A NEW YEAR BRINGS EXCITEMENT AND EXPECTATION

Luke 2: 41-52

Very Reverend. Timothy G. Bakakos

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

CHRIST IS BORN!!! LET US GLORIFY HIM

We have again found ourselves on the threshold of a New Year, and with the start of the year, we look anxiously as a new chapter of blank pages lay before us that have yet to be written. The year 2017 is fresh, and awaits our contribution and impact upon it as we are given the opportunity to offer our time and talents and gifts to God in a productive and constructive manner.

The Gospel Reading that is read during the Divine Liturgy on January 1st, is one that focuses upon relationships within the family. Specifically, in this instance, we are given the story about the time Mary and Joseph misplaced Jesus. It certainly must have been embarrassing. Saint Luke writes that Mary and Joseph were on their way home from visiting the temple in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. They were among a large crowd of pilgrims traveling together, and these parents thought Jesus was with the other children. They were probably unnerved to realize that somehow, he had been left behind.

Well, when Mary and Joseph realized that Jesus was not with them, they hurried back to the Holy City, and after three days of searching, found their bright 12-year-old son in the temple in deep discussions with the Rabbis. “Did you not know,” Jesus said, “that I must be about my Father’s business?”

We can assume that Jesus was a good kid……probably a ‘model child’. While theologically, we know and accept that He is God, He did come down to earth and take on humanity, and we also see that the writers of the New Testament go to great pains to emphasize that Jesus was also a real person. When He came into the world, He took on, in addition to His unique divinity, humanity, to experience and became as we are, subject to all of the temptations, heartaches, and hurts you and I are capable of. We need to understand that Jesus was a real 12-year-old boy.

As a priest, the question I am occasionally asked is, “Did Mary ever have to discipline Jesus?” If He took on humanity, we would have to answer ‘yes’ to that question, just like all loving parents are forced to discipline their children from time to time. Jesus was a good kid. but he still was a boy. Maybe that is why there is no record of His teen years.

Listen again to what Saint Luke tells us even before Jesus 12th birthday: “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was on him.” (v. 40) And here is what Saint Luke says about Jesus’ teen years: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” (v. 51)

We are also blessed to have so many good kids around this Church. There are some boys and girls and young people in our own Parish who are growing in favor with God and with their family and friends. Parents certainly know that children have their own personalities and identities. And every parent knows how difficult it is to ease up on the apron strings, not because we do not trust our young people, but because there is so much to fear.

Jesus was at that age in Jewish life when a boy begins taking on some of the responsibilities of adulthood. He was not trying to hurt His parents when he stayed behind at the Temple. He was simply following His heart, and sometimes following your

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A NEW YEAR BRINGS EXCITEMENT, EXPECTATION, Continued

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heart can pose some real problems for those who love you and feel responsible for you.

I urge you to read this story from the Gospel of Saint Luke. You will notice that it has a happy ending. Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple; He came back home with them; and then, Saint Luke tells us, "He grew in favor with God and man."

My dear friends, we can ask why does this story have a happy ending? It is the same reason most of the young people in this Church will turn out to be fine, responsible adults. Jesus knew Mary and Joseph cared about Him. And He knew God loved Him. This is a story of a family filled with love. They were devoted to one another and to God. This is a beautiful message and learning experience for each of us in our relationships as well.

Jesus was a child just like each of us were, at least from the humanity part. He knew that His parents loved Him. That love was with Him all the way to the Cross. Jesus was a good kid, but even a good kid can make a parent sick with worry. Every parent in this Church knows what I am talking about. But fortunately the story has a happy ending.

As we welcome and usher in the new year 2017, as responsible Orthodox Christians, we should take stock of what we have, where we are, and what we have accomplished. We are all blessed with abilities and talents and treasures that have been given to us by God. What we do with them, how we use them, and where we channel our energies for the glory of God, is something that is expected of each of us. We need to more seriously understand our faith, and take a more Christian-like approach to our beloved Parish of Panagia, to our parishioners, to our employees, and yes, to continue to respect our priests and hierarchy who are servants and representatives of God. We need to know that our gifts and service to the Church are directly related to giving ‘back to God as we feel we have been blessed’. Your Church needs your help. Offer your time, your talents, and your treasure wherever you can. You will be further blessed for that act of love and support to our blessed Spiritual Home of Panagia.

