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THE

Stream

NEWSLETTER

An Online Publication of the Diocese of South-West America Sunday School Edition

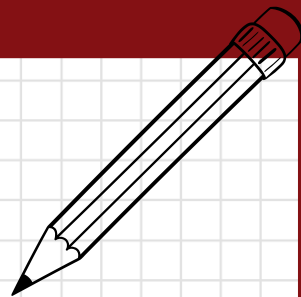


*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
Proverbs 9:10*



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A New Chapter



The beauty of life is that no one is the same. It is our differences and our unique stories in life that make us stand out. As the saying goes, God is the director, and we are all actors, with the only catch being that our free will provides us the framework to live life to our fullest potential. Hence, as we progress to this new school year, we embark on *a new chapter*.

We may not know how this chapter will go, but we know we are not in it alone. Our Father in Heaven will always guide us through it. Our family and the friends we have made throughout our previous chapters in life will walk among us and, in this new journey, we make way for new people in our lives, new opportunities to build us up, and new struggles to teach us. And so, at this point in our lives, we stay grateful for our past, hopeful for our future, and embrace the present with open arms.

With this time, we must also review the previous chapters in our life, our accomplishments, our challenges, and the moments that have made us who we are. We are but the lessons of our past. And so, we take a moment to reflect on the beautiful work created by our students, embracing their creativity, and allowing it to further fuel our minds to create and innovate.

The pages of this August issue will take you through the CWE work of the children from the South Region (Houston) as well as summer events around the diocese.

Happy Reading!

Abin Varghese
St. Mary's
Calgary, AB





WORDS OF WISDOM

His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Ivanios

My Beloved Children,

As you step aboard on a new journey and step back into the world of learning, may I take this opportunity, as your spiritual father, to share with you some encouragement and faith. Remember that God is always by your side, guiding you, and blessing you in everything you do, including your studies. Just like the saints who came before us, knowledge is a precious gift that we can use to honor God and serve others. As you sit at your desks and open your books, remember that every subject you study is an opportunity to discover the wonders of God's creation.

Cherish the love and guidance of your parents. They are God's chosen vessels to care for you, support you, and teach you valuable lessons. Honor and obey them, for it is a commandment from God. Show them gratitude for their sacrifices, and let your words and actions reflect the love they have poured into your life. Always be mindful of the fact that your teachers are not just providers of knowledge, but they also play a vital role in your growth and development. Treat them with respect and gratitude, for they dedicate their time and energy to help you learn and succeed. Listen attentively, follow their instructions, and show appreciation for their hard work.

In your classrooms, be kind and compassionate towards your classmates. Treat them as brothers and sisters, just as Christ taught us to do. Offer help to those who struggle, and be humble enough to ask for help when you need it. Remember, we are all unique and special in God's eyes.

When faced with challenges or difficult tasks, don't be discouraged. Pray to God for strength and wisdom, and trust that He will provide you with the tools you need to overcome any obstacle. Remember the words of Paul the Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13).

Like St. Thomas, be courageous in sharing your faith with those around you. Let your actions speak louder than words, showing kindness, love, and respect to your classmates and teachers. Remember that you can be a light in your school, shining the love of Christ to those who need it most. When faced with difficulties, remember that St. Thomas faced trials and setbacks too. Yet, he remained steadfast in his belief in Jesus Christ. Trust in God's plan for your life, and know that challenges can help you grow stronger and wiser.

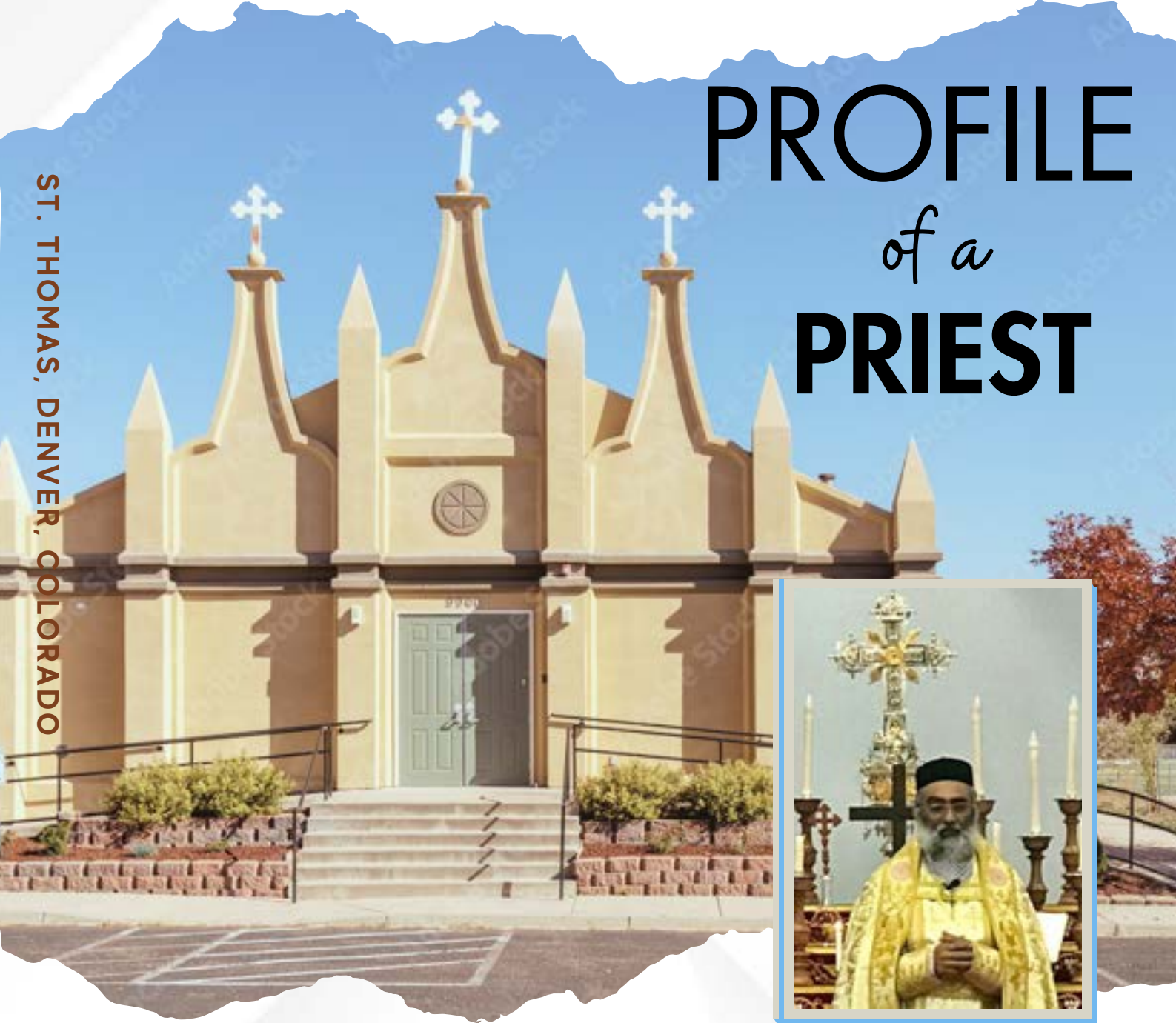
Finally, never forget to take moments to pray and thank God for the opportunity to learn and grow. Offer your successes and failures to Him, knowing that He is always with you, supporting and loving you. Seek His guidance in all that you do, and let your faith shine brightly in your words and actions.

