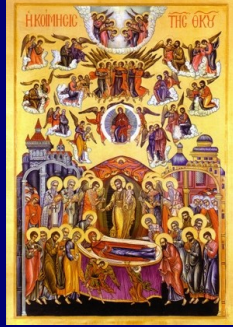


## CHURCH STAFF

- Parish Priest: Very Reverend Archimandrite Christodoulos Margellos
- Parish Council President: Christy Chappell Belkin
- Philoptochos President: Maria Molzahn
- Sunday School Directors: Susu Saba
- Greek School: Illektra Kolokouri
- Choir Director: George Tzougros

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

February Calendar	16
Focus on Philoptochos	4
Youth Corner	6
Community News	7
February Fliers	8-11
February Saints	12—15



# Wonder Worker

FEBRUARY 2025

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD TO THE TEMPLE

The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord to the Temple, also known as "The Meeting of Our Lord," "The Purification of the Holy Virgin," is celebrated annually on February 2nd. This feast holds profound significance in the Orthodox Church, commemorating the event described in the Gospel of Luke (2:22-40) when the infant Jesus was brought to the Temple in Jerusalem by His parents, Mary and Joseph, to be presented to God according to the Mosaic Law. This seemingly simple act of piety reveals a wealth of theological meaning and offers valuable spiritual lessons for Orthodox Christians today.

To fully appreciate the significance of this feast, it is essential to understand its historical and scriptural context. According to the Law of Moses, a woman who had given birth to a son was considered ritually unclean for a period of time and required a ceremony of purification before entering the Temple. Furthermore, every firstborn male child was to be dedicated to God. Mary and Joseph, devout Jews, meticulously observed these laws, demonstrating their obedience to God's commandments.

The Gospel of Luke recounts the encounter of the Holy Family with two individuals in the Temple: Simeon and Anna. Simeon, a righteous and devout man, had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. Upon seeing the infant Jesus, Simeon recognized Him as the promised Savior and, filled with the Holy Spirit, uttered the words now known as the "Song of Simeon."

*"Νῦν ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλόν σου, Δέσποτα, κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου, ἐν εἰρήνῃ· ὅτι εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου, ὃ ἠτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν· φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν, καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ."*

*"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples. A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."*

This prayer, recited daily at Vespers services in the Orthodox Church, encapsulates the profound significance of the Presentation. It marks the first public recognition of Jesus as the Messiah and highlights His mission to bring salvation to both Jews and Gentiles.

Also present in the Temple was Anna the Prophetess, a widow who had dedicated her life to prayer and fasting. Inspired by the same Holy Spirit as Simeon, Anna also recognized Jesus as the Messiah and gave thanks to God, proclaiming the good news of His arrival to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Simeon's encounter with the Christ Child included a prophetic element. He foretold that Jesus would be "a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed." He also prophesied to Mary, "and a sword will pierce your own

*Continued on next page*

soul too." This prophecy foreshadowed the suffering and rejection that Jesus, and His mother Mary, would endure.

The Feast of the Presentation is richly depicted in Orthodox iconography. The icon typically portrays the meeting of the Holy Family with Simeon and Anna inside the Temple, in front of the altar. The altar, often covered by a canopy and adorned with a book or scroll, symbolizes the presence of God and the sanctity of the Temple.

Mary, the Theotokos, is usually depicted on the left side of the icon, holding out her hands in a gesture of offering and humility. She has just handed her Son, the infant Jesus, to Simeon. Joseph stands behind Mary, carrying two turtle doves, the offering of a poor family, as a sacrifice. Simeon, often depicted bareheaded, holds Jesus with reverence, his hands covered as a sign of respect. Anna the Prophetess stands behind Mary, pointing towards the Christ Child, emphasizing His significance. The icon of the Presentation captures the essence of the feast, visually narrating the meeting of God and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. It serves as a reminder of the Incarnation, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the beginning of Christ's mission of salvation.

The Feast of the Presentation holds multifaceted significance for Orthodox Christians. It is a Christological feast, celebrating Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Redeemer. It is also a Mariological feast, commemorating the purification of the Virgin Mary. Finally, it is a temple feast, highlighting the importance of the Temple as the dwelling place of God.

The Presentation affirms the Incarnation, the central mystery of the Christian faith, by emphasizing the reality of God becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ. The infant Jesus, presented in the Temple, is both fully God and fully human. This divine-human union is the foundation of our salvation. By fulfilling the requirements of the Law, Jesus demonstrates that He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. His submission to the Law reveals His perfect obedience to the will of God the Father and sets an example for all Christians to follow.

