

The St. George CHAMPION

The Parish Newsletter of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, Little Falls, NJ

April 2010

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"Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

By Very Rev. Fr. Elias Bitar

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen! This is the response the angel gave the women searching for the Lord. They did not know any better. Their faith did reach far enough to the level of full knowledge. The women went looking for the Lord in the wrong place.

On this great feast we should be asking the question "Do we look for God in all the right places?"

1. Do we look for God in the lives of other people? Sometimes the mirror which is supposed to reflect God is shattered and God becomes invisible. We should look hard enough into the soul of another human being and be able to see and love God in them and through them. "If you have done it to the least of my brethren, you have done it unto me"

We allow evil and sin to stop us from loving the other person. That person is still the child of God and loved by Him. Let us look for God in all the right places.

2. Look for God in prayer. We pray as if God does not know who we are. We are not strangers to Him. We are His creation and were saved by the blood of His only Son. Only in prayer we may become closer to the heart of God. Do we pray from the heart? It is not how long we pray, but how we pray. It is not the number of words we utter, but where the words come from. When we talk to our children with just our lips, they will soon turn us off, but when we speak from the heart they listen and learn to love back.

Praying from the heart even for a minute is like moving a small mountain. Do we look for God

in prayer? Or we pray to ask God for something?

3. Look for God in the Church. The Saints are living witnesses of God. Speak to God through them. God has no needs, but He wants us to love Him as He loves us. The saints did. We ask them (the saints) to pray for us, because God listens to the intercessions on our behalf. The saints are good examples for us to emulate, instead of worldly heroes. The lives they lived were blessed by God. Their lives, though were mixed with sin, they repented and God accepted and blessed. We should look for God in the church and in the saints.

4. Do we look for God in the chalice? Holy communion is God Himself. Without repentance God will not force Himself on our will. He will not bring us to Himself unless we want to be closer. So for the body and blood of our Lord to have effect on us, we need to initiate repentance and return to the Father like the prodigal son. The chalice is the source of life and not a habitual occurrence. If we look for God in the chalice, our bodies, minds and hearts must be made ready by prayer and humility.

5. Look for God in your heart. The kingdom of God is within you. You have been baptized and Chrismated. The Holy Spirit desires to live in you. If you cannot find God within you, how could you find Him elsewhere?

"Love your neighbor as yourself" — you are the image of God.

• Community News •

BAPTISMS

Noah Said RahalJanuary 10, 2010
 Lean Amelia-Avis Shehady.....January 17, 2010
 Tyler Anthony ShehadyJanuary 17, 2010
 Julian Basel Sabbagh1.....February 7, 2010

MARRIAGE

Michael Karaoglan
 & Nina Sarraf.....December 26, 2009
 Georges Nicholas Chalet
 & Cherith Ann Norman.....January 2, 2010

FUNERALS

Michael Joseph Nassor.....December 19, 2009
 Jabra DaibesFebruary 2, 2010

St. George Festival 2010 is upon us!

June Fri 18 Sat 19 Sun 20.

The first work day will be Sat June 5th.
 The next work day will be Sat June 12th
 and everyday that week until the Festival!

The Festival supports the financial needs of our
 St. George Parish and brings us together to work in
 His Name. Don't stand on the sidelines —
 be a team player!

Please contact the Festival Chairs to volunteer your
 help:

Jennifer Zabaneh – 713 204-7171

Amin Amireh – 973 953-4819

Elias Chalet – 973 454-6315

Let's make this Festival the community family
 attraction it has been for over three decades!

The Ceremony of the Holy Light in Jerusalem

By Deacon Michael Ibrahim

Every year the same miracle happens in the Orthodox Church at the time of Pascha Service in the Orthodox Church of the Resurrection in the Holy city of Jerusalem. It takes place every year, at the same time, in the same manner, and on the same spot.

On Pascha Saturday, at noon, the Orthodox Patriarch, or any other Orthodox Archbishop, enters the Holy Sepulchre, recites special prayers and remains waiting. Sometimes the waiting is long, sometimes short, while the, in the darkened church, repeats continually with a loud voice: "Lord, have mercy."

At a certain moment the Holy Light flashes from the depth of the Holy Sepulchre in a supernatural way, miraculously, and lights up the little lamp of olive oil put on the edge of it. The Patriarch, after having read some prayers, lights up the tow clusters of 33 candles he is holding, and begins to distribute the Holy Light to the multitude of pilgrims, who receives it with great emotion, accompanied with the pealing of bells, acclamations, and an unbridled enthusiasm.

