

Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Church

December 2014-January 2015

www.saintsophias.org email: stsophia.bellingham@gmail.com (360) 734-8745

510 East Sunset Drive Bellingham, Washington 98225

God Became Human To Show Us the Way!



By Fr. Thomas FitzGerald

*What shall we offer you, O Christ?
Who for our sake appeared on earth as a human?
Every creature made by you offers you thanksgiving.
The angels offer you a hymn,
The heavens, a star,
The magi, gifts,
The shepherds, their wonder,
The earth, its cave,
The wilderness, a manger,
And we offer to you, a Virgin Mother.*

Hymn from Great Vespers

The simplicity of the story of Christ's birth reveals the depth of God's love and the mystery of His actions in our life. As we celebrate Christmas anew this year, once again Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and wise men, the angels and animals direct our attention to the Lord Jesus. He who is truly the 'way, the truth and the life' (Jn. 14:1) who reveals Himself in the humble circumstances of a cave in Bethlehem. All of time is centered upon his coming. All of creation surrounds Him who fashioned the creation!

The Expression of Divine Love

The story of the birth of Christ is a vivid reminder of the depth of God's love for us. He loves us so much that he has entered into life in this world in the person of Christ. The infinite God mysteriously accepted the limitations of our humanity. It was not enough for God to act through signs and wonders of the physical world. It was not enough for God to guide us through the prophets and teachers of old. No, this was not enough for our God. To express his boundless love for us, the Living God appeared among us in the person of Christ Our Lord. By fully identifying himself with us, Christ has come to teach us, to heal us and to lead us back to the Father. He has come to remind us that we are the Father's precious daughters and sons. As St. John the Evangelist says: "God so loved the world that he sent His Only begotten Son so that all who believe in him will not be lost but will have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).

Many years before the Beatitudes were taught and many years before His glorious Resurrection, Christ revealed God's love for us through the simple events of his birth. The Lord of Glory demonstrated his love for us simply by entering into our life and by



Christmas Services at St. Sophia

Christmas Eve Day
Wednesday, Dec. 24th

9:30 am Royal Hours
6:00 pm Vespers Liturgy

Christmas Day
Thursday, Dec. 25th

8:45am Orthros
9:30 am Divine Liturgy

Epiphany Services

Eve of Theophany
Monday, January 5th

9:30 am Royal Hours
6:00 pm

Vespers Liturgy and Blessing of the Waters

Theophany

Tuesday, January 6th
8:45 am Orthros

9:30 am Liturgy and Blessing of the Waters

St. John the Baptist
Wednesday, January 7th

8:45 am Orthros;
9:30 am Liturgy

sharing in all that is truly human. St. Basil the Great reminds us of this saying: "Every act and every word of our Savior is a guide for holiness and virtue. For this reason he became human, so that in images he may depict both holiness and virtue for us...For this reason he bears a body so that we may imitate His life" (Ascetical Principles, 1)

Through His birth in Bethlehem, Our Lord reveals to us the breath and depth of God's love for us. Whether we see him as the child in Bethlehem, the teacher in Galilee, or the Risen Lord in Jerusalem; Christ is truly the greatest gift of the Father 'for us and for our salvation.'

A Sense of Wonder

The story of Christ's birth speaks to us about the mysterious ways of God. The Triune God acts in ways that we do not always expect! His ways are truly wonder-filled. For centuries, the Ancient Israelites had expected the Messiah. The prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah, called the people to readiness and openness to God's actions. Their message provided the people with indications about the coming Messiah.

Yet, when 'the fullness of time had come' (Gal. 4:4), the Messiah did not arrive as a conquering hero in a golden chariot with pomp and splendor. He was not robed in expensive clothing. He did not appear in the capital city. Throngs of adoring followers did not accompany him.

When the Messiah finally arrived, he came first as a baby. He was born to a young girl who was not formally married. The event occurred in the simple village of Bethlehem. He was sheltered in a place reserved for animals because the inn was full. There, in such simple circumstances, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth..." (Jn.1: 14). This is the mysterious way of God!

Through the Christmas story, Our Lord reveals that God acts in ways that we do not always expect. We cannot shape the mighty acts of God to our limited understanding. The Triune God is greater than our limited perceptions of Him. He acts in mysterious and wondrous ways to draw us to Him and to one another in love.