At the same time, we should also give thanks to our Lord for the many blessings He continues to bestow upon each of us. We should ask Him to guide us and our families, our friends, and all people to righteousness. And then, we should use this opportunity and look forward to this New Year 2017 with real hope, with true expectation, and with all our love and faith to our Heavenly Father to continue to minister and lead us and our loved ones.

Jesus Christ is our beginning and He is our end. May the New Year 2017 bring you an even deeper understanding and love for the Grace of our Lord, and may He bless you and keep you and your family safe always.

+ A M E N
Christmas is a time to count our blessings. As stewards of the Assumption Church, we have many things for which to be grateful. Here are but a few:

We thank Father Timothy and Father Dimitrios for their gift of worship. The clergy serve as the representatives of Our Lord within the parish. Through the miracle of the Holy Spirit, our priests offer us Communion—the body and blood of Christ—at every Divine Liturgy. There can be no greater gift.

We thank Nick Georgiafentis, Bill Deligiannis, and Marika Panton for their gift of liturgical music. Our chanters and our choir inspire us as we pray to the Lord. Panagia is blessed to have a talented cadre of ecclesiastical musicians. During the Divine Liturgy, they respond on our behalf to the clergy’s petitions to the Lord. There is no more important role for the laity.

We thank Gail Holguin and Georgia Psichogios, our Church Office personnel. Gail and Georgia ensure that the boiler is heating in the winter, the chiller is cooling in the summer, and that there is a Church bulletin to review each week. We take for granted these details of parish life. Were it not for the tireless efforts of our Church Office, we would all quickly realize the complexity of operating our parish day to day.

We thank our Parish Council. On our behalf, they safeguard the physical plant and the financial resources of the Assumption Church. They assist Father Timothy in the operations of our church ministries. They serve as role models for all of us. Our Parish Council for 2015-2016 includes: James Lakerdas, Bill Vranas, John Vassiliades, Ted Pappas, Joann Stavropoulos, Stacey Lynch, Dr. Voula Spyropoulos, Peter Spyropoulos, Chris Limperis, Dean Bastounes, Nick Mansour, Rose Marie Stewart, Chris Caprio, Tom Collis, Tom Poulos, Mary Zouras, Andy Kanel, Dean Sarantos, and Diane Berbas. We thank them for their service.

We thank everyone who assists in our parish ministries. Those ministries include (but are not limited to): the Philoptochos, the Sunday Church School, the Father’s Committee, the Sunday School Choir, youth sports, the Internet ministry, the website, and this newsletter. Dozens of parishioners participate in these programs. At the risk of embarrassing them, I highlight two ministry leaders—Ann Dervis, President of our Philoptochos, and Christina Arvanites, Director of our Sunday Church School. Ann and Christina are servants of the Lord who guide their organizations with efficiency and kindness; their selfless actions typify a worker in Christ’s vineyard. May the rest of us emulate these indefatigable community leaders.

Lastly, I thank you, the loyal stewards of the Assumption Church. It has been a privilege to have served as your Parish Council President for the past two years. Mere words cannot express what you have done—and what you continue to do—for this parish. Your commitments of time, talent and treasure simplify the role of the Parish Council President. You are doing the heavy lifting. Your words of encouragement always inspired me and I commend you for placing the Lord and the Blessed Panagia first in your lives.

Merry Christmas!
Busy Winter Months
By Dr. Evie Maggos

Our Assumption Philoptochos Sisterhood hosted the Parade of Prizes on November 3rd at the Diplomat West. Guests won over 150 prizes, enjoyed delectable sweets and fellowship and generously raised funds to benefit IOCC and Bright Pink, an organization that promotes prevention and early detection of breast and ovarian cancer. Thank you to all who supported this event.

