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# The Epistle

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2024

## Father's New Year Message!

**"This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you" (Exodus 12:2)**

When the fulness of time had come for Israel and God's plan was ready to be put into operation, He had announced to Moses and Aaron the words above.

This was a new beginning for the people of Israel and surely there is a parallel in our situation as we come to the close of an old year and **"the beginning of months...the first month of the year."**

As we stand here at the beginning of 2024 the words of our Lord should resonate in our heart, **"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth...When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:1-4).** Today is a good time to reflect and look forward into the year that is soon to begin. It is also a good time for us to take inventory of our walk with the Lord. We should take a very close look at where we are in our relationship with Him. We need to examine ourselves and see where we have been, where we are and where the Lord wants us to be. You will find that these verses challenge us as God's children to do exactly the same thing. As we look at our lives in the light of these verses, we are challenged to retain some things, to release others, and to remember the rest. These verses show us that God has a plan for our life, He wants certain things from our life, and that He has the right to demand these things from our life.

He is telling us to set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth. The word "affections" refers to the mind. We are told here to focus our thoughts on heavenly things, not earthly things. We are to set our minds on the things of God and on **the things that bring glory to Him.** In other words, we are to live like Jesus lived. We are challenged to live out our lives with genuine **spiritual values** and not the values of a fallen world. God has made it possible for us to change, not by making a New Year's resolution, but by the work of His Holy Spirit in our hearts.

St. Paul also gives us some things to think about for the new year. In his letter to the Philippians 3:13- 4:1, he says, **"Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead."** His words guide us to put behind us the bad, the failures, the hurts, the disappointments, the Sin – confess it, forget it and move on.

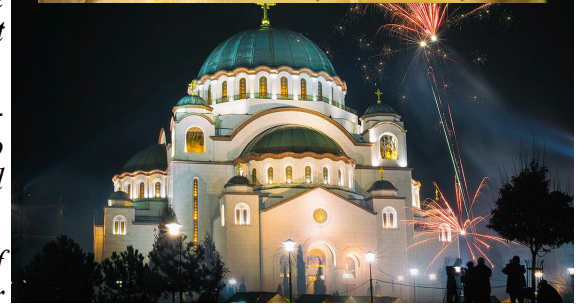
But every year the ritual is relatively the same. People dress up, gather with friends, some may overdo it with the celebration, and finally we get to the countdown. It marks a new beginning, a fresh start, a time to turn over a new leaf and start again.

Of course, this is a totally secular form of ritual purification. It has absolutely nothing to do with God ... and it certainly wasn't ordained by God.

The New Year's Eve countdowns don't effect **permanent change.** Many make

**Continued page 2...**

*May each day of your life turns out to be a wonderful blessing.*



**Message continued...**

resolutions that are hard to keep. Have you noticed that many of our resolutions have nothing to do with spiritual improvement? Or that God was not included? That's the way it is with many people. They don't include God in the picture of their lives. Let me suggest to you that **the Lord should be included in every aspect of our lives**

Jesus came to bring permanent change into people's lives, to bring in a new kingdom, and a brand new life for anyone who wants it. Repentance was always the necessary requirement for any sacrifice and it remains the way we access the benefits of Jesus' perfect sacrifice.

God has anointed us with His Spirit within us, Who counsels, Who Comforts us, and shows us the sin in our heart. Today we celebrate the beginning of a new year, but more importantly, that God made with us a new covenant ... a covenant that does lead to **permanent change**.

Looking forward in the New Year may we be thoughtful, and be thankful. Seek the Lord's will in all things. Every day and in every way. As we usher in the New Year, we need to take a good, hard look at our lives and at our walk with the Lord. Are there some things in your life that need **to be retained**? Does our focus need **to be adjusted**? Are there some things in our life that need **to be released**? Are there some things in our life that need **to be remembered**?

Whatever the needs may be today, let us listen to the voice of the Lord and do what He is telling us to do. Let's seek to make 2024 the best year of our lives, for the glory of God.

**Happy and Blessed New Year!**

### DIVINE SERVICES & MINISTRIES MONTH OF JANUARY

#### Saturday, January 6th, HOLY EPIPHANY

Divine Liturgy and the Blessing of the Holy Water, Divine Liturgy 10:00am

#### Sunday, January 7th, Sun. after Epiphany

Orthros, 9:00am, Divine Liturgy 10:00am

♦ **PARISH COUNCIL OATH OF OFFICE**

♦ **PARISH COUNCIL MEETING**

#### Sunday, January 14th,

Orthros 9:00am, Divine Liturgy 10:00am

**Blessing and CUTTING OF THE VASILOPITA & Live Auction: Support St Basil Children's Home**

#### Sunday, January 21st

Orthros 9:00am, Divine Liturgy 10:00am

**Ladies Philoptochos Meeting-Conference Room**

#### Sunday, January 28th,

Orthros 9:00am, Divine Liturgy 10:00am

#### CATECHISM CLASS: Tuesday Evenings

(January 9, 16, 23, 30) at 5:00pm **in person /Zoom**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87525594697?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87525594697?pwd=TIUKV2pkcmFTdStza0RLMXkvNC9ydz09)

[pwd=TIUKV2pkcmFTdStza0RLMXkvNC9ydz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87525594697?pwd=TIUKV2pkcmFTdStza0RLMXkvNC9ydz09)

Zoom Invite: Meeting ID: 875 2559 4697, Passcode: 477296

#### BIBLE STUDY: Tuesday Evenings

(January 9, 16, 23, 30) at 6:00pm **in person/Zoom**

### VOLUNTEERS MONTH OF JANUARY

#### Sunday, January 7th

Orthros Reader, Epistle Reader - Gregory Painter

Ushers - Vicky Fullmer, Tom Hugie

Prosporon (Holy Bread) - Sophie McCurry

Agape Fellowship-Lamb/Manestra-Goldie Homan

#### Sunday, January 14th

Orthros Reader, Epistle Reader - John Speck

Ushers - Goldie Homan, Kade Schmalz

Prosporon - Candice Apostle

Agape Fellowship-Vasilopita (host needed)