Simeon's proclamation of Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles" emphasizes the universal nature of Christ's salvation, extending beyond the Jewish people to all nations. This prophecy highlights the inclusive nature of God's love and the mission of the Church to bring the Gospel to the entire world.

The Presentation foreshadows the Church as the new Temple, where God dwells among His people through the Holy Spirit. Just as God was present in the Temple in the Old Testament, He now dwells within believers through the Holy Spirit, making each Christian a "temple of the Holy Spirit."

The Feast of the Presentation is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, preceded by the Matins service. A Great Vespers service is conducted on the evening before the feast. The liturgical texts for the feast are rich in hymns and scriptural readings that emphasize the themes of light, salvation, and the meeting of God and humanity. The scripture readings for the feast include extracts from Exodus 12:15-13:16, Leviticus 12, Numbers 8, Isaiah 6:1-12, Isaiah 19:1,3-5,12,16,19-21, Luke 2:25-32, and Hebrews 7:7-17.

Blessing of Candles: In many Orthodox churches, candles are blessed during the Divine Liturgy, symbolizing Christ as the "Light of the World." The blessing of candles reminds us that Christ came to dispel the darkness of sin and ignorance and to illuminate the path to salvation.

The Presentation also provides the basis for the tradition of "churching" women forty days after childbirth. This practice mirrors Mary's purification after the birth of Jesus. Special prayers are offered in thanksgiving for the physical safety of the mother, and the infant is presented to the Lord in the Church. This symbolizes the entry of both mother and child into the life of the Church and their dedication to God.

The Feast of the Presentation is adorned with beautiful hymns that capture the essence of the event. One such hymn is the Troparion of the feast:

***"Lady full of grace, rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos,  
for Christ our God, the Sun of righteousness has risen from you  
and He illumined those in darkness.  
And you, righteous Elder, be glad in heart,***

***receiving in your embraces the One who liberates  
our souls and bestows on us the Resurrection."***

This hymn praises Mary, the Theotokos, as the one who brought forth Christ, the "Sun of Righteousness," who dispels the darkness of sin. It also celebrates Simeon, the righteous elder, who received Christ, the "Deliverance of our souls," into his arms.

Sermons delivered on the Feast of the Presentation often delve into the spiritual meaning of the event. One such sermon emphasizes the importance of encountering Christ in our own lives:

"On February 2nd the Church celebrates the great feast of The Meeting of our Lord in the Temple. The Gospel lesson...source dedicating our lives to following Christ's teachings and participating in the life of the Church.

Seek Christ with expectant faith: Like Simeon, we should eagerly await the encounter with Christ in our lives, trusting in His promises. This requires cultivating a life of prayer, studying the scriptures, and actively seeking God's presence in our daily lives. Become bearers of Christ's light: We are called to reflect Christ's light in the world through our actions, words, and faithfulness. This means living a life of love, compassion, and service to others, sharing the Gospel message with those around us.

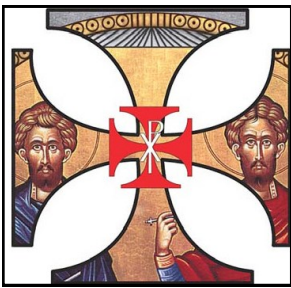
The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord to the Temple is a celebration of the Incarnation, the fulfillment of the Law, and the revelation of God's salvation to the world. It is a time for Orthodox Christians to reflect on the profound significance of Christ's entry into the Temple and to renew their commitment to live as true disciples.

By following the examples of Mary and Joseph, we are called to be obedient to God's commandments and to raise our children in the faith. Like Simeon, we should seek Christ with expectant faith, trusting that He will reveal Himself to us in His time. And like Anna, we should proclaim the good news of Christ's salvation to all who will hear.

The Feast of the Presentation reminds us that Christ is the light of the world, who came to dispel the darkness of sin and to guide us on the path to eternal life. Let us embrace this light and strive to become beacons of His love and truth in the world.

***+Very Rev. Archimandrite Christodoulos Margellos***





# FOCUS ON PHILOPTOCHOS HELP US TO HELP OTHERS

## Agape Forward

February, traditionally the month of Valentine's and chocolates, tends to invoke happy emotions. According to Alexandros Kosmas Kyrou (2014): "The actual Orthodox liturgical Feast Days of Valentinus (Greek)/Valentinus (Latin) commemorate two Early Christian saints, Saint Valentine the Presbyter of Rome (July 6) and Hieromartyr Valentine the Bishop of Interamna (Temi), Italy (July 30)," ([The Historical and Orthodox Saint Valentine](#)). While February 14 is the international St. Valentine's Day holiday, in the Orthodox church, St. Valentine is commemorated on April 24, July 6, or July 30 ([St. Valentine: The Most Famous Saint You Never Knew](#)). In honor of this Saint/Saints let's continue to work towards the true Agape that Christ calls us toward.