Sunday, November 6th, the feast day of Sts. Cosmas and Damianos, patron saints of the Philoptochos was observed with an artoclasia, memorial service for departed Philoptochos sisters and a coffee hour. We also passed a tray to benefit the Patriarchate.

At our general meeting in November Melia Linardos was sworn in as a new Philoptochos board member. Welcome Melia! We thank Tina Sarantos for her service as a board member.

The Philoptochos women hosted receptions following the Vespers and Divine Liturgy for the Feast Day of St. Catherine November 24th and 25th.

Our 2017 membership drive is underway. Please stop by our table in Plato Hall during coffee hour to complete your membership and bring a friend. We welcome new members—men are welcome as associate members too! The Philoptochos is one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the United States.

December is a festive and busy month. Below are some of the events we’ve hosted in December!

Dec. 3—Philoptochos Christmas Party
Dec. 10—baking in Plato Hall for the bake sale
Dec. 11—Christmas Bake Sale
Dec. 11—last day to donate warm, clean winter coats
Dec. 13—Feed the Hungry at Annunciation Cathedral
Dec/Jan—Metropolis Vasilopita tickets on sale in Plato Hall

The sisters of Philoptochos wish everyone a joyous and blessed Christmas!

Melia Linardos is sworn in as a new Philoptochos Board Member.
Sunday School News...

Visit With Santa, Food Drive, and More!
By Christina Arvanites

Our Church School Students have been busy over the last few months. Our parish donated close to 90 toys to the Visit with Santa event that benefited children of the Austin community hosted by our neighbor Loretto Hospital, our 7th/8th grade class with the help of their teachers packed all the food collected during our food drive. 10 local families will receive food baskets and all remaining food donations have been given to the Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry. Cards were written and mailed to a young boy with leukemia who’s one wish was to receive cards from around the country. Cards and baked goods were also made and delivered to the 15th District Chicago Police Dept that services our Parish.

With the hard work and dedication of our Directors JoAnn Bastounes and Christine Caprio, our children presented our parish with the gift of "Joy," our 2016 Christmas Pageant.

The New Year promises to be filled with as many opportunities for our students to do what they do best......putting our faith in action!!

Wishing everyone a joyous Christmas!!

2016 Christmas Pageant Highlights
**Youth Ministry...**

*Merry Christmas Charlie Brown*

*An Orthodox Perspective on the Classic Christmas Special*

*By Fr. Dimitri Burikas*

As I sat down at my desk to write my newsletter article on this Cyber Monday 2016, I couldn’t help but take a few minutes from watching my inbox slowly flood with promotional emails from every company I’ve ever shopped with to watch the delightful short film, “A Charlie Brown Christmas”.

(Full disclosure: I only saw “A Charlie Brown Christmas” for the first time last year and despite the low-def picture quality was overcome by its charming simplicity and innocence. For all you millennials and Generation-Zs out there who haven’t seen it, spend the time to give it a watch. It’s worth it, I promise.)

In the show, it’s Christmastime, but Charlie Brown is depressed. He doesn’t understand what Christmas is all about. All he sees around him are others who find the meaning of Christmas in material things: his sister Sally, who is sending Santa a long list of gift requests (“Make it easy on yourself, just send money. How about 10s and 20s?”); his canine companion Snoopy, who decks out his dog house to win the grand prize in the town’s Christmas lights and display contest (“Find the true meaning of Christmas: win money, money, money!”); and his good frenemy — definition: someone who is your friend and your enemy — Lucy, who bemoans the fact that she never gets what she wants for Christmas (“What is it that you want?”… “Real Estate!”). Later in the show, Lucy remarks to an exasperated Charlie, “Look Charlie, let’s face it. We all know that Christmas is a big commercial racket. It’s run by a big eastern syndicate, you know.”

He himself tries to find the meaning of Christmas by directing the children’s Christmas play. His frustration reaches a boiling point, however, when none of the play’s actor’s (all of Charlie’s friends), will listen to him. He tries to inject more of the “Christmas spirit” by adding a Christmas tree to the set, but returns with a tiny, thin, wispy, embarrassment of a tree and is promptly mocked by everyone. Charlie, however, takes the tree home to decorate it, renouncing the materialism surrounding him and vowing that it won’t ruin his Christmas.

