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SAINT PHILIP'S FAST—NATIVITY FAST--ADVENT

ON THE MEND: Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Metropolitan Constantine, Patriarch Pavle, Metropolitan Theodosius, Bishop Robert, Father Peter Natishan, Father Gerald Olszewski, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Dragan Filipović, Father Elias Katras, Father Stevo Rocknage, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Michael Mihalick [MS], Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Charles Mezzomo, Father Anthony Dimitri, Ollie Pendylshok, Walt & Evelyn Burlack, Joshua Agosto and his family, Harley Katarina Rahuba, Mike and Hilda Holupka, Eva Malesnick, Helen Likar, Stella Peanoske, Joe Nezolyk, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Maria Balo, Linda Mechtly, Mary Mochnick, Mildred Manolovich, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachele, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Sandy Gamble, Glen Lucas Burlack, Bernie Vangrin, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Stella Cherepko, Sam Wadrose, Cameron [a boy in Matt's class], Faith—a 7-year-old girl with rheumatoid arthritis, Isabella Olivia Lindgren—a 3-year-old with a brain tumor, Dillon, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Nick Malec [Maxine's brother], Erin, Jim Markovich, Jeff Walewski [thyroid cancer], Carol [Lotinski] Rose, Michael Miller, Dave May, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Alverta, Gary Zurasky, Michael Horvath, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Rita Very & family, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Mildred Walters, Michael Miller, Jim Logue—throat cancer, Liz Stumpf, Ester Tylavsky, Ed Jamison, Theodore Nixon, Charles Johnson, Amy Forbeck, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Gloria Prymak [Liz's niece], Robert Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, John Sheliga, Sabrina, George & Mika Rocknage, Elizabeth Mitchell, Robert McKivitz, Cliff Dow, Marjorie Pershing, Amy Kemerer, Tom Marriott, Joe Farkas, Liz Obradovich, Liz, Halyna Zelinska [Bishop Daniel's mother], Mary Ann, Charlotte, Peter Natishan, Michael Spak, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah Finley, Claire Senita, Brandi Thomas, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Ben Bonifield—a classmate of Alex, and Daria Masur. **ARNOLD:** Stefania Lucci, Steve Sakal,

Homer Paul Kline, and Steve Ostaffy. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY to our January babies: Evelyn Burlack on the 1st, Lyndsey Weiser on the 4th, Marcy Jones on the 8th, Brenna Scott, Kristin Tkacik Scott, and Kayla Weiser—all on the 29th! May God grant them all Many Happy, Healthy, Prosperous, and Blessed Years! Mnohaya Lita!

2009 Church Icon Wall Calendars & Envelopes are available downstairs.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR “BOXTOPS FOR EDUCATION” AND CAMPBELL’S SOUP LABELS TO CHURCH. There is a shoebox in the basement for Alex’s Sixth Grade and Matt’s Fourth Grade collections. THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HELP! Love, ALEX AND MATT

REMEMBER—PRAYERS ARE ALWAYS FREE!

Communion Fasting: nothing to eat or drink after midnight, EXCEPT in cases where your doctor tells you to eat or drink something for medical reasons: medication, diabetes, etc. If you have a question, please call Father Bob.

AT ANY TIME—if there is an emergency, if you have questions, or if you just need to talk, please CALL FATHER BOB at [412] 279-5640.

