

**JANUARY 3, 2021**

**ST. GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE DESERT**

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# THE LADDER

SUNDAY BEFORE EPIPHANY



## Mailing Address:

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– Fr. Theodore Pantels,  
Proistamenos (Pastor)

– Deacon Euthym Kontaxis,  
M.D.

## Holy Communion Order

1. Please remain standing while following the directions of our ushers.
2. Ladies, kindly remove lipstick before receiving.
3. When receiving Holy Communion, make the Sign of the Cross, state your name (baptismal name), and naturally receive as if being fed.
4. Non-Orthodox Christians may not receive Holy Communion, but they may receive the Holy Bread at the end of the service.
5. All Orthodox Christians must be spiritually prepared to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Please see the priest if you have any questions.

## FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

In his classic book, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, Dr. Karl Menninger writes: "The early Christian Church cells were comprised of small groups of people who met regularly -- often secretly. The order of worship was, first of all, self-disclosure and confession of sin, called 'exomologesis.' This was followed by appropriate announcement of penance, pleas for forgiveness and plans for making restitution. A final period of friendly fellowship (*koinonia*) closed the meeting." (pg. 30). As to what happened to sin, he writes, "*Sin began to be questioned. [By the mid-60s] magazine articles appeared bear-*

*ing such articles as 'Sin or Symptom?'...Sins had become crimes and now crimes were becoming illnesses...The general conclusion seemed to be that if behavior is really wrong, it is a crime--unless it is an illness."* (pg. 52).

In his book, *Toward Transfigured Life*, Fr. Stanley Harakas notes that much of the reason for the "disappearance" of sin lies in the misunderstanding of the virtue of love that became popular in the mid-60s, especially in the credo of *situational ethics*, founded by Joseph Fletcher. According to this thinking,

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**HOLY WATER** --With the Feast Day of Epiphany, an understanding of the use of the Holy Water that is imparted from the "Service of the Blessing of the Waters" is helpful. Let me share some excerpts from an article written by Fr. George Konstantopoulos of St. Andrew Greek Orthodox Church in South Bend, Indiana.

*"Like everything else in the Church, the vessel in which the blessing of water takes place carries a great symbolic meaning...As a vessel and container of God's grace, the bowl for the blessing of water approaches in its symbolic meaning the Eucharistic cup--the Chalice (translated from Greek--a vessel for drinking)--and, like the chalice, signifies the Holy Theotokos (Mother of God) and Ever-Virgin Mary, in Whose womb formed the human nature of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Externally, this vessel resembles a chalice for Holy Communion. The vessel for the blessing of water is a large bowl on a low stand with a round base for placement on a table...According to Church belief, **agiasma** is not merely water of spiritual significance, but a new being, a spiritual-corporeal being, an intertwining of heaven and earth, of grace and matter, and a close one at that. This is why the Great Agiasmo according to Church holy Canons is viewed as a kind of lower degree of Holy Communion.."*

As this pandemic lingers on, and at any other time of hardship, when one is unable to partake of Holy Communion (especially in the current hospital settings), please consider having Holy Water with you. +FR. THEODORE



Σε σύγκριση με τους αρχαίους Χριστιανούς, η νοοτροπία των Χριστιανών σήμερα - συμπεριλαμβανομένων των Ορθοδόξων Χριστιανών - έχει αλλάξει ως αποτέλεσμα της γενικής μας αμέλειας καθώς σχετίζεται με την αμαρτία. Η αμαρτία είναι αντίθετη με το «σημάδι» που έθεσε ο Χριστός κατά την εντολή Του να αγαπάμε τον Θεό και τον πλησίον μας - και ο πλησίον είναι η «εικόνα του Θεού». Όμως, η μετάνοια δεν είναι απαραίτητη εάν τάχα δεν υπάρχει αμαρτία, και χωρίς να τιμήσουμε την ικανότητα του ανθρώπου να μετανοήσει, το μόνο που μένει είναι να χαρακτηρίσουμε την αδικοπραξία ως «έγκλημα» ή «ασθένεια» με βάση ο,τι είναι αποδεκτό από την κοινωνία. Έτσι, οι αμαρτίες και οι αρετές έχουν επαναπροσδιοριστεί. Π.χ., η βλασφημία δεν είναι πλέον αμαρτία. Απλώς, είναι ένας αποδεκτός τρόπος εκφράσεως και η πλεονεξία και η φιλοδοξία εκτιμώνται περισσότερο από την ταπεινοφροσύνη ενώπιον του Θεού.