This February, Philoptochos is excited to welcome all of our sisters to our annual luncheon. Please, if you haven't R.S.V.P'd yet, let our hostess, Valerie Kazamias know ([valkaz3633@gmail.com](mailto:valkaz3633@gmail.com)), the invitation and response form are included in this newsletter.

Thank you to everyone that came either in person or virtually to our January meeting. Philoptochos meetings are always full of wonderful discussions. This past month, along with our regular commitments, we allocated \$3,000.00 towards the California Wildfire Relief fund. Together, we harness our power and help those in need.

March 25th will be here before we know it. This year, the luncheon associated with this event will be held on Sunday, March 23rd. As always, proceeds raised from this luncheon and raffle go to help the poor in Greece and Cyprus. More information will be coming soon.

As always, please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns ([philomadison@gmail.com](mailto:philomadison@gmail.com)).



THE ASSUMPTION GREEK ORTHODOX LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY

Madison Wisconsin

Cordially invite you to their

MIDWINTER APPRECIATION LUNCHEON

Memories Reflections Anticipations

Saturday, February 8, 2025

MADISON CLUB

5 East Wilson Street

Madison, Wisconsin

Reception...11:30 AM

Luncheon...12:30 PM

\$40.00 per person

Includes lunch, gift and raffle ticket

RSVP

January 27, 2025

In enclosed envelope

GUESTS ARE WELCOME AND ENCOURAGED

Parking is available in the Hilton Hotel garage and in the two city lots across the street.



## YOUTH CORNER

# February

Hello Sunday school families,

Just a quick reminder, Sunday classes are in session after Holy Communion for 30 min. We love teaching your children about the Orthodox faith and this year we have had the most student attendance. We appreciate all the help and support from our amazing teachers and families!

This month we have two events happening, please mark your calendars!

- **Sunday Feb 2nd** is Godparent day! Children will sit next to their Godparent during liturgy, take Holy Communion together, and enjoy a delicious pancake breakfast with their Godparent. (There will be a free will offering basket).
- **On Sunday February 16th** there will be a family outing to Ten Pin Alley for bowling night from 5:00-7:00 pm. The church has reserved 6 lanes for families to bowl. Families will only have to pay for food/drinks and shoe rentals which is \$2 per bowler. Please **RSVP to Fr. Chris or myself by Feb 12th** if you are planning to come.

In Christ,  
Susu Akkawi

## COMMUNITY NEWS

**PARISH COUNCIL MEETING:** Will be held on Tuesday, February 18th at 7:00 p.m.

**PHILOPTOCHOS MEETING:** The Next meeting will be on Tuesday, February 25th via Zoom.

**ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASS:** We have begun A.R.E. classes. We will be continuing the Gospel of John. Classes are on Wednesday's at 11:00 a.m. and Thursday at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom. Everyone is welcome to join us.

**WOMEN'S SPIRITUAL MEETING:** Women's spiritual zoom meetings will be on Thursday, February 27th at 7:00 p.m. If you are interested in participating and you haven't signed in yet please contact Peli Galiti at pegaliti@gmail.com You will get the zoom link in your email.

**GODPARENT SUNDAY:** Our Parish Community is delighted to honor the beautiful spiritual bond in our Lord that is the relationship of God's love between Godparents and Godchildren. Let us come to worship on this day, properly prepared to receive Holy Communion, and acknowledge the blessings of salvation through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us all recite the Prayer Service of Rededication to remind ourselves of the saving grace that has been bestowed upon us through the Sacrament of Baptism.

Following services on February 2nd, everyone is invited to attend a Pancake Brunch offered in the Social Hall for the benefit of our Sunday School. IT will be a Free Will Offering so each person give what you can.

**SUPERBOWL SQUARES 2025:** Mark your calendars for Sunday, February 9th, so you don't miss our Annual SUPERBOWL Squares. \$25 Game Board tickets are now on sale. Prizes \$150 for winning a quarter and \$350 for the final. Join the fun and have a great time!

