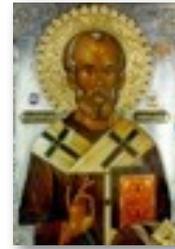




ST. NICHOLAS ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX  
CHURCH

Wonder Worker

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Pinellas Park  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33781



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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF ST. NICHOLAS ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, PINELLAS PARK,  
FLORIDA

Thoughts From Father Michael  
"The New Year"

January 2020

With the Circumcision of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on January One, we begin our walk with Him as He progresses through His earthly life. For, on January Sixth The Forerunner John baptizes Him in the Jordan; after which He will go into the desert to fast and to pray to begin His ministry. But before He does the Devil will try to tempt Him three times to abandon His mission and succumb to his wiles. Christ, reinvigorated from His forty-day trial in the desert repels the Evil One.

Christ's Baptism – the Theophany – is a major breakthrough in our understanding, for on this day the Three persons of the Trinity became manifest as the Troparion of the Day states. Jesus was in the waters of the Jordan, a dove representing the Holy Spirit descended on Him, and the voice of the Father was heard saying "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." [Matt 3:17] All three persons are present at this historic occasion.

Now the Trinity is revealed in the Old Testament, but as St Paul reminds us there was a veil over it. Paul himself, a Pharisee and a student of the famous Gamaliel knew, or thought he knew, the Scriptures. [Acts 22:3-5] As a consequence, he found Christ to be a blasphemer and began to persecute Christians. He stood by as the Proto Martyr Stephen was stoned to death, approving of this action. With letters from the Jewish leaders he was on his way to Damascus to arrest and to bring back to Jerusalem anyone who followed "The Way." We know what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus: he met the Risen Lord, who told him to go into Damascus where Ananias would baptize him and remove the scales from his eyes. After his conversion Paul began to preach Jesus Christ and riled the Jewish authorities so that he has to escape death by being lowered in a basket over the wall of *(continued)*

Damascus. Paul tells us he then went into Arabia for three years before going back to Jerusalem where he spent fifteen days with Peter. [Gal 1:17-18]

Now, what was Paul doing for those three years? He was re-reading the Scriptures through the prism of the Risen Lord where he now could see the distinction of the Father from the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and where the prophets spoke to the coming of the Messiah. With this “academic” understanding he now had to speak to someone who knew Christ. What better person than Peter who was always with Christ as He healed the lame, the paralytic, the man born blind, the man with the withered hand, the woman with an issue of blood, the bent over woman, when he fed the 5,000, raised the dead including Lazarus, and when He Transfigured Himself. As my New Testament Professor pointed out, those fifteen days were like an intense graduate seminar. Paul undoubtedly bombarded Peter with questions from morning to night. As Paul remind us, the veil over the Old Testament could only be removed with the knowledge of Christ.[II Cor 3:13-16]

With Christ’s Theophany and repelling the Devil, he is now free to accomplish His mission to reconcile God’s Chosen People to the Father, to take His message to the Gentiles, to inaugurate a New Covenant, and ultimately to enter Hades to defeat death and the Devil to give us the path to everlasting life in the Kingdom.

Each year we have the opportunity to journey with the Lord as He calls His Disciples, teaches them, sends them out to preach, performs healings, raises the dead, and on the night in which He was betrayed provides them and us – His inheritance - with the saving grace of the Eucharist and establishes His Church to which we are heirs.

In this adulterous, corrupt, and wayward generation His coming into the world is still the best answer to the craziness in which we find ourselves. All generations from the time of Noah have had to deal with the ungodly culture of this world and its anti-godly values.