#### Sunday, January 21st

Orthros Reader - Karl Thienes

Epistle Reader - Alex Tarasau

Ushers - Vicky Fullmer, Ron Sims

Prosporon (Holy Bread) - Hala Abou Arraj

Agape Fellowship - David Sandborgh, Caroline Peters

#### Sunday, January 28th

Orthros Reader - John Peskey

Epistle Reader - David Sandborgh

Ushers - Goldie Homan, Sophie McCurry

Prosporon (Holy Bread) - Rebecca Tysor

Agape Fellowship-Ashley Tarasau in Memory of

her father Bob Atwood's 1-year Memorial &

Devyn Schmalz's father Daren Murdock 1-Year

Memorial. Everlasting be their Memory!

**EPIPHANY CELEBRATION, SATURDAY, JANUARY 6TH, AT 10:00AM****The Blessing of the Waters will be celebrated following the Liturgy.****Everyone will be blessed with the Holy Water.**

The parish will celebrate the sacred day of Epiphany also known as Theophany on **Saturday, January 6th at 10:00am**. The word Theophany means the appearance of God. Hence, the feast of Theophany is dedicated primarily to the commemoration of God's appearance to humanity. (At other times the feast is called Epiphany, which means divine appearance.)

At the conclusion of the Liturgy, we will celebrate the Blessing of the Waters. God has appeared precisely to restore us to that perfect life of unity and peace that prevails among the divine persons of the Holy Trinity. The son of God, Jesus Christ, became man so that we might participate in the life of the Trinity; that is, to lead us to the life of many living in oneness, in harmony and love.



Following the blessing everyone present will receive the blessed water to take home to be used throughout the year. We encourage the faithful to attend and receive the Lord's Blessing. Every year it is a wonderful Orthodox Christian practice to invite Father Constantine to bless your home. Bring the Spirit of renewal into your home by bringing Christ's radiant light into your family's life. Please contact Father Constantine if you would like your home to be blessed.

**Introduction**

The Feast of the Holy Theophany (Epiphany) of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ is celebrated each year on January 6. For convenience of those who work during the day, we will celebrate the feast with the Blessing of the Water on **Saturday, January 6th at 10:00am**. The Feast commemorates the Baptism of Christ and the divine revelation of the Holy Trinity. At the Baptism of Christ, all three Persons of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—were made manifest. Thus, the name of the Feast is Epiphany, meaning manifestation, or Theophany, meaning manifestation of God.

John the Baptist, the one chosen by God to proclaim His coming, was preaching in the wilderness and was baptizing all who would respond to his message calling for repentance. As he was doing this, John was directing the people toward the one who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. Initially, John would not do this, saying that Jesus should baptize him. Jesus said to John, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). John consented and baptized Jesus.

When Jesus came up from the water, the heavens opened suddenly, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. The Bible records that the Spirit descended like a dove and alighted on him. When this happened, a voice came from heaven and said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." This was the voice of God the Father.

Christ's baptism in the Jordan was "theophany," a manifestation of God to the world, because it was the beginning of our Lord's public ministry. It was also a "theophany" in that the world was granted a revelation of the Holy Trinity. All three Persons were made manifest together: the Father testified from on high to the divine Sonship of Jesus; the Son received His Father's testimony; and the Spirit

*Epiphany continued page 4...*



**Epiphany continued ...**

was seen in the form of a dove, descending from the Father and resting upon the Son. The theme of “manifestation” or “revelation” is also expressed in Scripture with the symbolism of light. In the hymn of the Feast we sing, “Christ has appeared and enlightened the world.” Thus, January 6 is also known as the Feast of Lights. The Church celebrates on this day the illumination of the world by the light of Christ.

**Icon of the Feast**

In the center of the icon is Christ being baptized in the Jordan. He is standing in the water wearing a waistcloth, and with His right hand He is blessing the waters of the Jordan. Above His head is the Holy Spirit descending as a dove upon Him. At the top of the icon, a semicircle depicts the opening of the Heavens and the voice of the Father. On the right side of the icon, angels are shown with their heads bowed in reverence to Christ. They are prepared to receive Him as He comes out of the water.

**BLESSING PRAYER FOR THE VASILOPITA AT YOUR HOME**

GLORY TO THE FATHER, AND TO THE SON AND TO THE  
HOLY SPIRIT, NOW AND EVER, AND FOREVER. AMEN.

LET US PRAY TO THE LORD. LORD HAVE MERCY.

**PRAYER FOR BLESSING YOUR VASILOPITA**

O Lord, King of the Ages and Creator of all things; You are abounding in mercy and plenteous in goodness! You accepted the gifts of the Wise Men in Bethlehem. You are the Bread of Life Who came down from heaven. You put times and years under Your authority and hold our lives in Your hands. Hear us on this auspicious day of the beginning of this New Year of 2024 and bless + this sweet bread which is offered for Your glory and honor and in memory of our Father among the Saints, Basil the Great. O Generous One, look down from heaven and send down Your heavenly gifts upon us, those who prepared this bread and all who shall partake of it, because we have placed our hope in You, the Eternal Living God! Bless our coming and going, enrich our lives with Your abundant blessings and direct our steps in the working of Your Divine commandments, because we shall not live by bread alone. Through the intercessions of your all-pure and holy Mother, of our Father among the Saints, Basil the Great, and of all Your Saints, who have pleased You over the ages. Amen.

Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and forever. Amen.

More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, who, a virgin, gave birth to God the Word, true Birth-giver of God, we magnify you!

Lord Jesus Christ, our true God, through the prayers of His most pure Mother, of Saint Basil the Great, whom we honor this day and of all the saints, have mercy on us and save us. Amen.