**PARISH OUTING TO THE MADISON CAPITALS GAME:** Once again our parish is going to be doing an outing for the Madison Capitals Hockey Team on Saturday, February 22nd. This year we have gotten one of the suites for the game and cost will \$20 per person. It is also Team USA Bobblehead night. This will be a great game to attend with the whole family. Come cheer on our Madison Capitals to defeat the Youngstown Phantoms on February 22nd at 7:05 p.m. at the Bob Suter's Capital Aren

**STEWARDSHIP 2025 APPEAL:** At our Stewardship meeting, we have discussed the changes at Assumption. The church is in constant transition, and our aim is to anticipate the time, talent, and treasure needs of our community. We need to combine the Strengths of our heritage, our Orthodox Tradition, and our faith in God to encourage what we do now & toward the future. The Church needs the involvement of you and me, & with the Help of God, to shape our programs to meet the needs of our community & to reach out to others, outside of our community. Please volunteer this year your time and talents, for the good of the church. Nearly every committee has need of the talents and time of leaders & contributors.

**PLEASE REMEMBER THE CHURCH IN YOUR WILL OR ESTATE PLANNING:** As we begin this new year, please consider making a Planned Gift to the Church. A Planned Gift is an opportunity to leave a legacy that strengthens the Church and supports its vital ministries and will leave an impact that will be felt for years to come. It may also give you substantial current tax benefits as well as estate tax benefits. If you are interested in finding out more about the many ways that the Church can be included in your will or estate planning, please contact a Parish Council Member.

**NEW CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT DRIVE:** As a community we have always tried and succeeded in taking care of and upgrading our Sanctuary and facilities. We the spirit of continuously improving our church. We are beginning a long term Capital Improvement Fund Drive. We are looking at 3 particular future projects. These are the Broken Sewer pipe in our back parking lot, Replacing and upgrading our current church sound system and remodeling our kitchen. The months ahead we will be formally setting up a Capital Improvement Fund Drive Committee who will spearhead the entire process. We ask everyone to consider this in future giving, funeral memorials and in planned giving. If you are interested in giving a donation for the Capital Fund please put "Capital Improvement Fund Drive" on the memo line of the check or mark it on the envelope. Together we can get these projects finished.

# happy God Parent

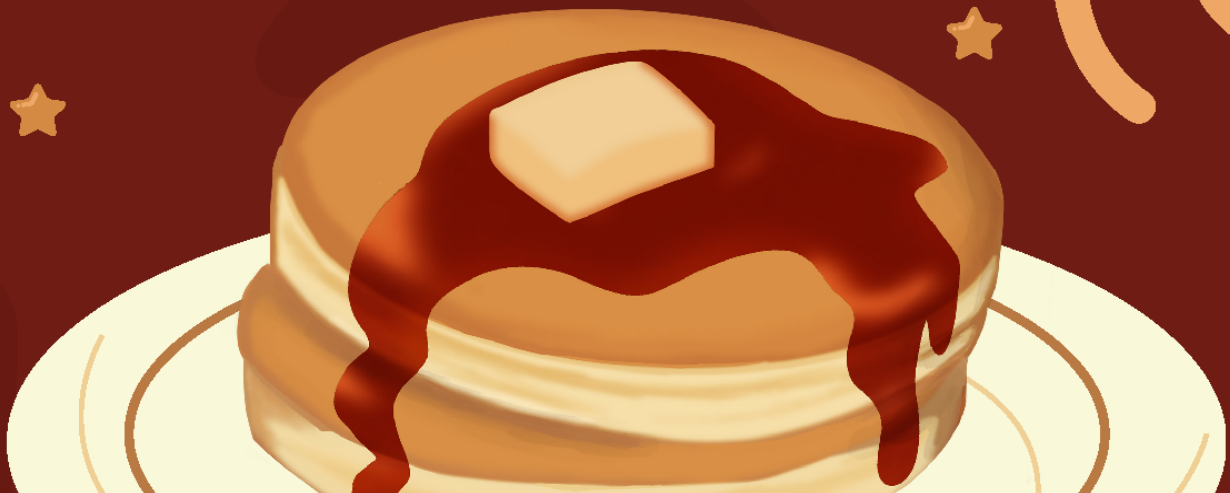
day

February 2nd, 2025

Come join us for pancakes to celebrate God Parent day  
with your God children!

Sunday school students will sit by their God parent/s during  
liturgy and take Holy Communion together. Then during  
coffee hour there will be a breakfast celebration with  
delicious pancakes!

There will be a basket for free will offering.  
Donations will go towards Sunday school.





# ASSUMPTION BOWLING NIGHT!

The church has reserved 6 lanes for families to bowl and families will only have to pay for food/drinks and shoe rentals which is \$2 per bowler.