The Holy Light is not only distributed by the Patriarch, but also operates by itself. It emits from the Holy Sepulchre having a gleam of a hue completely different from that of natural light. It sparkles, it flashes like lightning, it flies like a dove around the tabernacle of the Holy Sepulchre, and lights up the unlit lamps of olive oil hanging in front of it. It whirls from one side of the church to the other. It enters to some of the chapels of the Calvary (at a higher level than the Holy Sepulchre) and lights up the little lamps. It lights up also the candles of certain pilgrims.

This divine light also presents some special peculiarities: As soon as it appears it has bluish hue and does not burn.

The appearance of the Holy Light is an event which occurs every year in front of thousands of visual witnesses. Nobody can deny it. On the contrary, this miracle can reinforce those who have lack of faith.

Metropolitan PHILIP's visit, Palm Sunday, 2010

The parish of St. George, Little Falls, NJ welcomed His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP as he celebrated the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy with us on Palm Sunday, April 28th.

Joined by co-celebrants the Very Reverend Elias Bitar, Deacon Michael Ibrahim, along with Arch Deacon Hans El Hayek and Deacon Jason Blais from St. Vladimir's Seminary, the day began with the ordination of two Subdeacons from St. George parish – Peter Yazgi and Matthew Chatri. St. George Church was packed to capacity, with an overflow crowd viewing the Liturgy from our large parish hall via a large video screen.

Sayidna PHILIP spoke about the events in the Gospel of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, and while this was not the first time Christ gave life to the dead, it was the most famous. Comparing it to today's world, His Eminence suggested that the event would be on "the headline biggest... the first item of news on TV!" And as the news of this miracle "spread throughout the country like wildfire" Christ could have rode triumphantly into Jerusalem as a conqueror, yet He chose the most humble and smallest beast of burden to ride upon to greet the people who shouted "Blessed is He who cometh in the name of the Lord!". Sayidna's oration, peppered with humorous phrases in Arabic, kept all present in rapt attention.

Fr. Elias thanked His Eminence for the blessing of sharing the Feast day with us. Despite the overcast skies and cool weather, the 500+ parishioners who came to worship — much like the crowds Sayidna spoke of — processed around the church carrying palms. After the procession, Fr. Elias invited the children to come forward and sit on the steps of the Sanctuary while Deacon Michael read the Gospel. For a few hours on Sunday, we relived the experience of the joy, excitement and even chaos of Jerusalem 2000 years ago.

Metropolitan PHILIP's presence magnified excitement of this blessed Feast day. As the congregation began to leave the crowded parking lot, the grey skies gave forth to rain. The Lord's timing, as always, was perfect.

Many Years, Master!



Teen Vist to NYC

It's 8 o'clock on a Saturday morning and instead of sleeping in, 53 teens meet at church. At church we make sandwiches and separate coats for the poor. Then we put the goods in the bus and set off to New York City. When we arrive at the homeless shelter we see happiness and hope in the people's faces. That because of us they will be able to go through another winter with ease. When we serve we forget about our needs and think about someone else's. When I was standing there passing out coats and seeing my fellow teen do the same, I feel like God is working through us. That God appointed us to serve his children and also to teach us to love one another as he loves us. After passing out the coats and food we stand with the people and they share stories about their lives. Before we leave the site we sing carols and pray that they will be safe during the winter season. We wish them a Merry Christmas and go our way. The next site we go to is Rockefeller center to sing more carols. We had such a fun time that day being Little Christ's — a.k.a. Christians.

Its 6 o'clock on a Wednesday evening a group of us go to a nursing home to sing to the elderly. When we arrive we start up singing and soon or later our two person crowd ends up being a mob. They get so excited that they start to dance and sing with us. They love our visits and asked that we would come back for Valentines and one lady said "come back for my birthday." The elderly people put a smile on each one of our faces, as they tell us jokes and stories about their lives. I enjoy this trip because it shows me that you should live your life to the fullest. One lady said "you're only young once."

The Teen SOYO does so many things to make the Christmas season what god intended to be, a joyous and giving one.



Awesome Love

by Miranda Bandeli

You've given up everything for me:
 Any of your wants and all future dreams.
 Can anyone ask for such a decree?
 A foolish notion; Not for God it seems.
 Wherever life takes me, you will be there.
 You guide me through the true way of living,
 And help me with all feelings of despair.
 Unto thee should I offer thanksgiving.
 But without thee I'd be lost and confused,
 Searching for the source of my existence,
 Wandering about, listening bemused.
 I accept your Word without resistance.
 My life is truly a gift from above.
 None but thee could supply such awesome love.