Schedule of Services

Sunday, January 4 **Divine Liturgy** **10:30 AM**
29TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY, SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS, GREAT-MARTYR ANASTASIA & HER TEACHER CHRYSOGONUS & WITH THEM MARTYRS THEODOTA, EVODIAS, EUTYCHIANUS, & OTHERS WHO SUFFERED UNDER DIOCLETIAN
Tone 4
Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23
Matthew 1:1-25
Litany in Blessed Memory of Steve Kuzman & Nicholas Vitosky—Fr. Bob

Tuesday, January 6 **Nativity Eve STRICT FAST** **6:30 PM**
Grand Compline and Holy Supper

Wednesday, January 7 **Divine Liturgy** **10:30 AM**
Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Galatians 4:4-7
Matthew 2:1-12

Sunday, January 11 **Divine Liturgy** **10:30 AM**
30TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY, COMMEMORATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS ONES: JOSEPH THE BETROTHED, DAVID THE KING, JAMES THE BROTHER OF THE LORD, 14,000 INFANTS [THE HOLY INNOCENTS] SLAIN BY HEROD AT BETHLEHEM, VENERABLE MARCELLUS-ABBOT OF THE MONASTERY OF THE UNSLEEPING ONES, VENERABLE THADDEUS-CONFESSOR OF STUDION, VENERABLE MARK THE GRAVE-DIGGER, THEOPHILUS, & JOHN OF PERCHEVSKY LAVRA, VENERABLE BENJAMIN-MONK OF NITRIA IN EGYPT, VENERABLE ATHEADORUS-DISCIPLE OF VENERABLE PACHOMIUS THE GREAT, SAINT GEORGE-BISHOP OF NICOMEDIA
Tone 5
Galatians 1:11-19
Matthew 2:13-23
Parastas in Blessed Memory of Steve Kuzman—Debbie & John Paouncic

Sunday, January 18 **Divine Liturgy & BLESSING OF WATER STRICT FAST** **10:30 AM**

31ST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, SUNDAY BEFORE THEOPHANY, MARTYRS THEOPEMPTUS-BISHOP OF NICOMEDIA & THEONAS, VENERABLE SYNCLETIA OF ALEXANDRIA, PROPHET MICAH, VIRGIN APOLLONIA OF EGYPT, VENERABLE FORISTIRIUS & MENAS, VENERABLE GREGORY-MONK OF CRETE

Tone 6

1 Timothy 4:5-8

Mark 1:1-8

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 04 JANUARY 2009

TWENTY-NINETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**SUNDAY BEFORE THE NATIVITY—SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS
GREAT-MARTYR ANASTASIA & HER TEACHER CHRYSOGONUS & WITH
THEM MARTYRS THEODOTA, EVODIAS, EUTYCHIANUS, & OTHERS WHO
SUFFERED UNDER DIOCLETIAN**

TROPARION—TONE 4

When the women disciples of the Lord
Learned from the angel the joyous message of Thy Resurrection;
They cast away the ancestral curse and elatedly told the apostles:
Death is overthrown! Christ God is risen,
Granting the world great mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and
unto ages of ages. Amen.

KONTAKION—TONE 4

My Savior and Redeemer,
As God rose from the tomb
And delivered the earthborn from their chains.
He has shattered the gates of Hell,
And as Master, He has risen on the third day!

PROKEIMENON—TONE 4

READER: O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all.

PEOPLE: O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all.

READER: Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, Thou art very great!

PEOPLE: O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all.

READER: O Lord, how manifold are thy works!

PEOPLE: In wisdom hast Thou made them all.

ALLELUIA VERSES—TONE 4

Go forth and prosper and reign, because of truth and meekness and righteousness.

You love righteousness and hate iniquity.



PERMANENT CONFERENCE OF UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX HIERARCHS BEYOND THE BORDERS OF UKRAINE

Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ 2009

*To the Venerable Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Ukrainian
Orthodox Church beyond the Borders of Ukraine and to our Brothers
and Sisters of the Faith in Ukraine:*

Peace be with you from the Christ-Child-born of God's Love for us!

Christ is Born!

Once again, we experience, by the grace of God, the Great Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ in the midst of Winter, bringing to us a Spring-like joy, the joy of the birth of the Infant, “a great joy which will be for all people...for there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2: 10-11).

