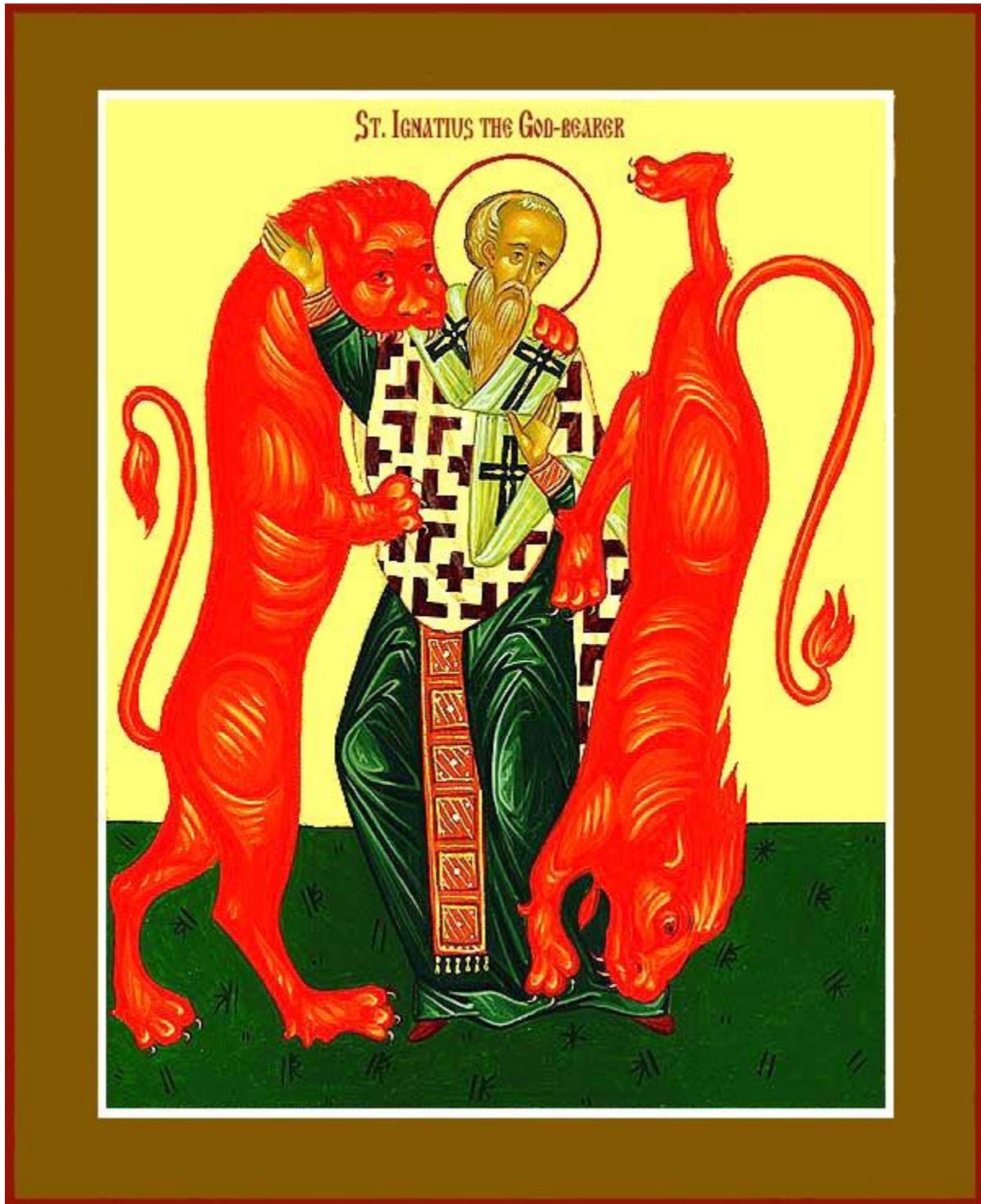


The Life Giving Fountain



December 2016

Ignatius of Antioch

Our father among the saints **Ignatius the God-bearer of Antioch** (probably died AD 107) was the third bishop of Antioch, after the Apostle Peter and Euodios, whom Ignatius succeeded around AD 68. Ignatius, who also called himself **Theophorus** ("God-bearer"), was most likely a disciple of both Apostles Peter and John. Several of his letters have survived to this day; he is one of the Apostolic Fathers (the earliest group of the Church Fathers), and a saint in the Orthodox Church (feastday, **December 20**).

