

Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Church

December 2015-January 2016

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510 East Sunset Drive Bellingham, Washington 98225

Christmas: The Divine Descent



*by Fr. Tom Tsagalakis
Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church
Shoreline, WA*

An extraordinary historical scientific event took place when the Rosetta mission, after traveling 6.4 billion kilometers through the solar system, landed on the comet on November 12, 2014. This space expedition was launched on March 2, 2004 at the tune of \$1,580,000,000. Yes, that is 1.58 billion dollars!!

The scientist's hope was to unlock the mysteries of comets, made from ancient material that predates the birth of the solar system. They want to learn how the solar system formed, and how comets carried water and complex materials to planets. There was even thought of boring into the comet to analyze its properties.

This event reminded me of the space shuttle Columbia where astronaut James Irwin walked on the moon in 1971. He said, "I can't describe the thrill of

looking out into space and seeing it as only a handful of men have ever seen it. The stars and sun offered the most breathtaking colors humankind has ever witnessed...I could hardly contain myself."

"I came to a stop. Moon dust settled down on my boots and chills ran up and down my spine. I thought, WOW!! This is the greatest miracle in the history of the human race. Man is walking on the moon!! Then God spoke to my heart, "No, Jim. It isn't really. The greatest miracle in the history of mankind is not that man walked on the moon, it's that God walked on the earth and lives in your heart... in the Bethlehem of your soul and mine!"

James Irwin reminds us that there cannot be anything that compares to the greatest miracle of Christ entering our space, our world, our heart! No moon walking, no comet landing, no mountain climbing, nothing can be compared to this event!

Continued on page 2...

Christmas Services at St. Sophia

Christmas Eve Day
Thursday, Dec. 24th

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

Christmas Day
Friday, Dec. 25th

8:45am Orthros
9:30 am Divine Liturgy

Epiphany Services

Eve of Theophany
Tuesday, January 5th

9:30 am Royal Hours
6:00 pm
Vespers Liturgy and Blessing of
the Waters

Theophany

Wednesday, January 6th
8:45 am Orthros
9:30 am Liturgy and Blessing of
the Waters

St. John the Baptist

Thursday, January 7th
8:45 am Orthros;
9:30 am Liturgy

God's grand space expedition was launched over 2000 years ago when the Holy Spirit invited a young girl named Mary, the Theotokos to be the vessel to carry Jesus into this world. This expedition does not take billions of dollars, does not need a space shuttle, there is no use for a GPS system or electronic devices to calculate distance or time of travel. You see, this space expedition will land this December 25th.

This Christmas, we experience the most significant space adventure that not only rocked the world but changed the course of humanity! Christ in the most humble and silent way stepped into our space with the hopes of entering the holy sanctuary of our heart so we can be united with Him. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life" Jn 3:16

Yes, the creator of the universe, the one who knows no time, the one who suspends the stars, moon and earth, the one who created light out of darkness, the one who breathed life into the human person came to invite Himself into the space of our heart.

So the miracle is not about walking on the moon, it's not about climbing famous mountains or buying the right gift to show love for our beloved family and friends. The true gift of Christmas comes when we prepare the manger in our heart to receive Christ. When we receive Him, there will be a change and there will be a thirst and hunger for God, for truth, for forgiveness, and for life! When Jesus is allowed to land in our soul, our priorities will be illuminated to focus on making our aim to love and to earnestly desire spiritual gifts.

Just as the scientist's hope was to unlock mysteries of space and solar systems, our Lord came here to unlock the mysteries of life for you and me. Jesus entered our galaxy so we might learn what it means to be human, what it means to be created in His image and likeness. Christmas opens the door to understand and experience that God's energy and life are in us! Christmas is about engaging and embracing this Divine power, this Divine life, this Divine energy that can make us true vessels of the Holy Spirit!

Our church is calling us to the greatest space exploration one could imagine. Yes, a round trip ticket to the moon and back will be about \$700 million dollars but the journey I'm talking about is available at no cost, this journey that will change your life is the '30cm descent'.

Yes, this Christmas we are called to travel to eternity which is 30cm, about 11.81 inches from our head to our heart. God created everything beautiful in its time and has planted eternity in the human person's heart. It is in the heart that we will find true life. It is the heart that resonates with the kingdom of heaven and it is the heart that must be tuned in to prayer, to the right frequency of peace and silence.

So this Christmas let us all acknowledge that we have this divine power within us, in our heart! And the only response when we realize this truth is to experience it fully and to travel wherever it takes to live in this Holy Space. It is not about traveling outwards, not about traveling to Mt. Athos, or the Holy land. It is not about getting on an airplane, space shuttle, or mountain expedition.