Για τον Χριστιανό, η ευθύνη στη λήψη ενάρετων ηθικών αποφάσεων εξαρτάται από την προτροπή του Αγ. Παύλου να «πολεμήσουμε τον καλόν αγώνα» ενάντια τους πειρασμούς. Με το βάπτισμα, είμεθα αναγεννημένοι «εν Χριστώ.» Ο Πατήρ Αλέξανδρος Schmemmann εξηγεί: «Στη Π.Δ., [της Γένεσεως] η δημιουργία της ζωής παρουσιάζεται ως απελευθέρωση της ξηράς από τα ύδατα - ως νίκη του Πνεύματος του Θεού... Ο Χριστός αγίασε το ύδωρ και το έκανε το ύδωρ προς συμφιλίωση με τον Θεό... [Όμως] κανείς δεν μπορεί να είναι με τον Χριστό μέχρι που να αντιμετωπίσει το πειρασμόν και μετά να είναι έτοιμος να το πολεμήσει.» (Για τη Ζωή του Κόσμου, σελ. 72-73).

+Ο ΠΑΤΗΡ ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ

“agape love” is not necessarily linked with prayer and a Christ-centered mentality, but is linked with one’s situation and one’s perception of “love.” “To collapse the law aspect of sin into the rational aspect of sin as Fletcher does is to lose the Christian experience of the concrete power of sin.” (pg. 79).

Sin is “missing the mark” set by Christ our God in His Commandment to love God and one’s neighbor -- and “in Christ” we are to see our neighbor as the “image of God.” When we take away the real meaning of sin, we take away our opportunity for God’s gift of repentance and forgiveness. All that is left is to label wrongdoing as “crime” or “illness” based on the standards of an imperfect society. Thus, sins and virtues have been redefined; for example, blasphemy is no longer a sin; it is simply another way of expression. Greed and blind ambition are becoming virtues; humility before God is a weakness, or a “weirdness.”

For a Christian, responsibility for making good moral choices comes down to St. Paul’s admonition to “fight the good fight” (See 2 Timothy 4:6.) against powers of darkness, temptations and sin. The fight against sin is at the same time the fight for salvation through the grace of Christ. We join in the fight against sin and evil when we are baptized, so that we can participate with our Lord in His manifestation to the world. Manifestation of God as Trinity and in glory is: Epiphany.

Understanding the meaning of our baptism in Christ provides for us the meaning of His Baptism in the Jordan. Baptism is the forgiveness of sin and our re-birth in Christ as we join ourselves with His Divine nature. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann notes in his book, *For the Life of the World*: “In the Book of Genesis creation of life is presented as the liberation of the dry land from the water--as victory of the Spirit of God over the waters...Christ sanctified the water and made it the water of purification and reconciliation with God...[But] no one can be Christ’s until he has first faced evil and then become ready to fight it.” (pgs. 72-73).

+FR. THEODORE

### WEEKDAY CALENDAR

Tuesday, January 5th.....**Eve of Theophany**

Royal Hours-8:00 a.m./Divine Liturgy- 9:30 a.m.

Great Blessing of the Waters - 10:45 a.m. (No Bible Study)

Wednesday, January 6th....**Holy and Great Theophany**

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

Great Blessing of the Waters-10:30 a.m.

Thursday, January 7th.....**St. John the Baptist**

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

**NOTE:** When unable to attend Church Services in person due to state regulations regarding the Coronavirus or personal illness, follow the Divine Liturgy through live-streaming provided by various Archdiocese parishes at: <https://www.goarch.org/live-broadcasts>.