- ♦ *Take a knife and incise the sign of the Cross on top of the loaf. Then cut the Vasilopita and distribute the bread after the prayers are complete. (recipe page 5)*





## THE VASILOPITA BLESSING SUNDAY, JANUARY 14TH

One of the most beautiful and inspiring traditions and customs of the Orthodox Church is the observance of Vasilopita. It is an annual observance, together with many other traditions of our Church, which joins our Orthodox Faith with the history of the Christian religion itself.

The word Vasilopita is a compound Greek word which means the sweet bread of St. Basil. The annual observance of the Vasilopita originated from the Feast Day of St. Basil on January 1st and the Baptism of Christ on Epiphany Day on January 6th. During the first three centuries, the birth of Christ and Epiphany were celebrated on the same day. St. Basil was the first person to establish a children's orphanage, in addition he founded the first Christian hospital in the world. He was considered one of the wisest and most compassionate clergymen in the entire history of the Orthodox Church.

According to tradition, Basil would ask every baker in his province to insert a gold coin in the bread that was to be given to poor families. No one knew of this great deed until he fell asleep in the Lord. This tradition of baking sweet bread and including a coin is prepared both in parishioner's homes and for the parish. The sweetness is added to the bread to symbolize the sweetness and joy of life everlasting. It also symbolizes the hope tYear will be filled with the sweetness of life. When the bread is cut and distributed, the person who finds the hat the New coin is considered blessed and fortunate for the coming year.

## PARISH CUTTING OF THE BLESSED VASILOPITA & LIVE AUCTION SUNDAY, JANUARY 14TH



The Cutting of the Vasilopita will take place on Sunday, January 14th. **In keeping with tradition, everyone is invited to bake a Vasilopita to be auctioned off** to raise funds for the **Saint Basil Academy Children's Home**, an institution of the Archdiocese. This year the Blessing and Cutting of the Vasilopita will take place in church at the conclusion of the Liturgy.

### **MAKE SURE TO INCLUDE A COIN IN EACH VASILOPITA**

Also at the conclusion of the Liturgy a Special Offering will be taken for the **St Basil Children's Academy**.

If you are unable to attend services you may offer a donation for the St Basil Academy by making a check payable to the Ladies Philoptochos and mailing to Assumption PO BOX 4567, Pocatello, ID 83205, or bring it to church.

### VASILOPITA RECIPE FOR YOUR HOME

#### **Ingredients:**

1 cup butter  
2 1/4 cups sugar  
7 eggs, separated  
3 teaspoons almond extract  
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

3 cups flour  
2 1/4 teaspoons baking powder  
1 1/4 cups milk  
1 cup almonds, crushed  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
2 tablespoons orange zest  
\*recipe is adjusted for altitude

*Over these past six years, our parish has had an influx of families and individuals migrating from the Northwest and California. We have also been blessed with many who have come seeking the Historic Christian Church, and thus found themselves here in Southeastern Idaho and the parish of the Assumption. Once a month, The Epistle will feature a family or individual who has embraced the Faith and how they came to Orthodoxy.*

## **JOURNEY INTO ORTHODOXY**

### **by Steven and Jacque Swanson**



Jacque's and my background are very different, just like a lot of people in our parish! I grew up in a family that was not sure what to believe. My grandparent, aunts, and uncles had come out of Mormonism before I was born, and they relied on the Bible as their only source of authority. We hardly went to church, but we talked about God a lot and had basic Christian morals. Jacque's family, on the other hand, was deeply committed to the Roman Catholic faith. She was taken to Mass frequently, and her family was centered around their church life.

Despite the differences, we both have open hearts that desire to worship God in Spirit and in truth. This has led us both to wander into forms of Christianity that we were not raised in. Jacque craved a deeper relationship with Jesus and wanted a less distant and ritualistic experience. When she left Roman Catholicism as a young adult, she almost lost her whole family. It was a trying time for her. I was a completely blank slate and went through several Protestant denominations trying to find the most accurate expression of the Christian faith. On this journey I lost and gained a lot of good friends along the way. I guess we both took seriously the warning that Christ gave:

*Matthew 10:37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."*

As a young adult I had a great desire for ministry. I was consistently involved in teaching bible studies, catechism classes, and helping with outreach activities. Eventually I went to seminary to get a degree so I could serve as a Youth Pastor. During seminary, I learned many things that the professors did not intend. We had a heavy emphasis on church history and theology, and as I read the early church fathers, I noticed their perspectives were very different from what I had been exposed to. On top of that, the Lord graciously introduced me to a family that was becoming Orthodox, and they pointed me to the Ancient Faith Radio podcasts. Through those activities I became deeply impressed with the Orthodox Church and began to consider her claim to be the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

Jacque moved to Idaho and joined Calvary Chapel in Idaho Falls where she worshipped for 15 years and I returned from seminary and joined Calvary Chapel as well. By God's grace, a mutual friend introduced us to one another and we began dating. As dedicated Christians, we talked a lot about Christ and theology. I started sharing with Jacque about some of the things I had been learning about Orthodoxy, but she was very reluctant - due to her past in Roman Catholicism.

As time went on, we desired to take the relationship to the next level and got engaged. As we drew closer together, I became more interested in possibly attending the Orthodox church in

Pocatello. Jacque struggled with this decision and felt the relationship was about to become unequally yoked (see 2 Corinthians 6:14). She prayed a lot and realized she needed to let God take control of the likely life changes, which also meant, a possible end to our engagement.

I slowly began to introduce my favorite podcasts from Ancient Faith Radio, videos from YouTube, and gave her an Orthodox Study Bible. Over time, by the grace of God, she started to see the validity of the

***Continued Journey into Orthodoxy...***

Orthodox Church, just as I was. A handful of months before we got married, we started attending church services at Assumption, to be certain this is where God was leading us. To our delight, it was!

