

**The Orthodox Parish
of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
Lancaster, UK.**

The Stavronian

Monthly magazine and newsletter published by the Holy Cross Synodia



*Ἐπιθρονος Χριστός, Ζωοδότης.
(Φ. Κόντογλου, 1962).*

*The Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
belongs to the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland.
The Patriarchate of Antioch is third senior of the Orthodox Churches.
Our Metropolitan is His Eminence Bishop Silouan.
Our Patriarch is His Beatitude John X.*

*The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch
(Acts 11:26)*

Often, goes the Christ in the stranger's guise

WE WORSHIP THY NATIVITY, O, CHRIST!

"Today He Who in essence is God intangible and holdeth all creation in His hand is born of the Virgin and creation in His hand is born of the virgin and wrapped in swaddling bands. He lieth in a manger Who established in a manger Who established the heavens by His word in the beginning. He is fed at the breast with milk Who rained down manna upon the people in the wilderness. The Bridegroom of the church summoneth the magi; the Son of the virgin receiveth their gifts. We worship Thy Nativity, O Christ!
We worship Thy Nativity, O Christ!
Show us also Thy divine Theophany. "

OPEN THE DOOR!

Open the door, Christian man and woman! is the first line of one of the most popular Romanian Christmas carols. Advent and especially the Feast of the Nativity are the time to open our door and our heart. This is often very uncomfortable and difficult. Opening up our homes and ourselves to others leaves us vulnerable, tired, unsettled.

In *Prayers of Life* the poet Michel Quoist describes the miracle which happens when we open the door of our heart to allow people to come in:

*"Lord, I was so peaceful at home, I was so comfortably settled.
It was well furnished, and I felt cosy.
I was alone, I was at peace,
Sheltered from the wind, the rain, the mud.
I would have stayed unsullied in my ivory tower.
But, Lord you have discovered a breach in my defences,
You have forced me to open my door,
Like a squall of rain in the face, the cry of men has awakened me;
Like a gale of wind a friendship has shaken me,
As a ray of light slips unnoticed, your grace has stirred me...and rashly enough I left my door ajar. Now, Lord, I am lost!*

*Outside men were lying in wait for me.
I did not know they were so near; in this house, in this street, in this office; my neighbour, my colleague, my friend.
As soon as I started to open the door I saw them, with outstretched hands, burning eyes, longing hearts, like beggars on church steps.
[...]
They don't come alone any longer but in groups, bound one to another.
They come bending under heavy loads; loads of injustice, of resentment and hate, of suffering and sin...
They drag the world behind them, with everything rusted, twisted or badly adjusted.
[...]*

*I can't do anything any more; as they come in, they push the door and the door opens wider...
Lord! My door is wide open!
I can't stand it any more! It's too much! It's no kind of a life!
What about my job?
My family?
My peace?
My liberty?
And me?
Lord I have lost everything. I don't belong to myself any longer;
There's no more room for me at home. "*

But the Lord answers his prayer:

*"While men came in to you,
I, your Father,
I, your God,
Slipped in among them. "*

As Saint Joseph and the Mother of God travel along and knock on doors to find a place for the Lord Jesus to be born, they knock on every Christian's door and ask to be allowed in. Let us open the door and allow our brothers and sisters to come in to our hearts, let us invite Christ to be born in our homes and in our hearts. Let us welcome Him to bring light and joy into our darkness. From the cave of Bethlehem shines out the hope of redemption and resurrection. Throw open your door without fear!

Martha and Mary

WHERE IS BETHLEHEM?

Micah 5:

*2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands
of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting."*

Where is the Christ who comes to save?
Has heavens home become a cave?
Was God made human flesh from Word?
Were angel voices over heard?
At Bethlehem

Was the Christ found in a manger?
Did He Behold the world as stranger?
Does the Light from Light out shine
The darkness of our life and line?
In Bethlehem

Is Wisdom's power for fools below?
Did He "Who is" cause us to know
The love of God in Mary's Son?
Immanent yet Transcendent One
Of Bethlehem

"I am the Life," our Saviour said.
Where is this house of Living bread?
Where does our birth to new life start?
The chamber of a loving heart
Is Bethlehem

St. Athanasius of Alexandria (On the Incarnation, 54): "For He was made man that we might be made God (divine)"

GRUMBLING

"We must begin with thanksgiving for everything. The beginning of joy is to be content with your situation" (St Ambrose of Optina)