Martyrdom and Writings

He was arrested by the Roman authorities and transported to Rome to die in the arena. They hoped to make an example of him and thus discourage Christianity from spreading. Instead, he met with and encouraged Christians all along his route, and wrote letters to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Philadelphians, Smyrneans, and Romans, as well as a letter to Polycarp, who was bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of John the Evangelist.

These letters proved to be influential in the development of Christian theology, since the number of extant writings from this period of Church history is very small. They bear signs of being written in great haste and without a proper plan, such as run-on sentences and an unsystematic succession of thought. Ignatius is the first known Christian writer to put great stress on loyalty to a single bishop in each city, who is assisted by both presbyters (priests) and deacons. Earlier writings only mention *either* bishops *or* presbyters, and give the impression that there was usually more than one bishop per congregation. Ignatius also stresses the value of the Eucharist, calling it "a medicine to immortality." The very strong desire for bloody martyrdom in the arena, which Ignatius expresses rather graphically in places, may seem quite odd to the modern reader, but an examination of his theology of soteriology shows that he regarded salvation as being from the power and fear of death. So, for him, to try to escape his martyrdom would be to fear death and place himself back under its power.

Nowadays only shorter variants of those seven letters are thought to be authentic writings of Ignatius. Their longer variants are thought to be emendations from the fifth century, created to posthumously enlist Ignatius as an unwitting witness into certain theological fights of that age.



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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
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My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today the Virgin is on her way to give birth. This is the season when we remember the Nativity of the Lord. We approach day-by-day the cave of His coming into our world, becoming one with us. “What took place bodily in the case of the Virgin Mary occurs in every soul spiritually giving birth to Christ.”

The remarkable message of Christianity is that God gets involved. Jesus Christ is born truly human. And yet He is truly God, God Incarnate. The Son of God is born Son of Man. Christ has a mother. God has a grandparents, a family. We are His family. “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder.”

In Christ we are all family. Sometimes our family is scattered, dispersed, and we are still family. But it is normal for family to come together from time to time, even to share a meal. The gathering of Christ’s family is around His table, the Holy Altar. We have many concerns, many involvements. But if we choose, we can make time to gather at His table. As somebody else provided this month in the explanation of St. Ignatius on the cover of this “magazine”, communion in the Eucharist at the Divine Liturgy is “a medicine of immortality.” The Liturgy of the Church can seem long and wearying. Indeed, it is so. Unless we find God there. If we love God and find God in the gathering at the Eucharist, then the Liturgy is very short. It is seldom difficult to find time to be with one we love. If I don’t find God in the Liturgy, it might be that He is not there – or more likely that I am not looking for Him.

Some people look for rules, what is required. And often the minimum requirement becomes the maximum that I will invest. I would suggest that we think in terms of guidelines rather than rules. The Lord invites us; do we choose to accept His invitation? And then, perhaps we would like to prepare for the celebration.

The Lord invites us daily. He especially invites us at the major feasts of the Church. This year the Nativity falls on a Sunday. The usual Christmas Eve Liturgy is an evening vespereal Liturgy. Because of it being on a Saturday this year, it will be earlier. The community decided for 3:00 PM on Saturday December 24th. Then on Sunday morning at 10:30 AM we will celebrate the actual Christmas Divine Liturgy for the Birth

of the Lord. Please let us join together as family. If you have family visiting from out-of-town, so much the better. Bring them all!