An Open Heart

The persons who are involved in the story of Christ's birth were all quite different. Mary and Joseph were humble travelers seeking a place of shelter. The shepherds were simple men of the land tending their flocks. The wise men were wealthy and aristocratic foreigners wandering in a strange land.

Yet, each of them shared a common characteristic. They opened their hearts to the actions of the Lord who mysteriously led them to the village of Bethlehem. Each of

them permitted God to act in their lives. Mary and Joseph were willing to change their whole life to nurture and protect the child Jesus. The shepherds were willing to hear the words of the angels. The wise men were willing to follow the star. We remember them to this day because they opened their hearts and trusted in the Lord.

Through His birth in Bethlehem, Jesus reveals that we too must open our hearts to his presence and actions. God wants us to share in His work of reconciliation. Like the participants in the first Christmas, we too are called to be person whose hearts are open to the divine presence and actions.

Centering the Season on Christ

The story of the birth of Christ and its true significance is often clouded by the commercialism of the season. There is a very frenzied pace to these days which can so easily depersonalize us and dampen the true joy of the season. The stores tempt us for weeks on end to buy this thing or buy that thing. Some of us prefer to speak of the 'Holiday Season' rather than of Christmas. Many schools have forbidden the remembrance of Christ's birth in the classroom. Yes, throughout our society, many fail to remember that the coming of Christ is truly at the heart of the Christmas celebrations.

What can we do? Let us remember that the season celebrates the love of God revealed in the coming of Christ. For those with faith, the colored lights, the green trees, the wreaths and the flowers are the symbols of the joy of Christmas. Let us celebrate the joy of Christ's coming!

Let us share the love of God with others. Christ has come to bear witness to the Father's love for us. We too can share this love with others, especially with the poor and less fortunate among us. We can be sensitive to those who cannot easily celebrate because of a loss in their lives. Let us be the ambassadors of God who share His care and philanthropy.

Let us seek the Lord with an open heart as the shepherds and wise men did. This means that we find opportunities for prayer and meditation, for reading the Scriptures related to Christ's coming. This means that we can make Christmas a special day by participating in the Divine Liturgy and by receiving Holy Communion with reverence for God, with faith and with love.

To Christ Our Lord be glory, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Fr. Thomas FitzGerald is Dean and Professor of Church History at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Mass.

**The Ladies Philoptochos of
St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church, Bellingham**

Invites you to a one-day retreat with

Metropolitan Nikitas

of the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute, UC Berkeley

**The Poetry of Christmas:
Ecclesiastical and Secular**

Saturday

December 13th, 2014

St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church
510 East Sunset Drive Bellingham, WA
Phone (360) 734-8745

Schedule:

11:00 am Coffee & Registration
11:30 First Presentation
1:00 Lunch
2:00 Second Presentation
4:00 Great Vespers

A \$15.00 donation will be appreciated,
payable at the door.

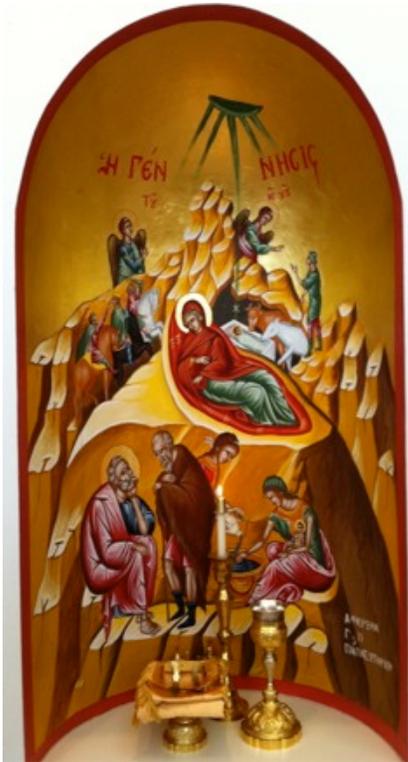
Lunch included.

Retreat includes activities for children.

If you are bringing your children, please contact
Presvytera Elizabeth at elizabeth.tervo@gmail.com

For Directions and other information, visit

www.saintsophias.org



His Eminence, Metropolitan Nikitas is the Director of the Patriarch Athenagoras Institute (PAOI), which is part of the Graduate Theological Union at UC Berkeley. His Eminence, who was born in the United States, was consecrated a Hierarch in 1996 and was enthroned as the first Metropolitan of Hong Kong and South East Asia (the Exarchates of China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore). In 2007, His Eminence was appointed Director of the PAOI. While possessing sterling academic and ministerial credentials from his years of study and service, the Metropolitan is most well known as a refreshingly candid and engaging speaker.