May your school year be filled with joy, friendships, and exciting discoveries. Trust in God's plan for your life, and know that you are loved beyond measure. I will keep you as my beloved children in my humble prayers and supplications to Christ our Lord.

PROFILE

of a

PRIEST



Greetings to All,

FR. JOHN MATHEWS
VICE DIRECTOR, SOUTH REGION (HOUSTON)

I am Fr. John Mathew and I was recently appointed as the Vice-Director of the Houston Region Sunday School in the South-West American Diocese. Currently, I live in Dallas, Texas, and serve as the vicar at two parishes. I have been serving for two years as the vicar of St. Thomas Indian Orthodox Church in Denver, Colorado, and for five years as the vicar of St. Gregorios Orthodox Church in New Orleans, Louisiana.

I completed my studies in Kerala and I have a BSE in Maths. I have been a priest since 1992, making this my 31st year. By the Grace of God, I have been serving the Church for many years. In my experience, Sunday school is the best place for Orthodox catechism practice where we learn about orthopraxy - to live the lifestyle of the Orthodox faith.

My hope and prayer for the Sunday School ministry is that Christ is the only model of our life, and we must practice more to attain that life in Christ.

The Simple Conversation

I remember, when I was young, how eagerly my mother would check the mail to receive a letter from my grandfather who lived in India. There was such anticipation and excitement to read these letters. It wasn't until much later in life that I realized that this excitement and longing reflected a deeply cherished and loving relationship that persisted beyond physical boundaries. We strive for a similar relationship with God when we have simple conversations with Him through prayer.

In prayer, we elevate our minds to our Creator and confide in Him as a loving Father. Through prayer, we bring worship, thanksgiving, and petitions before Him as our providential and Almighty King. Rather than viewing prayer as a task or obligation, such as school or work, we are created to enter into this conversation willingly and joyously. Many of us, when we are spiritually young, resort to prayer only in desperate situations - similar to a "Hail-Mary Pass" in football, and we are not alone in doing that. We all have to start somewhere. When we look through the Old Testament we see that God trained the children of Israel to pray in an elementary way using the prophets. Later, when Christ came to seek the lost sheep of Israel, their education in prayer was made complete by the Divine Teacher Himself.

When we read about the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, there were many times when they encountered challenging situations and they petitioned Moses to intercede for them; Moses was their Christ-like mediator. Moses had a uniquely intimate relationship with the Lord. The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11). However, even Moses when he approached God for the first time in the burning bush, was asked to remove his sandals from his feet before approaching the Almighty. In the same way, before we can approach God with our thoughts and intentions, we must remove certain things that might be holding us back. St. Isaac says "Prayer is not a matter of knowledge and eloquent phraseology. It is rather a matter of clearing one's mind from extraneous thoughts, rendering it serene in a state of concentration attained by silence of movements and serenity of senses. Pure prayer calls for concentration of mind, serenity of conscience, tranquility of thoughts, reflection on the new world, hidden comfort, and discourse with God." Removing the sandals of our lives will take courage and effort, but the reward is limitless. As prayer is an intimate conversation with God, it is important that we concentrate our minds to meditate on the Lord and cast off all carelessness and inappropriate thoughts. We must also have a mindset of humility, openness, and vulnerability that allows us to be intimately seen and known by God. Concentrating the mind is not an easy task, especially with our busy and noisy lifestyles. However, just like we learn a new trade or skill, it takes a lot of time and practice but eventually, we will get better at it. St. Ephraim the Syrian says, "When you pray, have your mind well in control and restrain your thoughts directing them towards your heart. Let not your body be standing there and your mind off on some other occupation. Rather, make your body a church, and of your mind a splendid temple. Make of your mouth a censor, of your lips incense, and of your tongue a deacon that you may please God." (Bovooso of Monday Compline)

In the busyness of a new academic school year, finding a few moments to meditate and reflect upon our spiritual journey in this world can be a challenging task. In all relationships, we make time for the people that we love, and the way that we prioritize our time when we're busy reveals what/who we truly love. Let us prioritize the simple conversations with God so that we can cultivate an intimate and loving relationship with Him who is steadfast in His love, faithfulness, goodness, and mercy towards us.

Fr. Joel Mathew
Vice Director, South Region (Dallas)



Diane.mathew@gmail.com

Meet
Diane!

What am I doing here? A question that is not completely clear. I follow "The Plan" that is set for me before my life began."

I am Diane Mathew, the secretary for the Sunday School Association at the Diocese of South-West America. I am a member of St. Mary's Malankara Orthodox Church in Calgary, Canada. I have been associated with Sunday School for the last 15 years in various roles as a teacher, vice principal, principal, OVBS coordinator, Online Sunday School coordinator, and now the secretary to an amazing Sunday School administration team.

Over the years, I have discovered my love for children, and I work to make things efficient and interesting for them. I have learned a lot more about my church and have held my faith stronger as each day passes. I have been the Online Sunday School Coordinator for the past 2 years and the principal of my parish for a year. Prior to this, I was the Vice Principal for 4 years. Every role comes with its own challenges and perks. I own them all alike and enjoy the tasks I do.

Born and raised in Mumbai, little did I know the plan for me.
Moving to the Middle East to settle down with my spouse was the best move can be.
Deciding to spend the rest of our lives in Canada was the best.
To be a mom to two loving kids completes my nest.
I am who I am; God has made me so that I serve Him and glorify Him.
In this process, I am here to hear you.

If you are a Sunday School child, a teacher, a principal, or a parent, I can be your voice and your support. Let's build this community together of faithful little human beings.



Know Your Friends



Sophie Jacob
St. Gregorios
Houston, TX

“Ding.” The school bell rang as Mary and Maria walked to their locker to get ready for their next class. Suddenly, they saw the final scores for AP biology. “Maria, you got a hundred again! Wow, you’re totally going to ace this school year.”, Mary cheerfully said. Right then a girl named Melanie came toward them. Melanie was the meanest kid in school, and she had never minded Mary or Maria. “Hey, Bestie! I heard you got a 100% on your test! Congrats!”, said Melanie.

“Um, Melanie? First of all, I’m YOUR bestie? Thanks for congratulating me!”, replied Maria. “Hey, of course, we’re besties! Do you want to help me study for the AP physics exam that’s coming up next week?”, she asked.

After that day Maria and Melanie became friends. However, Mary was suspicious of her since she came out of nowhere. Mary tried warning Maria, but Maria thought Mary was just jealous and overreacting. Until one day, Melanie came up to Maria’s locker.