We are indeed blessed to be able to follow Christ from His birth, His circumcision, His baptism, His repelling the Devil, and His ultimate crucifixion and Resurrection. By doing so we are transformed each year a little closer to the Kingdom, and encouraged to follow Him. The opposite of not following Him is to become lost, befuddled, anxious, depressed, and open to fantasy and pagan rites; characteristics of our current culture. *(continued)*

### **Birthdays for January**

1 January, Samir Isaac; 3 January, John Daher; 5 January, Kathy Boreman; 6 January, Ivetta Kanalos; 8 January, James Miller; 9 January, Christine Doerner, Pia Cummings; 11 January, Maria Khoury; 12 January, Michael Jacob, Suha Mansour; 13 January, Nadier Yacoub, Brittany Kassis; 14 January, Mona Elkhoully; 17 January, Janet Rodriguez; 22 January, Ron Patell; 23 January, Joseph Mobayed, Evern Hazel; 24 January, James Calamas; 25 January, Richard Pippy, Reem Jacob; 26 January, Ben Massouh, Jamal Mansour; 27 January, Justine Imseis; 28 January, Philip Kassis, Salome Rollins; 30 January, Marcia Thorpe

### **Anniversaries in January**

10 January, Al & Cheryl Lipscomb; 13 January, Mona & Koly Elkhoully; 18 January, Michael & Olga Boisvert; 27 January, Andi & Alba Budo; 31 January, Charles & Gail Barnett

### **Departed this Life in January**

3 January, Mitchell Abraham; 6 January, John Specian, Cheryl Catton, Fares Beder; 9 January, Hanneh Kassis; 11 January, Zelpha Albert; 13 January, James Sexton; 14 January, Evelyn Pippy; 20 January, Fr. Spyridon Massouh; 22 January, Isa Ishak; 22 January, Anthony Patell; 23 January, Jaber Ibrahim

### **New Year’s Resolutions**

My observation is that most people’s New Year Resolutions deal with the body: eat better, exercise, and stay away from stress.

Eating more fruits and vegetables, cutting back on sugar and carbs, substituting chicken and fish for beef and pork are recognized as most healthful. Walking briskly thirty minutes a day will keep the doctor at bay, and staying away from stress will nurture and build up our natural immune system; a system that fights off infections and cancer, and relieves back pain and headaches. Nothing wrong with these resolutions; in fact they go back to Hippocrates. If we take care of our bodies, our bodies will take care of us.

People also resolve to attend church more often. Yet, by February or March all these resolutions are no longer observed. Why? Because they do not involve God. We tend to want to do them on our own. That is not how God intended us to be. We know that St Paul tells us that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” But, the opposite is also true. I can do nothing without God. Without God in our lives, we can drift away and be subject to the to’s and fro’s of whatever new idea comes our way.

For those of us who resolve to attend church once a week, we cannot do that without a daily prayer life. When we pray daily and throughout the day, read Scripture and other religious books, and acknowledge God presence in our lives, then going to church to participate in the corporate worship where we work together with the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ and partake of the Eucharist becomes the normal thing to do. It is the fruition of our weekly struggles, the cherry on the top of the ice cream sundae.

Brothers and sisters, let us resolve to follow Christ each and every day. “Seek first the Kingdom of God,” the Bible tells us and all these things we desire will be given to us.

## **Please Pray for the Following Brothers and Sisters**

**Departed:** Mitchell Abraham, John Specian, Cheryl Catton, Fares Beder, Hanneh Kassis, Zelpha Albert, James Sexton, Evelyn Pippy, Fr. Spyridon Massouh, Isa Ishak, Anthony Patell, Jaber Ibrahim, Mae Victoria Wragg, Jean Renner

**Shut-ins/Sick:** Metropolitan PAUL, Archbishop YOHANNA, Nicholas Hughes, Schauki Kassis, John Bennett, Rose Beede, Alice Flaherty, Theodora Ohlinger, Sally Bell, Bob Bostley, Bill Yopp, George Joseph Rolfes, Aurelia Buda, Eveyn Lonack, Richard Pippy, Diane Zorich, Lisa McCoy, Thomas Ziegler, Susana Kassis

