



LET US REJOICE
AND PROCLAIM

the Mystery

OF CHRISTMAS!

Cosmically speaking, when we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we celebrate God's compassion and providence, His saving us from the bondage of sin and death, and opening for us the gateway to eternal fellowship with Him in Paradise.

At the Great Vespers for the Nativity of Christ, the one of the hymnographers wrote a powerful statement that we Orthodox Christians need to hear:

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord, proclaiming the present mystery; for He hath broken the middle wall of partition, and the flaming spear shall turn about, and the Cherubim shall admit all to the Tree of Life.

Let's look at this hymn in two parts:

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord, proclaiming the present mystery...

How are we to properly understand and respond to the mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord and God, Jesus Christ?

The wonder of the incarnation of our Christ is truly more than our minds can comprehend. What a great mystery it is for the uncreated God to take on flesh just so he can dwell with and rescue mankind from the bondage of sin. How can the God, whom the vast universe cannot contain, be born of a woman? How can a God, who sits on an eternal throne in the heavens, be laid in a manger, among poor and anonymous folk?

Comprehending the mystery of Christmas is a spiritual exercise... which requires divine illumination and revelation through the Church. Christmas, in other words, must be experienced in our hearts.

In our American society, however, Christmas can become something we experience in the flesh. It has ceased to be a spiritual experience. Instead it has become a time of tedium: long lines, competitive shopping, social obligations, small talk at parties, corny television shows, sales, credit card debt.

If we try to experience Christmas as most Americans do, that is materially, we will lose. We will become even a little less joyful than the year before. We will become a little more deaf to the Gospel. Our hearts will be a little harder and distracted away from focusing on our life with God.

As at all feasts, concerning the Nativity the Church calls us to do two things: to recall God's merciful coming to us and for us to go back to God. In other words, there is no true joy without repentance, and there is no repentance without joy.

St. Gregory the New Theologian explains:

continued on next page...



St. Sophia
Greek Orthodox Church

DECEMBER
2013-
JANUARY
2014
MONTHLY
BULLETIN



Christmas
Services
at **St. Sophia**

Christmas Eve Day
Tuesday, Dec. 24th
9:30 am Royal Hours
6:00 pm Vespers
Liturgy

Christmas Day
Wednesday, Dec. 25th
8:45am Orthros
9:30 am Divine Liturgy

continued from page one...

*"This . . . is this what we are celebrating today: the **Coming** of God to man, that we might go forth, or rather that we might **go back to God**, that putting off the old man we might put on the New; and that as we have died in Adam so we might live in Christ, being born with Christ. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not after the manner of a pagan festival, but in a godly way. "And how shall this be? Let us not decorate our porches, nor arrange dances, nor adorn the streets. . . . These are the ways that lead to evil and are the entrances of sin. Let us leave all these things to the pagans. But let us who are worshipers of the Word of God, if we must in some way have luxury, let us seek it in God's Word and in the law and the scriptural stories" (Oration 38)*

St. Gregory is not saying that decorating our homes, parties, and the like are evil in themselves. However, they in themselves do not proclaim the mystery of Christmas. If we only see Christmas only in terms of these things, we are no different than unbelievers.

Christians "proclaim the mystery" of the incarnation by recalling God's goodness and repenting... by wanting to change, by desiring to a new life. This comes by seizing the opportunity that God offers to life a life in Christ. It comes by dedicating one's self to the Sacramental life that the Church offers. The call of Christmas is to accept the invitation to break into God's life, to learn about him, to dedicate our life to him, to make his will our will.

Whoever seeks the spiritual meaning of Christmas has a far deeper and mature faith that the rest of the world. Whoever does this adorns their bodies and souls with beautiful decorations. Whoever does this has a song that naturally sings a carol of praise.

