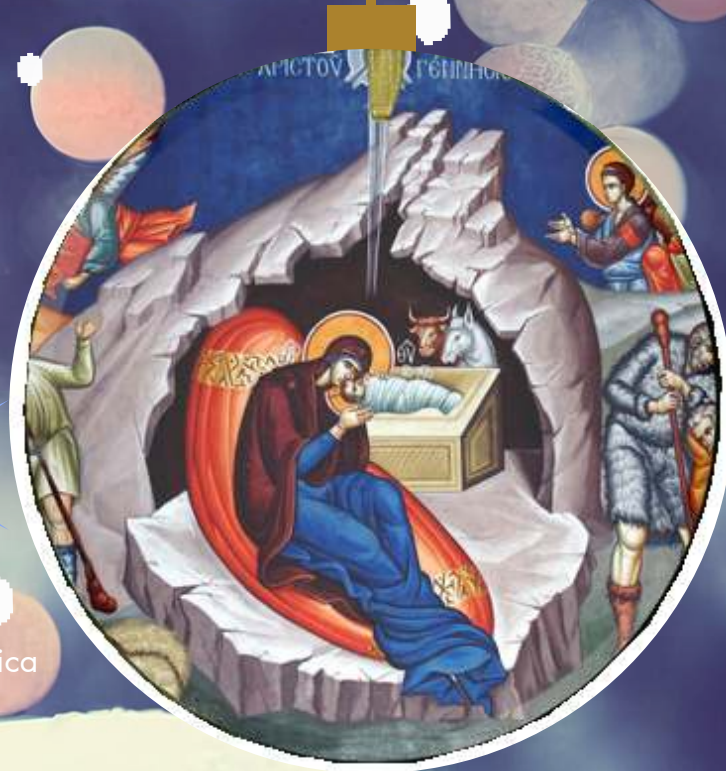


Volume 2, Issue 6 | December 2023

A VERY FESTIVE EDITION OF

The Stream



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



Explore

THIS ISSUE

02

THIRUMENI'S MESSAGE

His Grace Dr. Thomas Mor Ivanios

03

MEET GLADSTONE!

Mr. Gladstone Mammen

04

SUNDAY SCHOOL ADMIN TEAM

Admin Retreat in Chicago

05- 17 **CWE**

*Children's Work from the Midwest -
Chicago Region*

18 - 23 **SUNDAY SCHOOL SCENE**

*Sunday School Events around the
diocese*

24

UPCOMING EVENTS

What's next?

The Birth of Christ

His Grace Dr. Thomas Mar Ivanios



The incarnation of Christ our Lord or Christmas is not merely a historical event but a continuing reality that shapes the understanding of God, humanity, and the purpose of life for us. The incarnation is inseparable from other key aspects of Orthodox theology, such as the Trinity, salvation, and Theosis, and it provides the theological framework for the Church's liturgical and sacramental life. While the theological significance of Jesus' birth is paramount for Christians, it is essential to note that the importance of this event extends beyond religious boundaries, influencing cultural and societal practices globally.

The Manger of Humility

In Christian theology, the birth of Christ and the love of God are inseparable, with the former being a tangible expression of the latter. The Christmas season serves as a time for believers to reflect on the profound message of God's love demonstrated through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The birth of Jesus Christ marks the beginning of a profound and transformative love story between God and humanity. In sending His Son to us, God demonstrated the depth of His love in a way that we can comprehend and experience. The manger in Bethlehem becomes a symbol of God's humility and love, as He chose to enter our world in the most humble and vulnerable form.

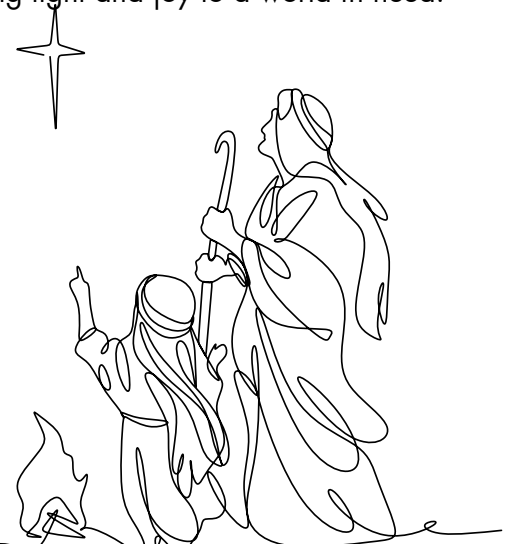
The Challenge of Christmas

As we celebrate Christmas, let us take a moment to reflect on the nature of God's love. It is a love that knows no bounds, a love that transcends our understanding. In the midst of our joyous festivities, let us not forget the true meaning of Christmas – a celebration of God's immense love for each and every one of us. The Christmas story teaches us the challenge of God's love. Love is not just a feeling; it is an action. God's love is not passive but active, reaching out to us in the person of Jesus Christ. This love is a gift – a gift that keeps on giving. It is a gift that brings hope to the hopeless, healing to the broken, and joy to the weary.

The birth of Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of that love. As we exchange gifts and share in the warmth of fellowship, let us not forget the true essence of Christmas – the gift of love. May the love that God has lavished upon us be a source of inspiration and transformation in our lives. And as we go forward, may we be beacons of God's love, spreading light and joy to a world in need.

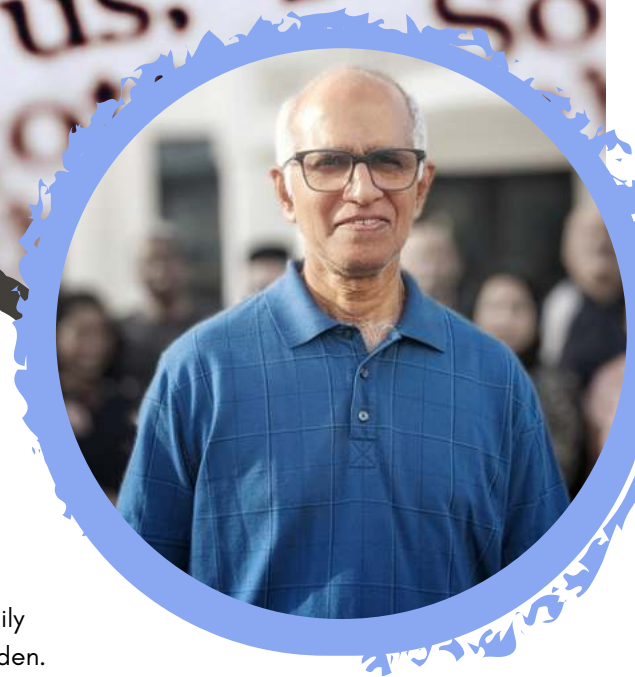
Christ is Born!

