

THE CHAMPION

A Monthly Publication of Saint Athanasios Greek Orthodox Church

DECEMBER 2023



MESSAGE FROM FR. PANAGIOTIS

“Christ is Born; glorify Him! Christ is come from heaven; go and meet Him. Christ is on earth; arise to Him.” (Katavasia hymn of the Nativity)

We return to our ongoing examination of God’s desire “That ALL should be saved and come to the knowledge of TRUTH” (1 Timothy 2:4). For months now I have been presenting this verse to you as a guide and lens for the future ministry of St. Athanasios, last month reflecting on what it means for ALL to be saved. Now, as we prepare to celebrate the Nativity of our Lord, is the appropriate time to speak about coming to knowledge of the truth.

Christ reminds us that He is “The way, the TRUTH, and the life” (John 14:6). Thus, truth is not a set of facts, or beliefs. Truth is first and foremost a person: The Son of God. All that He is is true, and anything that is not of Christ is therefore false.

There is a monumental difference between knowing about someone and knowing someone. I can read about a celebrity, follow their social media, watch their movies, tv shows, sports games, etc. and gain a lot of knowledge about them. But if I never actually meet them, if I never interact with them myself, can I say that I know them? Of course not.

The Father’s desire that we come to the knowledge of truth is an invitation to each of us to come to know His Son, Jesus Christ. Christmas, the celebration of the incarnation of Christ, His being born and walking among us is the greatest example of our Lord inviting us to encounter, to meet, and to begin to know Him. The Church makes that invitation quite explicit with the words of the Christmas hymn quoted at the top of this article, “Go and meet Him”. Christmas is God’s descent to us and the gift to mankind to be able to experience the presence of God so that we may come to know Him.

While Christmas highlights the Lord’s invitation to come to the knowledge of truth (Christ), this is the ongoing and eternal desire of God. As such, it is an essential aspect of the ministry of the Church, Christ’s very body. The ministries and activities of our parish foster our direct experience and knowledge of God. Take the sacraments for example. What difference is there between Christmas and the Divine Liturgy: Christ descends from His heavenly kingdom, becomes incarnate flesh and blood here on earth, and when we draw near to His very presence we bow our heads in worship and in praise. Every liturgy then is a personal encounter for each of us to come to meet God in the chalice.

Likewise God is alive and active in His holy ones and in holy places of the earth. Pilgrimages to visit places of prayer, or to venerate the relics of men and women who have Christ dwelling within them also bring us into contact with our Lord, mediated through saints and holy places.

Lastly, our neighbors as men and women created in the image of Christ offer us an opportunity to experience the Lord. Remember the words Christ addresses to those who will join Him in His kingdom, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

As we seek to fulfill the Lord’s desire “that ALL should be saved and come to the knowledge of TRUTH”, ministry at St. Athanasios will reflect the Christmas invitation to meet Christ with an emphasis on the sacraments and worship of our Lord, pilgrimages and the veneration of holy men, women, and places that shine forth with the grace of God, and a philanthropic spirit that puts us face to face with our brothers and thus face to face with Christ.

May the Lord bless you and your family this Christmas season. As He presents Himself to the world, may we accept His invitation and come to meet the one who is “the way, the TRUTH, and the life.”

Fr. Panagiotis

BAPTISMS

John (Izan) Rodriguez (Son of Megan and Joel Rodriguez)

WEDDINGS

Ralph Hilton Jr & Christiana Tsimouris

MEMORIALS

James Gianacakos (6 Month)

Glykeria (Gloria) Mihalopoulos (9 Month)

Afroditi Botsis (1 Year)

Demetrios Botsis (7 Year)

Vasiliois (Bill) Mihalopoulos (14 Year)

Thespina (Esther) Condos (16 Year)

Ted Dulles Sr (18 Year)

Stavros (Steve) Condos (19 Year)

Theodora Savas (30 Year)

PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE



Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Parish Assembly: Thank you to all parishioners that stayed for our Parish Assembly on November 19th. We were able to approve the budget for 2024, and also spoke about our vision for 2024, and the years to come.

Breakfast with Santa: We are having our breakfast with Santa, on December 17th. Santa and Ms. Claus will be there! Face painters, balloon artist, cookie decorating and ginger bread house making. Join us for a delicious breakfast!