“Hey, bestie. So, I know you get to skip the physics exam and you also aced it last year. Could you give me the answers?”, asked Melanie. Maria was shocked.

Maria didn’t know if she would give the answers since Melanie was her best friend. She decided to do what was right. “I’m sorry, Melanie, but I can’t give you the answers. It wouldn’t be right or fair.”, she replied truthfully. “Fine! To be completely honest, I only wanted to be your friend to get the test answers – nothing else. Why would I want to be friends with you? So goodbye and forget all the good things I said about you.”, said Melanie.

As she stormed out of the room, Maria was sad and shocked at the same time. All this time, Melanie was being nice for nothing. Maria was happy at the same time too. She would rather do the right thing instead of the wrong thing. Maria apologized to Mary who forgave her, knowing it wasn’t really her fault.

After that day, Maria chose friends who she knew were real friends.

illumination

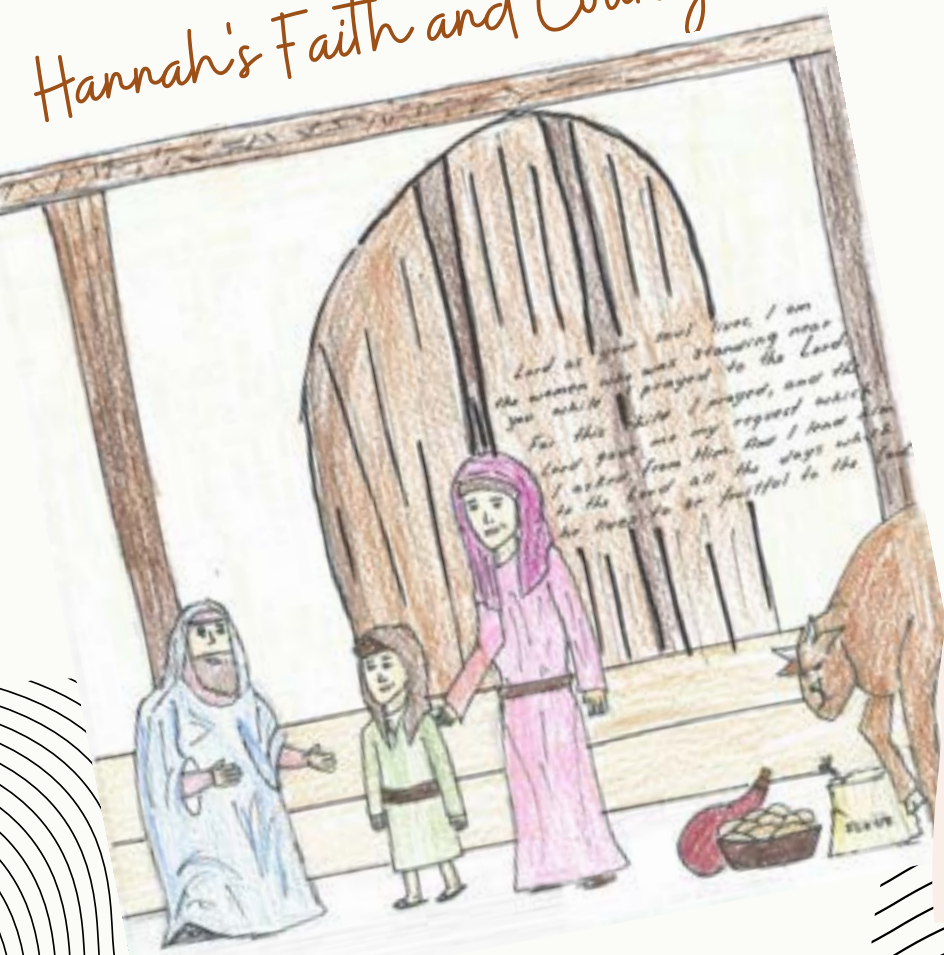
Temptations creep in
My thoughts start to fray
Like a slithering snake
Wrapped around its prey

Hurricanes of urge
So really strong
Quickly spin and swirl
So I go along

But then a light appears
Ever so bright
It illuminates the way
Like fire in night

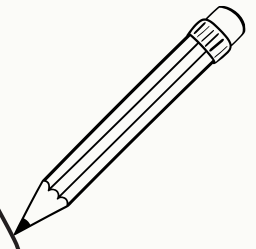
The light becomes larger

Hannah's Faith and Courage



JOANN GEOGI

St. Gregorios
Houston, TX



Christina George

St. Gregorios
Houston, TX

Lord, as your soul lives, I am the woman who was standing near you while I prayed to the Lord.

For this child I prayed, and the Lord gave me my request which I asked from Him.

And I lend him to the Lord all the days which he lives to be fruitful to the Lord.

August 2023

THE STRUGGLE WITH ENVY

Jeremy Chacko
St. Gregorios
Austin, TX



The envious see the world as one great competition with only winners and losers. Inferiority drives the envious. The envious is not content to be like their (assumed) rivals, but rather, he or she must be superior to the rival. Another person's abilities, successes, or status almost always provokes a sense of inferiority in the individual. Envy can cause us to sorrow over another person's success, not only because it excels our own, but because it reminds us of our lack of ability. That lack is welded into our sense of worth or, in the envious, worthlessness.

Competition is the activity that provokes envy. Thus, the statement "ruinous impulses are always personal" is about who we are, not just what we can or cannot do, nor what we have or do not have. Envy's litter can be best described as feeling offended at another person's talent, success or good fortune, unnecessary rivalry, ill will, pleasure at another person's distress or difficulties, reading false motives into the successful, belittling, back-biting, organizing antagonism against the individual, bullying, scorn, ridicule, and prejudice. This envy can be a driving factor in conversations with spiritual leaders, rulers, and even common people. It is the feeling inside a human being that unfortunately loosens their relationship with God.

Envy may fester into malicious intent, evolving into murderous hatred. Envy works secretly, avoiding open warfare as acting openly would expose the person's inferiority. An envious person always targets someone like themselves in some way.

Continued...

THE STRUGGLE WITH ENVY

Jeremy Chacko

These ideas are elegantly expressed in the Oscar-winning film "Chariots of fire", as the main character, Harold Abrams, is consumed by comparing himself to his rival, Eric Liddell. Both men strive to run in the Olympics. Even when he wins, Abrams cannot enjoy his success or be content. He must beat Liddell. Abram's self worth is dependent on his performance, and Liddell is a threat to that performance.

Envy, at heart, is a flaring failure of love. Envy has to manufacture self-worth. Envy cannot enjoy another person's success, as gratitude and contentment are absent in the soul. Antonio Salieri's blame for his discontentment is laid upon God. God created Mozart and gave him his talent. Eric Liddell felt God's presence as her ran, not just when he won. The antidote for envy is simple! God's incomparable, unconditional love.