Glorify Him!



8 He that is love.
for 'God is love.
this was manifi
ard us, becau
So

Meet Gladstone!



My name is Gladstone Mammen, a member of St. Gregorios Orthodox Church, Elmhurst (previously Oak Park) in the Chicagoland area. By God's grace, I am a servant in the Diploma and TTC Team at the Diocese level and I also serve at the parish Sunday school. I am an Accountant by profession. My immediate family consists of my wife Betty, children Gibson & Jocelyn and Gilbert and grandson Caden.

I have been mentored in my journey by several people and I thank God for all of them but I would like to mention here one person : Fr (Dr) M K Thomas of blessed memory who was the Vicar for 16 years of the parish I am a member of. He taught me about the ministry in depth, being a servant, witnessing Christ and His love. Working in Sunday school and the Church has enabled me to stay connected to the Church and be disciplined while strengthening me to face the challenges of this secular world more effectively.

I am definitely not worthy of all the blessings God has bestowed upon me but as a servant in His service, I would like to mention a few points to the children, parents and Teachers who may read this note.

Being a disciple of Christ, we are all called to serve. We are called to give back to God what He has given to us in abundance. Everything we have comes from God. We are stewards. We are to commit our time, use our talents and apply our treasure for helping our brothers and sisters in Christ and to serve in His vineyard. St. Luke reminds us in chapter 6:31; to do for others as you want them to do for you.

Let us do everything in humility as Christ modeled to us. Let our love for God and our fellow human beings speak through our actions. At times, the world can be challenging and may seem too tough to deal with but St. Paul reminds us: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Let our love for the church, passion for Christ and His kingdom be seen by our children, parents and our colleagues in the ministry.

Through ceaseless prayer, let us try to enjoy the presence of God always. We can do short prayers as and when time permits. We can say the Jesus prayer or the Lord's prayer as we go about our work or while we get a few moments. Even by just making the sign of the Cross, we constantly remind ourselves of the grace of God that is always with us.

May I suggest to the parents to be involved in the Church, the Sunday school ministry and other ministries. Let the children see that we are passionate and committed about the church and its spiritual activities and thus are laboring towards our salvation. Always keep in mind that with God, nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37). When we work as servants in His kingdom, God supplies all the resources that we need to do a good job. Thus, we are leading others to the Light. Let us be like the seed sown on good ground, who hear the word of God, accept it and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty and some a hundred. God always multiplies what we do; thirty, sixty and a hundred fold. Let our light shine before others, that they may see the good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

All glory belongs to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

ADMIN RETREAT

Chicago

Priests and laypeople with distinct proficiencies, experiences, and talents serving the DSWA Sunday School came together in Chicago on October 13th and 14th for one shared purpose: To better serve the Sunday School children and teachers of DSWA.

The mission of DSWA Sunday School is "to witness Christ through the Orthodox faith in the love for God and one another, demonstrating humility, servanthood, and integrity."

The team evaluated all the current projects that the Sunday School focuses on and discussed how to make the Sunday School an even better place. The key projects discussed include the Parenting Program, the College Internship Program, the Online Sunday School, the Teachers' Training Program, the Grade 12 Diploma, the Project Transfiguration, OVBS, CWE, and the Stream News Letter (Sunday School Edition). The new Sunday School portal (www.dswasundayschool.org) was another critical area of discussion. The team discussed the implementation of the portal and the lessons learned, for improving the portal in the coming year. The meeting approved a budget of \$70,000.00 for 2024. There are some exciting upcoming projects, and the details of which will be shared as soon as we finalize them.

One of the main highlights of the meeting was the 'Teacher Empowerment' discussion. The Admin team discussed what can be done to support the Sunday School teachers consistently. The team has listed various areas of teacher support. Some of them include providing teaching aids (like lesson plans and templates) , providing more Orthodox resources through www.Talmido.org and providing teachers' learning sessions to continue education. This will not only spiritually empower them but will also instill more confidence in them.

Stay tuned for regular updates from the Admin team. Find us on Facebook (DSWA Sunday school teachers group). For any questions kindly email at dswa.sundayschool@gmail.com

DSWA SUNDAY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION TEAM



*"Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much"*
- Helen Keller



Jayne, Thomas

St. Thomas
Chicago, IL



Mecheal Mathew

St Thomas
Chicago, IL



*"The Lord is my light and my Savior;
whom shall I fear"
(Psalms 26:1)*

*My Lord is always near.
You are my Savior.
He who doesn't favor.
Never let me fear.
You who taught us to pray,
Will never be ignored.
He who cares like a father.
I will not fear when I am with you Lord.
You will always guide my path.
My dear God.
Your blessing shine upon me.
You enlighten my thoughts.
You brighten up my way.
Seeing trembling step forward.
Will not lead me backwards.
Following my soul.
Will cleanse and console me as a whole.*

Teach Me

*Teach me your ways O' Lord
Teach your ways
Help me to walk alright
More by Faith, Less by sight.*

*When I am sad,
When I am distracted
In the hours of loneliness
In the hours of regret
Teach me your Ways O' Lord
Teach me your ways.*

*When I am happy
When I am faithful
In the hours of success
In the hours of applause
Teach me your ways O' Lord
Teach me your ways.*

*Make my path plain O' Lord
Until the road is done
Until the journey is over
Until the cross is one
Teach me your paths O' Lord
Teach me your paths.*

Looking Inward

Laya Grace John
St. Marys
Chicago, IL



St John Chrysostom once said, "Happiness can only be achieved by looking Inward and learning to enjoy whatever life has and this requires transforming greed into gratitude." Many people have the wrong concept of how to become happy and what it takes. St John Chrysostom's words teach us how we can be joyful and grateful. You may think that true happiness is from money, fame, and many other luxuries but that is false. As Christians, we must remember to focus on God, not allowing worldly desires to get in the way.

