

THE MESSENGER

ST. GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
BANGOR, MAINE

EDITORS:
AMBROSE &
MARINA
SMITHERMAN

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Feast of St. Lucia Celebrated on December 13th



St. Lucia was born in the late 3rd century, in Sicily. Her mother raised her as a Christian in a time when it was very dangerous to be a Christian. Her mother planned for her to marry someone who was not a Christian, but Lucia wanted to be a bride of Christ more than anything.

Lucia's mother became very ill and Lucia convinced her to go on pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Agatha. St. Agatha appeared to them, told Lucia God was pleased with her desire to remain unmarried, and St. Agatha also healed her mother of her illness. Lucia gave all her money away to the poor thus could never marry because she had no dowry.

Her fiancé became so angry that he had her arrested because she was a Christian and when she refused to worship idols, she felt determined to give her life for her love of Christ. Lucia was tortured because of her Christian faith and gave up her spirit into the hands of her heavenly Bridegroom. She was buried with honor and became the patron saint of her city, Syracuse.

Many years later, during the Middle Ages in Sweden, the people of southern Sweden were starving. On the darkest day of the most terrible winter of all, they saw a boat sailing toward them across a lake. Instead of a dragon's head at the prow, there stood a beautiful maiden, dressed all in white and glowing with an unearthly light. When the boat reached the land, the maiden was St. Lucia who handed out huge sacks of wheat to all the people until the boat was empty. The people had bread to eat all winter long and did not starve through this miracle of the Saint.

It is said that Lucia used to visit Christians hiding in the catacombs also. In order to keep her hands free to carry the food she brought them, she wore candles on her head. There are many illustrations of the Christian Lucia wearing a wreath of candles on her head to light her way to the prison.

In some pictures, Lucia wears a lovely white dress because she is a bride of Christ our Lord. She wears a red sash because she was martyred for Christ. The bread she gives reminds us of the wheat she brought to the people of Sweden, and they are often made in the shape of a cross.

Let us remember and honor St. Lucia on her feast day, December 13, who brings us light and hope as we ponder her beautiful life lived fully for Christ.

Dear Fellow Members of the St. George Family,

Greetings to all! As we celebrate the joyous Holiday season of Thanksgiving, Christmas and Epiphany, I want to thank all of you for creating the very special environment of love and warmth that is Saint George. I thank the members of the Parish Council for their unselfish service to Saint George. I am so grateful that we share our community with Father Leo and Presbyteria Candace.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Church over the next few months as we celebrate the birth of our Savior. Thank you my brothers and sisters in Christ for being my strength during a trying year. As usual the spirit and love of the Saint George family was greater than all difficulties presented during the year.

As a community and a family, Saint George is shining in the light of Orthodoxy. We are strong in our faith and each other. Thank you to the entire Parish family both here and our special family who are now away from Bangor. We are, and will always be, a strong, joyous and loving community.

Please feel free to contact me at any time to offer your wisdom or guidance. Should any of you ever have any questions about the operations of the Parish please do not hesitate to inquire. All information belongs to you, the parishioners of Saint George. The Parish Council strives to maintain a culture of respect peace, love and humility though transparency.

Yours in the love of Our Lord,
May God Bless All of Us
Lee P. Speronis
President, Parish Council 2015



The Messenger publication is now only twice a year, for Christmas and Pascha. Fr. Leo posts a weekly church bulletin which is available at the church web site: www.stgeorge.me.goarch.org

Underwriting *The Messenger*

We invite parishioners to help subsidize our newsletter. You can support publication of *The Messenger* by becoming a Messenger Patron @ \$50.00 for the year.

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*Thy Nativity, O Christ our God,
hath shone to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it those who worshiped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
the Sun of Righteousness,
and to know Thee,
the Orient from on high
O Lord, glory to Thee!*