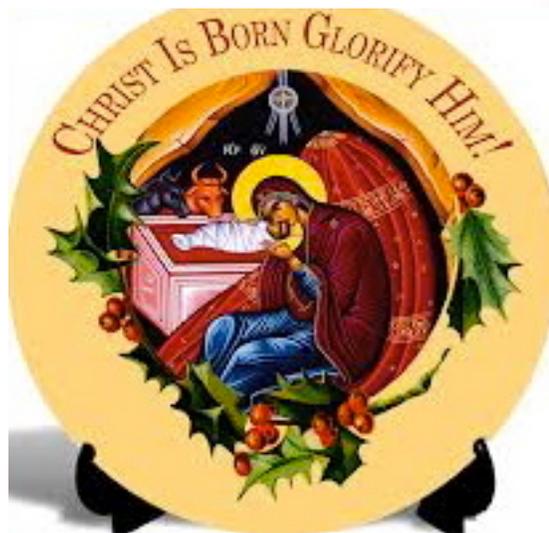
...for He hath broken the middle wall of partition, and the flaming spear shall turn about, and the Cherubim shall admit all to the Tree of Life.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they were cast out of Paradise as a result. God commanded the archangels to keep them out with a fiery sword. Realizing what they had done, Adam and Eve and mankind from that time attempted, in vain, to re-enter Paradise. Man lived in alienation and exile because of sin and disobedience.

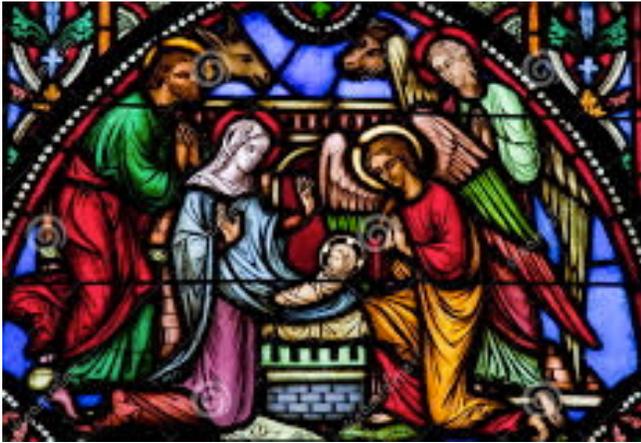
The Christian Good News proclaims that God changed all that. God took pity on mankind. He heard the prayers and knocks of Godly men and women. He took action. He went on a rescue mission, bridging the chasm that separated us from him.

The hymn above says through the Christ child, "*God has broken the wall of separation.*" One can picture God taking a sledge hammer to the wall of exclusion, exile and alienation caused by sin. We can also picture the archangel, once a fierce and dangerous guard keeping us out of heaven, laying down his sword. Rather than jealously guarding the entrance to Paradise, the angel jealously guards *us* and as our body and soul guard, watches our back as we enter in. The Cherubim, surrounding the throne, praising God, become our hosts and welcome us into to the heavenly worship and eternal Liturgy and praise of God.

May we celebrate Christmas as Orthodox Christians ought. May it become a liturgical feast where we praise, thank and worship God for giving our life and purpose back to us. Through the Liturgical services may we hear and experience the good news of our salvation and our re-admittance to Paradise. And may we share this news with the world!



On the Nativity of our Lord



“Behold, the time of our salvation is at hand. Prepare yourself, O cave, for the Virgin approaches to give birth to her Son. Be glad and rejoice, O Bethlehem, land of Judah, for from you our Lord shines forth as the dawn. Give ear, you mountains and hills and all lands surrounding Judea, for Christ is coming to save the people whom He has created and whom He loves”

- Hymn from the Vespers for the Sunday before the Nativity

“Come, then, let us observe the Nativity Feast.

Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been ‘in planted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels.

“Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle. He became Flesh. He did not become God. He was God. Wherefore He became flesh, so that He Whom heaven did not contain, a manger would this day receive. He was placed in a manger, so that He, by whom all things are nourished, may receive an infant’s food from His Virgin Mother. So, the Father of all ages, as an infant at the breast, nestles in the virginal arms, that the Magi may more easily see Him. Since this day the Magi too have come, and made a beginning of withstanding tyranny; and the heavens give glory, as the Lord is revealed by a star....”

“To Him, then, Who out of confusion has wrought a clear path, to Christ, to the Father, and to the Holy Ghost, we offer all praise, now and for ever. Amen.”