Today is born the One whose advent the Righteous men and women of the Old Testament hoped for, the One proclaimed by the Prophets of the nation of Israel, the Creator of the World, the Almighty and Sustaining God is born of the All-Holy Virgin Mary as a weak human child. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity becomes the Son of Man, to make us children of God by Grace, so that we may, with boldness and without condemnation call upon our Heavenly God, as Father. The Son of God descends from the Heaven to raise all to Heaven, to grant us life eternal, “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His Cross (Colossians 1: 19-20). By His birth the Son of God humbles Himself as the Apostle Paul says: “...being in the form of God...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:6-7) with endless love for us.

Today heaven and earth rejoice, “the fullness of time has arrived” (Galatians 4:4), anticipated for centuries, promised by God - “So all this was done that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the Virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel’, which is translated ‘God with us.’” (Matthew 1:22) Angels and humans spiritually

rejoice. Today we sing with the Holy Church: “Christ is born – glorify Him! Christ has come from Heaven – welcome Him! Christ is on earth – exult Him! (Irmos of the Nativity Matins Canon)

The world, which after the sinful fall of Adam and Eve, was veiled in sadness and darkness and because of sin lost its filial relationship with God, rejoices today for the Son of God, by His nativity, again renews to humanity the path of reconciliation with God, which leads to adoption by God and to Theosis (becoming one with God).

On the eve of this Holy Day, more that 2000 years ago, the new Bethlehem star shone above the world to guide the Wise Men from the East to the new-born Christ the Savior in a Bethlehem cave. As the Evangelist Matthew records, among the first to arrive and welcome the new-born God-man were the Wise Men from the East, “who saw His star and came to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2). Saint John Chrysostom comments that the star of Bethlehem was not an ordinary star, for it moved not as do other stars in the firmament, from east to west, but from the north of Jerusalem to the south to Bethlehem; the wise men from the east saw it throughout the day and the night, until it stood over the Bethlehem cave, “where the young child was.” (Matthew 2:9)

Saint John Chrysostom states that this was not an ordinary star, but an invisible power, which appeared in the form of a star. Other Holy Fathers note that it was the Archangel Gabriel, who assumed that form of a star and who, after the Wise Men worshipped and presented gifts to the new-born Christ the Savior, appeared to them in a dream in his true form, warning them not to return to Herod.

More than 2000 years ago the star of Bethlehem guided the Wise Men to worship the newborn Savior and today that star guides all of us to our parish churches to worship Him, Who is “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” (John 14:6) For more than 1020 years this star of Bethlehem has enlightened the way traveled by our God-loving Ukrainian people in Ukraine and beyond her borders. This path of life in Christ, followed by our people was at times similar to the times of martyrdom experienced in the early ages of Christianity. For over 70 years the satanic Communist empire sought to replace the star of Bethlehem with its red star, but the light of the star of Bethlehem never did and never will grow dim and will never cease to enlighten the way traveled by our God-loving nation for “God is with us”, Who is born today in Bethlehem of Judea.

We wholeheartedly greet all of you – our spiritual children and our brothers and sisters in the Faith and by blood lineage, who reside in Ukraine and in the Diaspora, with the great feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and we pray that the blessings of the new-born Christ the Savior will remain with you at all times unto the ages of ages.

**In His abundant Love and with great Joy,
+ Constantine**

Metropolitan – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA and in Diaspora

+ John

Metropolitan – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ Antony

Archbishop – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

+Ioan

Archbishop – Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Diaspora

+ Yurij

Archbishop – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ Jeremiah

Archbishop – Ukrainian Orthodox Church, South America Eparchy

+ Ilarion

Bishop – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ Andrij

Bishop – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ Daniel

Bishop – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

BARTHOLOMEW

By the Mercy of God

Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church

Grace, peace and mercy from the Savior Christ, born in Bethlehem

Beloved brethren and children in the Lord,

The great and sacred day of Christmas has dawned, the metropolis and mother of all feasts, inviting each of us to spiritual uplifting and encounter with the Ancient of Days, who became an infant for us.