The history of humankind consists of one long list of grumbling. Adam and Eve grumbled that they were not allowed to eat the most attractive fruit in the garden, Cain grumbled against Abel that his offering was more pleasing to the Lord, the Israelites grumbled against their lot in Egypt but

grumbled even more against Moses and their God for leading them into the desert: the manna from Heaven wasn't filling enough, not enough water, they were too tired. The brother of the prodigal son grumbled against the Father

"Lo, These many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends." (Luke 15: 29-30)

Nothing is ever fair enough or good enough for us: Paradise, manna from Heaven, the love of our Father. We grumble against our parents for not raising us properly, against our teachers for giving us homework, against our husbands and wives for not helping enough, against the NHS for being slow, against the government. We are so used to doing it we hardly notice it. Grumbling appears to be a little daily sin which we tolerate, but in fact it is a great sin against God. What we implicitly mean in our grumbling is that what God has provided for us is not good enough, not fair, not right for us.

"Grumbling is caused by misery and it can be put aside by doxology (glorifying and thanking God). Grumbling begets grumbling and doxology begets doxology. When someone doesn't grumble over a problem troubling him, but rather glorifies God, then the devil gets frustrated and goes off to someone else who grumbles, in order to cause everything to go even worse for him. You see, the more one grumbles, the more one falls into ruin." (St Paisios the Athonite)

The irony is that we accuse our own children and young people of being ungrateful. "In my day..." often prefaces our thoughts. As a parent I have learnt that giving in endlessly to a child's demands does not trigger satisfaction or gratefulness on their part. In fact quite the opposite. It seems the more one has, the more things they ask for and the less they appreciate what they have. I have also learnt that you can never have enough to satisfy a child's desires. Two children playing together will often squabble over the pine cones, whether you provided one, two or twenty, they will often find a reason to claim they have less cones or of a poorer quality than the other child or that they are entitled to more than the other.

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

We, Martha and Mary, are great grumblers ourselves, just like Martha of the Bible. Our discontent often resembles a slow bubbling pot of water on the hob. After a lot of bubbling and complaining about how things are, we realize our foolishness and think of all the things we ought to be grateful for. But this is only a first step we are grateful in our mind but it needs to reach our heart.

I once heard a story of somebody who had been ill and had made a very long stay in hospital. She felt abandoned, uncared for, despondent and was very wishful to go back to her home and family. The nurses were too busy to pay her much attention, the food was very bad and the bed uncomfortable. Then, in the bed next to hers, the nurse brought a man who was very dirty and unkempt. He had very advanced cancer. This man's eyes lit up when he saw the clean white bed and looked positively delighted when food was brought round. He was a homeless man, for whom a stay in hospital was a rare treat. The lady's grumbling ceased and thankfulness replaced it.

The antidote of grumbling is Thanksgiving.

"Happiness can only be achieved by looking inward and learning to enjoy whatever life has and this requires transforming greed into gratitude." (St John Chrisostom)

Grumbling is in fact a manifestation of greed ("not enough") and pride ("we deserve better"). Modesty and humility then are the building blocks to thankfulness.

"The truly intelligent man pursues one sole objective: to obey and conform to the God of all. With this single aim in view, he disciplines his soul, and whatever he may encounter in the course of his life, he gives thanks to God for the compass and depth of his providential ordering of all things" (St Anthony the Great)

Let us therefore school ourselves to rejoice in all that is given to us and when the grumbling demon comes to tempt us, let us say from our hearts, in the words of the psalm *"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth."* (Psalm 33)

"For if God does not for a moment tire of giving us good things, how can we tire of thanking Him for these good things?" (St Nikolai Velimirovich)

Martha and Mary

Christmas is one of the most important holidays in Christianity during which the Birth of Jesus is commemorated. People celebrate this beautiful holiday all around the world. I had the opportunity to celebrate Christmas in three countries: Ukraine, United Kingdom and the USA. I remember when we were kids in Ukraine we used to celebrate Rizdvo (Christmas in Ukrainian) in January. We decorated a Christmas tree at home. Usually we had a school break during this time and we visited our Grandparents who lived in a small town and a village.

My Grandmother was a great cook, she cooked delicious Christmas meals with ancient recipes. There were pierogi, but unlike the Polish pierogi, these reminded small buns made from yeast dough with delicious stuffing, savory and sweet. We liked the sweet ones with poppy seeds, with preserved berries and sweet farm cheese. My grandma also cooked a goose with stew cabbage, pork stew, pork sausages, and the 'holodets'. The latter dish was made from different kinds of meat with bones and boiled for a very long time; after removing the bones and refrigerating, it became like savoury meat jelly, usually served with a mix of grated horseradish and beetroot juice, or with mustard. There were lots of Ukrainian dishes, but the main Christmas dish was Kutia. Kutia is made from boiled rice or wheat and mixed with raisins or other dried fruits and served with uzvar, honey syrup. Most joyous moments for me were when the whole family -- our Grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins -- gathered and celebrated together.