**For the Health of:** Fr Lazarus Sucanto, Kh Loretta Karparlenia, Kh Virginia Massouh, Pf. Margot Siniari, Viola Haddad, Anna Jacob, Angela Jacob, Farhat David, Helen Massarelli, Carole Massarelli, Evelyn Salem, Helen Salem, Ruth & Evern Hazel, Gerorgette Abraham, Mariam Haddad, Annette & Bryan Haddad, Nasir Kassis, Geri & Mitch Kanaan, Alice Faccenda, Pat Salem, David & Eva Szabo, Marion Bostley, Theodore Todorow, Alex Gimon, Diane Karns, Leo Poirier, Sophie Massouh, Bob Poirier, Steve Bové, Natalie Floreancig, Millicent Palko, Leila Bashara, Philip Lemieux, Mary Magdalena Foltz, Charlene Toney, Gail & Charles Barnett, Suha Mansour, Bruce Bingham, Mathilde Atik

**Service Members:** Christopher Salem (Air Force): Nephew of Helen Salem), Peter McIntire: Nephew of Viola Haddad, Curtis Brickwood (Navy): Fr. Michael's Cousin, James Sexton(Army): Grandson of Michaelina Sexton, David Butler (Navy): Son of Joanna Kassis Butler, Trenton Wesley (Army): grandson of Leila Bashara, Luka Dundua (Army): Grandson of Salome Rollins

## **Upcoming Events**

Wednesday, January 1, 2020 - 10:30 AM, Basil Divine Liturgy for the Lord's Circumcision and the Doxology for the New Year

Sunday, January 5, 2020 - Divine Liturgy for the Theophany of the Lord and the Great Blessing of Water

Monday, January 6, 2020 - 5:30 PM, A-Men Dinner Meeting

Monday, January 13, 2020 - 6:30 PM Parish Council Dinner Meeting

Sunday, January 19, 2020 - Swearing in of the New Parish Council

Tuesday, January 28, 2020 - 6:00 PM Ladies Society Book Discussion & Potluck Dinner

Weekend of May 22-23, 2020 - Annual Visit of His Grace, Bishop NICHOLAS

## **Annual Parish Meeting**

At the December Annual Parish Meeting Bob Rolfes and Seraphim Foltz were elected to three year terms to serve on the Parish Council. Fr Michael, as per the by-laws of the Parish, appointed Doreen Radich and Mona Elkhoully to one year terms. Also, according to the by-laws, the president of the Ladies Society serves ex-officio on the Parish Council. The other members of the Parish Council elected in prior years are: Andi Budo, David Yopp, Bob Poirier, and Al Lipscomb. Bob Wiggins retired from the Parish Council as his term expired. Please congratulate the new and old members, and thanks Bob Wiggins for serving two consecutive three-year terms.

So, we begin again.

It is a joy to know that we can find peace, love, compassion, and an uplifting spirit following Him. The road may be rocky at times as the Devil is still out to trip us up. As C. S. Lewis so aptly writes in The Screwtape Letters, the Devil uses myriad ways to hinder our journey to the Kingdom. He never forces us to do anything “wrong.” Rather, like his enticing of Eve he uses “positive” thoughts to beguile us. He did not tell Eve to do anything that appeared to be bad. He merely asked her if she wanted to be like God. It sounded so desirable that she succumbed, yet the hook was that she and Adam thought they could do it alone without God's involvement. We all want to be like God; after all Christ asks us to follow Him to the Kingdom. But Christ is there to assist us in this endeavor, and we need Christ to lead the way. It is by grace that we are saved; [Eph 2:8] Grace comes from God, not from anything or anyone else.

As we acquire the Holy Spirit we gain as St Paul tells the Galatians “...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, [and] self-control.” [Gal 5:22] Now these fruits do not occur overnight; they require time, prayer, and the grace of God. As we travel with Jesus in His earthly ministry each year we are able to make progress – sometimes easily and sometimes haltingly. That is why we are encouraged to join Christ and His Apostles each year, to stay connected.