We have been Orthodox for almost 5 years now. It is such a blessing to be a part of a church that has an unbroken tradition going all the way back to the apostles. There is great comfort in knowing that during these difficult times in our land, our church will not change. By God's grace, the Orthodox Church, has not changed in almost 2,000 years.

For sure there have been moments when new practices have seemed strange to us. But we take comfort during these times by recognizing that the scriptures witness to the church receiving many teachings that were not written in the Bible (see John 21:25, 1 Corinthians 11:2, and 2 Thessalonians 2:15). Furthermore, now that we can see the Orthodox Church is the original church, we can rest in her as our ultimate authority (see 1 Timothy 3:15).

We are so thankful to be a part of a loving family that knows us and desires to be with us. Now we are **disciples** of the historic Christian church – resting in her guidance, just as Jesus wanted. In Matthew 28: 18-20, And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**” **GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!**

**THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD - Food for Thought - Fr Georges Massouh**

New Year's Day, according to the Orthodox Church, does not fall on the first of January, but rather on the first of September. The Church has her own calendar that contains the seasons, feasts and celebrations along with the rites, prayers and fasts connected with them. The purpose of this calendar is to help people to reach holiness by reminding them daily of the importance of spiritual struggle in order to arrive at "life in the continuous presence of God".

On this occasion, the Church chooses to read a text from the Gospel of Saint Luke, where Christ says at the beginning of His ministry, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19).

How will our coming year be a year acceptable to the Lord? How will the days and nights that we amass be acceptable? Christianity says that God, the Creator of time and space, became fully man in order to make man into a god by grace, not substance. On the other hand, those humans who desire to heed this divine call should strive to sanctify their life by consecrating their time to anticipating God's good things to come and living them in their present moment. Holiness is not complete without uniting the spiritual life with the active life incarnate in daily reality.

Christianity does not believe in luck, fate or chance. It is people who make their own luck, not psychics, prognosticators or fortune-tellers... It is in people's own hands and their own power to make their year acceptable to the Lord, since no one determines their fate besides God.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 202) says that the time falling between Christ's becoming man and His second coming at the end is the time in which God causes the fruits of history-- that is, the saints-- to ripen. How can we turn our coming evil days into a year acceptable to the Lord? This is our hope.



## NEW BIBLE STUDY: THE HEAVENLY BANQUET: UNDERSTANDING THE DIVINE LITURGY

Beginning **January 9th** we will be studying *The Heavenly Banquet*. It is more than a liturgical commentary. With an abundance of copiously documented biblical citations and rich patristic references, the Divine Liturgy is explained line by line, word by word. This book holds answers to all kinds of complex liturgical, social, and theological questions. This study will be of great benefit to any Orthodox Christian who seeks to obtain a better understanding of the Divine Liturgy. The richness and the thoroughness of the subjects treated in in our gatherings will make The Heavenly Banquet a treasure.

I encourage everyone to set aside one hour a week and join us in the study of the Liturgy!

### 2024 PARISH COUNCIL OATH OF OFFICE JANUARY 7TH



The following parishioners were elected at the recent General Assembly in November to serve a three year term on the Parish Council, they include: **Vicky Fullmer, Gregory Painter, Ron Sims and Kade Schmalz**, the remaining members of the Council include: **Tressa Rockwood, Jacque Swanson, David Harmer, Vivian Goodner, Tom Hugie, Goldie Homan, and Tony Hoskin**. The Oath of office will be given to all Parish Council Members at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on **Sunday, January 7th**. The Parish Council will then elect its officers for 2024 at their first Council Meeting.

Much appreciation is extended to **Dean Harris and Yolanda Riech** for their many years of service on the Council.

### MUCH APPRECIATION for DONATIONS

**Poinsettias for the Sanctuary, the Parish Christmas Card and also  
Christmas Baskets by the Ladies Philoptochos Ministry**

**THANK YOU! YOUR GENEROSITY HAS BEEN A BLESSING TO OUR ASSUMPTION PARISH. YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT ALLOWS US TO HELP OUR CHURCH MINISTRIES.**

#### **DONATIONS WERE RECEIVED FOR POINSETTIAS FROM:**

Tim and Maria Swore  
Dave and Jeanne Harmer  
Heidi Linehan  
George & Betty Katsilometes  
John E. Speck Jr  
Betty Angelos  
The Painter Family  
Maria Poulos  
Goldie Homan  
Vivian Goodner  
Ashley and Alex Tarasau  
Naglaa & Chris Bargelski  
Dimitri and Pauline Zozos

#### **DONATIONS WERE RECEIVED FOR THE CHRISTMAS CARD FROM:**

John Speck  
Heidi Linehan  
Ron & Julie Kuhn  
Dave & Jeanne Harmer  
Rocky & Vicky Fullmer  
George & Betty Katsilometes  
Goldie Homan  
Vivian Goodner  
Gus & Demetra Kalabokias  
Annie Semons  
Maria Poulos  
The Painter Family  
Mary Frances Cozakos  
Betty Angelos  
Alex & Ashley Tarasau  
Dimitri and Pauline Zozos  
Les & Helene Poulos-Edmo

#### **...TO THE LADIES OF PHILOPTOCHOS FOR PREPARING GIFT BASKETS FOR OUR SENIORS AND HOME BOUND:**

Vicky Fullmer  
Sophie McCurry  
Goldie Homan  
Ashley Tarasau  
Angela Fullmer  
Betty Katsilometes  
Jacque Swanson  
Hala Abou Arraj  
Svitlana Hoskin  
Devyn Schmalz  
Kim Sims  
Vicky Fullmer  
Olenda Painter  
Tressa Rockwood

## PRAYER REQUESTS

Please offer names (first name only) to Father Constantine of those who are suffering from illnesses or challenges in life so they can be included in our prayers during the divine services. The prayer list will be published in The Epistle Newsletter monthly so that our parishioners can include the names in their personal prayers as well. Contact Father Constantine (805) 570-6525 to submit your names.