**Sunday February 16th | 5-7 pm**  
**Ten Pin Alley**

6285 Nesbitt Rd, Fitchburg, WI 53719  
RSVP by Feb 12th if you are coming to Susu or Fr. Chris



# 2025 Parish outing to the Madison Capitol's Hockey Team

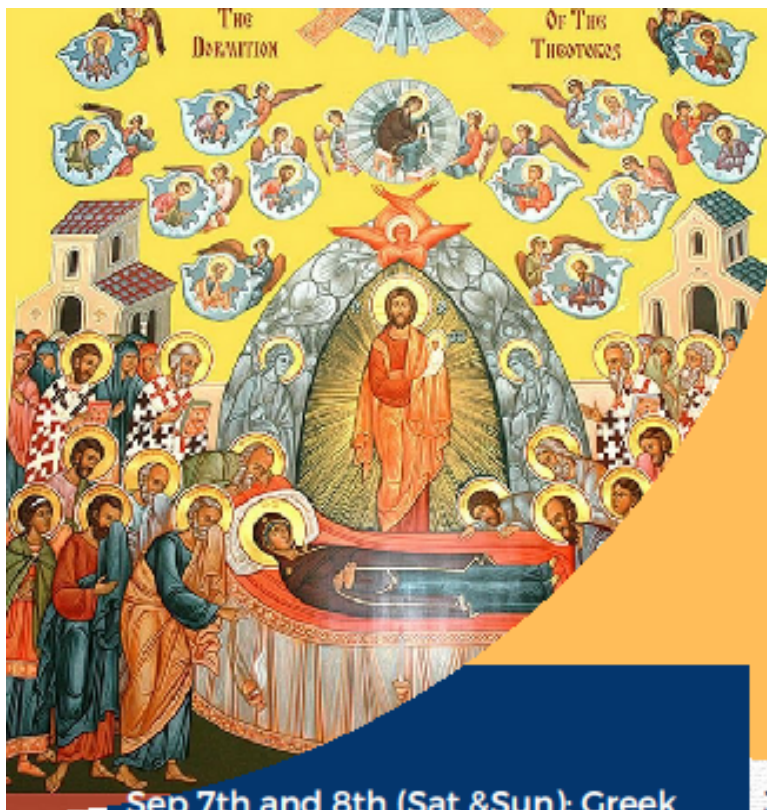


**On Saturday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2025 we will have a Parish  
Outing to the Madison Capitol's Hockey Game vs the  
Youngstown Phantoms**

**This year we have one of the Suites reserved for the  
church. This means we will only have 30 tickets available.  
The cost is still pending.**

**RSVP with Fr. Christodoulos**

**Join us for what is sure to be a great night of fun &  
fellowship.**



**SAVE THE DATES**

# Assumption

## Sunday School 2024-2025 Events

Mark your calendars for the different Sunday school events for the new school year!

**Sep 7th and 8th (Sat & Sun): Greek Fest +**

**Sep 15th (Sun) : First day of Sunday school**

**Oct 20th (Sun): Pumpkin patch and corn maze family outing**

**Nov 10th (Sun): Chili cook off fundraiser**

**Nov 15th (Fri): Kolyva Night**

**Dec 1st (Sun): No Classes Thanksgiving break**

**Dec 13th (Fri): Ginger bread night**

**Dec 15th (Sun): Christmas Pageant**

**Dec 22nd & Dec 29th: No Classes Christmas Break**

**Jan 12th (Sun): Ice Skating at Edgewater**

**Feb 2nd (Sun): God Parents Day Breakfast fundraiser**

**Feb 17th (Mon): Family bowling night**

**Mar 3rd (Mon): Lent Starts**

**Mar 30th (Sun): No Classes Spring Break**

**Apr 12th (Sat): Lazarus Retreat**

**Apr 13th (Sun): No Classes Palm Sunday**

**Apr 20th (Sun): No Classes Pascha**

**May 4th (Sun): Family picnic outing**

**May 18th (Sun): Last day of Sunday school**

**Jun 1st (Sun): Graduate Sunday Celebration**

**The Meeting of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the Temple:** Today the Church commemorates an important event in the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 2:22-40). Forty days after His birth the God-Infant was taken to the Jerusalem Temple, the center of the nation's religious life. According to the Law of Moses (Lev. 12:2-8), a woman who gave birth to a male child was forbidden to enter the Temple of God for forty days. At the end of this time the mother came to the Temple with the child, to offer a young lamb or pigeon to the Lord as a purification sacrifice. The Most Holy Virgin, the Mother of God, had no need of purification, since she had given birth to the Source of purity and sanctity without defilement. However, she humbly fulfilled the requirements of the Law.

At this time the righteous Elder Simeon (February 3) was living in Jerusalem. It had been revealed to him that he would not die until he should behold the promised Messiah. By inspiration from above, Saint Simeon went to the Temple at the very moment when the Most Holy Theotokos and Saint Joseph had brought the Infant Jesus to fulfill the Law.