I think that in a way, Charlie identifies with that sad, little tree. The tree embodies how Charlie feels about the Christmas holiday and all the modern meanings attached to it. He’s hanging on for dear (Christmas) life! And I think that in a way I identify with Charlie and the tree, too. I don’t know how many more commercials I can watch where an adult writes a letter to Santa asking for a new car, then in the next scene is standing in front of a shiny new Lexus with a huge ribbon on it. Enough already! The worst part: it’s only November 28th.

We have to be honest with ourselves in saying that as a society we have twisted Christmas into something that it was never meant to be. We have taken a celebration of the birth of Christ our Savior and made it all about ourselves. We’re like Sally, Snoopy, and Lucy times infinity. It’s no wonder that Charlie Brown cries out in anguish:

“I guess I really don’t know what Christmas is all about. Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?”

*Enter Linus, Charlie’s blanket-carrying, thumb-sucking younger friend.*

“Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about. Lights please.”

*The spotlight lowers on Linus in the center of the stage.*

“And there were in the same country shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. And they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, ‘Fear not, for behold I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you, you shall find the babe in swaddling clothes, lying in the manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace goodwill toward men.’”
Merry Christmas Charlie Brown/An Orthodox Perspective, Continued

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In my head, Linus drops the mic and walks out of the theater. What Linus hits us with is not the trite “Jesus is the reason for the season” but cold, hard Scripture, the Gospel, the Message of Good News from God to men. And what is that message? That God loves us so beyond our understanding of love that He would take on our own weaknesses and brokenness and be born as a fragile baby in a cave used to shelter animals if it meant that we could be united to Him in His Heavenly Kingdom. This same baby is the one who will eventually grow up and teach us the path to eternal life, die for us on the cross and rise up from the dead on the third day to free us from the bondage of sin and death. This same baby opened for us the gates of Heaven and to this day calls us forward to be with Him forever, unto the ages of ages. This same baby takes our dilapidated humanity, much like Charlie Brown’s little Christmas tree, and makes us whole and perfect as we were intended to be.

“That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”

May God bless all of you abundantly this Christmas season! Merry Christmas and happy New Year!

Adult Education Videos Now Online

Did you miss the last Adult Education Program session? Have no fear! The hard working video team at Assumption will be recording all of the AEP sessions and posting them on the parish website. You can watch all of the videos at http://www.assumptionchicago.org/video/educational-videos/
Names in bold with an asterisk (*) are pre-pledged for 2017.

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MR JOHN ALEXANDER
MS PAULINE ALEXANDER
MR ORESTIS O ALEXOPOULOS
MR SARANTIS ALEXOPOULOS
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Stewardship... November 2015—Dec. 31, 2016

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MR GERASIMOS VASILATOS
MR & MRS JOHN VASSILIADIES
MR & MRS PETER VLAGOS
MR & MRS CONSTANTINE P VLAHOS
MR & MRS GEORGE VLAHOS
MRS MARIANTHE VLAHOS
MR & MRS PETER J VLAHOS
MR & MS THOMAS VOLLMAN
MRS MARIA VOULGARAKIS
*MR & MRS PETER VOULGARAKIS
*MR & MRS BILL J VRANAS
MS FRANCES WAHBY
MS TERESA WEIK
MR & MRS THOMAS WHITE
*MR & MRS JACK M WOODS
MS MARY ELLEN WOODS
*MR WILLIAM WOODS
MRS MARIKA XINOS
*MR & MRS CONSTANTINE YANNIAS
MS DONNA YANNIAS
MRS ELAINE YANNIAS
MRS MARY YANNIAS
MS TRACY YANNIAS
MR & MRS JOHN ZENDOL
MR & MRS ARMAND ZIKE
MR & MRS DIMITRIOS ZOGRAFOS
MR & MRS IOANNIS E ZOGRAFOS
MR & MRS PETER ZOURAS
**Parish Registry… Sept. 20, 2016—Dec. 04, 2016**

**40 DAY BABY BLESSING:**

The son of Harriet and Nicholas Senses was Churched.