- St. John Chrysostom, “Homily on Christmas Morning”

Apolytikion for the Nativity of Our Lord

*"Christ is born! Glorify Him!
Christ descends from the heavens, welcome Him!
Christ is now on earth, O be jubilant!
Sing to the Lord, the whole earth,
And sing praises to Him with joy, O ye people,
For He has been exalted!"*



The Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC)

Many of us at St. Sophia are blessed to belong to cultures which have embraced Christianity since the earliest times. But the good news that Jesus Christ has come into the world is still spreading even in our own day! This is accordance with His commandment to the church: "Make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19)

Many of the saints whom we venerate were active in spreading the gospel to new lands and peoples: Saints Cyril and Methodios, Saint Innocent of Alaska, Saint Nicholas of Japan, and Saint Nina of Georgia.

In recent decades, the Orthodox churches in the U.S. have joined together to begin missionary efforts.

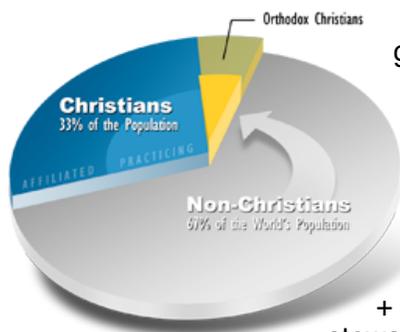
The **Orthodox Christian Mission Center, or OCMC**, is the official missions organization of all the Orthodox jurisdictions in America. The OCMC works to spread the gospel in areas of the world which have very new, or no, Orthodox Christian churches as yet. Many of these areas have no Christian churches at all. The OCMC also supports the missionary and charitable efforts in Albania, Guatemala, Kenya, Moldova, Mongolia, Romania, Tanzania, and even in the the United States.

OCMC's Mission is to follow Jesus "Great Commission" to make disciples of all nations by bringing people to Christ and His Church.

OCMC's Vision is for all people may come to know the saving love of our Lord: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

OCMC's Values

- + We value proclaiming and witnessing Christ to all people with priority given to those who have never heard or accepted the Gospel.
- + We value sharing the love of Christ for the care of the total person, both spiritual and physical.
- + We value ministry in the language and culture of the people.
- + We value our people – well-trained Missionaries, Staff, Board, Supporters, Indigenous Leadership and those being served.
- + We value communities, parishes, and individuals that are mission-minded and have active mission involvement.
- + We value being an open and transparent agency that values the gifts of stewardship provided to us by the faithful.



OCMC's efforts consist of:

Long-term missionaries, who may have a focus on planting churches, teaching in seminaries or schools, or medical work. Such missionaries provide healthcare, catechetical and theological training, working with the youth, and administrative support. By also learning the language and culture of the people they serve, OCMC missionaries were able to provide a vibrant witness to the Orthodox Christian faith around the world.

Continued on next page...

... Continued from previous page

Missionary ministries contributed to the following in 2012: ministering to the needs and providing catechetical instruction where tens of thousands of indigenous Mayans are coming into the faith in Guatemala; developing and expanding ministry to children in Albania with additional focus on reaching out to the entire family; completing OCMC's commitment to help inaugurate Youth Ministry Programs in Moldova with an additional focus on cultivating indigenous leadership; witnessing hundreds of baptisms in Albania, Kenya, and Tanzania; catechizing over a thousand people in Albania, Guatemala and Tanzania.

Short-term missions projects, including construction of churches, teaching, children's summer camps, or other charitable works. In 2012 OCMC was able to fund the completion of a church and a two-room classroom in a remote village in the Turkana region of northern Kenya. Construction of a six-classroom academy for the Kenyan Turkana in the town of Lodwar and the construction of a church in Pakistan also began in 2012.

Summer short-term projects for 2014 are:

Teaching about the faith (Albania, Ghana, Guatemala, Kenya, Mexico, Moldova, Tanzania, Uganda), Construction (Kenya), Youth ministry (Albania, Guatemala, Moldova, United States), Healthcare (Tanzania, Uganda), and outreach (Alaska). The projects last from one to three weeks.