As St. John of Damascus underlines: "By the grace of God the Father, the only begotten Son and divine Word of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the pre-eternal and perfect God, who is without beginning, condescends to us as His servants, becoming fully human and achieves that which is newer than new, the only new thing under the sun." (On the Orthodox Faith) This incarnation of the Son of God is not merely symbolical, like the other incarnations of the numerous gods in mythology; it is reality, a truly new reality, the only new thing under the sun, which occurred at a specific historical moment in the reign of the Emperor Octavian Augustus some 746 years (according to new astronomical data) since the establishment of Rome, in the midst of a specific people, from the house and line of David (Luke 2.4), in a specific place, namely Bethlehem of Judaea, with a very specific purpose: "He became human in order that we might become divine," in accordance with the succinct expression of Athanasius the Great. (On the Divine Incarnation 54)

The event of incarnation of God's Word grants us the opportunity to reach the extreme limits of our nature, which are identified neither with the "good and beautiful" of the ancient Greeks

and the "justice" of the philosophers, nor with the tranquility of Buddhist "nirvana" and the transcendental "fate" or so-called "karma" by means of the reputedly continuous changes in the form of life, nor again with any "harmony" of supposedly contradictory elements of some imaginary "living force" and anything else like these. Rather, it is the ontological transcendence of corruption and death through Christ, our integration into His divine life and glory, and our union by grace through Him with the Father in the Holy Spirit. These are our ultimate limits: personal union with the Trinitarian God! And Christ's nativity does not promise any vague blessedness or abstract eternity; it places "in our hands" the potential of personal participation in God's sacred life and love in an endless progression. It grants us the possibility not only "of receiving adoption" (Gal. 4.5) but also of becoming "partakers of divine nature." (2 Peter 1.4).

Of course, amid the global confusion and crisis of our time, these truths have a strange echo. Most people's hope, resting on worldly "deities," is falsified on a daily basis in the most terrible ways. The human person is humiliated and crushed by numbers, machines, computers, stock markets, and diverse flags of vain ideological opportunism. Nature is blasphemed; the environment groans; young people despair and protest against the injustice of the present and the uncertainty of the future. "Darkness, clouds, storms and noise" (Deut. 4.11) prevail in our world, giving the impression that even the light of hope that dawns in Bethlehem is threatened with extinction and the angelic hymn of universal joy—"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to all people" (Luke 2.14)—is in danger of being overcome. Nevertheless, the Church calls everyone to sober attention, re-evaluation of priorities in life, and pursuit of divine traces and value in every other person of respect toward the image of God. Indeed, the Church will not cease to proclaim – with all the strength acquired by its two millennia of experience – that the child that lies in the manger of Bethlehem is "the hope of all ends of the earth," the Word and purpose of life, redemption sent by God to His people, namely to the whole world.

We share this good news with much love from the martyric Throne of the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople, proclaiming it to all children of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and to every person that thirsts for Christ, invoking upon all of you the mercy, peace and grace of God, together with the saving gift of the only-begotten Son of God, who came down from the heavens—for us and for our salvation—and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, becoming human. To Him belong the glory, power, honor, and worship, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, to the ages.

At the Phanar, Christmas 2008
Fervent supplicant to God for all
+BARTHOLOMEW

***Archbishop Lazar,
Abbot of New Ostrog
NATIVITY EPISTLE,***

NATIVITY OF CHRIST, 2008.

"Ye rich and ye poor...enter ye all into the joy of the Lord."

This year, as we approach the Feast of the Incarnation of God, we might reflect on the beloved Paschal Sermon of Saint John Chrysostom. In it, he invites all, those at every level of society and in every spiritual condition, to “enter into the joy of the Lord.”