Vespers and Feastday Celebration: Join us for our Vespers and Feastday on January, 17th for Vespers, and our Feastday January 18th.

Feastday Luncheon: Join us on January 21st, for a delicious meal as we celebrate our Feast Day. More information will be forthcoming about the luncheon. Please join us so we all can celebrate as a parish family!

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Foti Georgopoulos
Parish Council President

Divine Liturgy

THE GREATEST INVITATION

Enrich your experience with the Divine Liturgy, the Greatest Invitation we will ever receive.

5 part series designed to help us:

- Grow in the Liturgy mindset away from the “me-centered” mindset of the world.
- Understanding relationships and the importance of being in person with those in our community.
- Learn about the synergy that occurs between our work and God’s Grace.
- Be reminded of Gods radical love which is experienced most fully in the Divine Liturgy.

Small group facilitators will lead one 90-minute lesson per month. Choose the location and date that is most convenient for you. Please sign up for January, February and March using the QR Code below:



**SCAN
HERE!**



Scan QR code for an overview of the program.

Questions? Need help with sign up? Contact Maria Lambrou:
makokoslambrou@yahoo.com | 708-269-9991



KNOW THE SAINTS

In December we will be celebrating the Divine Liturgy in honor of two saints whose relics are in our community, both celebrated on December 4th

St. Barbara

Saint Barbara was from Heliopolis of Phoenicia and lived during the reign of Maximian. She was the daughter of a certain idolater named Dioscorus. When Barbara came of age, she was enlightened in her pure heart and secretly believed in the Holy Trinity. About this time Dioscorus began building a bath-house; before it was finished he was required to go away to attend to certain matters, and in his absence Barbara directed the workmen to build a third window in addition to the two her Father had commanded. She also inscribed the sign of the Cross with her finger upon the marble of the bath-house, leaving the saving sign cut as deeply into the marble as if it had been done with an iron tool. (When the Synaxarion of Saint Barbara was written, the marble of the bath-house and the cross inscribed by Saint Barbara were still preserved, and many healings were worked there.) When Dioscorus returned, he asked why the third window had been added; Barbara began to declare to him the mystery of the Trinity. Because she refused to renounce her faith, Dioscorus tortured Barbara inhumanely, and after subjecting her to many sufferings he beheaded her with his own hands, in the year 290.



St. John of Damascus

Saint John was born in Damascus about the year 675, the son of wealthy and pious parents. Saint John became a great philosopher and enlightener of the age in which he lived, and was honoured by the Caliph with the dignity of counsellor.

When Emperor Leo the Isaurian (reigned 717-741) began his war on the holy icons, John wrote epistles defending their veneration. Since the Saint, being under the Caliph of Damascus, was beyond Leo's power, the Iconoclast Emperor had a letter forged in John's handwriting which invited Leo to attack Damascus, saying the city guard was then weak; Leo then sent this letter to the Caliph, who in his fury punished John's supposed treason with the severing of his right hand. The Saint obtained the Caliph's Permission to have his severed hand again, and that night prayed fervently to the most holy Theotokos before her icon. She appeared to him in a dream and healed his hand, which, when he awoke, he found to be healed in truth. This Miracle convinced the Caliph of his innocence, and he restored John to his office as counsellor. The Saint obtained his permission to withdraw from the world to become a monk.



He assumed the monastic habit in the Monastery of Saint Sabbas. Then he had as elder a very simple and austere monk who commanded him neither to write to anyone, nor to speak of the worldly knowledge he had acquired, and John faithfully obeyed. A monk grieving over his brother's death prevailed upon John to write a funeral hymn to console him for his brother's death. When John's elder learned of his transgression of the rule he had given him, he cast him out of his cell, and would only accept him back after John had humbly, with much self-condemnation and without murmuring consented to clean all the latrines in the lavra. After his elder had received him back, our Lady appeared to the elder and sternly charged him not to hinder John any longer from his writings and composition of hymns.

In his old age, after his foster-brother Cosmas had been made Bishop of Maiuma, John also was ordained presbyter by the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Having lived eighty-four years, he reposed in peace in 760.