*His Eminence,
Metropolitan Nikitas*

SPIRITUALITY!

**Children's Program
During the Retreat with
Metropolitan Nikitas.**

While His Eminence is speaking to the Adults, we will have activities for kids at the same time.

The schedule:

11 am arrive/coffee

11:30-1 pm Adults: 1st lecture.
Kids: service project making sandwiches for the Lighthouse Mission (thank you Effie Eisses!)

1:00-2:00 pm lunch, all together
(thank you Philoptochos!)

2:00-4:00 pm Adults: 2nd lecture.
Kids' activities Lebanese dance, and craft projects related to St Herman and St. Lucia (thank you to Nadia Boulos, Brooksana Raney, and Tawni Martini)

4:00 pm Great Vespers (all together in church)

We encourage everyone to come and bring their kids! The cost of the retreat is \$15 per adult, with optional donation per child/youth.

Milestones

FUNERAL

The St. Sophia community sends its condolences to Steve Tselios and Star Vagelaras and their families on the falling asleep of their father, Christos Tselios. His funeral was celebrated at the church on Friday, November 7th.

A one-year memorial service was sung in the memory of Gus Ilvanakis on Sunday, October 5th.

*A one-year Trisagion was sung in the memory of **Vasilis Zikakis** on Sunday, November 30th. Vasilis is the father of Andrea Zikakis.*

BAPTISM

***Aggelos Primbas**, son of Peter and Matina Primbas. November 8th. God parents: Stephanos and Paula Margaritis.*



4th Annual Blessing of the Waters and the Diving for the Cross

Sunday, January 11th, 2015

1:00 pm

Location: Lake Padden
By the playground area



2015 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

PHILOPTOCHOS



ST. SOPHIA PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS

The Kids'n'Cancer fundraiser was a success and we are sending a check to Camp Agape in the amount of \$2206.39. A special thank you to the committee of Tula Trames, Georgia Sentkowski, Elizabeth Morgan and Nahla Gholam. Thanks also to Georgia Stennis from St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church in Seattle for her presentation of this special camp that takes place at All Saints Came in Gig Harbor.

The Christmas Tea will be held Saturday, December 6 at 11:00 a.m.. It will be a Christmas ornament exchange and we are also bringing non-perishable food for donation to the food bank. Bring friends and neighbors for fun and fellowship.

Philoptochos-Sponsored Retreat: Mark your calendars for December 13 for our one day retreat with Metropolitan Nikitas.

Invitations have been issued to the churches in Vancouver, BC , Seattle and Tacoma. Thank you, Father Michael for all your guidance and assistance with this wonderful event. During the event we will serve a Lenten lunch. More information will follow in our Sunday bulletin. Children's activities are also planned.

We will be baking Vasilopita between Christmas and the New Year to sell; times and dates to follow. Fr. Michael will cut a Vasilopita for the parish at the end of the Liturgy on Sunday, January 4th. A **Vasilopita auction** will take place during the coffee hour on that day.

I wish you a HAPPY THANKSGIVING, A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY AND BLESSED NEW YEAR.

In Christ, Harieklia Bryant



Philoptochos Vasilopita Cutting and Auction

Sunday, January 4th

Parish Vasilopita Cutting

will take place at the conclusion of the Liturgy.

Vasilopita Auction will take place during the coffee hour.

The Whole Community is Invited...



Saturday, Dec. 6th the Philoptochos is sponsoring a **Christmas Tea and Christmas Ornament Exchange**. The time is 11 am; those attending are asked

to bring a Christmas ornament under \$20. Contact: Harieklia Bryant

ST. SOPHIA BOOKSTORE

The bookstore is a Christian educational outreach ministry to both parishioners and the general public. It is the only store in Bellingham that offers in one place books and other media on the Orthodox Christian Faith.

If you would like to read a book on the Orthodox Christian Faith and need a recommendation, please ask Father Michael.

BOOKS:

1. **Witness of Bartholomew, by our Patriarch**

There are eight individuals who contributed to the creation of this book. His Holiness is one of the top 50 leaders in the world today. This book is in celebration of an outstanding Christian leader on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his enthronement as Ecumenical Patriarch.