In conclusion, we must cultivate our shared successes, shared goods, and shared joys. Who owns the Rockies and Smoky Mountains? Who created the oceans and the forests? As we share good things together, comparisons and ruinous impulses become irrelevant, and we can foster deep gratitude and contentment within ourselves. We can cultivate a love for God, for others, and for ourselves. We can rest content in who we are as loved by God. We can celebrate the success of others. We can give up "feeling bitter when others have it better."

Celebrate the
success of others



My Reward

Those who do evil gain power,
The thieves gain many riches,
But I am not jealous,
For my reward is in heaven.

The wicked may cheat me,
The liars deceive me,
But I am not jealous,
For my reward is in heaven.

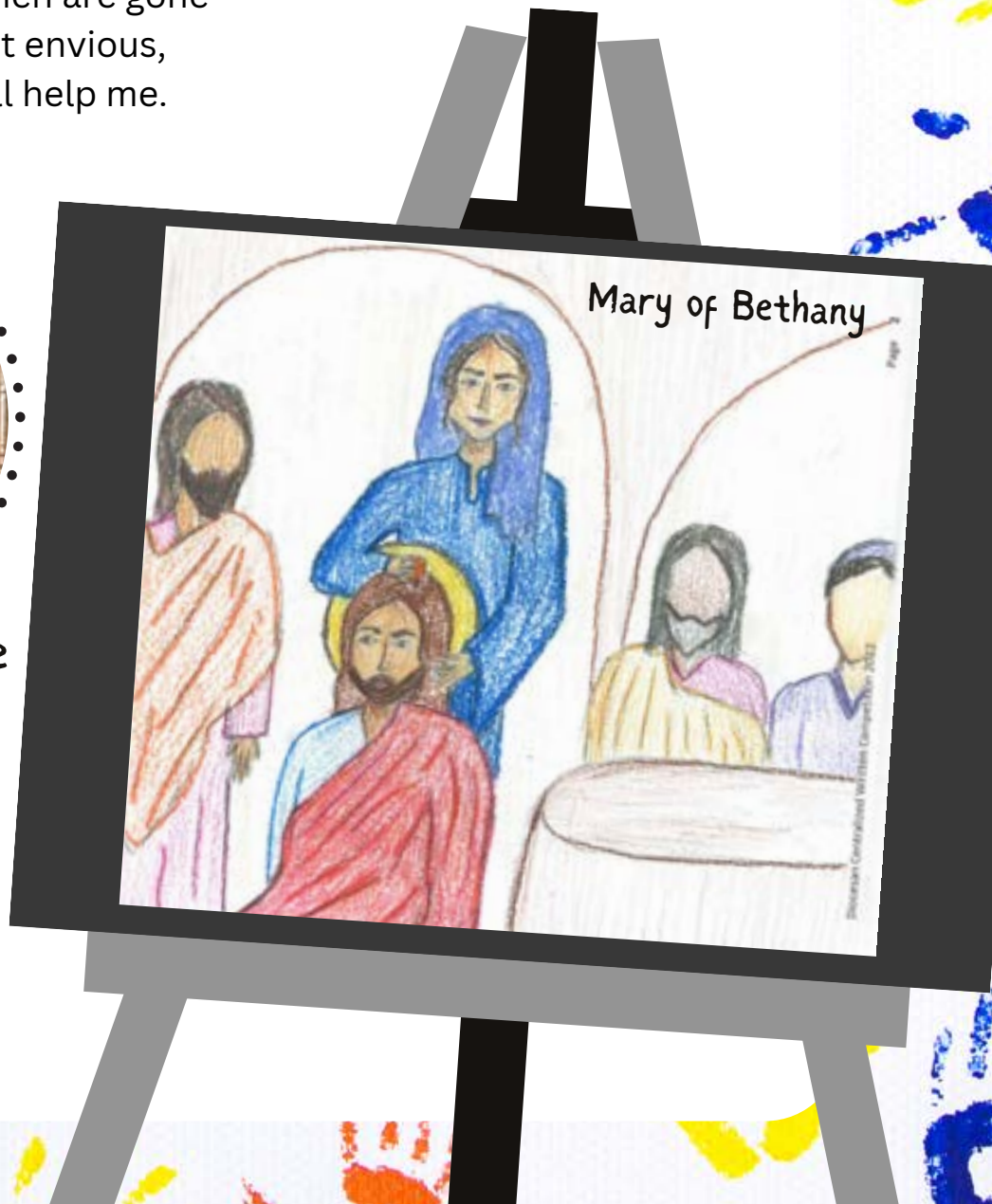
Everywhere I look I see evil.
All the good men are gone
But I am not envious,
My Lord will help me.



Josh John
St. Thomas
Houston, TX



Neha Ann Varghese
St. Gregorios
Houston, TX



Nothing TO FEAR

I have nothing to fear.
Because God is with me.
Taking my hand.
And holding me.

I have nothing to fear.
Because His light brightens my soul.
And helps me see the path.
I never saw before.

I have nothing to fear.
Because God has saved me!



Ann Denson
St. Thomas
Houston, TX



Johnathan Joseph Mathews
St. Gregorios
Houston, TX

Christ's Birth Announced to St. Mary



Dioecesan Centralized Written Competition 2022



CHASING GLORY

Neha Ann Varghese
St. Gregorios
Houston, TX



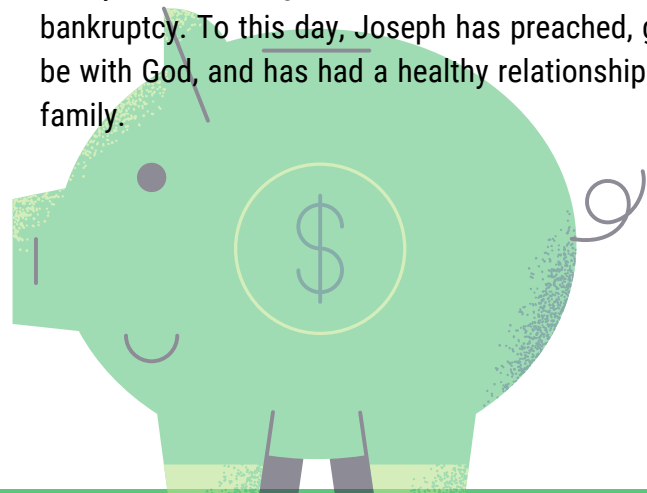
Once upon a time, there was a very rich man. He had so much money that if he wanted to, he could fill every single room to the top with bars of glistening gold. Joseph became rich after making it to a top-tier company that gave him a steady flow of money every day. But he wasn't always rich. He started as a humble man from humble origins, fighting for every cent. His family came from poverty, and they never had much money but one day, Joseph stole his family's savings and ran away to start his company. While Joseph was starting up, his family was mourning, not over the money, but over the loss of Joseph. They were concerned for Joseph's safety and were not terribly mad over Joseph's actions. Ever since Joseph became rich, he had been sending his family weekly checks to cover their expenses and to pay them back for what he had stolen. The family received weekly, but they had not seen Joseph in over ten years. This is because Joseph thought his family held him back from his full potential.