The Nativity Season is a time of joy and many blessings. It is customarily a season when families come together. If not physically, then still we remember those whom we love but are not near. It is a time for sharing. It is a time for giving. Sadly, that impulse to give and share has been grossly commercialized in our country today. Let us remember that the shepherds in their simplicity and poverty were just as much praising the Nativity of the Lord, just as much valued, as the wise men from the east with their gold and frankincense. As Christ gave Himself to the world, let us also give of ourselves to one another. As He becomes family to us, let us be family to one another.

Our small parish does not have some of the physical splendor of other larger communities. But every visitor tells me what nice people are here. We exist by the grace of God and the favor of His saints. In response to God's gifts, we give back. We give to His people and we give to His temple. God's gifts don't come with an invoice, a price tag. They are always free gifts. Our response needs to be as freely given.

I have asked that this year we set aside the idea of "dues" to be members of Christ's family. We all know what had been prescribed as dues in the past. We all know that our dues have not been enough to meet the expense of the church. And we also know that there has been enough, not much extra, but enough. This is the third year in a row that we are coming to the end of the year with a bit more than we started. Obviously some have stepped beyond the boundaries of minimal dues. The Lord values whatever we share. So this year let us each pledge and give as our conscience and ability calls for. No one should ever be turned away for financial reasons. Christian living is not a matter of rules. We cannot buy God's love. A dollar or a thousand is the same if it is given with sincerity.

The Biblical, scriptural standard is a tithe, "and Abraham gave the High Priest Melchizadek a tenth of all." That may seem extreme. Can I afford 1% at this time? A dime a day? A dollar? Perhaps next year I will be able to add a bit. What do I spend elsewhere and where does my church fit among those priorities? Christ rejoiced at the widow's two pennies.

Fr. Michael



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Today the Virgin is on her way to the cave where she will give birth to the eternal Word of God in an ineffable manner. Rejoice, therefore, O universe when you hear this news, and glorify with the angels and the shepherds, Him who shall appear as a young child, being God from all eternity.

God is Glorious in His Saints

December is the season of the Nativity of the Lord. The beginning of the month commemorates several important saints. On December 4th the Church remembers St. Barbara the Great Martyr and St. John of Damascus. The Great Martyr Barbara lived about 300 AD. Her father, a pagan, kept her locked in a tower. Seeing the outer world through her window, she came to understand and know God although she had no human teacher. Coming out of the tower one day when her father was away she happened to meet some Christians who told her about Christ. St. Barbara was killed for her faith in Christ and the Trinity by her own father. A large relic of St. Barbara is preserved in our church thanks to Fr. Parthenios Kolonas the founding priest who brought it from the island of Patmos.

On December 5th we remember St. Savas the Sanctified. He is called “Sanctified” because he was a priest, which was uncommon among monks in the 6th century. This is the nameday of our Metropolitan Savas on Pittsburgh.

On December 6th the Church remembers St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, a very popular saint, patron of sailors and travelers and those in financial trouble. There is an icon of him on the left side of our iconostasis.

On December 9th we remember the Conception of the Theotokos by Sts Anna and Joachim. In the 19th century the Roman Catholic Church created a dogma of Mary being conceived free from the guilt of original sin. Since the Orthodox do not have this idea that we are each guilty of the first sin of Adam, nor indeed the understanding that sin is primarily a matter of guilt for violations, the Orthodox has never held this late western doctrine. However, the Orthodox do affirm the purity of Mary and accord her an honor only less than her son. She is only important because of who her Son is, and therefore she is very important indeed.

On December 12th the Church remembers St. Spyridon of Cyprus.

The week from December 20th to the Nativity of the Lord on December 25th should not be a time of maximum party but of relative quiet and prayerful preparation for the Feast. This is the time, both symbolically and literally that the Light, Emmanuel, God with us, comes into the world. On December 27th we commemorate St. Stephen the first martyr.

Many blessings to all who celebrate their Nameday this month.