\$22.00

2. **The Oxford English-Greek learner's Dictionary.** \$30.00

3. **Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World** by Andrew Walker and Costa Carras

"This book brings together twelve lay and ordained Orthodox writers, who provide profound and fascinating insights into the role and mission of the church in today's world".

\$22.00

4. **The Sign of the Cross;** the gesture, mystery and history \$17.00

5. **The Love Chapter;** meaning of First Corinthians 13 \$13.00

6. **Born to Hate Reborn to Love** \$12.00

7. Several titles of the Loukoumis's children books by Nick Katsoris....\$16.00

Other children book titles:

1. The boy, a Kitchen and His Cave
2. Celebrate the Earth
3. Saint George and the Dragon
4. The Hidden Garden

We have two beautiful coffee table books..

1. Meaning of Icons
2. Greek Vases: The Athenians and their images

**ANNUAL BOOKSTORE SALE: SUNDAY DECEMBER 7
DURING COFFEE HOUR. HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!**

ALL ITEMS 20% OFF.

Coffee Hour Offerings

December 2014 and January 2015

Thank you to the following for offering at Sunday Coffee Hour.

- * Dec. 7th--Georgia Sentkowski & Cheryl Lallas
- * Dec. 14th-- Star Vagelaras--40 day Memorial for Christos Tselios
- * Dec. 21st-- Eleni Kyriazis & Tasia Tsoulouhas-- Children's Christmas Pageant
- Dec. 28th-- Mary Hulbush, Dena Lien & Cherie Webster
- Jan. 4th-- Cristina Gholam & Wafa Gholam
- Jan. 11th--Marina Polichronakis & Eleni Pantoleon
- Jan. 18th--Nia Zourkos, Eleni Mystry, & Tammy Stavropoulos
- Jan. 25th--Effie Eisses & Joyce Piantes

*Please consider offering some lenten foods for those who are following Advent fast.

Thank you for finding a substitute and notifying Dena Lien if you are not able to provide for coffee hour on your scheduled day Please contact Dena at 360-421-3913 or e-mail her at play_ball@comcast.net

Prosporo Bakers

December 2014 and January 2015

Thank your for offering to make Prosporo!

- Nov. 30 Kim Weil (4)
- Dec. 7 Tamara Mattson (4)
- Dec. 14 Brooksana Raney (4)
- Dec. 21 Dionysios Ingraham (5)
- Dec. 28 Sue Raney (4)
- Jan. 4 Harieklia Bryant (6)
- Jan 11 Kim Weil (4)
- Jan. 18 Tamara Mattson (4)
- Jan. 25 Dionysios Ingraham (4)

Warm Jacket and Shoe Drive Please search your closets for jackets and shoes that you and/or your children no longer wear and donate them to the **Lighthouse Mission** before the cold weather hits. A donation box can be found in the fellowship hall. Contact: Kim Weil

Food Bank Collection: Please bring your non-perishable food items to the fellowship hall so they can be donated to the Bellingham Food Bank. Contact: Joyce Piantes



GOYA Christmas Party! Sat. Dec. 14th, 12-3:00 pm in the Church Hall. Thank you to Eleni Kyriazis for organizing the party! All parents will be asked to bring a dish. For more information, see Eleni Kyriazis.

Youth Service Project: Making sandwiches for the Lighthouse Mission. Saturday, Dec. 13th, during retreat with Metropolitan Nikitas. Contact: Effie

Eisses.

Sunday School Christmas Pageant Sun. Dec. 21st, at the conclusion of Liturgy. Community Christmas party to follow.

Diving for the Cross, Sun. January 11th, 12 noon Location: Lake Padden by the playground. Kids who want to participate in the diving for the cross should, with their parent's permission, contact Fr. Michael.

Youth Ice-Skating, Sun. Jan. 18th, 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 minimum donation of \$20. Sign up forms are available in the narthex or in the fellowship hall. For more information, please contact Christos Christophorou. The deadline to sign up is Dec. 14th.

2015 St. Sophia Oratorical Festival: The kids are already working on their speeches! Participants this year have to option of submitting a speech or a poem for presentation after the Liturgy on Sunday, March 15th. This year their will also be an exhibit of Sunday School student art. Grades 3-12. Contact: Presvytera Elizabeth.

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510 E. Sunset Dr. Bellingham, WA 98225