The God-Receiver Simeon took the divine Child in his arms, and giving thanks to God, he spoke the words repeated by the Church each evening at Vespers: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32). Saint Simeon said to the Most Holy Virgin: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against. Yea, a sword shall pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35).

At the Temple was the 84-year-old widow Anna the Prophetess, daughter of Phanuel (February 3), "who did not leave the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day. She arrived just when Saint Simeon met the divine Child. She also gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of Him to all those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:37-38). In the icon of the Feast she holds a scroll which reads: "This Child has established Heaven and earth."

Before Christ was born, righteous men and women lived by faith in the promised Messiah, and awaited His coming. The Righteous Simeon and the Prophetess Anna, the last righteous people of the Old Testament, were deemed worthy to meet the Savior in the Temple.

The Feast of the Meeting of the Lord is among the most ancient feasts of the Christian Church. We have sermons on the Feast by the holy bishops Methodius of Patara (+ 312), Cyril of Jerusalem (+ 360), Gregory the Theologian (+ 389), Amphilocius of Iconium (+ 394), Gregory of Nyssa (+ 400), and John Chrysostom (+ 407). Despite its early origin, this Feast was not celebrated so splendidly until the sixth century.

In 528, during the reign of Justinian, an earthquake killed many people in Antioch. Other misfortunes followed this one. In 541 a terrible plague broke out in Constantinople, carrying off several thousand people each day. During this time of widespread suffering, a solemn prayer service (Litia) for deliverance from evils was celebrated on the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord, and the plague ceased. In thanksgiving to God, the Church established a more solemn celebration of this Feast.

Church hymnographers have adorned this Feast with their hymns: Saint Andrew of Crete in the seventh century; Saint Cosmas Bishop of Maium, Saint John of Damascus, and Saint Germanus Patriarch of Constantinople in the eighth century; and Saint Joseph, Archbishop of Thessalonica in the ninth century.

On this day we also commemorate the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos known as "the Softening of Evil Hearts" or "Simeon's Prophecy." The Mother of God is depicted without Her Child, with seven swords piercing her breast: three from the left side, three from the right, and one from below.

A similar icon, "Of the Seven Swords" (August 13) shows three swords on the left side and four from the right.



**HIEROMARTYR HARALAMBOS:** The Hieromartyr Haralambos, Bishop of Magnesia, the Martyrs Porphyrius and Bapthus and Three Women Martyrs suffered in the year 202.

Saint Haralambos, Bishop of Magnesia (Asia Minor), successfully spread faith in Christ the Savior, guiding people on the way to salvation. News of his preaching reached Lucian, the governor of the district, and the military commander Lucius. The saint was arrested and brought to trial, where he confessed his faith in Christ and refused to offer sacrifice to idols.

Despite the bishop's advanced age (he was 113 years old), he was subjected to monstrous tortures. They lacerated his body with iron hooks, and scraped all the skin from his body. During this the saint turned to his tormentors, "I thank you, brethren, that you have restored my spirit, which longs to pass over to a new and everlasting life!"

Seeing the Elder's endurance and his complete lack of malice, two soldiers (Porphyrius and Bapthus) openly confessed Christ, for which they were immediately beheaded with a sword. Three women who were watching the sufferings of Saint Haralambos also began to glorify Christ, and were quickly martyred.

The enraged Lucius seized the instruments of torture and began to torture the holy martyr, but suddenly his forearms were cut off as if by a sword. The governor then spat in the face of the saint, and immediately his head was turned around so that he faced backwards.

Then Lucius entreated the saint to show mercy on him, and both torturers were healed through the prayers of Saint Haralambos. During this a multitude of witnesses came to believe in Christ. Among them also was Lucius, who fell at the feet of the holy bishop, asking to be baptized.

Lucian reported these events to the emperor Septimus Severus (193-211), who was then at Pisidian Antioch (western Asia Minor). The emperor ordered Saint Haralambos to be brought to him in Antioch. Soldiers twisted the saint's beard into a rope, wound it around his neck, and used it to drag him along. They also drove an iron nail into his body. The emperor then ordered them to torture the bishop more intensely, and they began to burn him with fire, a little at a time. But God protected the saint, and he remained unharmed.

Many miracles were worked through his prayer: he raised a dead youth, and healed a man tormented by devils for thirty-five years, so that many people began to believe in Christ the Savior. Even Galina, the daughter of the emperor, began to believe in Christ, and twice smashed the idols in a pagan temple. On the orders of the emperor they beat the saint about the mouth with stones. They also wanted to set his beard on fire, but the flames burned the torturer. Full of wickedness, Septimus Severus and an official named Crispus hurled blasphemy at the Lord, mockingly summoning Him to come down to the earth, and boasting of their own power and might. The Lord sent an earthquake, and great fear fell upon all, the impious ones were both suspended in mid-air held by invisible bonds, and only by the prayer of the saint were they put down. The dazed emperor was shaken in his former impiety, but again quickly fell into error and gave orders to torture the saint.

