

CROSS CURRENTS

Church Newsletter
December 2008



THE GLORY THAT IS THE INCARNATION

by *Father Peter Salmas, Pastor*

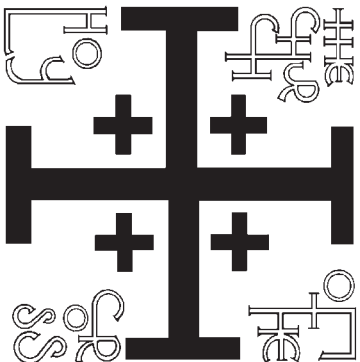


So simple and humble is the Nativity of our Lord that one can only think that God, the Father, knows us better than we know ourselves.

Why did He not come in glory, as would be expected of a King of this world? Certainly, it was in His power to do so. Why did He come in a manger, as a newborn babe, placed in a trough from which animals fed, wrapped in swaddling clothes, simply and humbly? Because He is our Creator, He does know us better than we know ourselves. He knows that we are connected to Him and that it is only through Him we can truly know ourselves.

Our response to newborn babies is almost universal; ours seems to be an automatic response of love. In the newborn Christ, we respond with love to Love Incarnate. Babies do nothing to repel us but by their very nature, they draws us in. We are not put on the offensive or on the defensive, as we all too often are with adults.

The world into which Christ was born was filled with fear, anger and hatred. People felt threatened and vulnerable, disenfranchised. Some felt as if they were losing control and someone else was going to take over; selfishness and aggression was rampant. A baby is born and the world as we knew it came to a screeching halt. Unable to respond according to the ways of the world, the response to God who came “In the fullness of time” was sadly misguided. As we greet God in the Incarnation, when He becomes part of our world as one of us, do we permit Him to bring us to our knees?



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We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

As He confronts every aspect of who we are and challenges us to become like Him, is our response to Him one of anger for the interference or of gratitude for His Love?

The celebration of His Incarnation, as simple as it may seem, is of universal proportions. There is no event that changes us more than God becoming flesh and living amongst us. And yet, it is sadly apparent that, despite the passing of 2000 years, the world is still not prepared, ready, or even willing to accept this miracle of miracles. Though we may seek change for our world, we find it difficult, no impossible, to turn to God. Change that will truly make ours a world more of a reflection of the intent of Our Creator can only come from the Son of Man. And we refuse to turn to Him. Though deep down we do know that it is not possible for man to make any change of such magnitude without His assistance, our pride continues to keep us from what our souls truly seek.

Our Lord and God has made the ultimate sacrifice for our salvation. It is ours to respond with a desire to know Him, with our hands and hearts willing to let go of the primacy of the material goods around us in order to reach up to take His Hand, to respond to His call to follow Him.

This Christmas, I encourage you to celebrate the Feast of The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ by attending the Divine services of the

Fore- Feast and of the Feast. Prayerful attention to the readings, the hymns, the chanting will renew His message of hope and trim the light of faith in each of us.

Be generous with your love, your time, and your attention to the simple yet powerful message of our Lord's Nativity.

A blessed and joyous Christmas to all.

MAKING CHRISTMAS REAL & EXPERIENCING ITS POWER

by Fr. Pete Sotiras, Assistant Priest



By the time you read this article, Christmas will be right around the corner. It's my favorite time of the year. I love listening to the radio stations that have Christmas songs 24/7 and watching Christmas classics on TV such as the "Charlie Brown Christmas Special", "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas", "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" (don't laugh and call me names), "Elf" (a new classic) and others. With all these songs and shows (and during the Christmas season in general), there seems to be a heightened sense of caring and giving. Why is this so? This spirit of caring and giving, this Christmas spirit, has as its source the Incarnation - God becoming human. It's not about a cute little baby in the manger—it's about God's master plan to recreate his creation, to fix us, to restore us, to renew us. How did God do this? He did it by actually becoming human, by entering our lives. Jesus Christ, who was not human, became human—for us. This plan was revolutionary—even to the angels. Now, the question is, do we just remember Christmas as an event that happened 2,000 years ago, or do we make it real for us today?