Let us recall that the proclamation of Christ’s birth came first to the poor, the disenfranchised, and humble of this world. The shepherds in the fields often had no better place to take shelter and sleep than in the manger caves at the edge of the hill upon which Bethlehem stands. It was these lowly outcasts who came first to venerate the Christ, the creator of heaven and earth Who now took upon Himself their lowliness and humanity. Only afterward did the Magi come. They were among the elite and wealthy of this world, and Christ came for them also, yet their journey was longer and more arduous, for they had first to learn humility and patience in order to be able to recognize in the child in this poor manger the King of Glory.

He received the lowliness and humility of the shepherds, and took upon Himself their passions and sins. He accepted the gifts of the Magi, and also accepted upon Himself their struggle and spiritual burdens. Both the one and the other were in a condition of alienation. The Magi were gentiles, men born without the promise, outside of the Covenant. The shepherds were on the fringe, among the poorest and most dispossessed of Judean society.

Throughout His earthly healing ministry, Christ would embrace the alienated, the sick and suffering and the sinful, while in no wise rejecting the rich and the powerful, who might respond to the call to humble themselves and come to a true understanding of the Covenant and the Law. From the blind beggar bar-Timaeus to the noblemen Joseph of Aramathea and Nikodemus, Christ would take upon Himself the sins and passions of all, bear them to the Cross and restore man’s unity with God. Even there on the Cross, He embraced the outcasts of this world, dying the death of the most wretched, in the company of two brutish bandits.

So often in our North American society, we approach the Christmas season in the spirit of a saccharine sentimentalism. Christ is portrayed as a cute, freshly washed infant in a tidy manger with well-groomed animals round about. His mother is a pretty, neatly coiffed young woman, and a handsome, strapping young father—Joseph—stands attentively nearby.

Far too often, we do not find a sense of awe and reverence at this event which shook all creation, interjected into the symmetry of the cosmos, and seized the universe, impelling it onward toward its final destiny of transfiguration and glory. Yet, the very purpose of the Nativity Fast is to prepare us spiritually to open our hearts and become truly present to this great mystery. But there is still more. The fast itself and the message of the Incarnation of God in the midst of the humble and outcast is intended to prepare us to open our hearts to the same. We think of the charity and giving of this season, but forget that the giving of gifts and the distribution of food at the mid-winter solstice and New Year predates Christianity and is common to believers and unbelievers alike.

I would like to call upon Orthodox Christians, during this season, to add a perspective to their charity and to their contemplation of the Feast. Preparing ourselves through fasting and prayer, let us with a spirit of awe and repentance, offer to those in need not only because of Christ's warning preserved for us in the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. Let us offer what we can, remembering that Christ was received first of all by the poor and the dispossessed of this world. Christ's ministry was carried out primarily among such as these. Neither with condescension nor pity nor condemnation did Christ walk in their midst and break bread in the homes of sinners and outcasts. Rather with His presence he acknowledged their humanity, restored their human dignity and invited the attention of all to the image of God in each person on all levels of society and in every nation. He invited the hearts of those who would be His followers to love their neighbor and to open with love to "the other."

But to recognize "the other" as our neighbor, as "equal to me" in human dignity and God's love, to see in the lowest and most downcast, a reflection of our own "self," I must first clothe my own ego in the robe of humility. Training ourselves in self-discipline and self-control, "decentering" our world view from focus on ourselves, are necessary in order to attain to a loving understanding which makes room for "the other" in our hearts. Of what benefit is it so say that we follow Jesus Christ but pay so little heed to how He lived His earthly, Incarnate life? We are called upon as Orthodox Christians to make the principles of Christ's life incarnate within each of us.

Brothers and sisters, let us be cautious that we do not allow our periodic charity and goodwill, our seasonal good deeds to become a substitute for a life in Christ. If we have sincere joy in the celebration of His Incarnation—the dawning of our own salvation—let us also find true joy in affirming the dignity and worth of the dispossessed and alienated in our society so that we can be followers of Christ in truth as well as in words. In this, we shall truly fulfill the will of the Father, acknowledge the Gospel of the Son, receive the comfort of the Spirit, and inherit everlasting life.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him.