One day, Joseph's friend told him about a secret monthly gambling event that made almost everyone rich. In his drive for more money, he went to every single event and almost doubled his net worth. On one precious day, everything went wrong. Joseph was used to winning at gambling events and if he lost, he would gain the money back. On this day, he kept losing his rounds over and over while he kept betting more and more. He was blinded by his drive for more money, and it finally came to the point where he had bet most of his assets. In one flash of a card, Joseph lost EVERYTHING!

He mourned for days and no matter what he tried; he couldn't get anything back. Slowly, he was going into bankruptcy. Slowly, his family's weekly checks never got to them. Joseph couldn't take it.

One evening after drowning his guilt in alcohol he came across a flyer for a new church. On Sunday, having given up he decides to try going to church. He entered the church and it hit him: The Holy Spirit filled him and opened his eyes past money, past worldly pleasures, and to God.

Slowly, Joseph started preaching more and growing his connection with God. When God told him to repent to his family for his misdeeds, he listened, with hesitation, and returned to his family. They welcomed him with open arms, forgiving him for all his transgressions, just like the Prodigal Son. Having given up his guilt, Joseph could finally form a strong bond with God and recover from his bankruptcy. To this day, Joseph has preached, grown to be with God, and has had a healthy relationship with his family.



Teach me Lord

Make known Your ways to me. O Lord, and teach me
Your paths.

May I not be condemned by Your wrath.

For I was a sinner from birth.

Ever since the day I came unto this Earth.

So please, Lord, teach me what I am worth

Teach me, Lord, of what I don't know.

Show me which way I must go.

Alone may I stumble and alone may I fall.

But Your gentle voice leads me through it all.

Remember to aid me so I may always stand tall.

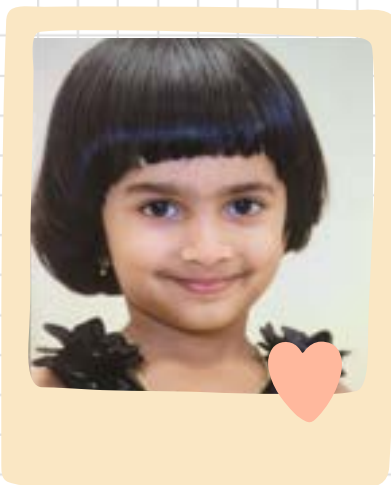
And allow me to always heed Your call.

Bless me with a godly mind

So that I can walk and be most kind.



Aaron Denson
St. Thomas
Houston, TX



Angela John
St. Peter and St. Paul
Houston, TX

Esther is Chosen Queen





ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Ainsley Kochumon
St. George
San Antonio, TX



Saint John Chrysostom was an influential early father of the church, known for his commentary and criticism on the abuse of power. In his quote, St. John Chrysostom outlines our Christian obligation to give back to our community and the importance of seeking God with an open heart. Looking throughout the Bible there are many examples that align with his advice to give back to the community. Namely St. Matthew chapter 12:41, better known as the widow who gave all she had. It can be assumed that even if the widow didn't have anything, she still would have spent her time to worship and praise God.

In some aspects, St. John Chrysostom's likening to Jesus as a beggar is our reminder to spread God's love to everyone. When we have any sum of wealth or abundance, we are put into a position where we can aid others. However, in most situations, we choose to justify why we are unable to give before we even entertain the idea of helping someone in need. This ideology is not only unfair but slightly hypocritical, considering as Orthodox Christians we believe that having faith in Jesus alone has warranted his help in getting us to the eternal kingdom. By helping others and giving back unconditionally, we experience a taste of the eternal Kingdom and get closer to Theosis, as Jesus has given us everything we have.

Another aspect of Saint John Chrysostom's quote is seeking God with an open heart. Proverbs 8:17 tells us that those who seek God diligently will find him. Sometimes it's easy to ignore God and come back to him the second it becomes convenient, but a father-son/daughter relationship is not one that just fades. In fact, it is our eternal reliance on Jesus that provides us life everlasting. By coming to God throughout all circumstances and all scenarios, we come to terms with that reality, and we show God how much we cherish it. Saint John Chrysostom's quote gives us strong advice to not just help the unfortunate but rather give, under all circumstances, unconditionally as God would for us. He also discusses the significance and reality of our relationship with God. We are his children, no matter the sin, but that comes with the simple responsibility of coming to him, throughout the good and the bad, and as a beggar or through a choice.