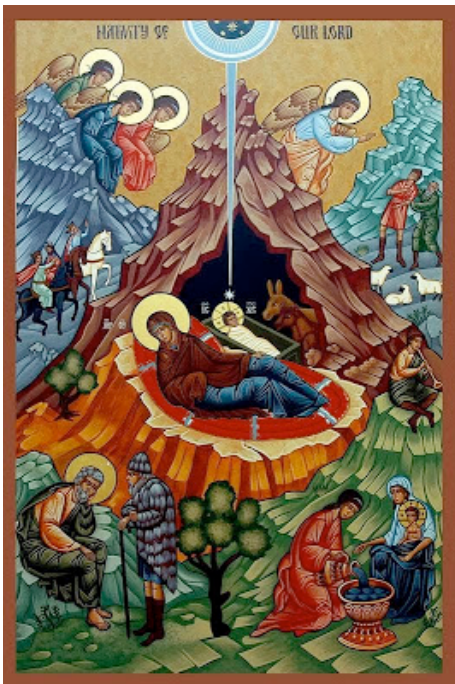
THEOLOGY IN COLOR

When I became Orthodox back in the early 90's one of the things that "drew me" was the iconography. I was familiar with Western style sacred art, but Byzantine iconography got my attention in a different way. For one thing, it appeared "other worldly" and it seemed right to me that it should be so. As I continued in my newfound interest, I learned that icons were referred to as "theology in color" and occupied the role of a teaching tool by the Church. Whether a person was literate or not or had access to the sacred Scriptures, an icon was (and still is) a vehicle used to communicate sacred truths to us.

I remember the first explanation I heard about the icon of our Lord's Nativity. Of course, I'd heard the account, but by having the icon "explained" to me by someone who was familiar with it, I learned more than I saw at first glance. These days, if one has computer access, there is a lot that can be learned about iconography. While pondering this article, I did some searching on-line and came across a site that I'd like to recommend to you by the Antiochian Archdiocese. Here is an explanation of the Nativity icon, at your fingertips: <http://www.antiochian.org/icons-explained-nativity> Use the computer mouse and move over the icon and click on the "hot spots" and learn about the details.

I think the Antiochians have done a great job here. They've done a nice job of covering the bases—I would add that the infant Christ is wrapped in swaddling bands and actually appears as one would be wrapped at the time of burial in the Jewish culture of that day. The cave in which the Holy Family took shelter at the time of birth looks like the cave that would have entombed Christ at His burial. There are more similarities between this icon of our Lord's Nativity and that of His death and Resurrection than we see at a glance. Of course, we know that Jesus became incarnate to die for us on the Cross. That was His mission. Iconography gives glimpses of theology's depths.

Below is yet another icon of our Lord's Nativity that I would like to draw attention to. This time, you do not need internet access to observe these things:



Often in iconography, we see a number of things happening in a single icon. The Nativity icon is like this.

Note the Star of Bethlehem at the top center which directed the Magi, shown on horseback traveling, following the Star, coming from afar to seek and do homage to the newborn King of Israel.

The heavenly host (angels on high) are singing in the heavens and telling the Good News to the lowly shepherds who, understandably, appear somewhat taken aback in amazement.

At the bottom right, there is a depiction of the midwives washing the newborn Jesus. And, at the bottom left, we have Joseph, the Betrothed, and Satan in the guise of an old man tempting Joseph with doubts.

The stable and manger were in a cave. Here the cave represents the darkness of the world due to sin. Jesus, however, illumines it by His grace. In the cave there are animals which bring to mind the prophecy of Isaiah from the Old Testament, "The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know; my people do not understand," Isaiah 1:3.

Most prominent in the icon, is the Theotokos resting on a red blanket, the color of life. She conceived as a Virgin and gave birth as a Virgin and remains Ever-Virgin.

What is our response? GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST AND ON EARTH PEACE AND GOOD WILL TO MEN. ALLELUIA!

This is a bright feast on our Church calendar, not quite as bright as Holy Pascha, but it has a gravity of joy attached to it—Emmanuel has come—God with us! The Nativity feast is commemorated with Twelve Days of joy feasting. These days of feasting and joy are in session from the 25th of December through the 4th of January. Only on January 5 do we hold a fast in anticipation of Holy Theophany on January 6. So, please, commemorate this feast with honor, remember that God has come into the world to save sinners and to bring hope to us now and an eternity of joy for those who seek to follow Him and hold their faith until the end. Let's use the greeting for the season, "Christ is Born!" we say. Glorify Him!" is the response. Let it ring in our hearts and in those who hear and respond with faith. Indeed, let us glorify Him this season and throughout our lives. +Fr. Leo

The Parish Council gives special thanks to **Cynthia Karris** and **Cathy Speronis** for once again surpassing their past success. The 8th Annual Dancing with the Greeks was a huge success not only as a fundraiser but as a time to greatly enjoy each other's company. Very importantly we almost filled the hall with Parishioners, Visitors and Friends. **Dr. Lambros Karris** dedicated his time on each Wednesday in October by giving dance lessons to all. He also had the exciting idea to bring two amazing Greek musicians from Boston to join us, as the Parish of Saint George celebrated with fabulous food, amazing music and lots of dancing! OPA!