Archbishop's Christmas Encyclical

Protocol 101/08

December 25, 2008, The Nativity of Christ

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, Full of grace and truth;(John 1:14)

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 Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On this most joyous day, our Holy Orthodox Church celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ and the fundamentally life-affirming and awesome consequences that flowed from this miraculous event. The birth of Jesus Christ was nothing less than the entry of salvation into our world. It was at that singular defining moment in

history, a moment of cosmic significance, that God the Word became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ, and began to dwell among us. This is what is meant by the above-cited passage from the Gospel of John, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

That the Almighty God freely chose to become a human being, in every manner like us except for sin, is a concept that is unique and central to our Christian faith.

It is, in fact, a quite radical concept: because God became a human being, we have been offered the ability to appreciate anew the exalted status of what it means to be a true human being. Equally radical was the divine and saving plan behind the manner by which God chose to enter our world and our human condition. Even though it was within His power, our God did not enter our world clothed as an earthly monarch seeking to acquire worldly dominion and control over those who might be called subjects. Rather, He came as the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6), Whose desire was to restore all human beings to a relationship with God permanently bonded by love, to herald the coming of a heavenly Kingdom, and to loose all human beings from the bonds of death. And this is what is meant by those familiar and beautiful words of Saint John, the Evangelist, which we truly take to heart on this most magnificent day: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

My beloved Christians,

These words are especially important on this day of Christmas since we are living at a time when in our world we are experiencing heavy levels of anxiety due to many ordeals. Some of these ordeals include the present state of our global economy, the rising of unemployment, the problems related to the use of energy, the health of our environment, and the continuing presence of terrorism and civil unrest. In the face of such tremendous stress, we take comfort that our loving and Almighty God Himself took on all kinds of ordeals. Indeed, the newborn Christ took on all the evils, sins, and pains of the entire humanity, and He transformed these ordeals into hope, strength, peace and resurrection. Therefore, even in the midst of difficulty, we experience the joy of hope and love that we spread abundantly to others.

On this day I extend to all of you my fervent prayers that the divine light of our Incarnate God and Savior Jesus Christ, Who is born to us on this day, may shine forever in your hearts and homes as a brilliant beacon of hope, joy, and love throughout this Christmas season, and indeed on every day of this New Year 2009 now at hand; and may His infinite mercy, protection, and peace be with you always.

**With paternal love in Christ,
+ DEMETRIOS
Archbishop of America**



"Blessed is the soul that knows her Creator and has grown to love Him, for she has found perfect rest in Him." St. Silouan

The Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries

CHRISTMAS PRESENTS OR CHRIST'S PRESENCE?

On November 30, 2008, the National Retail Federation reported that consumers spent an estimated \$41 billion dollars on "Black Friday," the day after Thanksgiving. Over 172 million shoppers spent an average of \$372.57 over the Thanksgiving weekend. Even in this time of economic uncertainty, spending and turnout was up from 2007.

Shoppers were determined to get those deals so they had all the right things under the Christmas tree. In fact, it is hard to imagine the Christmas season without waiting in line for six hours to grab the hottest deals on Guitar Hero, Apple iPods, and the XBOX 360.

With all the presents we bought, we have to stop and ask ourselves... where is Christ's presence? Where is Christ in all of our holiday chaos? Please read the following sermon by Theo Nicolakis on "The Gift of Christmas." It is a beautiful reflection on giving Christ this Christmas season.

"The Gift of Christmas"

By Theo Nicolakis

The Christmas season is such a beautiful time of the year. Lights, candles, and cutout snowflakes begin to decorate our city's streets. People begin to adorn their homes with the colors of red and green, wreaths, candles, and dazzling arrays of lights. These decorations even spill into our schools and businesses. That's the Christmas season! That is the Christmas season?