When you are facing obstacles, you are likely to stay focused on that problem. This is when you should be turning to God and asking for guidance. This is also the time when you should move forward just as St. John Chrysostom says. Rather than staying fixated on the problem and letting it distract you from what is ahead of you, we can remember Matthew 14:22-23, "Focus on me, not on the storm." This verse is telling us that when we are going through hard times, God wants us to call on Him and to rely on Him when there seems to be no way out. Trust in God, for His plans for you are bigger than what you can imagine.

Anger, desire, greed and pride are examples of worldly desires. St John Chrysostom says that in order to achieve happiness, we must transform greed into gratitude. This means that we must have patience and be thankful for what we have right now. Being greedy for more is also similar to being covetous. These two aspects are things we need to avoid in order to achieve happiness. God will provide you with everything you need when the time is right. This is why we have to be patient and trust Him. St John Chrysostom wants us to understand through his message that we must change certain habits for a different outcome. True happiness can only be found through trusting in God.



Diocesan Centralized Written Competition 2022



Annah Cherian
St. Gregorios,
Elmhurst IL



"If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find him in the Chalice." St John Chrysostom

CHRIST *in the Beggar*

Sarah Mariam Steephen
St. Gregorios
Elmhurst, IL

Jesus Christ is vital to the Christian faith. He is a part of all our doctrines, hymns and our worship. Everything we do follows the Gospel of Jesus Christ and we try to become like Him. What Christ teaches must always influence what a Christian does, says, and acts. God is Omniscient and ever-present, and we, as His followers, must always try to fulfill the will of God. We should be able to see God in all that we do. Therefore, we must be able to see Christ in holy objects, such as the chalice, and we must also be able to see God and things that seem distant from God, such as a lowly beggar.

We must also be able to find Christ in the beggar. It may not seem nearly as obvious as finding Christ and the Chalice but Christ is in everyone, all of us as described in Genesis. We are all made in the image and likeness of God. So we as Christians must be able to find Christ in everyone. This is also found in the New Testament book of St Matthew where Christ talks about how we should take care of others (feed them, quench their thirst, clothe them, etc...). We must connect our observance of the Holy Eucharist with our daily life actions of taking care and helping others. It will always be our responsibility as Christians to take care of the Earth and those who inhabit it, since this is what it means to be a true Christian. This is our stewardship.

The chalice is a key part of the divine liturgy and Christ is central to our understanding of the chalice. The Chalice is a stemmed cup or goblet, typically made out of a precious metal (such as gold), that holds the blood of Christ during The Divine Liturgy. During Holy Qurbana, the mystery occurs, where the Bread and Wine turn into the body and blood of Christ in the paten and chalice, respectively. This is an obvious way to see Christ as he is literally transformed from wine to the Blood of Christ. We as Christians are called to partake in the Body and Blood of Christ during the Holy Eucharist.

Our responsibility as Christians is to find Christ in everyone and take care of others, by following the gospel of Christ. Doing this as a Christian, will lead us down a righteous path, as long as our hearts are forever humble and loving toward Christ. So as stated by St. John Chrysostom, "If you can't find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find him in the chalice."

This idea is demonstrated in St Matthew 26:25-27, during the last supper, where Christ breaks the bread and wine for the apostles and He says, "He who eats My Body and drinks My Blood, he shall abide in Me and I in him". This shows that we must be able to find Christ in the chalice.

Envy Not



Joshua Kalarical
St. Gregorios
Elmhurst, IL

**Do not fret or envy any evil
For the Lord cares for his own
Remember not to envy your hates
The Lord watches what they have sown.**

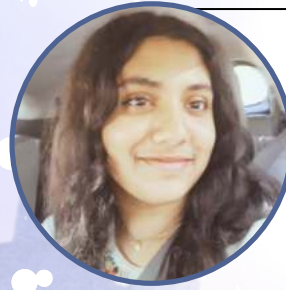
**Evil is the way of wrongdoers
For they will in no time soon fade
Darkened in their minds with folly
All their dependence cut with a blade.**

**Be committed and trust in the Lord
For you will find your Lord will act
Showing the light in His perfect justice
Never forsaking His own is a fact.**