When we visited my Father's parents, we went to other houses (mostly grandparents' friends) and were singing Christmas Carols. People gave kids candies and cookies, mandarins and some little money. When we were kids, it was our favorite time with a Christmas tree and a lot of sweets and presents around.

After I got married, I travelled with my husband. I had an opportunity to move to Lancaster (United Kingdom), and we attended the Lancaster Orthodox Church where we met our Spiritual Father, Father Jonathan. Once I asked him how to celebrate the Church holidays, because our Churches have different calendars. He replied that we should celebrate the holiday according to the

Church which we attend. Thus, we started celebrating Christmas on December 25. When my daughter was born, she started celebrating on December 25 as well, but she knew that our family in Ukraine celebrates this feast on January 7.

We used to attend beautiful Christmas Liturgies in the Lancaster Orthodox Church, followed by a wonderful Christmas potluck dinner celebrated with Father Jonathan and other parish members together like a big family.

Sometimes other friends invited us to their homes, where I tried the traditional food served in the United Kingdom on Christmas, including delicious turkey stuffed with minced meat, vegetables, unique Christmas pudding and delicious mince pies with tea.

I remember that there were beautiful Christmas lights and decorations. Christmas trees could be seen everywhere: in streets, buildings and malls. Amazing Christmas markets, especially a French market in Lancaster, could be visited at

those times. In addition, I admired wonderful Christmas cards in the United Kingdom --- they were the best I have ever seen.

A few years later we moved to the USA because of my husband's job. In America, the Christmas season begins right after Thanksgiving day, which is celebrated on last Thursday of November with a delicious Thanksgiving meal: roast turkey, stuffing, green beans, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie, sweet potatoes or pecan pie. People start decorating Christmas trees, which can be bought at the Christmas trees farms. There is a choice of different types of trees, so that they can choose and cut them. Interestingly, people can even meet Santa Claus there, take a ride around the farm, and get some Christmas presents: cookies, donuts, hotdogs, hot chocolate, or apple cider. All that is definitely funny for the whole family and friends. People can also buy a Christmas tree from a store or from a Christmas tree bazaar.

The Christmas season is a wonderful time in the US. You can see beautiful big Christmas trees decorated with lights and Christmas ornaments, placed on streets, parks, museums, and malls. Some museums offer Christmas trees on display from different countries which look wonderful.

Christmas time is the time of giving, hence you can see some people ringing bells. They usually have several big boxes and stay in front of the store entrances. Customers, if they want, can put a little money in the box as a charity to help homeless people, or pets...

You can see outdoor ice rinks in some cities and towns. The rinks are typically located not very far from a Christmas tree. Adults and kids enjoy ice skating, and have fun there. Sometimes, if you don't have your own ice skates, you can borrow those of your size from the ice rink. Just return them when you are finished.

Kids from our Church's Sunday school visit the Retirement center and sing the Christmas Carol for elder people. It was before pandemic time, actually. Before Christmas, ladies from our Church bake delicious Greek pastries and do baking sales.

When my daughter was little, we invited her friends to our place and baked Christmas cookies together and exchanged presents. Everyone was happy!

Finally, I would like to share a small Christmas story. When we moved to the US, we started



attending the Saint Catherine Greek Orthodox Church in Ithaca, NY. There was no permanent priest at that time. Father Scott was a substitute priest while being a permanent priest at Elmira Greek Orthodox Church. He came to Ithaca every Sunday, which took about one hour of driving.

Now Father Scott is retired. He is a very kind person and has amazing sense of humor. He likes kids. When he speaks, we smile all the time. We like his jokes. He told us that he has Ukrainian roots, particularly his grandma was from Ukraine and she taught Father Scott the Ukrainian language. One Christmas, I cooked a traditional Ukrainian dish "holodets". I decided to share the holodets with Father Scott. I wasn't sure if he liked it. But it turned out he did, and he remembered that his Grandma used to cook this dish as well, so this occasion brought him to his childhood...

It happened many years ago. Since then, we changed many addresses, because we moved a lot, but during the Christmas period every year we receive a handwritten Christmas card from Father Scott with our names and few words:

*Христос Рождається! Славіть Его!
Christ is Born! Glorify Him!*

We wish everyone Merry Christmas!

