewardship offerings to our St. George parish throughout the 2020 Covid pandemic has been inspiring and truly encouraging, to the level at which it is plainly evident that there is tremendous love for God and for our St. George parish on the part of each and every one of our parishioners.

For those who have not yet received their 2021 St. George Stewardship Cards, please contact our parish office at (760) 568-9901 so that any oversights or errors in mailing can be corrected and the Cards can be re-sent.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

We would like to start seeing our Sunday School students participate in the Divine Liturgy at least on a periodic basis, such as once-a-month, or so. The more they are removed from worship, the more their awareness of God's presence in their lives could weaken and there is the danger that they will become more unaware of God's wisdom as they make their life choices going forward.

We ask that if you are going to attend services to call ahead of time so you can be placed on the attendance list and try to call by 5 p.m. Friday at the latest by calling the office at (760) 568-9901, or myself at (760) 880-5869. Since outdoor seating will be available, please dress appropriately for the conditions. It's also cooler than normal inside of church with doors being open.

We miss all of you dearly – especially our young parishioners – and we are sympathetic to your concerns regarding this pandemic and not wanting to take any additional risks of getting the virus if you don't need to. We encourage everyone to be vaccinated. If you have any concerns, please consult with your physician.

With that, the church is always open to you. You can call during the week if you want to talk, light a candle, receive Holy Communion, or find peace through Holy Confession by calling me or the office and scheduling a time. God bless all of you and I pray for the day we can all be together again.

May our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ always grant to you all of His great and many blessings.
+FR. THEODORE

*In accordance to local **Covid-19 guidelines**, everyone is asked to contact our parish office or Fr. Ted at (760) 568-9901 or (760) 880-5869 **each week** in order to **indicate intentions to attend Church Services on Sundays or Feast Days**. On behalf of our Parish Council; our ushers, and our In-Person Worship Chairman, **Peter Snarskis**, we express our **sincere gratitude** to all of our parishioners for adhering properly to the Covid-19 safety requirements: wearing a mask during worship; sanitizing hands upon entering the church, and practicing social distancing.*

PARISH CALENDAR FOR: FEBRUARY 2021**Sunday Worship: Orthros - 8:30 a.m. / Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.**

Tuesday, February 2nd.....**Presentation of Christ in the Temple**

Orthros-8:30 a.m. / Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Bible Study-11:00 a.m. ("Zoom" format)

Monday, February 8th.....Philoptochos Board Meeting - 11:30 a.m. ("Zoom" format)

Wednesday, February 10th.....AHEPA Meeting - 6:30 p.m. ("Zoom" format)

Thursday, February 11th.....Parish Council - 2:30 p.m. ("Zoom" format)

Monday, February 15th.....Philoptochos General Members Meeting - 11:30 a.m. (Outdoor on the parish patio with distancing and Covid requirements in place, weather permitting.)

Sunday, February 21st.....Metropolis of San Francisco Virtual Sunday School Program: "*Lenten Journey to Great and Holy Pascha*" - 12:30 p.m.-1:30 p.m.