Spring Delegates Meeting

APRIL 16, 17, 18, 2010

St. Stephen the Protomartyr
 Antiochian Orthodox Church

609 Lane Avenue, South Plainfield, NJ 07080
 908-756-0410 • www.ststephenchurch.net

Holiday Inn, 4701 Stelton Road,
 South Plainfield, NJ 07080 (908) 753-5500
www.hisouthplainfield.com

St. George Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church Charity Committee presents
Presents an Evening of Dinner, Dancing and Entertainment

A Taste of **NEW YORK**

Saturday, May 8th
7:00 pm

Ticket Price: \$50.00
Children ages 12-18 price: \$30

*Featuring multiple food
stations representing
the varied tastes in the
world's most famous city!*

Wine and Soda included.



For tickets, table reservations and information contact:
Brian Nafash at 973-204-7074 or Julie Abboud at 973-812-0444

**Please note that advance sales are the only way to guarantee a table reservation.
Tickets the night of the event will be sold based on available seating.*

St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church • 237 Long Hill Rd., Little Falls, NJ

Orthodox icons are seen as “theology in color”

Sunday, April 04, 2010

By Ann Rodgers, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette; Robin Rombach/Post-Gazette

Large icons are painted on the ceiling leading up to the huge resurrection icon behind the altar at the St. Ignatius Church at Antiochian Village outside Ligonier.

On a wall behind the altar of an Orthodox camp chapel near Ligonier is a larger-than-life icon of Jesus freeing souls from Hades.

The 8-foot Jesus, robed in white, stands on his broken cross. Its shards also represent the shattered gates of Hades, which in Orthodox theology is where the righteous and unrighteous await judgment. Grasping the hands of Adam and Eve, he raises them from a dark pit.

The icon illustrates an ancient understanding of Jesus' resurrection as the gift he offers to all humanity on a renewed Earth. While all Orthodox churches are filled with icons, the Resurrection icon in the camp chapel at Antiochian Village retreat and conference center is one of the largest in Pennsylvania and possibly the United States.

“An icon is theology in color,” said Mother Alexandra, founder of the Convent of St. Thekla, which also is on the grounds of Antiochian Village in Bolivar, Westmoreland County. The center, which also houses a museum and bookstore, is a ministry of the Antiochian Orthodox Church.

Today Eastern and Western Christians all celebrate Easter. Most years the Orthodox celebrate after Catholics and Protestants because they use a different formula to calculate the date of Easter and also observe it according to the Julian calendar. The Orthodox and Catholic churches were originally one, but split in 1054. Orthodoxy is dominant in the east, Catholicism in the west. Protestants split from Catholicism centuries later.

Icons are part of the essence of Orthodoxy, and are also venerated by Eastern Catholics. The images of Jesus and the saints are believed to reveal God's word much as the Bible does, with Scripture and icon complementing each other. Believers who gaze on icons in prayer say their minds and hearts are drawn to God.

“We sometimes refer to icons as doorways to heaven. Often they are explaining things about God in ways that let us see and enter into the event,” said Mother Alexandra, a 44-year-old convert from Catholicism. Outsiders sometimes accuse the Orthodox of idolatry because they pray before images. But they are confusing veneration with worship, she said. “The only one we worship is God,” she said. “But we venerate those in whom we see Christ's light shining through, just as we venerate members of our family when we see that

they are holy. Do we have a picture of our loved ones? We do in the church also. The saints are our family.”

When the Orthodox bought the camp from the Presbyterians in 1978, they commissioned renowned iconographer Constantine Youssis to transform its chapel. Icons now adorn the walls, ceiling, and screen beyond which only the priest may pass to the altar. But, at 12 feet high and 18 feet wide, the Resurrection icon dominates.

It shows Jesus robed in white to represent the purity of resurrected life. Icons of his earlier ministry show him in red and blue garb to symbolize his humanity and divinity.

All icons must be made according to strict rules. “An iconographer can't do what he wants to do. There is nothing personal in it,” Mother Alexandra said. “It's very different from art.”

The iconographer must begin work with fasting and prayer, and allow no variation from the tradition that has been handed down through the ages. For instance, the moment of Resurrection itself is never depicted.

Instead, as in the camp chapel, icons depict what is sometimes called “The harrowing of Hades.” Jesus is shown above a dark pit, in which broken chains and keys can be seen, indicating that he has broken the power of death. He is bringing Adam and Eve out of Hades. In Orthodoxy, hell differs from Hades and is intended for the damned after judgment.

The image is drawn from the New Testament. 1 Peter 3:19-20 says that when Jesus was crucified, “he also went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”

In these icons, he is always shown raising Adam and Eve because they represent all of humanity. Other figures who commonly appear in the background are John the Baptist, King David and King Solomon. Their inclusion is partly based on Matthew 27:52-53, which says that when Jesus died, “The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”

Iconographers have some choice of who to depict in this scene. Sometimes the figures are recognizable, sometimes not.