Simply put, it is about traveling the 30 cm descent from the head to the heart! We ascend to God by descending in our heart to meet Jesus in that sacred space of eternity!

Have a blessed Christmas!



The Nativity Sermon of St. John Chrysostom



BEHOLD a new and wondrous mystery!

My ears resound to the Shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn. The Angels sing. The Archangels blend their voice in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory. All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He Who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised.

Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolds within itself on every side, the Sun of justice. And ask not how: for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed; He had the power; He descended; He redeemed; all things yielded in obedience to God. This day He Who is, is Born; and He Who is, becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is His. Nor yet by any loss of divinity became He man, nor through increase became He God from man; but being the Word He became flesh, His nature, because of impassability, remaining unchanged.

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him Angels, nor Archangels, nor Thrones, nor Dominations, nor Powers, nor Principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Since this heavenly birth cannot be described, neither does His coming amongst us in these days permit of too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a Virgin this day gave birth, and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of this generation I have learned to venerate in silence and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech.

For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of Him who works.

What shall I say to you; what shall I tell you? I behold a Mother who has brought forth; I see a Child come to this light by birth. The manner of His conception I cannot comprehend.

Nature here rested, while the Will of God labored. O ineffable grace! The Only Begotten, Who is before all ages, Who cannot be touched or be perceived, Who is simple, without body, has now put on my body, that is visible and liable to corruption. For what reason? That coming amongst us he may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that men cannot see. For since men believe that the eyes are more trustworthy than the ears, they doubt of that which they do not see, and so He has deigned to show Himself in bodily presence, that He may remove all doubt.

Christ, finding the holy body and soul of the Virgin, builds for Himself a living temple, and as He had willed, formed there a man from the Virgin; and, putting Him on, this day came forth; unashamed of the lowliness of our nature.

For it was to Him no lowering to put on what He Himself had made. Let that handiwork be forever glorified, which became the cloak of its own Creator. For as in the first creation of flesh, man could not be made before the clay had come into His hand, so neither could this corruptible body be glorified, until it had first become the garment of its Maker.

What shall I say! And how shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infants bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His Goodness.

For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, to sanctify me; He gives me His Spirit that He may save me.

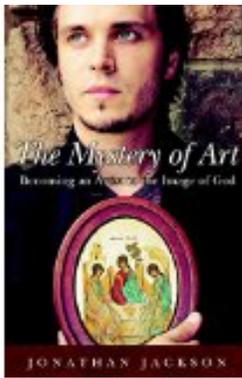
Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been 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 infants 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 Spirit, we offer all praise, now and forever. Amen.



The Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem. The silver star marks the spot where Jesus was born.



Come, Join the St. Sophia Book Group...

Meets once a month to discuss and read books that will be edifying to the Faith. It will meet Wednesday December 16 at 1:00 pm to discuss: **The Mystery of Art** by Jonathan Jackson.

The Book Group will meet Wed. January 10th at 1:00 pm to discuss the book **Diakonia** by Deacon John Chryssavgis.

For more information, please contact Presvytera Elizabeth at elizabeth.tervo@gmail.com

Book Group Book Review

In November, the St Sophia Book Group read and discussed ***The Scent of Holiness***, by Constantina Palmer.

Constantina, now a Presvytera, spent a lot of time in Greece staying at monasteries and learning about the Orthodox faith, while she and her husband were still pretty new converts. This sweet, innocent and humble lady taught us a lot. She tells a lot of anecdotes about the nuns and their lives which are interesting and reveal that we Orthodox are all, whether inside the monastery walls or outside, learning and growing in our faith. Most touching of all was the story of the death and burial of one of the nuns, which all the sisters face with the certainty of eternal life.

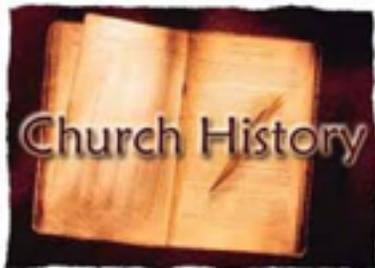
Join us on December 16 at 1:00 pm as we discuss ***The Mystery of Art-Becoming an Artist in the Image of God.***

-Presvytera Elizabeth



Orthodox Christian Fellowship: The OCF is a ministry to college students at WWU and other local colleges where they can meet with other Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians to learn about the Orthodox Faith. For more info, contact Matthew Macris at matt.macris@outlook.com

www.ocf.org



Church History Class at St. Sophia

This class is for anyone who wants to know about the early history of the Church, whether they are inquirers looking for information about Orthodoxy or Orthodox

Christians who want to expand their knowledge of the Church. The class will be taught by Father Michael.