AGAPE Canisters are used to collect spare change in homes, restaurants, or businesses in the U.S. The amount collected in 2012 was \$29,008 to support 9 projects in 8 countries. These funds are earmarked for projects such as medical care and clinics, wells for clean water, agricultural development, food and clothing, and support for personnel such as doctors, nurses, and teachers. Funding and supporting education of seminarians and missionaries at Orthodox seminaries in the U.S. Fundraising for these projects and to support administrative costs. OCMC is a 501(c)3 charitable organization. [graphic: pie of where money goes]

OCMC Ambassador program-- the volunteer liaisons from the local churches in the U.S. to OCMC, who support the work of OCMC in their local parishes and keep their parishes informed. As of now there are only two in the state of Washington-- one at St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church in Seattle, and one at St. Andrew Antiochian Orthodox Church in Arlington.

To learn more about OCMC and its programs, please see their website, **OCMC.org** or ask Fr. Michael or Presvytera Elizabeth. Also watch for the OCMC magazines, and Missions Sunday next spring.

OCMC's Contact Information is:

220 Mason Manatee Way
St. Augustine, FL 32086
Phone: (904) 829-5132
Toll Free: 1-877-GO-FORTH
E-mail: missions@ocmc.org
www.ocmc.org



Coffee Hour Offerings

Dec. 1 Tasia Tsoulouhas and Francine Tsoulouhas
Dec. 8 Ibtissam Mansour and Angelina Moussi
Dec. 15 Christmas Party - Dorine Boulos
Dec. 22 Mary Hulbush, Dena Lien and Cherie Webster
Dec. 29 Cathy Alex, Cheryl Lallas and Georgia Sentkowski

Jan. 5 Wafaa Gholam and Christina Gholam
Jan. 12 Marina Polchronakis and Eleni Pantoleon
Jan. 18 Nia Zourkos and Eleni Mistry
Jan.26 Effie Eisses and Joyce Piantes

Thank you for finding a substitute and notifying Georgia Sentkowski georgia2608@comcast.net if you are not able to provide for coffee hour on your scheduled day.

Prosphoro Baking

Dec. 1 Sue Moyer (5)
Dec. 8 Brooksana Raney (5)

Dec. 15 Kim Weil (5)
Dec. 22 Harieklia Bryant (5)
Dec. 29 Tammy Mattson (6)
Jan. 5 Tasia Tsoulouhas (5)
Jan. 12 Eleni Zourkos (5)
Jan. 19 Eleni Kipelides (5)
Jan. 26. Sue Moyer (5)

Epistle Readers

Dec. 1 Alicia Morgan
Dec. 8 Anastasia Boulos
Dec. 15 Gebran Gholam
Dec. 22 Nicholas Mattson
Dec. 29 Gabe Martini
Jan. 5 Juju Gholam
Jan. 12 Jason Morgan
Jan. 19 Alicia Morgan
Jan. 26. Bessam Boulos

Thank you to all of our volunteers!

St. Sophia Mothers Group Meets Friday afternoons, 5:00-6:00 pm at Estelle's Cafe. For more information, contact Presvytera Elizabeth or Nadia Boulos.

Bible Study will meet December 4, 11 and the 18th and then will be on hiatus until January 8th.

Special Note on Parish Council Elections: According to the *Archdiocese Regulations* which govern this parish, and at the direction of the Metropolis of San Francisco, the regularly scheduled parish council elections must take place, even in the event that the number of nominees is equal to the vacant positions, as is the case for the 2014 year. Therefore the elections will still take place on **Sunday, Dec. 8th** as scheduled as detailed in the voting information letter received by eligible voters. Absentee ballots will be available next Sunday, Dec. 1st until 2:00 pm and during regularly scheduled office hours.



Fr. Michael and Presvytera Elizabeth invite you to their

Open House Christmas Party

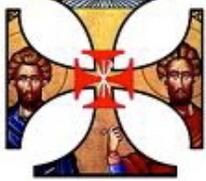
Saturday, December 21st

At the Tervo Home... 1:00-4:00 pm.
for directions call
call (360) 303-8242

The Whole Community is Invited...



Saturday, Dec. 7th the Philoptochos is sponsoring a **Christmas Luncheon and Christmas Ornament Exchange**. The time is 11 am'; those attending are asked to bring a Christmas ornament under \$20; also we give to the **Hope House** in Bellingham: items they have requested are soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, baby wipes, baby shampoo. Please RSVP by signing up on the sheet in the church hall so we know how much to cook.