Alla Ganshyna

ATTENDING THE SERVICES AT CHURCH

To attend the in-Church services during December you have to sign up using this [online form](#). We want to ensure that as many people as possible can attend at least one service over the weekend. So please rank them based on which of the available dates you prefer more. Allocation of the places depends on the volume of requests, and we cannot guarantee that you will be able to attend all services. The places are allocated on the "first come, first served" basis. At present, a maximum of 30 people including children, servers, chanter, and the COVID officer, are allowed in the Church.

Most importantly, please **Do Not** come to the Church if you experience any of the main COVID

symptoms, which are now: **headache, runny nose, sneezing, sore throat, loss of smell and/or taste, fever, and a new, continuous cough**. For the care, consideration and protection of our community, please also take a lateral flow test (LFT) before attending the church. If you test "positive" do not come to the Church and follow the government guidance. Please read [the list of Do's and Don't when in the Church](#) (available in English, Greek and Romanian).

Please note that if you are planning on attending the service as a family, you need to register each family member separately using the form. This is because each person, even from a single family, counts towards the maximum allowed number. You will be notified about attendance in due time, and the full protocols concerning attendance will be issued. Please check your email regularly to get the confirmation emails, as well as to be aware of any changes and updates regarding the online and in-Church services.

NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Dec. 2: *Necoula*

Dec. 5: *Mary*

Dec. 6: *Shukria*

Dec. 10: *Èbraheem*

Dec. 14: *Alexandru*

Dec. 28: *Fr Agoustinos*

MEMORY ETERNAL!

Please send us the names of your departed loved ones and date of their departure in order for them to be remembered.



MAJOR CELEBRATIONS THIS MONTH

4th Dec: Great Martyr Barbara

6th Dec: St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia

9th Dec: The conception of the Most-Holy Theotokos by Righteous Anna

11th Dec: Hieromartyr Metropolitan Seraphim (Chichagov)

12th Dec: St. Spyridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus

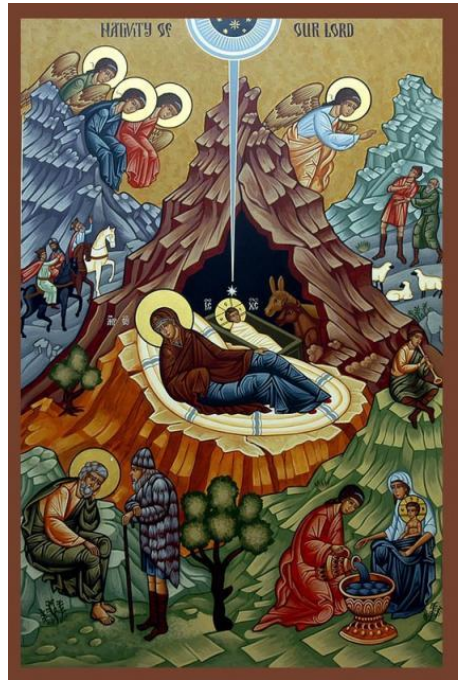
13th Dec: St. Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker of All America

20th Dec: The repose of St. John of Kronstadt

25th Dec: The Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

27th Dec: Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen

For the lives of Saints please visit the Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.calendar.goarch.org



*The Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
(source: antiochian.org)*

Services at St Martin's in December

Sat. 4 th	16:00	Memorial
	16:15	Great Vespers
Sun. 5 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy
	18:30	Great Vespers
Wed. 8 th	18:30	Vespers for the Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos by Righteous Anna*
Sat. 11 th	18:30	Great Vespers*
Sun. 12 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy. Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and St Spyridon
Tue. 14 th	18:30	Vespers for St Eleftherios*
Sat. 18 th	16:00	Memorial
	16:15	Great Vespers
Sun. 19 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy. Sunday before the Nativity of Christ and the righteous who pleased God
	18:30	Great Vespers
Fri. 24 th	19:00	Holy Liturgy. Christmas Eve (Nativity of Christ)
	20:00	Carols and Breaking of the Fast meal
Sun. 26 th	09:45	Holy Liturgy. Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos

* Services online. Please, join a Skype group <https://join.skype.com/KZt20cnwQw5f> to join a current service. The live services are also available on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/126074338184/>. All services are subject to change or non-transmission because of Internet connection or availability.

“God cares for everyone. Despair is in effect a lack of faith”
- St. George Karslides –



For further information please contact:

Father Jonathan Hemmings
67 Sibsey Str., Fairfield, Lancaster, LA1 5DQ
Tel: 07951 722 877

Email: frjah@yahoo.co.uk

www.orthodox-lancaster.org.uk

www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk

The following blogs of Old Stavronians are available in Romanian, [Constiinta Ortodoxa](#), in English, [Orthodox city hermit](#), and in Greek, [Orthodoxy rainbow](#).