Missed the classes so far? Join us anyways! You will be able to follow along easily.

Upcoming Classes

Dec. 2nd- First Ecumenical Council

Dec. 9th - Second Ecumenical Council

Dec. 16th- Third Ecumenical Council

Jan. 13th , 2016- Fourth Ecumenical Council

Jan. 20th- Fifth and Sixth Ecumenical Councils

Jan. 27th- Seventh Ecumenical Council



Fr. Michael and
Presvytera
Elizabeth invite
you to their

Open House Christmas Party

**Saturday,
December 19 th**

At the Tervo Home... 2:00-4:00 pm.
for directions call
call (360) 303-8242

The St. Sophia
Sunday School
Christmas Pageant...

"A Christmas Alphabet"

Sunday, December 20th
in the church after Liturgy.

Parents and teachers, please bring a
dish for coffee hour (no meat).

Parents, please advise a teacher if you
would like to help with the pageant!



4th Annual

Blessing of the Waters and the Diving for the Cross

Sunday, January 10th, 2016
1:00 pm (After Coffee Hour at Church)
Location: Marine Park
Near Ferry Building



2016 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:

to

Fr. Michael

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



PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS December/January

We, in Philoptochos, are thankful to God for a wonderful year 2015; one where we gave of our time and talents to help others and made a difference!

As we move forward we have many events on our agenda.

The Christmas Tea and Ornament Exchange will take place on December 12, at 11:30 a.m. All are welcome to bring an ornament and join us. Chairperson Dee Piantes can answer any questions you may have. 360-224-2311

Christmas Gifts for Children: Also this month, Dorine Boulos, chairperson for our Boys Club/Girls Club, will have a board set up in the parish hall with tags for gifts to give. Last year we gave 56 gifts to children, who were thrilled. We do not give toys...only essentials. Each tag will give you an idea of what to give.

Vasilopita Auction: In March, 1944, Archbishop Athenagoras recommended that the Philoptochos Society purchase the 250 acre Rupert Estate in Garrison, New York, located on the shores of the Hudson River, directly across from the United States Military Academy at West Point. With the purchase, Philoptochos undertook the daunting task of completely renovating the property. Today, Philoptochos remains a major financial supporter of the Academy through two ministry commitments. One major fundraiser is the call for each Chapter to hold a Vasilopita auction. We will have our **Vasilopita Auction** on January 10 during coffee hour in support of the Academy of Saint Basil.

Many thanks to those in our Philoptochos who baked their favorites for our annual bake sale. Thanks also to all the parishioners who purchased.

We have provided Father Michael with food gift cards for him to pass out to those who knock on the parish door needing food.

MAY YOU HAVE A BLESSED CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

In Christ,

Harieklia Meras-Bryant, president
Dorine Boulos, vice president
Nahla Gholam, secretary
Elizabeth Morgan, treasurer



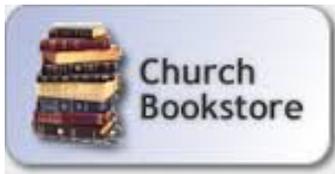
Philoptochos Vasilopita Cutting and Auction Sunday, January 10th

Parish Vasilopita Cutting will take place at the conclusion of the Liturgy.

Vasilopita Auction will take place during the coffee hour. Please bake and bring a vasilopita to sell for a great cause! Proceeds to benefit St. Basil Academy, the Philoptochos Sponsored orphanage located in Garrison, New York.



On Saturday, Dec. 12th 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. Everyone Young and Young at Heart come join us! Contact: Dalene Piantes



BOOKSTORE NEWS DECEMBER JANUARY

Our parish bookstore has many wonderful items for giving and getting.