St. Sophia Philoptochos

News

The bake sale/luncheon was a success; we will share the results and elicit ideas for next year at our next meeting on

December 8. *A special thanks to all those who provided the delicious food and baked goods!*

The vote is in: the ornament exchange will replace the gift exchange for our Christmas tea on December 7 at 11 a.m.. The invitations have been mailed and I pray no one was left out. Please advise me immediately(360-483-8200) if anyone was missed. This tea is for all in our parish who want to attend and bring an ornament. It is sponsored by the Philoptochos.

A thank you to all who provide the delicious food and serve us during coffee hour. The monies collected go towards the many philanthropic projects of the Philoptochos.

Also, accolades to those who honored our voted request to use the ceramic coffee mugs instead of the paper. This vote was cast not to save monies but to make a difference for our planet. When I had the privilege of visiting with His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew last September we had a powerful conversation concerning our Orthodox faith and it's relationship to our environment. The following is a message from him to the National Philoptochos of America.

"We are treating the planet in an inhuman, godless manner precisely because we fail to see it as a gift inherited from above. Our original sin with regard to the natural

environment lies in our refusal to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way with sharing with God and neighbor on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that divine and human meet in the slightest detail contained in the seamless garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust."

I, as your president, personally thank the leadership of Joyce Piantes and all of you who kept our Philoptochos alive while I was away those two months. I am so blessed to be among such caring and motivated women, of all ages, in our parish. We may not always agree, but our goals for our parish and our faith are the same.

As this is a two month newsletter, I wish all of you and your families a MERRY CHRISTMAS! A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Your sister in Christ,
Harieklia Meras-Bryant



Thank you to the many volunteers, donors and visitors who participated in the bake sale.



3rd Annual Diving for the Cross

Sunday,
January
12th,
2014

12:00 noon

Location: Marine Park,
near the Ferry Terminal

Milestones

The sympathies of the St. Sophia Community are extended to...

-**Maria Ilvanakis** and her family on the passing of **Gus Ilvanakis**, who fell asleep in the Lord on October 5th.

- **Presvytera Alexandra Diamant**, whose mother **Eirini Traiforou** passed away in Greece.

A trisagion was sung for **Ioannis Tsoulouhas**, father of Nikitas and Nick Tsoulouhas, on September 29th (5 years).

A trisagion was sung for **Nicholas Scott Anderson**, cousin of Dena Lien.

ST. SOPHIA BOOKSTORE NEWS

WE WILL BE OPEN EACH Sunday FROM 12 TO 2 PM THROUGH THE 22ND OF December.

We still have a nice selection of Christmas cards left for purchase; we have boxes of loukoumi, Greek honey, Greek caramels. We also have a nice selection of icons and can order whatever you would like in any size . With the icons we need a ten day lead time.

There are many great gift ideas in your bookstore, so come and take a look.

BOOKS:

“Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children” by Georgia and Helen Horns (15.00)

This is a translation simplified for older children and adults.

“Celebrate the Earth” by Dorrie Papademetriou.....(20.00)

This is a beautifully illustrated and written children’s book celebrating Psalm 104 in Which every vesper service in the Orthodox Church begins.

“Words for our Time”.....(17.00)

This volume is the first, in English, of a small selection of the talks of the twentieth Century elder Abba Matta of Egypt, known in the West as Matthew the Poor.

“Greek Vases” A beautiful illustrated coffee table book with history of vases which depicted how people lived throughout the ages.....(74.95)

“The Meaning of Icons” by Leonid Ouspensky, one of the most influential iconographers and iconologists of the twentieth-century, and Vladimir Lossky, a well known theologian who died in 1958..... (60.00)

“Icons Speak: Their Message” by Anthony Coniaris

Introducing the Twelve Great Feast Days of Orthodox Christianity through the written and visual Gospel(the Bible and Icon) emphasizing their meaning for us today.(24.00)

“Greek Cooking In An American Kitchen” from St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church in Seattle. (29.00)

Finally... what every Orthodox Christian’s kitchen must have: an icon of the Cook EUPHROSYNOS, whose memory is celebrated on September 11.

ICONS:

Guardian Angel with girl.....(20.00) Guardian Angel with boy.....(20.00)

Holy Trinity (Rublev).....small(10.00) med.(20.00) St Sophia,Faith,Hope & Love,,,small(10.00) med.(20.00)

Panagia med.(20.00) Hospitality of Abraham med. (20.00) St. Nicholas, Help of Mariners.....med(20.00)

There are many more icons from which to choose; we are happy to special order.

