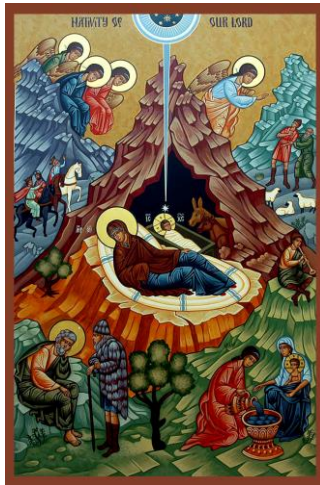


**The Orthodox Parish
of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
Lancaster, UK.**

The Stavronian

Monthly magazine and newsletter published by the Holy Cross Synodia



*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

NATIVITY HYMN

Based on the Nativity sermon of St. John Chrysostom

Look a new and wondrous mystery
Christ is born in Bethlehem,
Angels singing blend their voices
With the hosts of Cherubim.

Join in praise then all you living
Here on earth with those above,
He “Who is” comes down from heaven
Manifests the Father’s love.

Sun of Justice far outshining
Stars that led the kingly wise,
Today is born for our salvation
Him Unseen before our eyes.

Infants run then to adore Him
Shepherds come to be His sheep,
Priests to labour in His Vineyard
Wine and Bread His presence keep.

Fishers catch the world before Him
Sinful, lost and maimed repent,
That they may embrace together
This Child whom the Father sent.

Therefore let us sing together
Sharing in this choral dance,
“Christ is born!” the incarnation
So we may to heaven advance.

This our song our hope our story
This our life, so glory be
To the Father, Son and Spirit
Undivided Trinity.

*JAH. To the glory of God
31.12.2006*

THE PRINCE OF PEACE -- A CHRISTMAS STORY

The Golden Gate shut behind them. At the same time a terrible roaring shattered the silence of the green valley. A majestic figure sat on the towering



*Byzantine icon of Nativity of Christ
(Byzantine & Christian Museum, Athens)*

rock at the plateau in the middle of the forest. The silhouette of the Lion stood out against the starlit sky.

The Lion made a huge leap and stood at their midst. For the first time no animal dared to approach. The young couple and all the other animals stumblingly stepped back. They turned back to escape. But the Gate was shut. A many-eyed guard with a fiery sharp sword was blocking their way.

Then the Lion attacked the antelope. Immediately the panther charged at the goat. Then the big bear tore apart the tender calf. And the wolf the meek lamb. It had started. **A war had begun.** A cruel, relentless, and above all, prolonged, infinitely prolonged, war. The whole Creation would henceforth “groan as in the pains of childbirth” (Romans 8:22). This night was the darkest of all.

... The Lion sat on the towering rock. His eyes gazed intently at the abyss of the night skyline. Something unusual was taking place up there, this darkest night of the year. A new star seemed to dawn and eclipse all the rest. The whole forest

was in commotion. This night was hiding a mystery.

Further in the horizon a small company appeared. A humble little donkey was slowly climbing up towards the clearing. Sat on his back, a young woman, a tender daughter still, was gently clutching on her bosom a newborn baby. A white-haired old man was walking by their side. And this unusual, new Star was guiding their footsteps in the darkness. The tree tops were bowing humbly to the ground at their passage, venerating those unknown travellers.

Suddenly, before the night travellers made it to the clearing, a loud thundering shattered the silence of the dark forest. A horseback column was galloping towards them.

"*We found them!*" shouted the captain. But as the column thrust menacingly forward, a terrible roaring shattered the silence of the dark forest. The Lion made a huge leap and stood between the night travellers and the soldiers on horseback showing his terrible teeth to the soldiers. Stunned, the animals of the forest followed immediately their king. The scared horses would tear from their reins and got up on their hind legs. The captain went wild. "*Archers!*" He screamed out of his mind.

In vain. All bows fell immediately to the ground when they touched the animals' bodies. Like hitting steel. The horses grew uncontrollable. Any minute and they would flee back to the high land in a wild stampede.