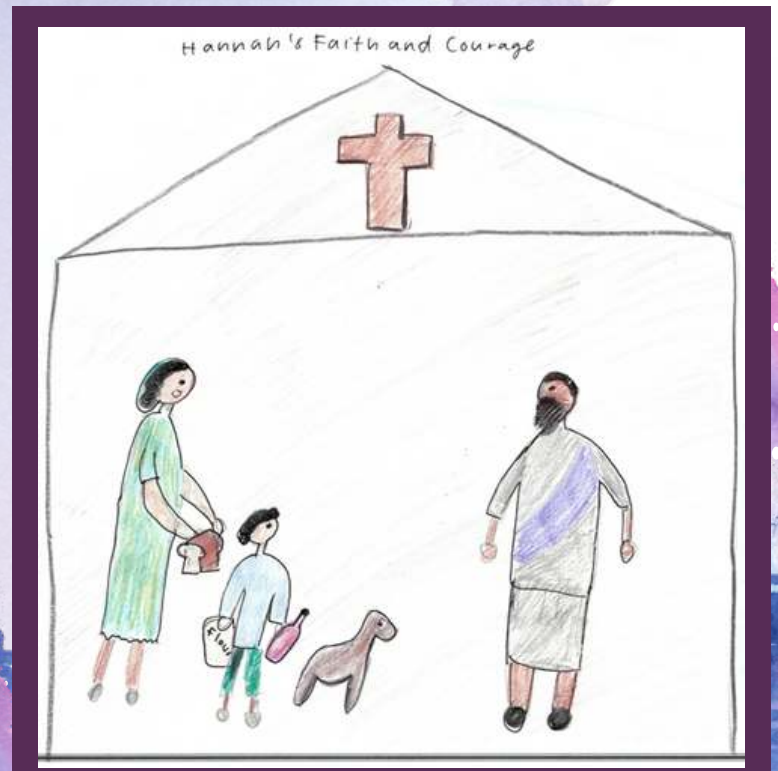
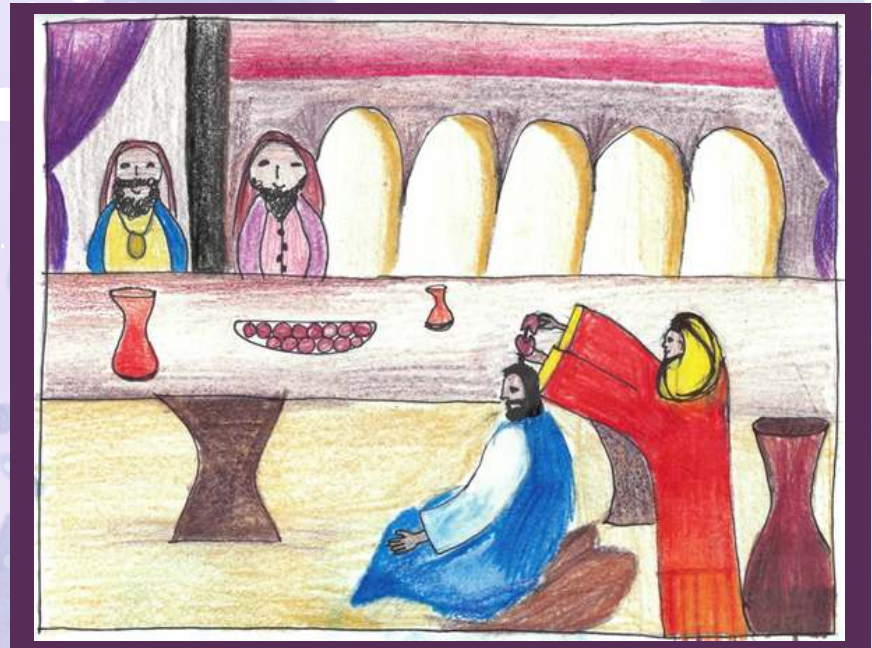
**Be still and trust in His majesty
He will not leave nor forsake you
Do not fret over all evildoers
For the Lord your protector is always with you.**

Sarah Mariam Steephen
St. Gregorios
Elmhurst, IL

Mary of Bethany



Angela Maria Raju
St. Mary's
St. Louis, MO



True friends

Sarah Mariam Steephen

St. Gregorios

Elmhurst, IL

"She's so gross!" Miranda exclaimed. "She doesn't look like she's combed her hair in centuries, she smells like a football player's sweaty jersey, and she just comes and hangs out with zero invitation! Like, no one wants her here!"

"Gosh, I know! One time, she came up to me after math class and asked me if I wanted to study with her. Like, does she think we're friends? She must be sick in the head. As if I would want to hang out with her," Carly explained.

"One time, I was planning my birthday party, and she just comes up to me and tells me she's so excited to hang out! Like, I never even mentioned it to her. How'd she even find out? I didn't want her there," Amanda agreed.

Now, let's rewind a little bit. My name is Rae, and I'm friends with Amanda, Miranda, and Carly. The girl they're talking about is our other friend - maybe not based on what they said - Nina. They were spewing lots of horrible things about Nina, but she's been really nice to me. I've always had lots of fun hanging out with her! But I don't want to lose my friends...

"Hey, girls. Don't say those kinds of things about anyone. You don't have to be friends with everyone, but it only reflects on you if you say all of those rude things about someone else," Mrs. Ellington said. I adore Mrs. Ellington; she's always been my favorite teacher. I wish I could be like her someday.

"Ugh, whatever. Anyway, let's talk about -." The girls continue talking, but about something else. I'm a bit confused though; we hang out with Nina all the time. Where did this come from?

A few days later, Amanda, Miranda, Carly, Nina, and I were sitting together at lunch.

"So, I have a surprise for you guys. I was stress packing yesterday, and I brought you guys what I made. Some chocolate-chip cookies!" Nina says, smiling proudly.

"Holy cow, Nina, do you know that you're literally the best? I literally love you," Amanda says.

"Yea, like, Nina, this is so nice of you. Thank you so much!" Carly says. I look at them, a silent question on my face. What is this change in attitude. In the distance, I see Mrs. Ellington walk by, and we make eye contact. She sees all of us hanging out together, Nina with us.

"Hey, Rae, do you want a brownie?" I look at her, look at Mrs. Ellington, and then nod yes. I'm sure it'll all be fine, right?

A few days later, Nina is at orchestra practice during lunch, so she isn't able to eat with us.

"Ugh, Nina texted me asking if I'm free later to help her with math. I'm gonna ignore it; does she think I actually want to spend time with her?" Carly complained.

"Yeah, I know! Did you see her outfit? It's Wednesday, why isn't she wearing pink? Come on, she can't even get one thing right." Amanda said. The juxtaposition of their words confuse me. I thought we were friends.

"Rae, what do you think of Nina?" Amanda asked. "You never say anything about her."

"Um, I gotta go to the bathroom." I rush out of the cafeteria, through the hallway where I run into Mrs. Ellington.

"Rae, why are you running?"

"Mrs. Ellington, I don't know what to do! Miranda and Amanda and Carly, they're always saying how much they hate Nina when she's not there, but when she is... I don't get it," I exclaim.

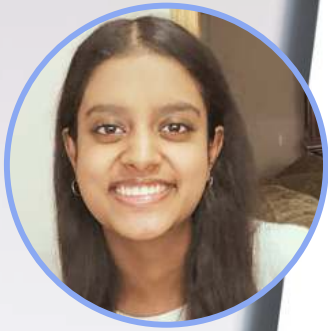
Mrs. Ellington sighs. "High school is a difficult time and I know you're Christian, so using the Bible might help you understand. Something I always want you to remember is this verse from Wisdom of Sirach 27:11. 'The talk of a Godly man is always wise, but a fool changes like the moon.' You know what Nina is like, I've seen you guys spend so much time together and laugh so much together. Remember that in your heart, and ignore what your other 'friends' are saying. Be a wise woman." I nod and say thanks.