First and foremost, we can make Christmas real and experience its power by allowing Christ into our own life. Jesus became a human for us so we can have an intimate relationship with Him. His own relationship with the Father was intimate. We know this because he refers to His Father (and our Father) as *Abba*, which is the Aramaic for "Daddy" or "Papa". God wants us to come with Him with all our hopes, fears, frustrations, concerns

and desires. Don't be afraid or feel that God doesn't care about you. You're His creation and He created you to have an open, honest and intimate relationship with Him—that's what He wants!

Secondly, and just as important, we can make Christmas real and experience its power by entering the lives of others God puts in our life, just like Christ did with us. When we enter someone's life, for no other reason than to love them, we and they are transformed. There is a transformation



↑ *Father Peter, Father Pete, Presbytera Angie and Holy Cross volunteers help decorate trees at the Valley Medical Center last Sunday afternoon.*

of us and them, from emptiness to fullness, from despair to hope, from frustration to peace, from jealousy to being content, from feeling worthless to having value, from having no purpose to having purpose and ultimately, from death to immortality. By entering someone's life, we not only help the other, but we find fulfillment and answers in our own life.

God puts people in our life for a reason. Let Christmas be the answer to why they're in our life. All of us, including myself, are challenged to reach out to those who do not have the love of Christ in their life. You know who such persons are: a family member, a friend or someone who you don't know. We may have family members who are picked on or ostracized for any number of reasons. Let us be the family members that reach out to them. We may have friends who are equally not given the time of day. Let us reach out to them. I'm sure there are people we don't know, strangers to us, even in our own Church community, whose lives we are unaware of. Let us reach out to them. Ultimately, let us reach out to those who are without friends, hope, help, and Christ's love, whether they be a family member, friend or stranger.

How do we reach out and enter people's lives? Well, what did Christ do? Christ spent time with people and listened to them. He formed relationships with them. He was quick to listen before He gave answers. He asked people, "What do you seek?" We too can ask people the same question by asking, "What are your hopes and dreams. What are your frustrations and concerns?" Let us be people who have compassion, who put ourselves in the shoes of the other, so we can truly *empathize* with them. Let us spend time with that person who God puts in our life. We need to resist the temptation to say that we don't have time for those people God puts in our life. Christmas is a reminder to put people who need Christ's love first on our list.

By allowing Christ to enter our life, and by doing the same for those who God puts in our life, we will make Christmas real to us and experience its power. This is why Christmas is my favorite time of the year.

May you and your loved ones have a Blessed and a very Merry Christmas!

PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS INFORMATION WE ALL NEED TO KNOW

Each and every baptized Orthodox Christian must make some effort of active commitment to his or her Church. Some serve by participating in the Choir; some do so by joining the Philoptochos Ladies Society; others assist whenever the Parish sponsors a community activity; and others participate in the life of the Church by serving as members of the Parish Council.

Being a member of the Parish Council is truly a responsible task that must be served by an individual committed to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The role of a Parish Council member is a holy and spiritual one. In assisting in the administrative responsibilities of the Church, a Parish Council member acknowledges the importance of strengthening the earthly ministry through God's Church. Being a member of the Parish Council should not be for social reasons or status in the Community; but rather an act of humility and conviction to Christ our Lord.

In accordance with the 2005 Regulations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, all candidates wishing to serve on the Parish Council must attend a PARISH COUNCIL SEMINAR organized by the current Parish Council and under the guidance of the Parish Priest. The purpose of the Seminar is to prepare candidates for the Parish Council, as well as making them aware of the sacred responsibilities expected of a Council member.

This year's PARISH COUNCIL SEMINAR will be held on **Monday, December 8** and **Wednesday, December 10**, at 7:00 PM in the Contos Library.

ALL POTENTIAL PARISH COUNCIL MEMBERS, INCLUDING THOSE SEEKING RE-ELECTION, MUST ATTEND THE SEMINAR.