We have incense and incense burners; the ceramic burners are beautiful and come in either red or blue. They retail for \$25.00.

The new 2014 icon calendar. The calendar pictures are of the parables and miracles of Christ; by the hand of Dmitry Shkolnik\$14.00

From your parish bookstore, we wish you a
**Happy Thanksgiving, A Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year!**



2014 House and Business Blessings

It is the Tradition of our Orthodox Faith that homes and businesses are blessed every year with the water that has been blessed during the services of Epiphany. During January, Fr. Michael will be available for these home/business blessings. If you would like him to schedule a visit, please fill out the "Request Form" and return it to the parish office as soon as it is convenient. Please mark if you prefer a morning, afternoon, or evening appointment. Fr. Michael will make every attempt to honor these preferences. He will call you back to schedule an appointment. For the house blessing, please have a table, bowl of water, a sprig of basil, and an icon of Christ. If you know someone who may not see this notice but would like their home or business blessed, please contact Fr. Michael.

Home/Business Blessing Request Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Preferred time: Morning _____ Afternoon _____ Evening _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Please cut and return
to St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church 510 E. Sunset Drive, Bellingham, WA 98225
or call Fr. Michael at (360) 734-8745

The Sunday School Christmas Pageant: The Grinch Who Stole Christmas Sunday, December 15th

Christ is Born, Glorify Him! With Christmas quickly approaching, your Sunday School child will be preparing for our annual pageant on Sunday, December 15th, in the Parish Hall, following Divine Liturgy. This year we will perform *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, and we need a little help from you.

Our classes will be rehearsing during Sunday School on Dec. 1st and 8th. If your child will be participating in the performance, please be sure they are here for rehearsal.

For the performance, we need a few props:

- 1-3 Christmas wrapped box (nothing inside), shirt size or larger, by Dec. 8th.
- Funny hat or delibobber (headband thing with antenna or something similar) for your child to be transformed into a Who, by Dec. 8th.
- Who-wear is encouraged (footie PJ's, polka dots, etc) but costume change time is limited.

If you are interested in helping with the set, preparing the hall, or helping dress children, please let your Sunday School teacher know.

Thanks for your support and help!
St Sophia teachers



St. Sophia Youth



"Jingle Bell Run" Members of St. Sophia of all ages are invited to participate in the "Jingle Bell Run" to support the **Arthritis Foundation**. Saturday, Dec. 14th, Registration 8:00 am at Bellingham High School. To register see Eleni Kyriazis or you can register online at www.arthritis.org/programs-events/jingle-bell-run. We are going to run/walk under "Team Orthodox Christian".

GOYA Christmas Party Sat. Dec. 14th, 12-3:00 pm in the Church Hall. For more information, see Eleni Kyriazis.

Youth Service Project: Making sandwiches for the Lighthouse Mission. Sun. Dec. 29th, during coffee hour. Contact: Effie Eisses.

Sunday School Christmas Pageant Sun. Dec. 15th, at the conclusion of Liturgy. Community Christmas party to follow.

Diving for the Cross, Sun. January 12th, 12 noon Location: To be determined. Kids who want to participate in the diving for the cross should, with their parent permission, contact Fr. Michael.

Youth Ice-Skating, Sun. Jan. 26th, 12 noon at the Bellingham Sportsplex.

Help Support Sunday School! Please sign up for the St. Sophia Parish Christmas Card to support the Sunday School program by making a \$20 donation. Sign up forms are available in the narthex or in the fellowship hall. For more information, please contact Georgia Sentkowski or Dalene Piantes. The deadline to sign up is Dec. 8th.

Calling all (junior) architects! Come and build your dream

gingerbread home Sunday, December 22nd, at 1PM in the Parish Hall. Let's get creative, and a bit messy. Parents: All supplies will be provided, but please sign up your child by December 20, on the list in the Parish Hall. Children five and under should have an adult helper during the construction time. Questions, please contact Brooksana Raney at 441-0144.

St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church

510 E. Sunset Dr. Bellingham, WA 98225