### PRAYER FOR THEIR HEALTH AND SALVATION

Heavenly Father, physician of our souls and bodies, who sent Your only begotten Son and Lord Jesus Christ to heal every sickness and infirmity, visit and heal also your servants: servants: *Sotirios, Fr. Achilles, Kathy, Mary Frances, Lavada, Wilma, Steven, Alicia, Christopher, Barbara, Georgia, Vlasios, Vivian, Thomas, Sienna, James, Casi, Jim, Scarlett, Zachary, Sara, Martha, Anna, Kieran, Valentin, Valentina, Rose Mary, Patricia, Sotirios, Anthony, Maria, Lucia, Michael, Krista, John, Bobby, Eric, George, Martin, Gayle, Alicia, Dianna, Chelsea, Dell, Gregory, Dimitri, Oleg, Tania, Ocey, Ethel, Carol, Robert, Casi, Jack, Carol, Roger, Anna, Steve, Christopher, Freda, Larry, Maria, Judy, Ignatius, Elaine, George, Barbara, Nicholas, Matthew, Jeff, Jacqueline, Dianna, Alton, Anna, Larry, Paula, Stacey, Orestes, Helen, Catherine, Andrew, Mary, Steve, Nicholas, Scarlett, Marie, Demetrios, George, Melissa, Galina, Sofia, Cheryl, Christ, Carolyn, Paul, Mary, Nick, John, Elaine, Nicholas*, from all physical and spiritual ailments through the grace of Your Christ. Grant them patience in this sickness, strength of body and spirit and recovery of health. Lord You have taught us through Your Word to pray for each other that we may be healed. I pray that You heal these, Your servants, and grant to them the gift of complete health. For You are the source of healing and to You I give glory. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.



### A PERSONAL 2024 NEW YEAR PRAYER

O Heavenly Lord, as I stand at the beginning of this new year I confess my need of Your presence and Your guidance as I face the future.

I have my hopes and expectations for the year that is ahead of me—but You alone know what it holds for me, and only You can give me the strength and the wisdom I will need to meet its challenges. So help me to humbly put my hands into Your hand, and to trust You and to seek Your will for my life during this coming year.

In the midst of life's uncertainties in the days ahead, assure me of the certainty of Your unchanging love. In the midst of life's inevitable disappointments and heartaches, help me to turn to You for the stability and comfort I will need. In the midst of life's temptations and the pull of my stubborn self-will, help me not to lose my way, but to have the courage to do what is right in Your sight, regardless of the cost.

And in the midst of my daily preoccupations and pursuits, open my eyes to the sorrows of our hurting world, and help me to respond with compassion and sacrifice to those who are in need.

As I look back over this past year I thank You for Your goodness to me—far beyond what I have deserved. May I never presume on Your past goodness or forget all Your mercies for me, but may they instead lead me to repentance, and to a new commitment to make You the foundation and center of my life this year.

And so, O Lord, I thank You for the promise and hope of this new year, and I look forward to it with expectancy and faith. This I ask in the name of Our Incarnate Lord and Savior, who by His Death and Resurrection has given us hope both for this world and the world to come. Amen.

## Giving Thanks

**T**he Holy Eucharist is called Holy Communion because it unites us as the Body of Christ. The word Eucharist comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving. This is what we do when we celebrate the Divine Liturgy – we are giving thanks. The Eucharist – the sacrament of Holy Communion – is the focus of our parish life. It is through the Eucharist that we take on our true nature as the Church of Jesus Christ. We are transformed from a human community into the Body of Christ.

Stewardship is our response to God's grace and moves us from grace to gratitude. Just as we love because God first loved us (I John 4:14), we give because God first gave to us. The question of the Psalmist (Ps 116:2)...



**“What shall I give to the Lord in return for all His benefits towards me?” (Ps 116:2), is answered in every liturgy when we pray, “Let us offer ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.”**

In his book on the Eucharist, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann explains that in the early church, the Eucharistic sacrifice was offered by all the members of the church. Each person coming to the gathering of the Church brought with them everything they could spare for the needs of the Church. This is the Church that we as Orthodox Christians claim to be. We read about this in Acts 2: “Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising

God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

How many times have you heard people say, “I don’t get anything out of liturgy”? The truth is that we don’t come to church to get something, but to give ourselves – our whole being to God. We have to give ourselves as an offering to God and what we get in return is the presence of Jesus Christ within us. As we come to know Jesus this way, we are drawn into the communion of the Church.

Through Holy Communion, we are drawn out of ourselves and embrace the mission of our parish. We carry the fire of God’s love within us with the power to renew all things. When we understand the true meaning of the Holy Eucharist, we bridge the gap between liturgy and life, between the love of Jesus on the cross and our daily lives, between our beautiful theology and practical stewardship. As Eucharistic Orthodox Christians, we see the world as God’s gift. We offer the world back to God in thanksgiving with the words, “Thine own of Thine own we offer to Thee....”

## His Gifts

Christian stewardship means that I own nothing. Everything I have belongs to God. He has loaned it to me. I am committed to use it responsibly, and one day, I will have to answer to Him for my use or misuse of His gifts. I am the manager of God’s gifts: my time, my talents, my possessions, my body, my soul – everything belongs to God. Saint Paul asks us, “What have you that you have not received?” Money, for example, becomes a sacrament when it is offered to God. It becomes a visible expression of our commitment, faith, and love for Jesus. Once given to God, our gifts are consecrated by the Holy Spirit, who then translates them into works of mercy that bring glory to God.