In order to be placed on the ballot, one must complete the PETITION FOR CANDIDACY form and return it to the Church Office before **Wednesday, December 10**, at 7:00 PM. If a petition has not been turned in by the ascribed date and time, the person will be ineligible to run for the Parish Council. Elections are **Sunday, December 14** following Liturgy.

HOLY CROSS CHOIR

SINGING IN MEMORY OF DAD

by *Eva Canellos*

When I was a young girl, my dad and mom would often take us five kids to church choir conferences in the summertime. I was always floored by how many people my dad knew at these gatherings of choir members from the seven western states. Dad seemed to know everyone by name, as well as their family members' names, their churches and hometowns, and even their pets' names. And they all knew Tom Pallad.

Dad greeted them with big bear hugs as though they were old friends, and that's because they WERE old friends. I realized, after awhile, that my dad knew choir directors and singers and priests from virtually every parish in the diocese. He loved them all, and they loved him. It was amazing. They knew my mom, too, because she sang in the choir, but she didn't have the same history with them that my dad did.

Dad grew up in Cleveland and directed the Annunciation Church choir of 120 members. After serving in the Navy in Korea, he worked as an electrical engineer in San Diego and became choir director at St. Spyridon. Later, he was transferred to the Bay Area before there was a Belmont church, and he served as choir director at St. Nicholas in San Jose and later Ascension in Oakland. He married my mom, and they lived in San Mateo, dreaming of a church in the Peninsula. Dad was instrumental in starting Holy Cross Church, and he formed the first choir here and served as director. He also was a building fund chairman, parish councilman and president. I was just a kid when we moved down South and became members of St. Nicholas Church in Northridge, but I'll never forget the close friendships that were formed in those early days at Belmont.

And so it was especially touching when the Holy Cross choir recently hosted a gathering of three visiting choirs for Sunday liturgy, and the choirs sang in Tom Pallad's memory. Originally there was no connection with my dad. The gathering was arranged by Leslie Cardiasmenos, who wanted to revive an old tradition: she invited the choirs of Annunciation

YOUTH AND PARENTS

DEAR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS,

Cathedral, Holy Trinity Church and Ascension Cathedral to sing with us at Holy Cross, with the idea that we, in turn, would pay a visit to those parishes in the near future. When my dad passed away shortly before that particular Sunday, the choir members dedicated their singing to Dad's memory. Many of them had sung with Dad or knew him through his work with the Church Music Federation. Even though I couldn't be at Holy Cross that day because I was with my mom in Arizona, my family and I were so pleased to hear about the wonderful 50-voice choir that sang that morning, in the same loft where my dad used to direct, and in the church that he helped build.

Even though he's physically gone, my dad is always with me, especially in church. Dad was my first choir director and church music teacher. He taught me (and the choir) so much about church music, and in teaching us about the music, he taught us about our faith. The hymns are educational, and Dad always made sure we understood the words we sang. This helps us sing them properly and prayerfully. Dad always said we're not "performing" when we're singing in church. We're participating in a holy worship service. He instilled in me a genuine love for our church music, and in turn, a tremendous love for God and church. How can you not love God when you're singing praises to Him. It is a special joy to sing in the church choir, so joyful that it's almost selfish to be in the choir. Without my dad's teaching and inspiration, I doubt I would have that. And so, I sing in his memory every time I put on a robe and pick up my book.

I also thank God that I found my husband, Chris, at a choir conference here in Belmont, and that I get to share this special music ministry with Chris. How blessed I am to be back at Holy Cross and singing under another fantastic director and teacher, Steve Cardiasmenos. If it's God's will, I look forward to someday singing with Christian in the choir, too!

Our choir had the wonderful experience of participating in the Divine Liturgy recently at Stanford University's Memorial Church. The liturgy was sponsored by the Orthodox Christian Fellowship and was organized by its leader, Yannis Paulus. Several Orthodox Stanford students were in attendance. Father Pete celebrated and gave a great homily. Father Peter, Konstantine Salmas and Andrew Vavuris also served at the altar. Steve Cardiasmenos directed the choir, of course, and Anita Mottola played the piano. It was a privilege to bring our faith and music to Stanford, and I hope we'll sing there often.