Rebekah at the Well

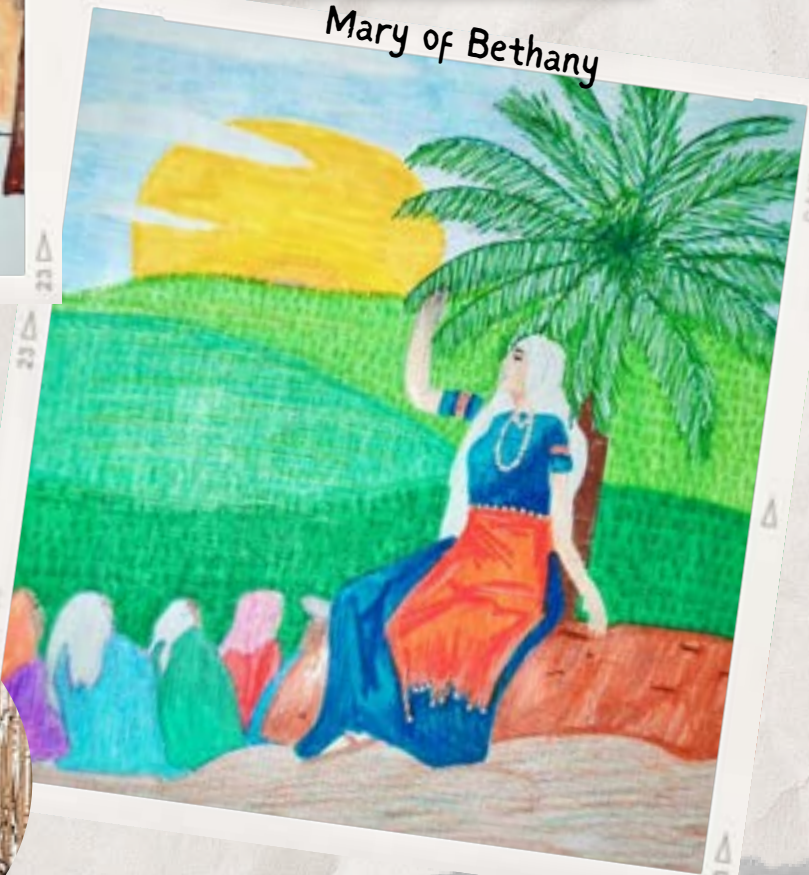
Ann Denson
St. Thomas
Houston, TX



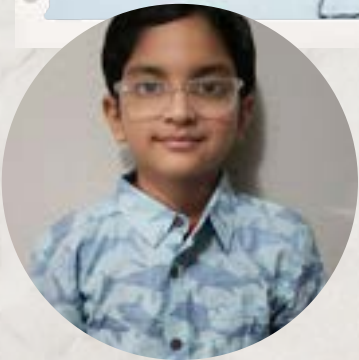
Christ's Birth Announced to St. Mary



Mary of Bethany



Juan Koshy
St. George
San Antonio, TX

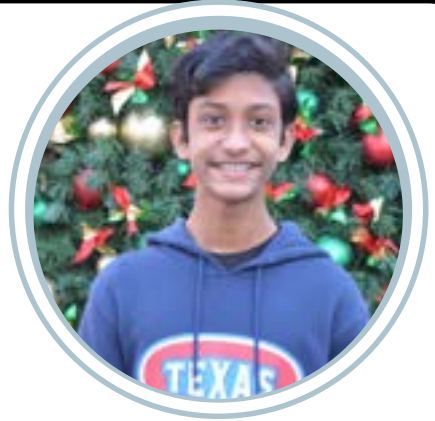


Neha Ann Varghese
St. Gregorios
Houston, TX



The Path To Happiness

Aaron Denson
St. Thomas
Houston, TX



Psalm 144:15 says, "Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!" Most of us know happiness when we feel it, and we can use many words to describe it such as joy, contentment, and, of course, gratitude. In fact, happiness can be defined as "the state of having joy and positive well-being that one's life is good and worthwhile."

However, in our world today, most of us are struggling to be truly happy. We have ideas about what makes us happy, but we are finding happiness itself to be elusive. There is a lot of pressure and a lot of demands on our time and energy.

Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." The truth is happiness is an inside job. We have to look "inward" into ourselves and learn that it is more about who we are on the inside rather than how we look on the outside or what others think of us. Happiness can only be achieved if we have the ability to look inside of us and find joy in our more mainstream traits.

Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." One way to attain happiness is by expressing gratitude to God and to those around us. Our main reason for coming together in the Orthodox Church is to give thanks. An example of this is when the priest raises up the bread and wine to be consecrated into the Body and Blood of Christ for our nourishment and sanctification. Giving thanks and showing gratitude to God and the blessing he has poured down on us is a great way to attain happiness.

Those who maintain an 'attitude of gratitude' tend to be happier than those who don't, and are more likely to not have jealousy or greed. The word 'greed' is the opposite of gratitude, and what some of us do not know is that greed is a never-ending downward spiral of sin. The more we feed our evil desire to greed, the worse it gets. So, if we are going to church or gathering with other people only to eventually end up becoming greedy for what they have that we do not, then for what are we truly training ourselves for the rest of our lives?

Becoming greedy will never answer any of our problems. In fact, it only worsens them. Instead, if every single one of us lived our lives with gratitude, then we will quickly see happiness spark in each one of us. One way to cultivate gratitude is by giving thanks to what God has given us, and being grateful to those around us, especially our loved ones.

In conclusion, expressing gratitude is very important in order to attain happiness. As Orthodox Christians, it is especially important for us to heed St. John Chrysostom's words in our hearts. Our material successes may give us happiness from moment to moment, but they can easily be destroyed if we become greedy or focus only on ourselves. True happiness does not come from such things. Through happiness comes from the fact that God has united us to Him by His Son, Jesus Christ, and that in every moment of our lives, we have an opportunity to be grateful and express thanks to Him.



My Lord

MY STRENGTH

What must I fear that my Lord has not conquered?
My faith is as strong as a warrior's core;
Body is flesh fighting for factions before it falters
But his shield engulfs those who choose to ignore

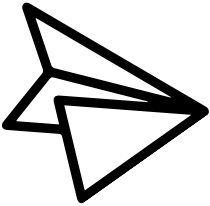
My strength comes from my protector's company,
His hand, from on high, handles my troubles
And trains my being with the might of his symphony.
My guidance comes straight from his knuckles,

And my steadfast finger overwhelms any enemy.
Fighting with faith, they will surrender,
What better ally than my God who wants harmony?
No matter where I turn, he will be my defender.

Yet, bursting forth with abundance and a sword,
I find strength and refuge in my Lord.



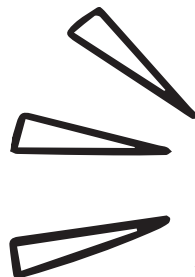
Ainsley Kochumon
St. George
San Antonio, TX



Ruth Shows Love



Ruth Jacob
St. Gregorios
Houston, TX

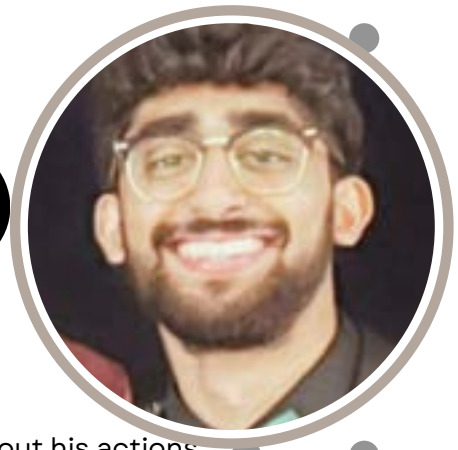


Why God?

WHY?

Ryan Chacko Roy

St. Gregorios
Houston, TX



“Chris, what are you doing?” said Solomon, questioning his brother about his actions.

“None of your business. Don’t worry about me. You’re not my dad!” retorted Chris.

This line from Chris emotionally scarred Solomon. Their father passed away ten years ago in a tragic car accident while their mother, Maria, was giving birth to Chris. With no male figure in the house and with the 15-year age gap between the two siblings, Solomon was always working and battling through sweat and tears to keep the house running and productive. Being the older sibling, Solomon always looked out for Chris. Without a father figure, Chris never had someone to keep him in check. He was always pampered by his mother and had no filter when he spoke.

One day, Chris, at the age of 16, went to his friend’s house. Being the pampered child, Chris had the car of his dreams – a Corvette. When Solomon bought this car for him, he made a deal with Chris that he must agree to never race with other people.

At a party at his friend’s house, Chris brought his Corvette. Solomon warned him, “Chris, you better not race anyone in the new car. All we have is the three of us; me, you, and Mom. If anything happens to you, we will not know. Stay safe.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever. Leave me alone,” said Chris.

Being at his immature age, Chris wanted to show off his car to his friends. “You’ll never beat me in a race! My car is too fast and it’s the newest engine and powertrain too!” His friends grew annoyed by Chris’ bragging. Raymond, one of Chris’ closest friends, challenged him to a race. They lined up at the starting line and they took off! The race started off smoothly with Chris in the lead but slowly over time, Raymond caught up. Raymond peaked closer and closer to Chris and Chris realized something was going wrong. Raymond slowly overtook Chris and Chris slowly glanced over. Raymond smiled at Chris and said, “You’re such a fool. No one genuinely cares about your car. I’ll show you how to stop bragging!”