(continued on back page)

Fellowship News

by Michael Kabbash

This past Great Lent, the Fellowship of St. John, with the financial support of the Parish Council and the Spiritual guidance of Fr. Elias assembled an Adult Education Lecture Series which took place after Lenten Services. On Friday, Feb. 19th, The Very Rev. Paul Tarazi, Professor in Old Testament St. Vladimir's Seminary, spoke on "*Psalm 50: A Model Prayer of Repentance*". The always animated and engaging Fr. Tarazi talked about the Biblical and historical basis of God's Mercy and Justice, provoking a lively discussion. On Friday, Feb. 26th, Deacon Jason Blais spoke to the Sunday School and their parents about the meaning behind many of the items and icons used during our Divine Liturgy. Saturday, March 1st, we hosted Dr. Paul Meyendorff, Professor of Liturgical Theology St. Vladimir's Seminary. Dr. Paul spoke eloquently and clearly for most of the day on two topics: "*Lent: Its Historical Development and its Meaning for Me Today*" and "*The Role of Men and Women in the Liturgy*". This event was, in my opinion, one of the most educational session I have attended in years. On Friday, March 19th, Sister Aemilane from the Twelve Apostles Monastery in Kardidsa, Greece, stepped in at the last minute to speak after Akathist Service. Wrapping it all up, we were blessed to have Fr. George Kevorkian leading a book club for four weeks on the book "*Who is God? Who am I? Who are You?*"

All the events were well attended, except unfortunately for the Saturday Retreat. I would like to personally thank all the visiting lecturers for sharing their wisdom with us, as well as to thank Fr. Elias and the Parish Council for making these events happen.

On Friday April 16 through Sunday April 18, The Spring Delegates Meeting will be held, hosted by St. Stephen's Church, South Plainfield.

Back in December, The Fellowship organized a SOYO Reunion for past Teen SOYO members whom we have not seen in a while, due to college, location, etc. The event was well attended by 35 past SOYO and current Fellowship members at the Town Pub in Bloomfield. Some just popped in to say hi, while others stayed, ate pizza, and caught up on their lives. Keeping in this social theme, The Fellowship is planning a

Fellowship Night Out on Saturday April 24th. See Mike Kabbash or Elias Chalet for details, hope you can join us for some fun!



The Shared Spoon

A Holy man was having a conversation with the Lord one day and said, "Lord, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like."

The Lord led the holy man to two doors. He opened one of the doors and the holy man looked in. In the middle of the room was a large round table..

In the middle of the table was a large pot of stew, which smelled delicious and made the holy man's mouth water.

The people sitting around the table were thin and sickly.

They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles that were strapped to their arms and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful.

But because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The holy man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering.

The Lord said, "You have seen Hell." They went to the next room and opened the door. It was exactly the same as the first one.

There was the large round table with the large pot of stew which made the holy man's mouth water.

The people were equipped with the same long-handled spoons, but here the people were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The holy man said, "I don't understand."

"It is simple," said the Lord. "It requires but one skill. You see, they have learned to feed each other. The greedy think only of themselves."

The 4th Annual Trip to the Holy Land

11 Days/10 Nights Oct. 22 – Nov. 1st, 2010

DAY 1:

Oct. 22, 2010 The group will gather at Newark Liberty Airport, NJ 3 hours before departure. A direct flight on Continental Airlines leaving at 4:05 pm (flight no. CO 84), arriving at Tel-Aviv the next day at 8:35 am.

DAY 2:

Oct. 23, 2010 Upon arrival your tour guide will escort you to a deluxe bus and will begin the trip with a short drive to Jaffa, and Lydda to visit St. George Church where St. George is buried. Our next stop will be at Haifa City to visit the Church of St. Elias on Mt. Carmel. The group will have lunch in Haifa and then will proceed to Nazareth City to the Golden Crown Hotel, relax and then join each other for Dinner.

Day 3:

Oct. 24, 2010 After breakfast the group will be escorted to the Greek Orthodox Annunciation Church in Nazareth to celebrate Holy Mass. Our next stop will be at the Golan Heights, have lunch and visit Banias to tour the area after that return to Nazareth for Dinner and overnight.

Day 4:

Oct. 25, 2010 Today the group will head to Cana of Galilee to visit the Church of the Wedding. From there we proceed to Mt. Tabor (the Mt of Transfiguration); after the visit the group will have lunch and then return to Nazareth to visit Mary's Well, then walk to the Basilica of the Annunciation where we visit the Grotto of the Annunciation, the modern church, and the house of the Holy Family. Dinner will be at the hotel in Nazareth.