Father Anthony M. Coniaris (1926-2020)



**ASSUMPTION CHURCH CONFIDENTIAL PLEDGE AND FAMILY INFORMATION FORM***Please complete both sides and return this form to the Church Office***TREASURE:****IN GRATITUDE FOR GOD'S BLESSINGS, I/WE COMMIT TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH THE FOLLOWING **PLEDGED AMOUNT FOR 2024** \_\_\_\_\_****Family Name:** \_\_\_\_\_**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip** \_\_\_\_\_**Hm Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

	Member	Spouse	Children Age
<b>Name:</b>	_____	_____	_____ / _____
<b>Mobile Tel:</b>	_____	_____	_____ / _____
<b>E-mail:</b>	_____	_____	_____ / _____
<b>Occupation:</b>	_____	_____	_____ / _____
<b>Work Tel:</b>	_____	_____	_____ / _____

**ASSUMPTION GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH CONFIDENTIAL FAMILY INFORMATION FORM****FAMILY NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_**Families should mark "H" for husband, "W" for wife or "C" for children.****IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME FOR ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING MINISTRIES PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM****LITURGICAL**

☐ Sanctuary & Altar Care  
☐ Altar boys / Acolytes  
☐ Baking Prospora  
☐ Choir  
☐ Reader  
☐ Greeter/Usher

**EDUCATION**

☐ Bible Study  
☐ Intro to Orthodoxy  
☐ Publications  
☐ Bookstore

**COMMUNICATIONS**

☐ Website  
☐ Bulletin & Newsletter  
☐ Public Relations

**YOUTH**

☐ Church School Teacher  
☐ Church School  
☐ Administration  
☐ Youth Leader  
☐ Vacation Church School

**PHILANTHROPIC MINISTRY**

☐ Ladies Philoptochos Ministry

**MINISTRIES & PROGRAMS**

☐ Welcome Team  
☐ New Member Events  
☐ Stewardship  
☐ Sunday Fellowship / Coffee  
☐ Visitation – Hospital  
☐ Visitation – Shut-ins  
☐ Seniors Ministry  
☐ Couples Ministry  
☐ Singles/young adults Ministry

**BUILDING & GROUNDS**

☐ Garden & Landscape  
☐ Plumbing  
☐ Electrical  
☐ Clean-up  
☐ Interior Repairs  
☐ Exterior Repairs  
☐ Roofing

**ADMINISTRATION**

☐ Development / Fund-raising  
☐ Office help  
☐ Computer / Technical  
☐ Data Entry

**Return at Candle Stand or Mail to: Assumption GOC, PO Box 4567, Pocatello, ID 83205**

# Philotimo: The Most Grateful Love

Philotimo is the devout quintessence of goodness; the most grateful love which is all goodness and humility.

**Geronda, (spiritual father) what is “philotimo”?** What does the dictionary tell us?

The word philotimo does not exist in any other language. You see, the Greek people may have a few shortcomings, but at least they have two gifts from God; they have philotimo and leventia; they celebrate everything.

Let me tell you what my dictionary says about philotimo: Philotimo is the devout quintessence of goodness; the most grateful love which is all goodness and humility. It is the polished love of a humble person who does not put his own self whatsoever into whatever he does, and whose heart is full of spiritual refinement, sensitivity and gratefulness to God and to the images of God, his fellow human beings.

People who have philotimo melt away inwardly, out of gratitude to God, which they express through every spiritual means, as children of God. Since they move about in the heavenly sphere of doxology, they even gladly accept trials and tribulations. They glorify God for their difficulties as well as for their blessings, and thus, constantly receive the blessing of God. People who have philotimo are indeed noble souls. They go through agonies over the slightest good others do for them and try to return the favor; but, no matter what they do, they never feel they have done enough, and they never forget it. **Geronda, why is it that am I not filled with prayer even though I attend to being consistent in my spiritual duties?**

Well, how can you be filled? Is it just like that, that you will be filled? You have to turn the knob to another position. Examine yourself to see how much work you do with rational thought in the spiritual life and how much with the heart; how much you are led by European “imports” and how much by Orthodox philotimo. That which we call “imports” is sometimes pride, and it robs us: I will be consistent so that I can show everybody that I am uniform in all things. But then my entire life becomes one big spiritual mess. You must proceed in all things with philotimo, for it is within this frequency that Christ, Panagia, the Saints ... move. Divine Grace does not come without philotimo.



Saint Paisios of Athos

**Geronda, does the person who has philotimo always have self-denial as well?**

If the philotimo he has is pure, then he has self-denial. The more a person removes his own self from his love, the more philotimo he acquires. There is no philotimo where self-love exists, because the enemy of philotimo is self-love.

**Geronda, does constant vigilance weary us?**

It wearies us when egoism enters into it, because that is when one puts pressure on himself. But when there is philotimo, the struggle is done with the heart, and then it does not weary us, for it is sweetened by philotimo. You should carry out your spiritual struggle not to be sanctified, but rather to bring joy to Christ. If you were struggling to please Christ, your struggle would have been soft and gentle and divine consolation would have settled within you. Instead, your struggle is hard and you do not have any consolation. Christ is a loving Father, not a cruel tyrant. Christ rejoices in the philotimo of our struggle.