After school, I found Nina, and we got ice cream together. I apologized for not standing up for her, and we stopped hanging out with Amanda, Carly, and Miranda, and became best friends.

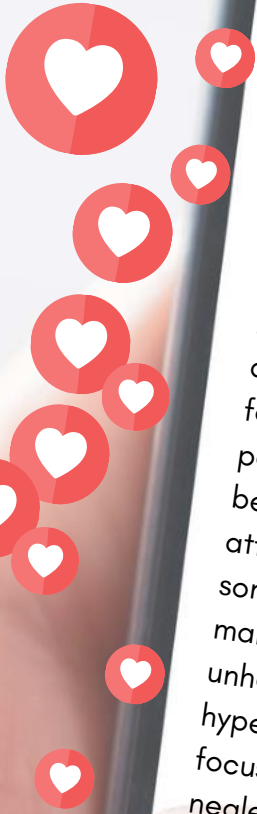


ENVY

Envy is an extremely dangerous vice that is detrimental to our spiritual growth. In a world in which everyone is flaunting their successes, envy is rampant. Our world, dubbed as "a world in the age of envy," is slowly descending into chaos just over this single sin. Envy consumes a man and it fosters anger between groups of people and challenges people to make themselves seem superior to others.



Riya George
St. Gregorios
Elmhurst, IL



Since our lives are heavily dictated by social media in this day and age, envy is even more present and consumes us all more now than ever before. With millions upon millions of people posting their seemingly perfect lives on social media, those who feel inferior to them will be forced to face their own personal shortcomings with every swipe and every minute spent looking at their screens. In a digitized world where people are surrounded by images of the perfect life with perfect people, envy will inevitably flare up. The problem, however, lies in people's responses to their envy. Some may take it to the extremes. To paraphrase The Guardian from October 2018, 'envy isn't just a simple feeling of petty jealousy, it can evolve into unbridled rage against parties and groups that act as a constant reminder of one's own "subpar" life'. This type of anger combined with envy in our life, we can be completely consumed by our desire to appear better than others.



Furthermore, envy consumes a person as it challenges people to appear superior to others. When one is surrounded by envy-causing things, it is only natural that they would retaliate in any way possible to make them feel better about themselves. With people showing off nearly every aspect of their life, we feel the need to prove to others that we too have unattainable, picture-perfect lives. However, in the pursuit of these measures and to make us feel better about ourselves, we may even feel pressured to go to great lengths and attempt to better ourselves. Although bettering oneself can be beneficial in some cases, when the basis for doing so is envy, we can become caught up in making ourselves prettier, smarter, or skinnier to the point where it becomes unhealthy and we lose sight of what is truly important in life - God. When we hyper fixate on making ourselves desirable and our lives appealing, we tend to focus solely on the physical, secular aspects of our life while completely neglecting our spiritual growth. Envy is nothing more than a roadblock on our journey toward Theosis - becoming like God. When we fall into the trap of envy, we can get consumed by it in every aspect of life.

Envy is undeniably a human emotion; everyone experiences it at one point in their lives at the least. But when we let envy take hold of our lives, we lose control over our relationship with God. St John Chrysostom's words are as applicable to current society as they were when they were written: Envy consumes us.

For the Will of God

Sarah Mariam Steephen

St. Gregorios
Elmhurst, IL

We train everyday
God prepares us for battle
Fighting for our Lord.

Sword of the Spirit
We wield it during hardship
For our Lord's honor.

We pray in God's name
Our prayer, our hymn, our weapon
Utilize it well.

Always spread the word.
Following the will of God.
His name in our hearts.

Our Lord and our God!
Loving our neighbor as yourself.
Always spread the will.

In God's name we pray.
Thank you for protecting us.
In war for your name.

Jeremiah John

St. Thomas
Chicago, IL



Siona Anna John

St Gregorios
Bellwood, IL



Prayer

Aeden Joseph

St. Thomas
Chicago, IL



Prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation for cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness." St John Chrysostom.

Prayer is a conversation with our God. God wants us to communicate with Him by prayer. When we are in prayer, we are giving our attention to God in a two-way relationship with Him. The early Christian prayer procedure is kneeling or standing with arms spread out and barefoot for supplication with our living God.

Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:5-18, "When you pray do not be like a hypocrite who stands in the synagogues and street corners to be seen by men but when you pray go into your room, close the door and pray to the Father who is unseen." We should also remember that God listens to our prayers. We should bring our problems to Him by repenting of our sins, asking for forgiveness, and for His blessings. This brings us closer to God.

Daniel 6:10 to 28 mentions Daniel praying three times every day. He bowed down and on his knees praised and prayed to God. He also fasted which made his prayer even stronger. When Daniel was put in the lion's den, he prayed to God and God sent an angel to save him. The lions did not hurt Daniel because he trusted in God.

Another prophet is Jonah who prayed in the belly of the fish. Jonah prayed to God in this manner (Jonah 2), " I called to you and you listen. I call for help from the depths of the grave. You listen and have heard my cry. " Jonah disobeyed God numerous times but He still showed unlimited love and compassion. God also forgave the people of Nineveh and showed mercy to them (Jonah 3) when they turned from their evil ways and wrongdoings.

Prayer is a powerful weapon, an instrument, a tool for us Christians to use in our lifetime. So let prayer be a refuge for every worry, a foundation for cheerfulness, protection against sadness, and a source of constant happiness" as said by St. John Chrysostom. If you need to call Jesus, just dial Jeremiah 33:3 - " Call upon the Lord and He Shall show you Great and Mighty things you do not know."

WHO WON THE BIBLE

QUIZ! ?