PARISH CALENDAR

All services are live streamed on our Facebook Page & YouTube Channel.

Orthros begins at 8:30am with Divine Liturgy following at 9:30am (unless otherwise noted below)

Friday, December 1st

6pm - Stocking Stuffer for AIFP (Philoptochos)

Sunday, December 3rd

Divine Liturgy - 14th Sunday of Luke
11:30 am JrGOYA Garden Christmas Decorations
11:30 am Christmas Pageant Rehearsal
1pm GOYA meeting

Monday, December 4th

Divine Liturgy - St Barbara and St John of Damascus

Tuesday, December 5th

7pm Vespers - St Nicholas
St Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church
10301 Kolmar Ave, Oak Lawn, IL 60453

Wednesday, December 6th

Divine Liturgy - St Nicholas
11am - Bible Study

Thursday, December 7th

6:30pm Christmas Party - Philoptochos

Sunday, December 10th

Divine Liturgy - 10th Sunday of Luke
11:30 am Christmas Pageant Rehearsal

Monday, December 11th

7pm Vespers - St Spyridon
St Spyridon Greek Orthodox Church
12307 Ridgeland Ave, Palos Heights, IL 60463

Tuesday, December 12th

Divine Liturgy - St Spyridon the Wonderworker
7:30pm Discover Orthodoxy

Friday, December 15

6pm - JOY Meeting

Saturday, December 16

11am Christmas Pageant Rehearsal (lunch provided)
7pm - Choir Carols and Christmas Party

Sunday, December 17th

Divine Liturgy - 11th Sunday of Luke
Christmas Pageant
11am Breakfast with Santa

Monday, December 18

7pm Lionheart Series

Tuesday, December 19th

7:30pm Discover Orthodoxy

Wednesday, December 20th

11am Bible Study

Friday, December 22nd

9am - The great Hours of the Nativity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
6:30pm GOYA Christmas Party

Sunday, December 24th

Divine Liturgy - Sunday before Nativity
Christmas Carols
6pm Vespers - Nativity of Our Lord

Monday, December 25th

Divine Liturgy - Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Sunday, December 31st

Divine Liturgy - Sunday after Nativity

COFFEE HOUR

Coffee-hour host(s) are needed! Please help us promote fellowship, community, and friendship following the Divine Liturgy by hosting Coffee-hour. There are several open dates. Please call the church office to sign-up today!

We are looking to expand our Coffee Hour Ministry. If you are interested in joining, please reach out to the office.



FOOD PANTRY



Thank you for the continued support with both donation of food and time. This month, we are focusing on back to school. See below, for monthly request. When dropping off, please remember to ask for a weight and submit to the church office or Christina Valavanidis. We are grateful for your support! (No Expired Food or partially opened packaged foods. Please do not bring toys or pantry items such as flour, sugar, spices, etc.) This month's request is:

Stuffing & Mashed Potatoes

Please contact Christina Valavanidis at christina.valavanidis@gmail.com with any questions.

PHILOPTOCHOS

Philoptochos has another busy month in November. We distributed meals to the homeless at Annunciation Cathedral on Nov. 7th. We had an artoclasia and memorial service for members past and present on Philoptochos Sunday Nov. 12th, followed by coffee hour. By the time you read this, we will have gathered to make desserts for the Men's Group to serve at Hesed House on Nov. 30th.

Getting ready for Christmas, you'll notice our Angel Tree is up in St. Matthew Hall. We encourage parishioners to remove a gift tag from the tree and purchase the gift item listed for Salvation Army. We are also in the process of collecting gift items for Christmas stockings for Aurora Area Interfaith Food Pantry. We invite parishioners to meet in St. Matthew Hall at 6 pm on Dec. 1st to help us stuff the 75 stockings we will deliver to AIFP. Finally, we hope all Philoptochos members will join us to celebrate the Christmas season at 6:30 pm on Dec. 7th at the home of Sue Manos.



Philoptochos
Christmas party!

THURSDAY **7** AT 6:30 PM

DECEMBER

THE MANOS RESIDENCE
640 NANAK COURT
NAPERVILLE

RVSP TO LEAH FANNING AT
630-664-3220

PLEASE BRING A GIFT CARD FOR GROCERIES
ALDI, WALMART, TARGET, ETC.