And finally, he sentenced Saint Haralambos to beheading with a sword. During his final prayer, the heavens opened and the saint saw the Savior and a multitude of angels. The holy martyr asked Him to grant that the place where his relics would repose would never suffer famine or disease. He also begged that there would be peace, prosperity, and an abundance of fruit, grain, and wine in that place, and that the souls of these people would be saved. The Lord promised to fulfill his request and ascended to heaven, and the soul of the hieromartyr Haralambos followed after Him. By the mercy of God, the saint died before he could be executed. Galina buried the martyr's body with great honor.

In Greek hagiography and iconography Saint Haralambos is regarded as a priest, while Russian sources seem to regard him as a bishop



## **Saint Theodore the Commander & Great Martyr:**

The Great Martyr Theodore Stratelates or Commander came from the city of Euchaita in Asia Minor. He was endowed with many talents, and was handsome in appearance. For his charity God enlightened him with the knowledge of Christian truth. The bravery of the saintly soldier was revealed after he, with the help of God, killed a giant serpent living on a precipice in the outskirts of Euchaita. The serpent had devoured many people and animals, terrorizing the countryside. Saint Theodore armed himself with a sword and vanquished it, glorifying the name of Christ among the people.

For his bravery Saint Theodore was appointed military commander [stratelatos] in the city of Heraclea, where he combined his military service with preaching the Gospel among the pagans subject to him. His gift of persuasion, reinforced by his personal example of Christian life, turned many from their false gods. Soon, nearly all of Heraclea had accepted Christianity.

During this time the emperor Licinius (311-324) began a fierce persecution against Christians. In an effort to stamp out the new faith, he persecuted the enlightened adherents of Christianity, who were perceived as a threat to paganism. Among these was Saint Theodore. Licinius tried to force Saint Theodore to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. The saint invited Licinius to come to him with his idols so both of them could offer sacrifice before the people.

Blinded by his hatred for Christianity, Licinius trusted the words of the saint, but he was disappointed. Saint Theodore smashed the gold and silver statues into pieces, which he then distributed to the poor. Thus he demonstrated the vain faith in soulless idols, and also displayed Christian charity.

Saint Theodore was arrested and subjected to fierce and refined torture. He was dragged on the ground, beaten with iron rods, had his body pierced with sharp spikes, was burned with fire, and his eyes were plucked out. Finally, he was crucified. Varus, the servant of Saint Theodore, barely had the strength to write down the incredible torments of his master.

God, however, in His great mercy, willed that the death of Saint Theodore should be as fruitful for those near him as his life was. An angel healed the saint's wounded body and took him down from the cross. In the morning, the imperial soldiers found him alive and unharmed. Seeing with their own eyes the infinite might of the Christian God, they were baptized not far from the place of the unsuccessful execution.

Thus Saint Theodore became "like a day of splendor" for those pagans dwelling in the darkness of idolatry, and he enlightened their souls "with the bright rays of his suffering." Unwilling to escape martyrdom for Christ, Saint Theodore voluntarily surrendered himself to Licinius, and discouraged the Christians from rising up against the torturer, saying, "Beloved, halt! My Lord Jesus Christ, hanging upon the Cross, restrained the angels and did not permit them to take revenge on the race of man."

Going to execution, the holy martyr opened up the prison doors with just a word and freed the prisoners from their bonds. People who touched his robe were healed instantly from sicknesses, and freed from demonic possession. By order of the emperor, Saint Theodore was beheaded by the sword. Before his death he told Varus, "Do not fail to record the day of my death, and bury my body in Euchaita." He also asked to be remembered each year on this date. Then he bent his neck beneath the sword, and received the crown of martyrdom which he had sought. This occurred on February 8, 319, on a Saturday, at the third hour of the day.

Saint Theodore is regarded as the patron saint of soldiers. He is also commemorated on June 8.



## Saint Theodore the Tyro, the Great

**Martyr:** The Holy Great Martyr Theodore the Recruit<sup>1</sup> was a soldier in the city of Amáseia in Pontus (Asia Minor) on the coast of the Euxine (Black) Sea, under the command of the Praepositus (regimental commander) Brincus. Saint Theodore was ordered to offer sacrifice to idols, but he proclaimed his faith in Christ the Savior in a loud voice. Brincus gave him a few days to think it over, during which time the Saint prayed.