A: ABNER

C: AEDEN

B: RIYA

D: ALONA

GROUP 2

GROUP 3

GROUP 4

GROUP 4



Abner Jojin
St. Mary
St Louis, MO



Emma Prakash
St Gregorios Cathedral
Bellwood, IL



Aeden Joseph
St. Thomas
Chicago, IL



Elijah Geevarghese
St. Gregorios
Elmhurst, IL

GROUP 5

GROUP 6

GROUP 7



Alona Daniel
St. Thomas
Chicago, IL



Riya George
St. Gregorios
Elmhurst, IL



Sarah M. Steephen
St. Gregorios
Elmhurst, IL



THE WEALTH *of Wisdom*

Angela Maria Raju

St. Mary
St. Louis, MO

In a small town in Ireland, lived a poor man. He was born into a poor family and grew up poor on the streets. He was left alone to care for himself on the streets with all the beggars. Tired of spending endless nights in the cold at night and wondering about how the next day would go, he wanted to find a job. He went around town looking for a job.

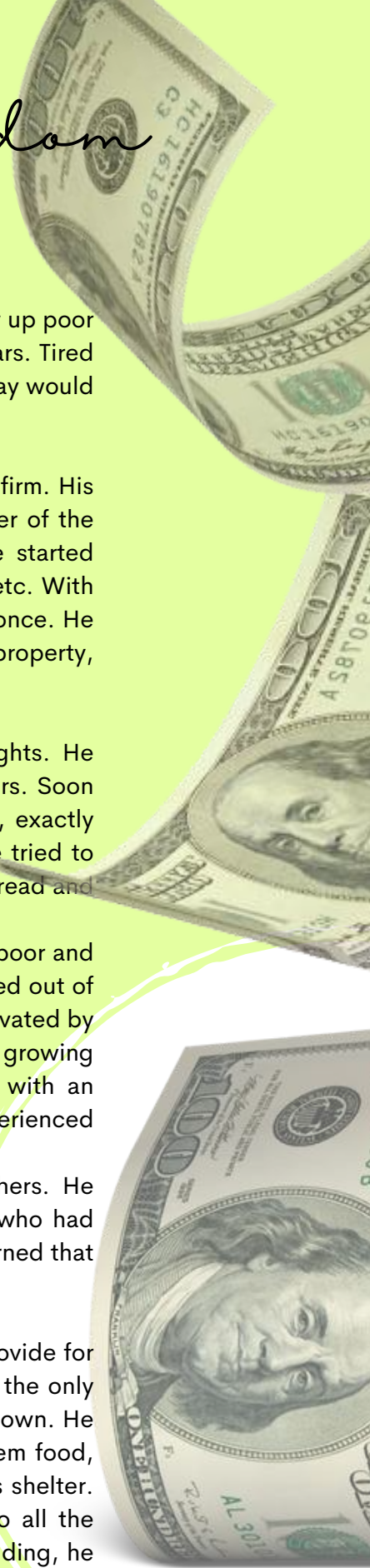
He started as a servant and really soon, he was a worker in a prestigious marketing firm. His boss, seeing his determination and amazing skill set, promoted him as the manager of the Finance department of the firm. With the promotion came wealth and fame. He started earning really well and was known to everyone in the town, rich, poor, old, young, etc. With the great amount of wealth he had and was receiving, he decided to spend it all at once. He bought everything anyone would want, plenty of food, expensive clothes, shoes, property, etc. At first it was going well. He was still rich and lived in a luxurious settlement.

But soon, everything went downhill. He got into drinking and drank multiple nights. He missed many days at work and missed important meetings because of his hangovers. Soon he lost his skillset and was kicked out of his job. He was returned to the streets, exactly where he had started. He felt really bad for himself and regretted his decision. He tried to get another job but was shamed by everyone. The news of him losing his job was spread and no one wanted to hire him.

He spent about 2 weeks on the streets before he met an old man. The old man was poor and new to the town. They exchanged stories and he realized that the old man was kicked out of his town for being poor. He feared that he would too be kicked out of his town. Motivated by the old man to improve himself, he attended a retreat center and spent time there growing and developing his inner self. He came out of there as a great individual and with an improved skill-set. He left his town and found a job in a neighboring town. He experienced *déjà vu* and found himself as the manager of a financing firm.

He earned really well but decided to control his spending and do good for others. He decided to pay a visit to his old town. Once there, he remembered the old man who had helped him be himself. He asked a food stall in the street about the old man and learned that the old man had passed away. The old man had left a note with the stall manager.

Upon reading the note, he realized that the old man wanted him to do good and provide for his community and especially care for the poor in his town. Realizing that this was the only way to repay the old man, he set out to build a homeless shelter for the poor in his town. He welcomed everyone who was poor to the shelter and took care of them, giving them food, shelter, and love. The news of his good deed spread, and everyone knew about his shelter. Everyone in the town joined him and helped run the shelter. The news spread to all the neighboring towns, and he became popular. This time, learning to manage his spending, he lived a good life providing for the poor and doing really well for himself. He lived happily for many years and even raised a family. One of the first things he taught his kids was to not go after their desires and wants, but to restrain themselves and give back.



Jess & Abbey



Evelyn George

St. Gregorios
Bellwood, IL



In elementary school, it was just Abbey and Jess. But everything changed in middle school. Right when Jess stepped foot in the school, everyone noticed her. No one really cared about Abbey. Jess and Abbey had only 2 classes together, lunch and recess. In every class Jess had at least 3 friends. Abbey wasn't as fortunate. After the first week Jess started sitting with her new friends. Abbey would sit with her teachers. One day, Jess got invited to go to a party. Jess, obviously, said yes. Abbey was still struggling to make friends.