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METROPOLITAN SAVAS SPEAKING ABOUT SAINT SAVAS

There is no solitary Christian. There are only Christians in community. We see that in the life of Sava who for a time lived the life of a hermit. He was a solitary...Until God called him to something else. St. Seraphim of Savov once said, "If you acquire silence, if you acquire stillness, if you acquire peace, a thousand around you will be saved." And that's true in the life of Sava. When Sava got to that place; when Sava was so intimate with God that he could be led into whatever God wanted, he came to the realization that God wanted him to cross over the River Kidron where he had been living in a cave far away. He saw a light marking out a place on the other side of the ravine. He worked his way down and up the other side and he came to a cave that was built as if it was a church. The whole shape of it was a church. And he realized, "God wants this to be a church. He settled there and men came to him because his reputation for holiness had preceded him. Soon there was a whole community of hermits living there. By the time he died on December 5th, 523, shortly after the Emperor Justinian began building St. Sophia, he had become the father of 7 monastic communities. And the patriarch had given him a very special title, archimandrite, which meant something in those days. It meant the leader of the mandra, the first abbot of the whole flock of monasteries in this region. He was the Patriarch's appointed overseer of the monasteries in the area we now call the West Bank.

If I had the time and you had the patience I could show you examples from the life of Sava of every virtue. I could talk about his love. I could talk about his kindness. I could talk about his patience. I could talk about his self-control. Savas was an embodiment of all those things.

It is interesting that in Sav's life which was written by one of his disciples, Cyril of Scythopolis, we don't hear Savas talk. There is not record of a teaching of Sava. What you do is you see Sava doing things. You see him building. You see him leading. You see him praying. You see him defending the poor and the disadvantaged. The life of Savas is a remarkable document.

The relics of St. Sava were taken by the Crusaders to Venice where they were kept as a treasure, until Pope John XXIII was troubled by a recurring dream of St. Savas wanting to go home. So Pope John committed to returning the relics. He didn't live to see it but his successor, Pope Paul VI, followed through and on October 10, 1965, the body of St. Savas was returned to his monastery, Mar Sava, just a few miles from Bethlehem. There he is now. Vested as a priest, holding a komboskini, praying for his community.

President's Message – December 2016

Dear Church Family,

I hope you enjoyed a delicious Thanksgiving dinner and were able to spend quality time with your family and friends. If you are a Black Friday shopper, I suspect you found some great deals and kicked off your Christmas shopping season. Can you believe it's December already, and we are in the last month of the year 2016? I can't wait to start decorating and to put up our outdoor lights and Christmas tree. My indoor cat "Lucky" also loves this time of the year. His wildest dreams are fulfilled. There is actually a tree in the house. He loves spending countless hours hiding and sleeping underneath the Christmas tree, basking in the heat from the lights, and waiting for a bird to appear, or Santa Clause to bring him a treat. I have tried to be on my best behavior also so Santa will bring me something other than a lump of coal!

Our finances to date are as follows:

<u>Month</u>	<u>Revenue</u>	<u>Expenses</u>
January	\$16,447.00	\$11,307.00
February	8,766.00	8,140.00
March	10,405.00	5,660.00
April	9,402.00	9,851.00
May	5,042.00	6,581.00
June	4,614.00	6,236.00
July	27,475.00	9,319.00
August	6,210.00	6,784.00
September	6,583.00	7,716.00

As you can see from the numbers above, the church budget continues to be a challenge. Please offer your time, talent and treasures to help our parish continue to survive. Remember all that we are and all that we have are a gift from God.

With the ending of the calendar year 2016, remember to fulfill your pledge. In this mailing, I am also including the new stewardship card for calendar year 2017. Please designate your monetary support for calendar year 2017. This card is very important for budgeting purposes. While you have it in your hand and it's fresh in your mind, please take the time to complete the form and return it to church. I want to extend a special thank you to those who are not in the area but continue to support our church financially.

We will have a general assembly on Sunday, December 11th after our church services. Please plan on attending.