It is like we are on a pilgrimage each year. The more often we engage in the trek, the more we participate in the life of Christ. Slowly, we become immersed in the context of the holy life. The more often we are immersed in this life the better the likelihood that something holy will rub off on us. And, as we make progress in these endeavors the more we see the ungodliness of the worldly values, and begin to shun them, to distance ourselves from them, and to gain insights as to how destructive they are for our wellbeing. We become free and liberated from the shackles that bind us to this world.

This progress will probably take a life time to accomplish, but as Mao once pointed out the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.

For many of us this will not be the first step to the Kingdom; maybe the second or third and maybe the thousandth. For others it will be the first step. Whatever it is we need to continue the trek praying to God that He will guide us if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. We must become consciously aware that God is everywhere and fills all (*continued*)

things. We are always in His presence. Does not He know each hair of our heads, and does not He know the price of two sparrows.

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin?  
And not one of them falls to the ground apart  
from your Father's will.  
But the hairs of your head are numbered.

Yes, He does know us, so "Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." [Matt 10:29-31]

Each of us will face troubles, disappointments, betrayals, and at times feel overwhelmed. With Christ we can easily overcome these down times. We can recover from whatever comes our way for with St Paul we can say: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." [Phil 4:13]

For our own good let us accept the invitation to follow Christ in His earthly journey each year by attending the worship services as they are offered, read the daily Scripture readings as found on the Church Calendar, observe the fasts, and be a helper to those searching for peace. Let us also resolve to take another step toward holiness and away from worldliness.

May God grant each of us a healthy and peaceful New Year!

### **Spiritual Sayings**

The carnal way of life constitutes death. If you wish to live long, live through the spirit; for life consists in the spirit: "If you through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live," both here on earth and there in heaven. Observe fasting, temperance and simplicity in food and drink; do not foolishly squander the balsam of your life; do not seek after riches or luxury; strive to be contented with little; keep peace with all, respect and love all, envy none; and, above all, strive ever to bear Christ in your heart, and you shall live in peace.

*St John of Kronstadt*

### **Update on Burning the Mortgage**

We are nearing our goal of reducing the Church Mortgage to zero. Thanks to the generosity of Helen & Carole Massarelli and others the mortgage balance as of December 31, 2019 is \$122,655.47 which is better than the goal we had set of \$125,000 by December 31, 2019.

Here is the accounting of the funds amounting to \$61,250 we have received so far in this campaign:

Helen & Carole Massarrelli \$40,000	Viola Haddad \$500
Anonymous \$10,000	Nadine Schmidt \$500
Fady Hakim & Mary Guirguis \$3,000	Alice Flaherty \$500
Anonymous \$1,000	Dean Smuro \$500
Anonymous \$1,000	James & Sheila Mallo \$250
Charles & Christine Doerner \$1,000	Bryan & Annette Haddad \$250
Walter Alexandroff \$1,000	Ralph & Eleanor Parker \$250
Alice Faccenda \$500	Steve & Lisa Spears \$200
Rob & Bonnie Guirguis \$500	Martin & Katherine Favata \$200

The following people made pledges on Sunday, October 27, 2019 when we announced the start of the Campaign: Fr Michael & Kh Virginia Massouh, Luis & Janet Rodriguiz, Pia Cummings, Chip Hanna, Gaby Atik, and Gerald Vizvary.

We humbly ask each of our parishioners to consider making a pledge. Once we pay off the mortgage, we can direct our current monthly payment to ourselves to begin setting aside funds to demolish the First Church and to build a new structure that will house a larger fellowship hall, Sunday School classrooms, a restaurant style kitchen, a clergy office, a library, and meeting rooms.

God and St Nicholas have blessed us to come this far, and with your prayers will continue to bless us in taking the next steps in the history of our beloved St Nicholas parish.

Please consider responding to Helen's and Carole's challenge by making a pledge or donation before His Grace, Bishop Nicholas's visit on May 22-23, 2020 when we look forward to burning the Mortgage. Consider your tax situation and make and honor your pledge in the current tax year.

You can make a secure on-line donation to St Nicholas using your credit card or through PayPal. Check it out at [www.stnicholasaoc.org](http://www.stnicholasaoc.org)