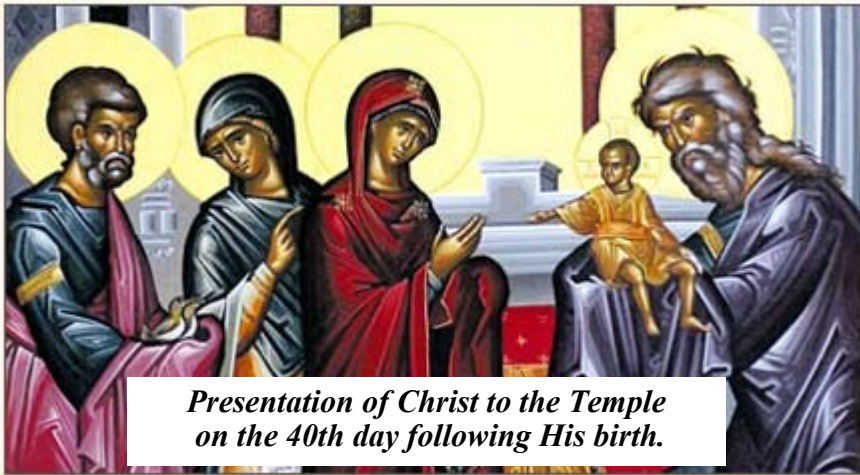
Excerpted from  
The Spiritual Counsels, Vol. V:  
Passions and Virtues







***Philoptochos Ladies present a 40-day blessing blanket to Rebekah Klinger at the Churching and 40-day Blessing. Sophie McCurry, Goldie Homan, Rebekah & Michael Klinger with baby Nikolai Micah and son Alexander Michael.***



***Presentation of Christ to the Temple on the 40th day following His birth.***



***Goldie Homan, Botros & Monika Hanna with baby Eliana, Fr. Constantine, and Sophie McCurry. Many Years!***

## **CHURCHING and 40-DAY BLESSING**

The servant of God (**Name**) is churching, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Orthodox Church sets aside a sacred period of 40 days for the mother to recuperate after the birth of her child. During this time, she cares for and bonds with her child, while her husband and other loved ones take care of her. On the 40th day, the woman and her child become reunited with the Church, receiving special blessings. In our Orthodox Faith the services for the Blessing of the Mother and the Presentation of the child take place together.

The story of the Presentation is told in Luke 2:22-29. Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews and observed their religious customs. An important custom was for the couple to take their first-born son to the Temple. The baby was taken to the Temple forty days after his birth and was dedicated to God. In addition, if the parents were wealthy, they were to bring a lamb and a young pigeon or a turtle dove to be offered as a sacrifice at the Temple. The custom provided that if the parents were poor, they were to offer two pigeons or two turtle doves for the sacrifice. Joseph and Mary were not wealthy, so they took two turtle doves with them to offer as a sacrifice at the Temple.

When Jesus was forty days old, Mary and Joseph took Him to the Temple in Jerusalem. As they arrived at the Temple, Mary and Joseph were met by a very old man named Simeon. He was a holy man and was noted as a very intelligent scholar. Simeon spent much time studying about the prophets of Israel. It was during his studies that he learned of the coming of the Messiah. The Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah to come and deliver Israel from their conquerors. From that time on, Simeon spent his time praying for the Messiah to come. He spent many years in prayer. Finally, while Simeon was praying he heard the voice of God. God promised Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah.

When Simeon saw Jesus, he took the baby in his arms and blessed the Lord and said: "Lord, now let Your servant go in peace according to Your promise, because my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory to your people Israel."



## LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS

### PARISH CHRISTMAS GIVING TREE -Ladies Philoptochos Project



The Parish Philoptochos Society found a worthy giving project on which we could focus our efforts. and reach out and help those of us who are less fortunate in our community.

This year the Philoptochos selected two local agencies to contribute necessary items to help the day-to-day needs of its clients and its agency: **AID FOR FRIENDS SHELTER** and **FAMILY SERVICE ALLIANCE OF SOUTH-EASTERN IDAHO**. Much appreciation to all those who were able to assist this



...to the **Ladies of Philoptochos** for preparing gift baskets for our seniors and home bound: Those who assembled: **Goldie Homan, Tressa Rockwood, Ashley Tarasau,**

**Sophie McCurry, Kim Sims.**

...to those who donated items: for the Gift Baskets: **Angela Fullmer, Vicky Fullmer, Svitlana Hoskin, Hala Abou Arraj, Jacque Swanson, Kim Sims, Betty Katsilometes, Ashley Tarasau, Devyn Schmalz, Sophie McCurry, Goldie Homan and Tressa Rockwood.**

### CAROLERS

The following Youth & Parents as well as some members of the Choir accompanied **Father Constantine** and brought gift baskets as well as Christmas cheer to a number of our seniors and those especially home bound or in Assisted Living Facilities. They included: **Kade, Devyn, Keeva, Adelaide and Phineas Schmalz, Evie and Vivian Merzlock, Shayla Bishard, Carrie, Jonny, Lucy and Isaiah Thienes, Ashley, Alex, Ben, Charlotte Tarasau, Jacque Swanson, Svitlana and Joseph Hoskin, Vivian Goodner, Olenda and Greg Painter.**



## CHRISTMAS PAGEANT-THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD—CAST

**NARRATOR**-Demetri Paull, **JOSEPH**-Dylan Paull, **THEOTOKOS EVER VIRGIN MARY**-Ivanna Hoskin  
**ANGEL GABRIEL**-Lucy Thienes, **SHEPHERDS**: Michael Hoskin, Joseph Hoskin, Isaiah Thienes, Nicholas Hoskin, Daniel McManus, Gussy Nicklos, Nikko Nicklos, Kevin Carroll, **SHEPHERD BOY**-Dean Paull, **SENIOR HERALD OF ANGELS**: Epi Nicklos, Charlotte Tarasau, Rylee McManus, Vivian Merzlock, Shayla Bishard, Sotiria Carroll, Octavia Paloukos  
**JUNIOR HERALD OF ANGELS**: Keeva Schmalz, Adelaide Schmalz, **THE THREE WISE MEN** Jonny Thienes, Benjamin Tarasau, Dominic Paull, **NATIVITY ANIMALS**: Chloe Wilhelm, Sophia Yanase, Phineas Schmalz, Alexander Klinger, Aiden Carroll, Vlada Vasylenko-Weaver, Mia Vasylenko-Weaver

## MUCH APPRECIATION

...to **Angela Fullmer, Ashley Tarasau and Devyn Schmalz** for directing and organizing the Pageant and to the parents for their assistance and support with the Parish Christmas Pageant

...to our singers **Olenda Painter, Carrie Thienes, David Sandborgh, Gregory Painter, Tony Hoskin, Jacque Swanson, John Peskey, Svitlana Hoskin, John Speck, David Sandborgh, Caroline Peters** who added their voices in leading the congregation in singing the carols. A special thank you to **Carrie Thienes** for her solo of “Mary Did You Know,” much appreciation to **John Peskey** for accompanying the Choir with his violin.