On Sunday, December 18th, Santa Claus will be making his annual visit to our church. If you have children who will be coming, contact one of the Sunday school teachers (Marlene Koucoumaris or Fanny Stambolis) or Kathy in the church office so we can be sure that Santa will have a gift for your child. Loukoumades will also be available during coffee hour. These are the best honey drenched fried puffs of dough you will ever eat!

As I look at my calendar, some dates in December are worth noting:

* December 21st is the first day of winter; it is also known as the winter solstice. The winter solstice marks the shortest day and the longest night of the year. The sun appears at its lowest point in the sky, and its noontime elevation appears to be the same for several days before and after the solstice. Following the winter solstice, the days begin to grow longer and the nights shorter.

* Christmas Eve, the day before Christmas, occurs on December 24th and is considered one of the most culturally significant celebrations in the Western World. It is widely observed as a full or partial holiday in anticipation of Christmas Day. One reason celebrations occur on Christmas Eve is that the traditional Christian liturgical day starts at sunset. This practice is based on the story of creation in the Book of Genesis: “And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day”. Many churches still ring their church bells and hold prayers in the evening. Since tradition holds that Jesus was born at night, services are celebrated on Christmas Eve, traditionally at midnight, in commemoration of his birth.

* Christmas Day, December 25th, is an annual commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ to the Virgin Mary and is celebrated by millions of people of numerous faiths around the world. According to popular tradition, the birth took place in a stable, surrounded by farm animals. Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. Shepherds in the fields surrounding Bethlehem were told of the birth by an angel and were first to see the child. The wise men visited Jesus in the manger and brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They followed a mysterious star, commonly known as the Star of Bethlehem.

The modern celebratory customs associated with Christmas include: giving gifts, Christmas music and caroling, an exchange of Christmas cards, church celebrations, a special meal, and the display of various Christmas decorations including Christmas trees, lights, nativity scenes, garland, wreaths, mistletoe, and holly. Santa Claus (Saint Nicholas) is associated with bringing gifts to the children.

The traditional colors of Christmas are red, green, and gold. Red symbolizes the blood of Jesus which was shed in his crucifixion; while green symbolizes life, and in particular, the evergreen tree which does not lose its leaves in the winter; and gold is associated with Christmas as one of the three gifts of the wise men (Magi) and symbolizing royalty.

* New Year's Eve, the last day of the year, is on December 31st. New Year's Eve is celebrated at evening social gatherings where people dance, eat, drink alcoholic beverages, and watch or light fireworks to mark the New Year. One of the most prominent New Year's celebrations in the country is the "ball drop" held in New York City's Time Square. The tradition began in 1907 and was inspired by the time balls that were formally used as a time signal. At 11:59 p.m. ET, an 11,875 pound, 12-foot diameter Waterford crystal ball located on the roof of One Time Square is lowered down a 141-foot high pole reaching the roof of the building one minute later to signal the start of the New Year.

I want to personally thank Anthony Mougianis, owner of Apollo Cleaning, who donated his staff time to clean our entire church. He did this to honor his Uncle Father Frank Kirlangitis who was ordained Presbyterian in our church and served as her priest from 1955-1965.

Although this may not be everyone from our small community, during the 2016 calendar year we lost the following members: Mary Pappas, Ernie Pandelos, Christ Pashalis, John Mallis, Nicky Glavaris, Blanche Glavaris, Ethel Augoustidis, and Helen Pritsos. Please keep their families in your thoughts and prayers during this holiday season.

Our next board meeting is scheduled for December 13th. If you have any items which you would like the board to discuss, please contact me so that I can add it to our agenda.

Father Michael will be having church service on Sunday December 25th celebrating The Nativity of Christ. Please make an effort to attend.

During this holiday season, remember the less fortunate and the saying, "It is better to give than to receive". If you can help someone who is struggling whether it is financially, emotionally or spiritually, it will warm your heart.

In closing, I would like to extend a thank you to all who are committed to keeping our faith and traditions of Zoodochos Peghe alive for the future. I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John S. Koucoumaris". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the text "With love in Christ,".

John S. Koucoumaris