The leader dismounted in a frenzy. Blind in his fury he hurled himself down in a bold leap and thrust himself to the baby. Menacingly he raised his sword to slaughter it, but the sword froze in mid air. To his horror and shock he saw before him the sweet face of his own wife, holding his own baby in her bosom!

His knees bent, his body collapsed to the ground. Sitting on the humble donkey the Daughter was looking in his eyes with infinite compassion. A bright, otherworldly halo was opalescing in rays around Her face! The soldier felt small, powerless before this Godly Babe, who seemed so vulnerable and helpless in the arms of his fragile mother, yet everything seemed to bow before Him.

Quietly all the animals surrounded in worship the human *synodeia*. The nod of the little child, invisible, yet omnipotent, was gently leading the lion and the calf together, the bull and the bear, the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the goat. Under

the "spell" of this otherworldly Mystery, the soldiers dismounted in awe and knelt side by side with the wild animals.

Time had stopped. The Golden Gate was open again. No longer does the fiery sharp sword guard the gate of Eden. The Babe mystically summoned all back to Paradise. A prophecy of old took flesh:

*The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling
together; and a little child will lead them.*

*The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*

*The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the
viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on
all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled
with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea...*

Isaiah 11:6-9

The Babe raised His Hand, a tiny, soft hand, yet capable to govern the whole Universe. The Babe blessed them with the Sign of the Cross. **The Prince of Peace had been born on earth.** The ancient, cosmic warfare would soon come to an end. *Maran Atha!*

Fr Demetrios Bokos

Adapted and translated by Kleio Kechagia

The original text can be found at the blog [Αντέχουμε...](#) (in Greek).



ON VULNERABILITY

A number of people in our parish have attended lately safeguarding courses, aimed at enabling them to protect those who are vulnerable (the children, the elderly, the disabled) from danger, neglect or abuse. I took away from these courses a few interesting thoughts which might be worth sharing and reflecting upon.

First, that we have a mission to care for the vulnerable in our churches and our communities, to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, to stand up for those who are weak and marginalised.

Secondly, that the position of vulnerability is not reserved to particular people, that any of us can find ourselves in a position of vulnerability at any moment, through accident, illness, misfortune, war. Just like Job in the Bible, life can be flourishing one day and we find ourselves deprived of everything the next, at the mercy of strangers. We see this happen around us -- elderly friends who suddenly cannot look after themselves, people fleeing war and persecution, who have lost all their earthly possession, bereaved people who have lost their child, people whose life is shattered by sudden illness. With this in mind, we can more easily place ourselves in the shoes of vulnerable people and show compassion and care. Whether we are caring for those in need or we find ourselves suddenly in extremely difficult situations, when it feels we have nowhere to turn and no way out of our predicament, we must remember that the one answer is to cling to God and ask for His mercy, and He shall care for us and bring us out of our distress. *"Cleave to God and His strength will be with you. Confess your weakness before Him and He will send you His All-Powerful Grace."* (St Nikolai Velimirovich)

Whenever we feel vulnerable or lost, we must look for strength and for a solution to our problem which appears insurmountable in human terms, to the only One who can solve it in the most unexpected ways. *"O Lord Jesus Christ, You are my medicine when I am sick; You are my strength when I need help; You are Life itself when I fear death; You are Light when all is dark."* (St Ambrose of Milan)

When we are at the lowest point, that is when God intervenes. His power and might shall be manifested in our life and in our soul. In the Gospels, who are the people whose direct

encounters with Jesus Christ are recorded? Not the strong and mighty, but mostly those small and hurting: the woman with a blood flow, the paralytic, the blind, the possessed, the bereaved, the lepers, the prostitute... In a word all the vulnerable and the weak.