The 13th version of the Greek Taverna at the American Folk Festival once again was a huge success. This was the 13th year for Saint George to be at the festival and Cathy and I have had the great pleasure of leading this very important fundraiser for an 11th year. The Festival booth revenue represents nearly 20% of our annual budget. We would like to thank all those who volunteered their time, energy and love during the four days of joyous activity on behalf of our Parish. The Saint George Taverna is considered by the Folk Festival organizers as the cornerstone of the food vendors. Our booth is brilliantly showcased by our smiling volunteers who welcome all to the booth not only for some spectacular food but also to share our culture! Once again and for the 11th straight year our booth was rated the best of all the food vendors by the over 100,000 folks who visit the Bangor Waterfront every August. Thank you!



SUNDAY SCHOOL IS UNDERWAY

The “Clean Slates,” our youngest class (ages 4-6/7), meet the first Sunday of each month, right after Divine Liturgy, in the “window room” upstairs. Athanasia Panakis is the teacher. Parents, you may want to accompany your wee ones in the class if they rely on you somewhat heavily.

The Junior class (ages 8-12) meets every 2nd-5th Sunday of the month, right after Divine Liturgy in the “window room” upstairs. (Kids have opportunity to go through the food line downstairs and bring up a plate up to class if desired.) Classes run 30-45 minutes. Parents and other adults are welcome to sit in on the class, too. We are studying Scenes from the Life of Christ from the Gospel of Luke. Teacher is Presbyteria Candace.

Teens (ages 13+) have an on-line class orchestrated by Dr. Dave Walter. They will also meet regularly for fun activities: movie nights, game nights, bowling, skating, skiing, sledding, etc. Contact Dr. Dave to get involved: sikirie@gmail.com.

CHRISTMAS SERVICE TIMES:

December 24th

5:30 pm Vespers Liturgy for the Nativity of our Lord

December 25th

9 am Orthros with Divine Liturgy following for the Nativity of our Lord

*O inexpressible mystery and unheard paradox;
the Invisible is seen;
the Intangible is touched;
the Eternal Word becomes accessible to our speech;
the Timeless steps into time;
the Son of God becomes the Son of Man.*
~ St. Gregory of Nyssa

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

In the spirit of giving... There's a principle found throughout the Scriptures concerning giving. It's this: When you give, you gain what you cannot buy with your money. What do I mean? In Mark 14:3-9, a woman gave Jesus a gift of precious ointment. There were some that saw who called her gift a “waste.” They said the ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus rebuked their hypocrisy, for gifts given from the heart are always accepted by the Lord. This woman gave Jesus something precious, her best gift, the best she could do.

When you give to the church, is the gift merely a token gift or is it a generous gift, coming from a loving heart? Notice what else Jesus said about this woman's gift, *“Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”* **She couldn't buy that kind of testimony for any amount of money; but giving obtained it for her.**

Your giving does not stop when you write a check for stewardship. Your giving continues to live on as a testimony to God's presence. Your money is transformed into the service of Orthodoxy on the parish, Metropolis, Archdiocesan, and Patriarchal level. You can't put a price on that. You cannot buy the blessings of God, but **through giving you can release God's blessing through the Church.**

When deciding on your Stewardship commitment for 2016, will you give in the spirit of the woman who anointed Jesus with the costly ointment? Have you increased your Stewardship commitment for 2016 over that of 2015? If you haven't, maybe you should reconsider. Does your giving reflect generosity of spirit, which provides blessings that money cannot buy? Does your Stewardship commitment for 2016 reflect a loving, generous gift coming from your heart?

Let's all join hearts and hands today in the Body of Christ and give our best to the work of the Lord for 2016. May the Lord say about you: “He has given his best,” “She has given her best.”

**ST. GEORGE GREEK
ORTHODOX CHURCH**

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