Theodore was accused of setting a pagan temple on fire and destroying the idol of Rhea, and so he was thrown into prison to be starved to death. The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him there, comforting and encouraging him. When he was brought before the Governor Publius, Theodore boldly confessed his faith, for which he was subjected to new torments and condemned to be burnt alive. The Great Martyr Theodore mounted an

enormous pyre, and after he made the Sign of the Cross, the wood was lit, but the Holy Spirit cooled the flames. Saint Theodore stood in the flames, praising and glorifying God. Then he gave his holy soul into God's hands, and the onlookers saw his soul ascending to Heaven, according to the author of his Life, who was also an eyewitness.

This occurred in about the year 306 under the Roman Emperor Galerius (305-311). Unharmd by the fire, Saint Theodore's body was buried under a widow's house in the city of Eukháita, not far from Amáseia. Later, his relics were transferred to Constantinople, to the church which bears his name. His head is in the city of Gaeto, Italy.

Fifty years after the Saint Theodore's martyrdom, Emperor Julian the Apostate (reigned 361-363), planned to commit an outrage upon the Christians during the first week of Great Lent. He ordered the city magistrate of Constantinople to sprinkle all the food in the marketplaces with blood which had been offered to idols. Saint Theodore appeared to Archbishop Eudoxios in a dream, and told him to inform all the Christians that no one should buy anything in the marketplaces, but to eat boiled wheat with honey (kolyva) instead.

In remembrance of this occurrence, the Orthodox Church commemorates the holy Great Martyr Theodore the Recruit each year on the first Saturday of Great Lent. On Friday evening, at the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, after the prayer at the Ambo, the Canon to the Holy Great Martyr Theodore, composed by Saint John of Damascus, is sung. After this, kolyva is blessed and distributed to the faithful. The celebration of the Great Martyr Theodore on the first Saturday of Great Lent was established by Patriarch Nektarios of Constantinople (381-397).

The Troparion to Saint Theodore is very similar to the Troparion for the Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths (on the Sunday Before the Nativity of the Lord). The Kontakion to Saint Theodore, who suffered martyrdom by fire, reminds us that he also had faith as his breastplate (see I Thessalonians 5:8).

In iconography, Saint Theodore the Recruit is depicted in four different ways: either alone in military garb, battling a large snake, or together with Saint Theodore the Commander, standing upright or riding horses. He always wears his military uniform.

We pray to Saint Theodore the Recruit for the recovery of stolen articles.

## February 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2  God Parent Sunday Presentation of our Lord to the Temple  8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy  God Parent Sunday Luncheon	3	4	5  Strict Fast Day   7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	6	7  Strict Fast Day	8  Philoctochos Mid- Winter Luncheon Madison Club
9  Sunday of the Publican & the Pharisee (Tridion Opens)  8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy  Sunday School/Creek School	10	11	12  Fast Free Day  11:00 a.m. Adult Religious Education Class  7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	13    6:30 p.m. Virtual Adult Religious Education Class	14  Fast Free Day	15  Russian Mission Service
16  Sunday of the Prodigal Son  8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy  Sunday School/Creek School	17	18    7:00 p.m. Parish Council Meeting	19  Strict Fast Day  11:00 a.m. Adult Religious Education Class  7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	20    6:30 p.m. Virtual Adult Religious Education Class	21  Strict Fast Day	22  First Saturday of Soule  8:30 a.m. Orthros followed by Divine Liturgy with Memorial Service
23  Judgement Sunday Meat Fare Sunday  8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy  Sunday School/Creek School	24  Fast Day (Dairy Permitted)  First & Second Find- ing of the Head of John the Baptist  8:30 a.m. Orthros followed by Divine Liturgy	25  Fast Day (Dairy Permitted)	26  Strict Fast Day  No Adult Religious Education Class  7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	27  Fast Day (Dairy Permitted)   7:00 p.m. Women's Spiritual Meeting	28  Fast Free Day	1  Second Saturday of Soul  8:30 a.m. Orthros followed by Divine Liturgy with Memorial Service
2  Fast Day (Dairy Permitted)  Forgiveness Sunday Cheese Fare Sunday  8:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy  Sunday School/Creek School  1:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers	3  Clean Monday Great Lent Begins Strict Fast Day   6:00 p.m. Great Compline	4  Strict Fast Day	5  Strict Fast Day  11:00 a.m. Adult Religious Education Class  5:30 p.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy  7:00 p.m. Choir Practice	6  Strict Fast Day	7  Strict Fast Day   6:00 p.m. 1st Salutation Service	8  Fast Day (Wine & Oil Permit- ted)  Russian Mission Service