**BAPTISMS:**

The son of Jenna Lee and Joshua Adams was Baptized, taking the name, Vasilios.

- **Godparent:** Ashley Demetropoulos

The son of Theodore and Stephanie Hadjis was Baptized, taking the name, Magnos.

- **Godparents:** Peter Hadjis and Melissa Poulos

The son of Katherine and Mitchell Celik was Baptized, taking the name, George.

- **Godparents:** John and Jenny Economos

**CHRISMATION:**

Christopher Torchia was Chrismated and his Sponsor is Dean (Constantine) Politis.

**WEDDINGS:**

Nick Kosmas and Meagan Rice were joined in Holy Matrimony.

- **Sponsor:** Amy Kosmas Rodriguez

Marie Pishos and Pat Esposito were joined in Holy Matrimony.

- **Sponsor:** Michael Pishos

John Gounaris and Olivia Rodriguez were joined in Holy Matrimony.

- **Sponsor:** Penny Gounaris

Athanasia Voulgaris and Mike Carlson were joined in Holy Matrimony.

- **Sponsor:** Harry Voulgaris and Fotini Aravantinos

**FALLEN ASLEEP IN THE LORD**

+ Spyros Kokolis  
+ Penelope C. Lageotakes  
+ Maria Papagiannopoulos  
+ Daniel J. Spiropoulos  
+ Maria Lekousis

**ARTOCLASIA**

- The Artoclasia was offered by Dimitrios Demos for his names day and for the Health and Welfare of the family.
- The Artoclasia was offered in honor of Sts. Cosmas and Damianos, the patron Saints of the Ladies Philoptochos Society and for the health and welfare of the Philoptochos members.
- The Artoclasia was offered for the Health and Welfare of the Members of the Daughters of Penelope, Homer Chapter #98 and their families.

**MEMORIALS**

In Memory of the members of the Philoptochos who have fallen asleep in the Lord

**40 Days:**

- Diana (Diamando) Dionesotes
- Spyros Kokolis
- Danny (Diamanos) Spiropoulos
- George Bambionitakis

**6 Months:**

- Mary Szczesniak
- Sophia Bambionitakis

**1 Year:**

- Catherine (Aikaterini) Fivos
- John Floros
- Fay (Fotini) Kollias
- Georgia Pappadimitriou

**2 Years:**

- Sophia Karagiannis

**3 Years:**

- James (Demetrios) Leakakos
- Efstathia Georgiarentis

**6 Years:**

- Peter (Panagioti) Ganos
- Joan (Yanolu) Ganos
- Nicholas S. Dallas

**9 Years:**

- Magdalene Dervis
- Nicholas A. Georgiarentis

**16 Years:**

- Gus (Constantinos) Gerakaris
- Alexandra Dervis

**25 Years:**

- Leon (Leonidas) G. Copitas

**31 Years:**

- Vasilios Dervis
Fifth Issue, 2016

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Dates to Remember:

December 24th
Christmas Eve Orthros/Divine Liturgy
(8:30/9:30 a.m.)
Great Vespers (5:00 p.m.)

December 25th
Christmas Day - Orthros/Divine Liturgy
(8:30/10:00 a.m.)

January 2nd
Adult Bible Study, St. Catherine Meeting Room

January 5th
Eve of Epiphany - Orthros/Divine Liturgy
(8:30/9:30 a.m.)

January 6th
Feast of Epiphany - Orthros/Divine Liturgy
(8:30/9:30 a.m.)

January 8th
Parish Annual Cutting of the Vasilopita

January 8th
Metropolis Annual Cutting of the Vasilopita
6 p.m., Saints Peter & Paul Church, Glenview, IL

January 16th
Adult Bible Study, St. Catherine Meeting Room

January 20th
Monthly Youth Night, Oak Brook, IL

January 22nd
Annual Stewardship Brunch
Following Worship Services