Eat, drink and be merry!

COMMUNITY DEDICATION PROJECT

On Sunday, November 12th we dedicated a new community initiative to St. Athanasios Church as well as the immediate Aurora community. John Haralambopoulos has been working on his Boy Scout Eagle Project for the past year and has now completed the building of the two boxes you see in the church circle drive. One is a Little Free Library and the other is a Micro Food Pantry. With the help of the Philoptochos of St. Athanasios and the blessing of Fr. Panagiotis and the Parish Council, this project has come to serve the needs of those who wish to use it.

Book Suggestions:

Appropriate books for any age (new or used). Books in Spanish are welcome.

Food Suggestions:

Dry foods (rice, beans, pancake mix, oatmeal, pasta, cereal), canned goods, diapers.

We also invite all GOYA and Sunday School kids to participate in this endeavor.



STEWARDSHIP

Being a good steward of the church means using your gifts and resources to serve God and his people. It is a way of living out your faith and expressing your gratitude for all that God has done for you. The end of the calendar year is a great time to examine our own personal acts of stewardship so that we can bring and expand these acts into 2024.

One example of how we can be a good steward is by giving generously. Giving is not only about money, but also about time and talents. Volunteering is a great example of this type of giving. Whether it is teaching, leading, singing or cleaning, volunteering is an opportunity to share our gifts and passions with others and to build relationships with each other. In the Bible, God promises to bless those who are faithful with what He has given them, and to entrust them with more. Jesus said, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21).

By being a good steward of our church, we can feel joy and reward by knowing that we are fulfilling God's will and pleasing him with our actions. In 2024, show your love for God and his people and to St. Athanasios by continuing and expanding your acts of stewardship.

In His Service,
Elli Koulos and Pete Nassos

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

(AS OF 11/10/23)

Number of Pledges: 281

Total ledged: \$343,098

Year-to-Date Collected: \$307,125

Average Pledge: \$1,221



**JOY
CHRISTMAS
PARTY**

DECEMBER 15, 2023

6:00 PM - 7:30 PM
SAINT ATHANASIOS HALL

**ALL KIDS KINDER-5TH GRADE ARE
INVITED TO JOIN THE FUN!**

QUESTIONS, PLEASE REACH OUT TO
LEAH FANNING AT 630-664-3220 OR
AMANDA MCKINNEY AT 630-533-
2839

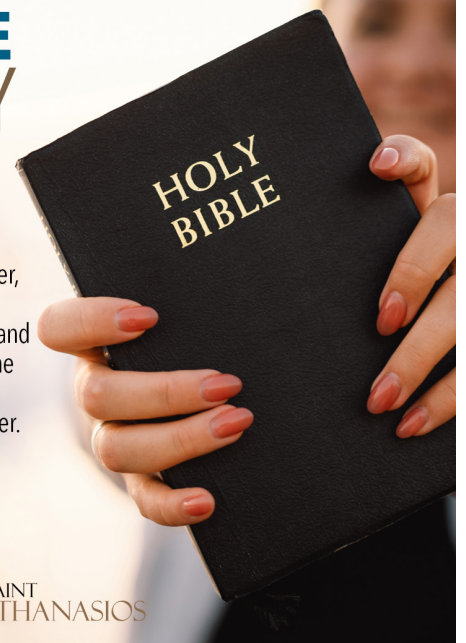
BOOK STORE

In the spirit of the three Kings bringing gifts to Baby Jesus for His Birth, Christmas is the time for honoring our loved ones with presents. Visit our Bookstore to purchase a treasure of an icon, book, music CD, jewelry, or other item wrapped in holiday decor. If you are not sure about something to buy at this time, consider a Bookstore gift card for a purchase later in the year. Nourish your own spirituality also with a gift for yourself!



BIBLE STUDY

Join our Bible Study this Fall as we take a look at the Universal Letters of James, Peter, John, and Jude. Sessions are the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month at 11am September-December.



MEN'S GROUP

We have had a busy fall schedule. Look forward to more events in 2024.

Blood Drive

The Men's Group sponsored a Blood Drive on Saturday, November 4. Twenty-one units were collected and will help sixty-three lives. Congratulations to Mickey Koulos on his 25th gallon of blood donation!