BOOKS:

- THE ORTHODOX STUDY BIBLE..... \$49.95
- THE ASCETIC LIVES OF MOTHERS(a prayer book for Orthodox moms) by Annalisa Boyd..... \$12.95
- THE SCENT OF HOLINESS by Palmer..... \$18.95
- TRAVELING COMPANIONS by Moore..... \$18.95

DECEMBER BOOK CLUB...Meets December 16.
bookclub price for December is.....\$14.00

THE MYSTERY OF ART by Jonathan Jackson, an Emmy award actor and musician explores the profound implications of human creativity in the image of God. The true Christian artist is one who creates through the power of Holy Spirit to the glory of God. Questions: contact Presvytera Elizabeth 360-303-8242

- **THIRSTING FOR GOD IN A LAND OF SHALLOW WELLS..**\$16.95
- **OUR THOUGHTS DETERMINE OUR LIVES.....** \$15.00

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

- **H is for Holy: An Orthodox Christian Alphabet....** \$18.95
- **Celebrating the Twelve Days of Christmas:** (Family devotional in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition)
- **Pictures of God** (child's guide to understanding icons....\$12.95
- **Saint Nicholas and the Nine Gold Coins.....** \$20.00
- **Saint George and the Dragon.....** \$20.00

WE HAVE CHRISTMAS CARDS
BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS WITH
ORTHODOX DESIGNS HAND-PAINTED \$30.00.;
Tapestry bookmarks at \$3.00; incense and incense
burners; and MUCH MORE!

We have Spanish olive oil, Greek honey, ouzo candy in gift jars; and MORE

COME AND TAKE A LOOK!

We are open every Sunday following the Divine Liturgy

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from your friends at the St. Sophia Bookstore!

St. Sophia Choir

Many thanks to all our choir members for their faithful service!

As a choir, our task is not to perform, but to lead our fellow faithful in worship. In order to lead well, we as a choir need to be confident and united.

Toward that end, I as your director am making a few adjustments to our usual habits. We will be holding practice once every month, beginning Sunday, December 13. While as always anyone is welcome to join the choir at any time, I ask that henceforth anyone who has not attended the last practice (whether a current or new member) meet with me before joining us in the choir loft, as it is very important that we all be on the same page.

Please feel free to e-mail me with any questions at tawnimartini@icloud.com. Thank you! Tawni Rebecca Martini, choir director

Coffee Hour Offerings December 2015 and January 2016

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

- Dec. 6--Brooksana Raney *
- Dec. 13--Cristina Gholam and Nadia Boulos*
- Dec. 20--Marina Polichronakis and Eleni Pantoleon*
- Dec. 27--Nia Zourkos and Eleni Mistry
- Jan. 3--Effie Eisses and Joyce Piantes
- Jan. 10--Voula Parks, Jaimee Twining, & Loree Foote
- Jan. 17--Cristina Faulkner and Ioana Aluash
- Jan 24--Evelyn Lallas and Tula Trames
- Jan. 31--Yanolla Boulos and Nahla Gholam

* **Nativity Fast**-- Lenten food only please -- fish is allowed

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 2015 and January 2016

Thank your for offering to make Prosporo!

- Dec. 6 -- Harieklia Bryant (4)
- Dec. 13-- Kim Weil (5)
- Dec. 20-- Brooksana Raney (6)
- Dec. 27-- Adrienne Hunter (4)
- Jan. 3-- Sue Moyer (6)
- Jan. 10-- Tasia Tsoulouhas (4)
- Jan. 17-- Tamara Mattson (4)
- Jan. 24-- Christos Christoforu (4)
- Jan 31-- Harieklia Bryant (4)

Left-over Wine from the Festival is available for sale. To see the selection and/or to purchase some, please see Georgia Sentkowski or another parish council member.

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

Special Note on the Upcoming Parish Council Elections: According to the *Archdiocese Regulations* which govern this parish 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 2016 year. Therefore the elections will still take place on **Sunday, Dec. 13th**. Absentee ballots are available in the church office. Please call Fr. Michael to set up an appointment to pick up absentee ballots.

St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church

510 E. Sunset Dr. Bellingham, WA 98225

**DECEMBER
2015-
JANUARY
2016**



St. Sophia Youth & Family Trip to “The Lights of Christmas” at Warm Beach Camp, Stanwood. Friday, Dec. 11th. *To rsvp, please email Fr. Michael by Dec. 8th.* Cost: Youth age 4-12, \$11; Adults \$13+ \$16. Drivers and chaperones needed. For more information: Fr. Michael

Sunday School will be held December up to the Christmas Pageant on December 20th. No classes December 27th or January 3rd. Classes will meet January 10, 17, 24 and 31.

Sunday School Christmas Pageant Sun. Dec. 20th, at the conclusion of Liturgy.

Diving for the Cross, Sun. January 10th, 12 noon Location: Marina Park, by the Ferry Building. 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. 17th, 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. 13th.

2016 St. Sophia Oratorical Festival: This Spring. Dates and Topics TBA. Contact: Presvytera Elizabeth.