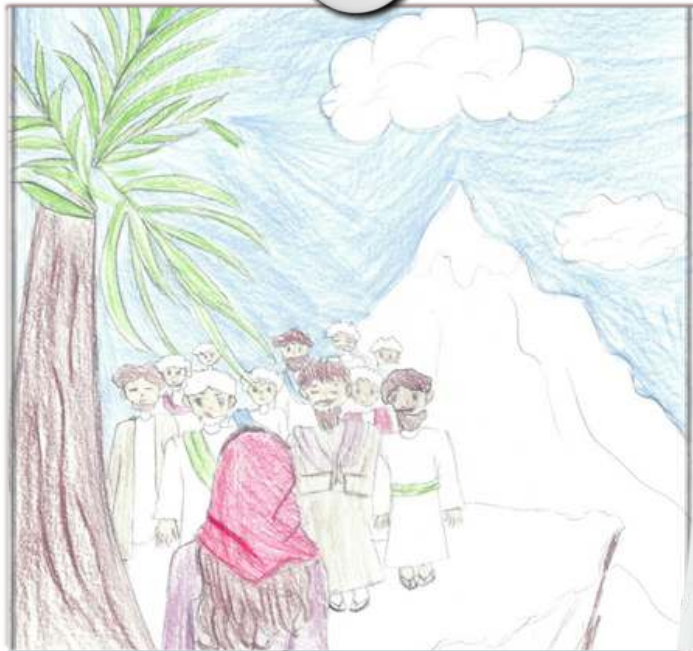
Jess and her friends went shopping for jewelry and dresses. Abbey was practicing the piano.

It was finally the day of the party. The girls decided to go Christmas themed. Jess was about to leave the house, but got a call from her dad saying he and mom were at the hospital. They had gotten into a car crash and told Jess to ask her friends if she could stay with them. Jess asked her two main best friends, Brooke, and Taylor. They argued saying they were going to have a sleepover at Megan's house, the girl who is throwing the party. Jess begged but they didn't budge. Jess realized her friends are fake. They only like her because of her clothes and looks. She called all of her friends. No one answered. Jess didn't know who to ask. She couldn't stay home alone. She had one person left. Abby.

She dialed her number. Their conversation was awkward, but Jess got to the point. Abbey asked her parents and they agreed.

Jess packed her things and was happy that she knew she could always have a friend that's loyal to her. Jess realized that there were true, and fake friends. You just need to pick the right ones.

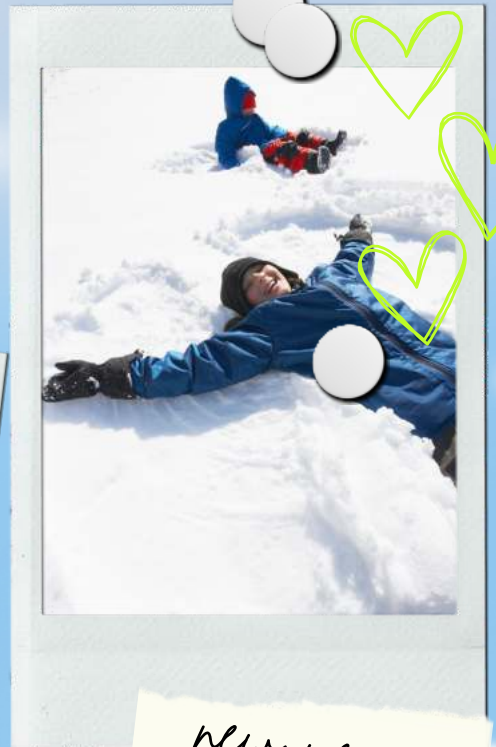
Vision Board



Deborah the Prophetess



Neha Sara Savish
St. Gregorios
St. Paul, Minnesota



new year
new me
new inspo



Annunciation to St. Mary



Emma Prakash
St. Gregorios
Bellwood, IL

● TO SEE BEYOND THE SURFACE

Tony and Rob, two best friends, would remember middle school as a time of struggle for their friendship. They had always had a strong relationship and hung out a lot. Until middle school, when things took a turn for the worst. Tony was a rich good-looking boy with lots of popularity while Rob was a poor boy, and not as handsome or as popular as Tony.

One day in middle school, Tony's friends asked him if he liked to hang out with Rob. Since Rob was not popular and he wanted to maintain his popularity, Tony said no. When Rob found out, he was troubled and talked to his parents about this and they said even if people frown upon you because of your looks, there is more to it than what is on the surface. Rob used this for the rest of his life. Tony was guilty and started to talk badly about others behind their back because of this.

People started to hate Tony while they started to like Rob because he was a kind and helpful guy. Tony continued to go down this downward spiral until he had no friends. One day Tony saw Rob talking to Tony's old friends. Tony confronted Rob asking him, "Why do you have more friends? It's not fair!" Rob, full of wisdom, said to his friend, "When you gossiped about me, I had to tell my parents. They said even if people frown at you because of your looks, there is more to it than what is on the surface." As Tony let this sink in, he remembered how he talked about Rob and many others, and he was very guilty. He apologized to Rob about how badly he talked about him and went around to others, apologizing truthfully for how cruel and rude he was. After everyone forgave him, he felt better and decided to rebuild the friendships he lost.

It took time, but he managed to rebuild all of his friendships. Everything was good again and Tony learned his lesson, being kind and talking to others no matter how they looked. As Rob and Tony were figuring out another sleepover, Tony felt at ease, knowing that things would change no matter how bad things were. As Tony and Rob did their secret handshake, they both knew that everything was back to normal.



Eli Mathew
St. Gregorios
St. Paul, MN



First Day of Sunday School

St. Gregorios

Edmonton

CANADA

Sunday School
Grade 12 Graduation



FIRST
DAY OF
Class

Jennifer Thomas

8th Grade
St. George
Sacramento, CA



A Christmas Miracle

"And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:31

It was a joyful day in St. Cloud, Minnesota. People were going around wishing each other a Merry Christmas and the scent of turkey wafted through the air. Everyone was happy... Well, almost everyone. A kid named Michael was sitting in his dark, dusty room. Michael was mean to everyone, and because of this, no one liked him or talked to him. However, because it was Christmas day, his mother told him to get out of the house and hang out with other kids. Unwillingly, Michael put on his winter clothes, and stepped out, only to be greeted with a snowball straight into his face. He looked in the direction of where the snowball was thrown and scowled at the kid standing there.

"Jeez, sorry," The kid muttered, as his face turned a shade of deep red.

"Watch where you throw your snowballs, kid," Michael snapped. The kid ran off in great fear, realizing who he threw a snowball at. A little kid was watching over all of this and glanced at Michael. Michael noticed and glared at the kid. The boy, (unfazed by Michael's glare), walked up to Michael and offered a smile.

"Hi! I'm Aaron! I'm eight years old!" Aaron enthusiastically informed.