Hellenic College/Holy Cross (HCHC) Fundraiser

There was a great turnout on Thursday, November 9 for our fundraiser to help support HCHC. Special thanks to keynote speaker Mike Emanuel, Fr. Panagiotis Boznos, Spiro Hountalas, Peter Metrou, Louie Lambrou, Liuba Kichakov and Alex Magdalinos for their support of this event. Pictures available on our Facebook page.

Hesed House Dinner Service

The Men's Group prepared and served at our quarterly Hesed House dinner service on Thursday, November 30. Many thanks to all of you that volunteered. If you are interested in donating food/money or just to volunteer your time and talents, please contact Spiro, Peter or Nick.

Lionheart Series

The second Lionheart Session is Monday, December 18. Please register and attend this four-part series on what true Christian manhood looks like.

Thank you all for your support and participation in this ministry!

Like and follow our Facebook page by searching for "Men's Group of St Athanasios Greek Orthodox Church" We welcome men (21+) to join us as we grow our mission.

If you would like to receive future information via separate e-mail on these events or take on a leadership role, please contact Spiro Hountalas (naperspike@aol.com), Peter Metrou (pnmlawyer@aol.com) or Nick Dagiantis (ndagiantis@gmail.com).



 **MEN'S
RESOURCE**
FAITHTREE.ORG

LIONHEART SESSIONS

A VIDEO-BASED
SMALL GROUP STUDY FOR THE
MEN IN YOUR COMMUNITY

LIONHEART SESSIONS

Fr. Panagiotis will be leading a 4 part series on what true Christian manhood looks like. Lessons will include men as servant-leaders, men in relationships, overcoming obstacles that stand in the way of authentic manhood, and the pursuit of God in Community. More details to follow.

Save These Dates:

- Monday, December 18, 2023
- Monday, February 5, 2024
- Monday, April 15, 2024



SIGN UP

Please contact Nick Dagiantis at ndagiantis@gmail.com with any questions.

JR GOYA

Join us immediately after liturgy on **Sunday, December 3rd** as we decorate the exterior of the church for Christmas. All middle schoolers and their families are invited to stay and help us deck the halls. When we've finished outside, we'll wrap up our afternoon together with a small Christmas party.



Christmas Pageant

Attention, Sunday School families!!

It's that time of year again! We are excited to announce that the planning stages for our Christmas Pageant are already underway! This is the wonderful story of Jesus' birth as told through the eyes and hearts of our Sunday School students. Pageant roles are open to all grade levels, and there are speaking and non-speaking parts available.

This year's pageant is on Sunday, December 18th. Rehearsal dates are:

- Sunday, November 12th from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm
- Sunday, December 3rd from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm
- Sunday, December 10th from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm
- Saturday, December 16th from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm (lunch provided)

Parents, we would be delighted to have you join us in guiding our little stars during the show. Please let us know if you are interested in helping!

To cast your student in a role, scan the QR code below before November 9th. We will assign parts at our first rehearsal on November 12th.

We cannot wait to see your kiddos' smiling faces at this year's pageant!

With love and joy in Christ,

Saint Athanasios Sunday School
sundayschool@saintathanasios.com



BREAKFAST WITH SANTA

When: December 17 (11:30AM)


Where: St. Matthew Hall

Fee: \$15 Adults (12+) | \$10 Kids
(2 & Under Free)

Includes: Cookie Decorating
Gingerbread House Making
Face Painting
Balloon Artist

To RSVP contact Foti at 630-251-3462
or Fotigl985@gmail.com





SAINT

ATHANASIOS

THE GREAT

You're Invited

SAINT ATHANASIOS

FEAST DAY LUNCHEON

JANUARY 21, 2024 | 11:30 AM | SAINT MATTHEW HALL

ADMISSION:

\$20 PER TICKET

\$10 PER CHILD (12 AND UNDER)

RSVP BY JAN 14 TO:

FOTI GEORGOPOULOS

CALL 630-251-3462 or

EMAIL Fotig1985@gmail.com

Funds raised will contribute to the Saint Athanasios Capital Campaign



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Glory Him!

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**SAINT
ATHANASIOS**

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