The essence of the gospel message is the affirmation that God is with us. The work of the Church is to celebrate and speak about the Incarnation, the event of God becoming man.

Repeatedly in the gospels, Christ demonstrates his ability to multiply those things which we offer to Him. He speaks about the way our lives should be effected through and through by the reality of the presence of His Kingdom.

The Church is the body that preaches the Resurrection of Christ. The goal of the Religious Education Department is teach our youth the culture of an Orthodox Christian community. A life of faith is a life of involvement with the world in a way that shows our love for God in many different tangible ways. Worship, ethical decisions, and love of Christ are all things which we learn.

Today, we are beginning to integrate a tithing program into our curriculum. The goal of the tithing program is for the students to experience the reality of putting God first by taking a small part of what they have and giving it back to His Church.

We are all blessed immensely and at the same time those blessings are often accompanied by challenges. Developing the habit of tithing on a regular basis is a practical way for us to come forward and give back, regardless of our financial situation. Like liturgical worship, regular private prayer, veneration of icons, lighting of oil lamps at home, fasting, and lighting of candles in the narthex, tithing cultivates in us the practice of expressing and demonstrating our faith.

The Lord speaks about the virtue of a parent getting their child a glass of water in the middle of the night. He accepts the offering of expensive oil broken over his feet. Finally, he looks at the widow who gave a penny as she entered the Temple, and said that He looks more fondly on her

who gave from what she does not have, than those who give from their excess.

We hope your children learn that to give even a little, a small portion, is great in the eyes of God, and that he promises always to multiply it a hundred-fold.

In Christ, *Father Peter Salmas, Father Pete Sotiras,
and the Religious Education Staff*

GIVING THANKS

The following messages were delivered on the eve of Thanksgiving by young people from our Holy Cross Religious Education program. Both **Anthe Roberts** and **Christian Canellos** provided for those in attendance their insight into the significance of Thanksgiving.

My name is **Anthe Roberts**, I am 8 years old, and I'd like to tell you some of the things I am thankful for.

I am thankful for my pets, my family, my teacher, my knowledge, shelter, my friends, food, drinks, school, God, gravity, air, nature and many more things.

I thank God for all my blessings, and I wish you all a happy Thanksgiving and a good night to all.



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I'm thankful for a lot of things, like my family, friends, food, drink, church and God. But I want to talk about why I'm thankful for my health.

I was sick with the stomach flu a few days ago. I woke up at 1:30 AM, feeling sick. I threw up, and then mom came upstairs.

I was up all night except for small naps which were constantly interrupted by throwing up. I felt absolutely horrible. The next day, I got up slowly

and went downstairs. My mom came over and gave me a sip of water. I drank the water, and my mom turned on the TV.

I stayed at the TV, taking occasional sips of water. Then my mom gave me some chicken noodle soup. I felt better after that. I felt good but not good enough to go to school. I was totally better by the end of the day.

I realized how important good health is. I thanked God for my good health.
- Christian Canellos, 8

TEEN NIGHT

by *Nicki Davis, Teen Night Leader*

Faith, Fellowship and Fun (F³) has been our motto, but as leaders of Teen Night, our intent is to become a part of the lives of our Orthodox youth; to guide them, draw them closer to their faith, and for them to become the future of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church.

Teen Night has exceeded our expectations. Through our first month, we've averaged 15 students in attendance each week. We've explored



↑ Thanks again to **Tom and Pete's (Minaidis) Produce of Half Moon Bay** for their generous donation of pumpkins for our youth groups!

some of the challenges our youth face, and have begun to draw a correlation between our decisions and our faith. The teens have been engaged and involved in our discussions and we are encouraged at their willingness to share their experiences.

The feedback we've received has been overwhelmingly positive. Parents have shared that they are grateful to Holy Cross for sponsoring this group. Students have also been enthusiastic in their feedback. A recent request to extend our time together to 90 minutes was confirmation that this is an important event in their week.