Raymond collided Chris into the curb and Chris and his car rolled over. Raymond took off, laughing as he left Chris all by himself, struggling to get out, almost paralyzed. Chris slowly grabbed his phone, called his brother Solomon, and told him the news. Solomon, who was at work, quickly bolted out of his work building and took Chris to the hospital.

Chris became unconscious at the hospital. The doctor approached Solomon and Mara to break the bad news. “Dear family, I don’t know how to say this but Chris has been diagnosed with a brain tumor.”

Solomon and Maria bolted to the ER to see Chris. Laying there in silence, his pulse rate machine beeped, and another silence. Silence, nothing else. Tears burst from Solomon’s eyes and Maria fell to the ground asking, “Lord, why did you do this to me? You know I have no husband, and now I lost one son. Why God, why?” Solomon comforted his mother and said, “God always picks the beautiful and struggling flowers first to be in the kingdom of God. Everything God does is for a specific reason.”

You can live in the world but do not let the world live within you. Even with Chris being pampered, he ultimately ended up losing his life because he acted like a fool by bragging and not listening to his brother’s wise words. You can have all the material in the world but if you do not know what to do with it and cannot utilize it for God, then material things are meaningless. Happiness can be achieved by looking inward in the inward life and transforming one’s greed into gratitude. If Chris had listened to his wise brother Solomon, he would not have died and left his family in sorrow.



The Greatest Doctor

Aaron Denson

St. Thomas Orthodox Cathedral
Houston, TX



One day an ambulance rushed towards a hospital carrying an injured boy and many doctors. The boy needed medical attention immediately. Among the people was the boy's father, whose face was filled with sorrow and dismay. As the boy was put inside a hospital room well there was told to stay outside of the room. After a few seconds of waiting, a handsome doctor approached the boy's father with a clean wardrobe and many badges on his chest. He introduced himself and said that he would go to the one who will for the boy. As he entered the room, the boy's father saw a glimpse of numerous certificates, all in the name of this doctor. The father was then assured that his son was in safe hands.

However, a few minutes later, the handsome doctor came out of his room and told the father that he needed to get a tool from another room to perform the boy's surgery. The father reluctantly nodded, and the doctor went on his way. However, seconds went by and turned into minutes, and a few minutes turned into ten minutes, and the doctor still didn't come back. The nurse, who was near the father, was able to tell by his scared face that he was troubled. So she immediately called another doctor to come.

A few minutes later, another doctor burst through the doors of the hospital. He had received the nurse's message and quickly changed into a wardrobe that was not as nearly as expensive as the first doctor's medical wardrobe. As this new doctor walked to where the father was, he saw him pacing in front of the door of the room that held his son. When the boy's father saw this new doctor, he was enraged.

"Why did it take you so long to come? Don't you know that my son's life is in danger? If your son was in that room, what would you have done?" asked the father. The doctor smiled and said to the boy's father, "I will say to him what Job said in the Holy Book – from dust we came, and from dust we will return. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Doctors cannot prolong lives. Go intercede for your son and we will do our best by God's Grace." "Giving advice when you're not concerned is so easy," mumbled the father of the boy. "Besides, he doesn't even look like a doctor who is fit for the job! Wherever that first doctor went, I'm sure he's coming back. I do not need you to take care of my son!"

However, the doctor rushed inside the room and started performing the surgery. It took hours after which the doctor came out with happiness. "Thank God! Your son is safe!" he exclaimed. "If you have questions, ask the nurse." Suddenly, he rushed out of the room and out of the hospital. The boy's father was angry again. "How dare he leave without even telling me of my son's state? May God curse such human beings who think that anything else is more important than my son!"

After a couple of minutes, the nurse entered the boy's room where the father was not seated next to the boy. The boy's father stood up. "What's wrong? Is something wrong with my son?" The nurse replied, "Your son is safe, thanks to the doctor who just left. He is a very kind man. His son died yesterday in a car crash and he was at this burial when we called him to rescue your son. That man has saved your son and now he has gone back to finish his son's burial."

The boy's father then realized that the doctor who had just left was the kindest person he had ever met. He prioritized the father's son over his very own. Not even the first doctor would ever try such a thing. This doctor was indeed the greatest doctor he had ever met.

THE END

Sunday School Field Trip

California Science Center



Nathan Shibu

St. Mary's, Chatsworth, LA, CA

July 8th field trip to the Science Center

Nathan's Day of Fun!

We had our field trip to the California Science Center, and I rode with my friends in a van. We told jokes and they were very funny. We saw spy planes outside that were used for wars. They were very cool. After that, we went into a hurricane chamber on the second floor. The winds were very strong and it was fun.

We also learned how astronauts use toilets in space. We also saw the spaceship carrier Endeavor. We saw different habitats like the polar and desert. In the polar exhibit, we saw a wall of ice where we could test different materials to see which would keep us warm. Fur was the best and cotton was the worst. We went to the Imax theater where we watched a 3D movie about blue whales. We learned that blue whales were almost extinct. But now they are having more babies.

I liked this trip very much and I would love to have more trips like this!

Trip to the **SCIENCE CENTER**



St. Mary's Chatsworth, California

St. Mary's Orthodox Church Sunday School organized a field trip to the Science Center. A total of 22 excited and enthusiastic students and parents attended. Our church arranged two vans so we could travel together and have fun! We met at the church and prayed for a safe and enjoyable day. Then we were off to enjoy science!

Jacob Thomas

We arrived, and there was a black plane that looked like a bat. Everyone told me it was an SR-71 Blackbird, the world's fastest plane made of titanium. As we walked, nearby, there was a rope connected to a Toyota Tundra pickup truck, called The Giant Lever. It consists of a giant purple lever at one end and a rope for one, two, or four people to hang on the opposite lever arm to lift the car. We decided to test our power and strength by pulling it together. Our successful attempt amazed the onlookers.

Inside the venue, we discovered a Hurricane Simulator. Visitors stand in a tube and experience wind of up to 80 mph, which is the minimum speed of a category 1 hurricane. My friends and I had a thrilling experience.

The California Science Center is a state agency and museum located in Exposition Park, Los Angeles. It is the West Coast's largest hands-on science center. Their current exhibits feature:

1. Ecosystem: Displays zones with live animals and an aquarium. We had the opportunity to touch starfish and learn about sea life.
2. Creative World: An area with hands-on activities and exhibits that explore innovation and invention.
3. Space Exhibits: My favorite - we saw the space shuttle Endeavour, Mercury Redstone, Gemini II capsule, and Apollo Soyuz test project.
4. Aircraft and Robotic Spacecraft: Douglas DC 8 Jetliner, Lockheed Starfighter, Pioneer 10, and Mariner IV.