Day 5:

Oct. 26, 2010 The Sea of Galilee is our first stop on this day. We will visit Capernaum, the house of St. Peter's Mother In-Law, and then we drive to Mt. of Beatitudes where we visit the place of multiplication of loaves and fish, the church of Primacy of St. Peter, and then take the boat ride in the Sea of Galilee to go to Ein Gev where we will have lunch. After lunch we will go to the Jordan River, and then return to Nazareth for dinner and over night.



Day6:

Oct. 27, 2010 Jericho is our first stop driving to it through the Jordan Valley. The group will visit the Mt. of Temptation, have lunch, and then head to the Dead Sea to visit Qumran and then relax at one of the beautiful swimming beaches of the Dead Sea. In the evening the group will go to Bethlehem for dinner and over-night.

Day7:

Oct. 28, 2010 We head to Jerusalem to visit Al-Aqsa Mosque, St. Anne Church. After lunch we drive back to Bethlehem to visit the Nativity Church, St. Catherine's Church, and the Grotto of St. Jerome and St. Joseph, the Shepherd's Field, and then back to the hotel for dinner and overnight.

Day 8:

Oct. 29, 2010 Back to Jerusalem to visit Mount of Olives, and the Garden of Gethsemane after that the group will have lunch at one of Jerusalem's famous restaurants. After lunch we visit the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, the Church of the Dormition of our Lady, the Upper Room of the Last Supper and the Cardo; then drive back to the hotel for dinner and overnight.

Day 9:

Oct. 30, 2010 This morning we visit Ein Karem and then tour the new city of Jerusalem. After lunch we visit the old city of Jerusalem to walk the Via Dolorosa and take our first visit to the Holy Sepulcher and the Golgotha. Dinner at the hotel and overnight.

Day 10:

Oct. 31, 2010 Today we attend Holy Mass at the Holy Sepulcher Church in the Old City of Jerusalem. After lunch the group is free to do shopping in the Old city, and then go back to the hotel for dinner and overnight.

Day 11:

Nov. 1, 2010 Departure is at 10:40 am to catch our direct flight back to USA on Continental Airlines Flight No. CO 85; Tel-Aviv to Newark Liberty Airport (EWR). Arrival at 4:50 pm

Contact:

Edward Kurzum: 973-857-6562 Cell – 201-563-1370
St. George Church Office: 973-256-8961



*Christ is Risen!
Indeed He is Risen!*



Orthodox Icons (continued)

Saints from later periods in history may be shown as a sign that all of the faithful someday will be resurrected and live with Jesus when he reigns on a renewed Earth.

“They have all been impacted by the Resurrection. This shows that the Resurrection is universal. It's for everyone,” she said.

Iconic figures appear flat and ill-proportioned. Scenery is not realistic. There are theological reasons for that.

“There is never a shadow in icons. There is always light, and the light is coming from Christ,” Mother Alexandra said.

“Even in icons of the saints alone, the light of Christ is showing through their life. That light is not their own.”

Ears, eyes and noses are enlarged to convey that Christ enlightens the senses. Hands are enlarged to symbolize service. But feet may appear smaller than they should be in life, and often don't touch the earth. “This shows that we are to seek the things from above, letting go of the things we don't need,” Mother Alexandra said.

The image of Jesus leading the dead out of Hades isn't the only iconic depiction of Easter. Another shows the women who went to the tomb to properly prepare his body and found the grave empty. A version of that icon was recently given to Antiochian Village in memory of Joanne Abdalah, a writer

and wife of the Rev. John Abdalah of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Oakland. Mrs. Abdalah, who died in 2008, was the first librarian at Antiochian Village.

One of the women in the Resurrection account from the gospel of Luke was Joanna, Mrs. Abdalah's patron saint. So St. Joanna is prominent in the icon, alongside the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, with unknown women in the background.

“The Myrrh-bearing Women at the Tomb” depicts a scene that the congregation re-enacts before dawn on Easter. The people gather in darkness -- it may be shortly before midnight or shortly before dawn. They make a procession around the outside of the church, imitating the women on their way to the tomb. The priest reads that Scriptural passage and then knocks on the church doors. When the doors are opened, all the lights are on and the candles lit, as a sign of the Resurrection.

The Resurrection, Mother Alexandra said, isn't only something that happened to Jesus long ago or that awaits the faithful when he returns. “Our resurrected bodies will be the bodies we have now. We walk in resurrected life every day with the Lord,” she said. “Death isn't a different life. It's this life, continued. It's the sequel.”



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