We invite all of you who are teenagers in middle school and high school to experience this new ministry for yourselves. We meet every Thursday night, from 7-8:30 PM in The Oaks. We also do other activities outside of this normal time. Please bring a friend, even if they're not Orthodox! The Church's job is to reach out to all people, not just our own.

As leaders of Teen Night, we are humbled and honored to work with such an amazing group of young people. As we strive to lead our youth to a stronger faith, we cannot help but be led to a stronger faith ourselves. To God be the Glory.

If you have any questions regarding Teen Night, please contact Fr. Pete at 591-4447 or via e-mail at petesotiras@yahoo.com

REFLECTIONS ON I.V. (second of a series)

by *Konstantine Salmas*

No one knows what to make of their experience the first week of the first session. Staff are well on their way to realizing they won't sleep for the next six weeks. The campers are well on their way to realizing this isn't like summer camps in America. They have never been so tired before, probably because they have not traveled so much before in one hundred degree heat. Both campers and staff are getting settled into Greece, with one another, far away from any sort of comfort zone. But, they do have American candy.

One of the things we like to do as administration is give the staff some comforts of home. **Fr. Constantine Lazarakis**, the director of Ionian Village, and I, always marvel at the amount of food **Anastasia**, his presbytera, brings from America. Anastasia and I walk through Costco in May and clean off the large shelves. We leave with boxes of Snickers, trail mix, page 12 - *Cross Currents*



Our very own Christian Stamates, along with several of the 2009 IV staff. →

granola, peanut butter, gummi bears, Hershey Mini's, and Red Vines. Of the twenty cardboard boxes of supplies we bring to Ionian Village through JFK International Airport, a third of them are filled with snacks and coffee for the staff. During the first week of mind numbing movement, a gummi bear and a handful of trail mix can help the staff member find some sort of a center.

NEWS & INFORMATION

A NEW YEAR AND NEW BEGINNING FOR YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY

by *Louis Busta, Young Adult Participant*

As the New Year approaches, many plans and resolutions are formed as people strive to achieve certain goals. For the Church of the Holy Cross, the clergy and laity together are working on new goals in the strengthening of our Orthodox Christian community. One of these "resolutions" is the reassembling of our Young Adult Ministry. On November 8, a group of college students and young professionals gathered together to establish a community with the common goals of growing in the knowledge of our Or-

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thodox faith, serving the community in love, and fellowshiping as brothers and sisters in Christ.

This Young Adult group meets every other Saturday at church for Great Vespers, which is then followed by dinner and a discussion/activity. These have included dinner at Hola's Restaurant and a ⬆ bowling night. The group is currently planning a trip to SkyHigh for its next meeting, as well as outreach services to the community. This is a great opportunity for college students and young professionals to spend time with other Orthodox peers in the pursuit of spiritual growth and communal fellowship. Please spread the word about this wonderful new ministry to young adults who may not be aware of this group.

If you have any questions, please contact **Fr. Pete** at the Church Office, 591-4447, or via e-mail at petesotiras@yahoo.com

HOLY CROSS THREE HIERARCHS BOOKSTORE

The Feast of the Nativity is very near. As you continue with your lists for gift giving, please consider the many options available in our bookstore.



Possible gift items include CD's, ⬆ icons, and specially made porcelain icons of the mosaic Nativity icon in our own church sanctuary. You will also find Christmas cards and a large selection of books, including those of interest to children, teens and adults.

CHRISTMAS PROGRAM SET FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

Brush off those musical instruments, because the Holy Cross Community Christmas Program is coming up, **Sunday, December 14**, 6 PM in The Oaks, and we want YOU to play in the Christmas Carol Sing-along and Play-along! Whether it's drums, trumpet or bassoon, bring your instrument and join in the fun!

The Christmas program will feature the traditional story of Jesus' birth (Nativity Scene), along with a special play from the Drama Program and beautiful music from the Choir, Youth Choir, Sunday School and Greek School.