After the informative and engaging experience, we were hungry. There was a food court where we had a delicious lunch together. While eating outside on the patio, we attracted pigeons and sparrows with our fries. It was fun to feed them. Now it was time for our 3D Movie named "Blue Whales." They gave us 3D glasses and guided us into a huge theater. I was fascinated and astonished to learn and watch blue whales up so close!! The 3D effects were amazing.

Our field trip ended with shopping at the gift shop. My friends and I purchased some toys as a memento. Overall, this field trip was the best I have ever experienced. The day was filled with amazing discoveries and exhibits. Thank you to our Sunday School team for organizing the event and making it a success!

San Antonio Area CVBS St George and St Mary's Indian Orthodox Church



OVBS in McAllen, Texas!

Our OVBS at St. Gregorios Malankara Orthodox Church, McAllen was a success! Even though we have a small church, we had lots of fun! It took place on the 22nd of July and our small group of kids enjoyed the fun. They were able to paint and Tie-dye T-shirts. They learned about the books of the Bible and about the Holy Confession. We did activities that brought a big smile to their faces!

We Thank God for bringing us another year of a great OVBS!



Chicago Region

OVBS

This year's Chicago region OVBS was held from July 20th to July 22nd at St. Gregorios Orthodox Church, Elmhurst.

We had over 116 students and 44 volunteers registered from all 4 parishes this year. We were blessed with the presence of Rev. Fr. George Ninan, the OVBS Director who led the introductory session on the opening day. Rev Fr. Amal Punnoose led the introductory address on the second day. And Rev. Fr. Abi Chacko, Rev. Fr. George David, and Fr. Ham Joseph who led the morning and noon prayers.

All three days were filled with lessons and fun activities like music ministry, games, arts and crafts, and moon bounce. Kids got to cool down with ice cones, and lemonade and enjoy treats like cotton candy, a lot of snacks, and ice-cream.

We closed this year's OVBS with a parade around the church and a class presentation. Both parents and kids enjoyed a final BBQ before returning home. Overall it was a blessed OVBS after a gap of 4 years.





OVBS 2023

ABIDE IN GOD JOHN 15:4

July 3-7
2023

St Gregorios Malankara
Orthodox Church

We hope to see
you there!

Click for
registration
form



OVBS 2023
St. Gregorios
Edmonton, CANADA

I want to try



Picnic 2023

Church

PICNIC & HARVEST FEST

JULY 8TH 2023, 10AM-6PM
SIR WILFRID LAURIER PARK
SITE #3

FOOD , GAMES , FUN!

St. Gregorious Orthodox Church
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada



OVBS 2023

Houston Region

Four Houston sister parishes joined together for two days of fun, fellowship, and faith! With 240+ children and over 70 volunteers, we had our work cut out for us. What an amazing two days we had of learning, team builders, music, and a parade. We topped it off with a carnival. In the words of one of our little ones... "I wish it didn't end!"

We thank God for bringing our parishes together for fellowship after many years.

[Click HERE to watch our OVBS video!](#)

St. Gregorios
St. Mary's

St. Stephen
St. Thomas

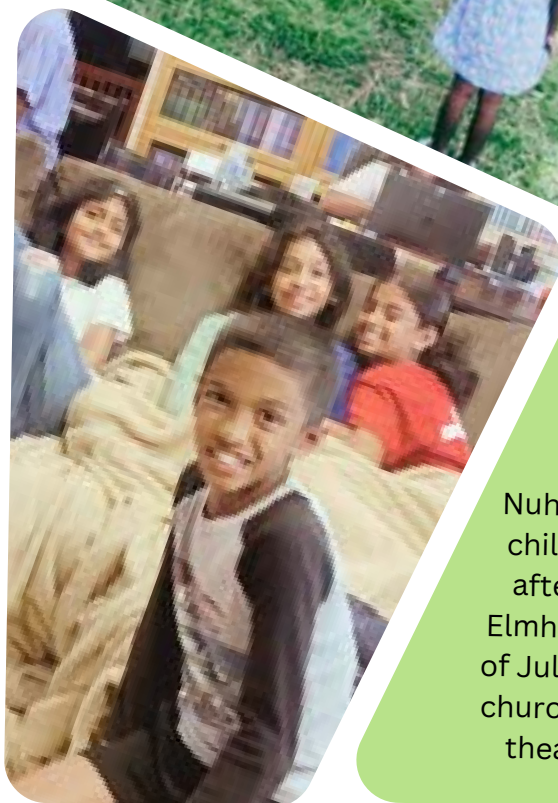


Summer

St. Thomas
Los Angeles California

NUH'RO

St. Thomas, Los Angeles



What is Nuh'ro?

Nuh'ro is St. Thomas LA's summer camp for children in KG through 8th grade, modeled after the Nuh'ro program of St. Gregorios, Elmhurst, IL. Every Monday during the month of July, our K-8th grade campers gather at the church for a day of fun games, arts and crafts, theater skits, and lessons on the Orthodox faith.

Foster Connections

The goal of Nuh'ro is to teach our children that they have a home within our church. We want to build the connections they have to each other and their chechis and achachens.

The Purpose

Build Knowledge

We aim to teach our campers about the Bible, lives of the saints, and our Orthodox faith with every activity and lesson we present.

Cultivate Leaders

Our program would not be possible without our wonderful MGOCSM volunteers. The high school and college youth of our church are tasked with running sessions, creating activities, games, and caring for our children.

Summer

Camp Activities

Theater and Lives of the Saints

The campers are introduced to a new saint every week and work together to create a skit based on the life of the saint. At the end of the day, we all gather to watch each group's skits while we munch on some snacks!



Fun time at the Park

After starting our day with prayer, we all head to the local park for a fun morning of organized team games and free play.



Arts & Crafts

Campers enjoy creating arts and crafts to take home or decorate our church property. Every craft is associated with a lesson so that our kids are continuing to engage with the faith as they express their creativity.



Life of the Church

The campers are engaged in tailored discussions for each age group. Our youngest ones enjoy interactive, hands-on lessons that speak to their budding curiosity while our older campers are introduced to ways in which they can harness prayer and the other tools in their spiritual life.

St. Mary's Malankara Orthodox Church, Calgary

We had a fun filled Carnival program on July 22 2023. Our Sunday School children conducted games alongside the MGOCSM team. They performed at the carnival to feet tapping songs and had a table full of drawings and craft items for sale.



UPCOMING EVENTS

September

1

TTC Question Papers
emailed to participants

30

TTC Question Papers
due via email

October

21

Centralized Written
Event (CWE)

Event Categories:

Essay
Story
Poetry
Drawing
Bible Quiz

[Click here for details!](#)



Diocese of South-West America
invites you to join

THE ONLINE SUNDAY SCHOOL

If you are a parish with less than 25 Sunday
school children please join us. This is our 3rd
academic year. We bring to you 14 amazing
teachers and classes from Pre-KG to Grade 12.



Beginning on

SEPTEMBER 10 2023

WE MEET EVERY SUNDAY AT 6PM EST

Via Zoom

Please email us :

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