This past week, as I was speaking with one of my staff members, we began to discuss putting up Christmas decorations in the office. As we were talking about Christmas decorations, she told me that at her son's school, her son's class had to write an essay on what Christmas meant to them. When her son showed her the essay he had written, she did not see any mention whatsoever about Jesus or His Birth. So she asked her son why he didn't mention anything about Jesus. He responded to her and said, "Well mom, Christmas isn't about Christ anymore"; that's not what it is about anymore? Then what is Christmas about? "It's about presents," he said.

It's about presents.

When I first heard this story, I was shocked and disturbed; but the more I thought about it, the more I began to realize that he's right. Christmas really is about presents.

But what kind of presents?

It's about a father who punished his three-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Since money was tight, he became furious when his little daughter tried to decorate a box with gold wrapping paper and put it under the Christmas tree. Yet, on Christmas day, the little girl brought the gift wrapped in gold paper to her father and said, "This is for you, Daddy." When he saw the gift, he was embarrassed by his earlier reaction, but his anger flared up again when he unwrapped the gift, opened the box, and found it to be empty.

"Don't you know that when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside of it?" he shouted. With tears in her eyes, the little girl looked up at him and said, "Daddy, it's not empty. I blew kisses into the box and put them in there for you." Her father then smiled, put his arms around his little girl, and begged her forgiveness and kept that gold box by his bed for years so that whenever he was discouraged he would take out a kiss and remember the love of his little daughter who put it there. — The gift of love.

It's about presents. Christmas really is about presents.

It's about a contest held to find the most caring child. The winner was a four-year-old boy whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked the little boy what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "Nothing... I just helped him cry." — The gift of consolation.

It's about presents. Christmas really is about presents.

It's about a four-year-old who went to the pediatrician for a check up. As the doctor looked down her ears with an otoscope, he asked, "Do you think I'll find Big Bird in here?" The little girl stayed silent. Next, the doctor took a tongue depressor and looked down her throat. He asked, "Do you think I'll find the Cookie Monster down there?" Again, the little girl was silent. Then the doctor put a stethoscope to her chest. As he listened to her heartbeat, he asked, "Do you think I'll hear Barney in here?" Oh no!", the little girl replied. "Jesus is in my heart." — The gift of faith.

It's about presents. Christmas really is about presents.

It's about God, who loved each one of us so much that he gave us his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. — The ultimate gift.

It's about presents. Christmas really is about presents; but it's not about the presents we give that we bought at the local Toys – R – Us, or the local department store. It's not about the giving of money; Christmas is not about a holiday season.

Rather, Christmas is about the gift of giving of ourselves. Giving of our time and talents so that we might touch the life of another. And the reason why we give of ourselves is because we commemorate the gift God gave us — His Son.

So what gift we will give this Christmas? But not only this Christmas, but also every day of the year. Will it be the gift of love by telling our family and friends how special they are to us? The gift of consolation by remembering those who have no one else to remember them; by visiting those who have no one to visit them? Bringing the gift of laughter to those who are in sorrow; imparting the gift of faith, by keeping Jesus Christ as the focus of our Christmas.

Therefore, how we can give of ourselves is perhaps summarized best in the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi who said:

O Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon,

Where there is doubt, faith,

Where there is despair, hope,

Where there is darkness, light,

And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;

To be understood, as to understand;

To be loved, as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive—

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.



ORDER OF SAINT ANDREW THE APOSTLE
ARCHONS OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE IN AMERICA

Ecumenical Patriarchate IN THE NEWS: Bartholomew I: Turkish Bureaucracy Is Trying To Make Us Disappear

12/18/2008 Istanbul, Turkey

IN THE NEWS - The Turkish foreign ministry and the state bureaucracy continue their efforts to diminish the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, according to the recently released minorities report submitted to the Turkish Parliament.