Vulnerability then ceases to be a misfortune in spiritual terms and becomes an opportunity for closeness with our Creator, for Him to be manifest in our life. The Lord says to St Paul: *"My strength is made perfect in weakness."* (2 Corinthians 12:9) Therefore, St Paul teaches us that weakness is an opening for Divine Grace to act when he says: *"Therefore most gladly I would rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Furthermore, loving means being vulnerable to hurt, disappointment, ingratitude. When we open our heart and our life to another we become open to suffering, but this is the choice which our Lord asks us to make. *"We always have choices and we can always choose kindness. And this means we choose to be vulnerable."* (Fr Antony Hughes)

What do we celebrate in the Feast of the Nativity? We celebrate the all Powerful Creator of the Universe taking flesh and becoming very small and humble and extremely vulnerable. And all this is done out of love. The incarnation shows us the way to absolute humility, giving and love. *"This will be a sign to you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."* (Luke 2:13)

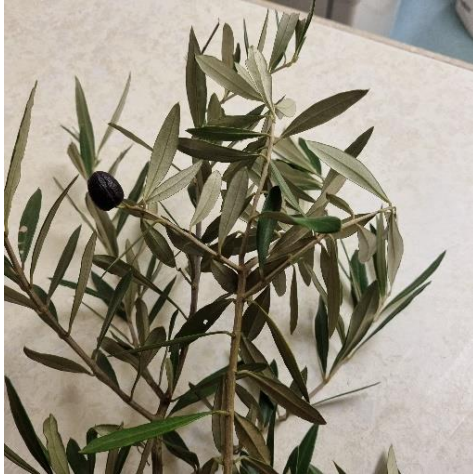
Fr Hughes describes our Lord as *"the All-Vulnerable One who dwells among us. He is the One who chooses humility over power and weakness over strength."* With this in mind, like Saint Paul let us boast of our weakness and dependence upon the Grace of God, let us lose no opportunity to become small and humble, let us open our hearts to people without fear of suffering, but with immense joy, and let us sing with the heavenly host: *"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill toward men!"*

"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted." (Aesop)

Martha and Mary

PARISH NEWS

Who said you will never grow olives in Morecambe? Olives from our olive tree outside church. Blessed and bearing fruit! Next year try our Holy Cross olive oil!



SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Dear brothers and sisters, the wearing of masks is encouraged in Church but is not compulsory.

Safeguarding

To ensure our church is a safe place of worship and fellowship, we implement the Archdiocesan Safeguarding Policy, which may be found [here](#).

Alexandra McCafferty is the Parish Safeguarding Representative. She assists the parish priest with the implementation of the Safeguarding Policy. She is the official point of contact for anyone who needs to report concerns about safeguarding issues. You can contact Alexandra by email at [alexispet\[at\]yahoo.com](mailto:alexispet[at]yahoo.com).

THANKSGIVING OF FAITH AND PRAYER

During the pandemic, we continue the standard prayer practice at home, including the reading of the Lord's prayer at 12:00 every day. In addition, many parishioners have already signed for the Vigil Prayer [online](#), so that the non-stopping prayer is maintained by the faithful all over the world continuously for 24 hours, until the pandemic surrenders.

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

Services at St Martin's in December

Sat. 3 rd	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 4 th	09:45	Divine Liturgy (St Barbara)
Sat. 10 th	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 11 th	09:45	Divine Liturgy (Sunday of the Holy Forefathers)
Sat. 17 th	16:00	Great Vespers
Sun. 18 th	09:45	Divine Liturgy (Sunday of the Righteous who pleased God from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed)
Sat. 24 th	16:00	Great Vespers with readings. Eve of the Nativity of Christ
Sun. 25 th	09:45	Divine Liturgy of St Basil (The Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ), followed by Parish Festive Lunch
Sat. 31 st	16:00	Great Vespers

There may be other Skype services in December (TBA). Please, join this [Skype group](#) to watch or participate in a service. The live services are also broadcasted simultaneously in the Church's [Facebook group](#).



“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](#).