*“Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord. Blessed are You at Your throne of the glory of Your Kingdom, seated above the Cherubic angels, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.”*

*“Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our minds that we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us, also, reverence for Your blessed commandments, so that having conquered sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all these things that are pleasing to You. For You are the Light of our souls and bodies and to You we give glory together with Your Father Who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen”*

EPISTLE - 2 Timothy 4:5-8

Timothy, my son, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

GOSPEL - St. Mark 1: 1-8

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my mes-

senger before your face, who shall prepare your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.' John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**MEMORIAL** -- Today’s Memorial Service is for the Eternal Rest and Salvation for the servant of God, **George Nicholas (40 days)**, the beloved husband of **Theophania Nicholas**. May our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ grant Eternal Life and Salvation to the servant of God, **George Nicholas** and may He grant peace and comfort to **Theophania Nicholas** and their entire family. **MAY HIS MEMORY BE ETERNAL!**

**VASILOPITA - Next Sunday**, following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy our annual Vasilopita celebration will take place. The Vasilopita celebration is held throughout our Archdiocese in honor of the St. Basil Academy, which is one of the ministries of our National Ladies Philoptochos Society.

**HOUSE BLESSINGS** – Due to Covid-19, Fr. Ted will only be scheduling house blessings on a “one-a-day basis,” rather than making the effort to bless multiple houses on the same day. To make an appointment, call Fr. Ted at (760) 880-5869 or (760) 568-9901. Appointments can be made after Epiphany, January 6th.



ARCHIEPISCOPAL ENCYCLICAL  
Encyclical on the New Year

January 1, 2021

Ὁ ἐν τῇ ἀφάτῳ σου μακροθυμία καταξιώσας ἡμᾶς εἰς νέον ἐνιαυτὸν εἰσελθεῖν· αὐτὸς πανάγαθε Δέσποτα, τὴν εἴσοδον ταύτην τῇ θείᾳ σου χάριτι εὐλόγησον. (Εὐχή τῆς Δοξολογίας ἐπὶ τῇ Πρώτῃ τοῦ Νέου Ἔτους)

O All-Good Master, by Your ineffable longsuffering You have vouchsafed us to enter into the New Year, bless this entrance with Your Divine Grace. (Prayer of the Doxology for the First of the New Year)

To the Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America,

Beloved Brethren in the Lord,

We are greeting the New Year of the Grace of our Lord, even as we share the longsuffering of our Lord that has strained our hearts and souls in the year that is behind us. We salute the New Year with faith, with hope for a brighter tomorrow. We welcome the New Year with the same confidence which knows that each passing day now possesses just a shard, just a hint of more light, even though the days of January seem darker than ever. Likewise, we know that the pandemic will come to an end, and that we shall return to our lives, but perhaps not as exactly as they once were. May this re-entry into our lives be blessed!

My dear Christians, the past year has prepared us for this New Year of 2021; that we might never again take our families and friends for granted, that we might think of the suffering of others above our own, that we might see in the midst of the obstacles to our way of worship, the light of Christ that lights our hearts, if we would but turn our attention there.

On this First Day of the New Year, eight days after the Nativity, we commemorate the Naming of the Lord, and Saint Basil the Great. The Lord was given the Name that is above every other name, Jesus, as was revealed by the Angel. This is the Name by which we have been appointed to be saved from sin, fear, and death. Saint Basil the Great reminds us that it is through manifest love for our fellow human beings and compassion for the suffering of others that our faith works unto this salvation in our hearts, and awareness in our minds. Thus, the Holy Archdiocese continues this saving work institutionally at the Saint Basil Academy, where love and compassion are extended to those in need.

As we enter this New Year of the Grace of our Lord, may we truly be blessed by His love that we may be a blessing to others, and thus may we all be granted a healthy, safe and fulfilling New Year of 2021. With paternal love in Christ Jesus,

With paternal love in Christ Jesus,

+ELPIDOPHOROS,  
Archbishop of America