The condescending report towards the Ecumenical Patriarchate is addressed in this originally published article by AsiaNews (by Nat da Polis) on December 18, 2008, entitled: Bartholomew I: Turkish bureaucracy is trying to make us disappear

Bartholomew I: Turkish bureaucracy is trying to make us disappear

By NAT da Polis AsiaNews.it Thursday, December 18, 2008

The Turkish foreign ministry and the state bureaucracy are trying to diminish the importance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for all of Orthodoxy. The shortcomings and errors of the report on minorities in Turkey. Putin hopes to visit Bartholomew.

"We will never permit tricks or the vagaries of history to wipe us out from this land": the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, has commented on the report of the Turkish foreign ministry, which denigrates the "minority" presence of the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey, and refuses to recognize the "ecumenical" character of the ancient patriarchate.

Presiding over the reopening of the church dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helena in the Bozakoy neighborhood in Istanbul, Bartholomew I highlighted for the faithful present that "we are not finished, or hopeless." And recalling the great battle of Greek king Leonides against Xerxes of Persia, he added: "we will never abandon our Thermopylae."

It seems that the Turkish foreign ministry is trying to make the Ecumenical Patriarchate "disappear," continuing to call Bartholomew I "the patriarch of Fanar [editor's note: the neighborhood where the Ecumenical Patriarch resides]," refusing to use the title "ecumenical" and acknowledging only that he has spiritual responsibility for the domestic Greek minority, and not for the Orthodox communities connected to Constantinople. It also seems almost a

concession from above to accept that Bartholomew I uses the title "ecumenical" abroad. All of this has an impact on the juridical status of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, on its freedom to travel abroad, and to host foreign delegations in Turkey.

This position has been reaffirmed in a report on the minorities in Turkey, presented by the foreign ministry in parliament, the details of which have been released recently. The report states that according to the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the patriarchate of Fanar is allowed ecumenical status: its presence and residence in Turkey is only in function of its service to the religious needs of the Orthodox, Turkish citizens who because of the persecutions and expulsions of the past have been reduced to a small minority of 3,000 souls, with an average age of 60.

But the report does not say that this interpretation is not accepted by the international community, and is also contested by eminent Turkish personalities like Professor Baskin Oran.

The report also excludes the possibility of reopening the theological school of Halki, in the name of state secularism, but does not say that the Turkish state, secular (and Sunni), finances mosques and schools for imams.

The curious thing is that the report on the minorities should be produced by the foreign ministry. In this way, Turkish citizens are in practice considered foreigners in their own country, under the constant and vigilant observation of the Turkish bureaucracy.

The report also contains manipulations of a political nature. In order to demonstrate to the world the magnanimity of the Turkish state toward the Orthodox minority - especially in view of entry into the European Union - the fact is cited that in Turkey, there are at least 270 places of worship for the Orthodox. But it says nothing about the fact that all of these were built before the foundation of the Turkish republic, during the Ottoman Empire, which, although it was a Muslim state, defended the minorities much more than the current state does.

The report also talks about the "interest" that the United States allegedly has in supporting the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. This "interest" is due to the fact that the United States would like to counterbalance the importance and influence of the Church of Moscow.

"It is clear," says an Orthodox source, "that the bureaucracy of Ankara wants to diminish the importance of the Patriarch after the reconciliation between

Moscow and Constantinople, in Kiev and during the pan- Orthodox summit.

"Besides," continues the same source, "Turkey was highly disturbed by the emphasis that the Russian media gave to the presence of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the funeral for Alexy II."

On that occasion, the Head of the Patriarchal see of Moscow, Metropolitan Kyril of Smolensk, praised the role of Constantinople. And even Prime Minister Putin thanked Bartholomew I and expressed his desire to visit the see of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

To our Parish Family and Friends,
CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

May the blessings of Our New-Born Lord and Savior Jesus Christ fill your hearts with His Love and Grace throughout the Nativity Season and the upcoming New Year. You are in our prayers and thoughts every day and your love for us is greatly appreciated.

God Bless and Keep you all!

Love,

Father Bob, Pani Gina, Alex, Matt,

The Holy Ghost Parish Board, and The Holy Ghost Parish Family