...to **Tressa Rockwood**, for decorating the Parish Christmas Tree in the church Narthex. Also to **Angela Fullmer, Devyn Schmalz, Ashley Tarasau** and the **young Sunday School children** in making the Nativity Ornaments for the Wish Tree.

...to **Tim Swore** for bringing St. Nicholas from the North Pole.

...to **A J Campbell, Scott Tysor and John Speck** for helping decorate the sanctuary.

...to **Adam Painter** for managing the live-stream cameras.

...to **John Speck** for photographing the Christmas Pageant

...to those who offered a free-will donation and also for our Parish Christmas Card. They include:

**John Speck, Betty Angelos, Mary Frances Cozacos, Heidi Linehan, Goldie Homan, Maria Poulos, George Poulos, Greg and Olenda Painter, Annie Semons, Dave & Jeanne Harmer, Vivian Goodner, George & Betty Katsilometes, Demetri & Paulie Zozos, Rocky & Vicky Fullmer, Ron & Julie Kuhn, Gus & Demetra Kalabokias, Ted Georges, Nick & Stella Gdontakis, Greg Maser, Martha Dugan, and Alex & Ashley Tarasau.**



Thank you to all who contributed to the Giving Tree, to help support Aid for Friends and the Family Service Alliance of Southeastern Idaho.







## JOY TO THE WORLD

Joy to The world! the  
Lord has come  
Let earth receive her  
King  
Let ev'ry heart pre-  
pare him room  
And heaven and na-  
ture sing  
And heaven and na-  
ture sing  
And heaven and na-  
ture sing

He rules the world  
with truth and grace  
And makes the na-  
tions prove

The glories of His  
righteousness  
And wonders of His  
love  
And wonders of His  
love  
And wonder wonders  
of His love



**Christmas Caroling 2023**  
Youth and Choir Members bring Christmas  
Joy to our homebound and those in assisted  
living facilities.





Rudolph, the red-nosed  
reindeer  
had a very shiny nose  
(like a light bulb)  
and if you ever saw it  
you would even say it  
glows. (like a flashlight)

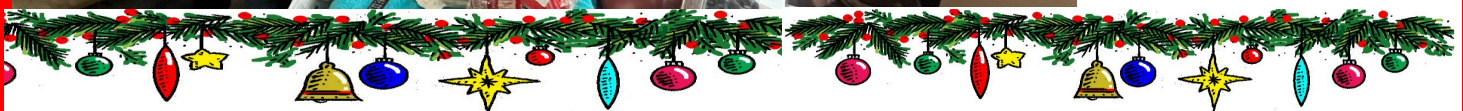


All of the other reindeer  
used to laugh and call  
him names  
(like Pinocchio)  
They never let poor  
Rudolph  
play in any reindeer  
games. (like Monopoly)

Then one foggy  
Christmas eve  
Santa came to say:  
(Ho Ho Ho),  
"Rudolph with your  
nose so bright,  
won't you guide my  
sleigh tonight?"



Then all the reindeer  
loved him  
as they shouted out with  
glee, (yippee)  
Rudolph the red-nosed  
reindeer,  
you'll go down in  
history!





# ASSUMPTION CHRISTMAS PAGEANT







*ST. NICK ARRIVES WITH  
PRESENTS FOR  
ALL THE CHILDREN!*





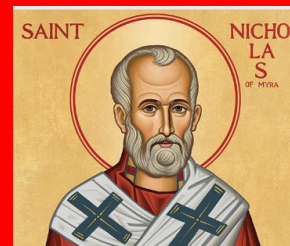
*FAMILY PHOTOS WITH  
SAINT NICHOLAS !*







*THANK YOU IS EXPRESSED TO ANGELA FULLMER-RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DIRECTOR AND TEACHERS ASHLEY TARASAU AND DEVYN SCHMALZ FOR ORGANIZING THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT.*





**-Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
Greek Orthodox Church  
PO BOX 4567, Pocatello, ID 83205**

**Email**

assumptionchurchpocatello@gmail.com

**-Parish Organizations & Ministries**

-Parish Council: Tressa Rockwood, Pres.

-Philoptochos Society: Goldie Homan

-Church School: Angela Fullmer, Ashley Tarasau, Devyne Schmalz, Karl Thienes,

-Choir: Olenda Painter, Carrie Thienes

-Acolytes: Dean Harris

-Bible Study: Fr. Constantine A. Zozos

-Chanters: Olenda Painter, Carrie Thienes

-Catechism Class: Fr. Constantine A. Zozos

-Orthros Readers: Karl Thienes, Gregory Painter, John Speck, David Sandborgh, John Peskey, Alex Tarasau

-Prosphoron: Sophie McCurry, Rebecca Tysor, Candice Apostle, Hala Abou Arraj

-Greek Festival: Tressa Rockwood

-Youth Dance Group: Angela Fullmer

-Fellowship: Goldie Homan

-Maintenance: John Speck, Ron Sims

-Live-stream: Adam Painter, Dante Dedic

# Happy NEW YEAR

*You crown the year with Your goodness,  
And Your paths drip with abundance.*

PSALM 65:11

*"The path of God is a daily cross. No one has ascended into Heaven by means of ease, for we know where the way of ease leads and how it ends. In Truth, without afflictions, there is no Life." St. Isaac the Syrian*



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