"Okay? And?" Michael scoffed.

"You should come sledding with me! My friends are all going and you should come too!" Aaron grinned.

"I don't want to come," Michael said.

"Too bad!" Aaron said, as he placed a vice-like grip on his hand, "If you don't come, I'll start crying." Michael reluctantly agreed, not wanting to get in trouble. Aaron dragged Michael over to Riverside Park. As soon as Michael and Aaron reached there, all the other kids ran away, scared of Michael.

"Look, kid, everyone is scared of me. Let me just go home," Michael said, exasperated.

"That's fine! We have the whole hill to ourselves now! Let's go sledding!" Aaron exclaimed. Michael sighed at Aaron's enthusiasm and went along with him to the hill. Both of them went on the hill and sat in the sled, ready to push downwards.

"Are you ready?" Aaron asked.

"I guess," Michael grumbled.

"Three, two, one, GO!" Aaron yelled. A blast of cold air smacked Michael and Aaron in the face, as they went down the steep hill at an incredibly fast speed. Their adrenaline levels rose, and Michael had a feeling he hadn't felt in a long time... Joy. They landed in the snow, face first and Michael did something he hadn't done in a long time. Michael laughed. They had landed near some other people, and they stared in shock.

"That felt SO GOOD!" Michael declared.

"Come on, let's do it again," Aaron said, his eyes shining at the other boy's happiness. They did it again, over and over and over. It started getting a bit late.

"I guess I should go now," Michael deducted.

"Me too," Aaron agreed. He then asked a question that stunned Michael for a few seconds. "Why do you hate Christmas so much?"

After a few seconds, Michael replied, "I guess I don't really hate Christmas, no one ever showed me the same kindness you did, ever. It made me dislike the idea of people having fun and getting together when no one ever did that for me."

"Well now you have me, and now you're happy," Aaron said, "Bye! See you tomorrow!"

"Bye," Michael said. Michael went home with a smile on his face and lots and lots of love in his heart. All it takes is a bit of love, and it can take your life and spin it in the right direction.



ST. STEPHEN HOUSTON, TX

On the special occasion of Sunday School Day, these three boys

Nathan Vinod, Zachariah Mathews, & Philip Mathews speaking passionately about the importance of Sunday school in shaping values and creating lasting bonds. Their heartfelt words echo the essence of community, faith, and the joy of learning, making this day even more meaningful for everyone present.

St. Stephen Orthodox Church, Houston, TX



ST. MARY'S LAS VEGAS, NV



Sunday school kids singing Christmas carols at Kerala association program of Las Vegas.



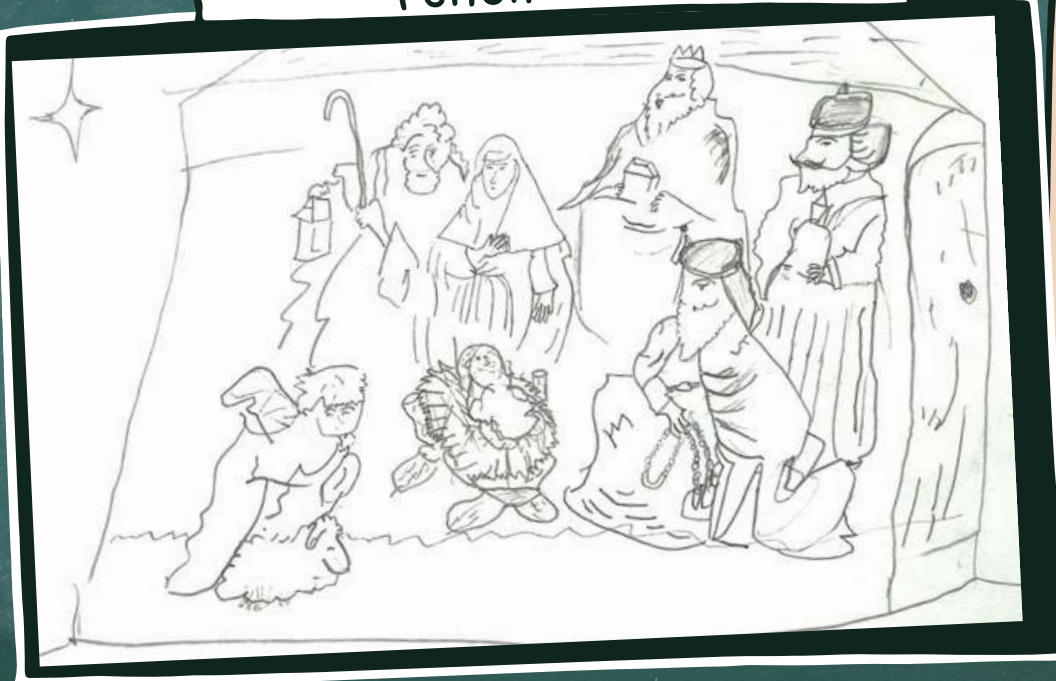
Today we are learning about...

St. Gregorios
Austin, TX



Ecumenical Christmas carol by Sunday School children.

Nativity Scene
Pencil Sketch



- Andrea George
- 3rd Grade
- St. Thomas
Phoenix, AZ

St. Mary's
Atlanta, GA

It's the perfect time to gather with loved ones to enjoy a special Nativity program performed by Sunday School children at St. Mary's, Atlanta, Georgia.

Click to Start the Video



Brikho 2023

St. Gregorios
St. Paul, Minnesota



St. Gregorios Malankara Orthodox Church of Minnesota held a three-day camp in Amery, WI led by Very Rev. Zakhariah Rambachen with guest speaker Brother Solomon Varghese. Our theme was, "Abide in God" as we combined our OVBS activities with our annual camp. The camp was held in another location from our usual worship and it gave parents and kids time to bond, learn about our Church and grow in their spiritual journey.

Our church chose the name "Brikho" as our annual Sunday School camp which is a Syriac word meaning, "to bow or kneel". This helps all the families to remember the importance of kneeling before God in all aspects of our lives.

We had sessions by Rambachen and Brother Solomon for different age groups, including songs, games, outdoor activities, campfire, and ending with a glorious celebration of Holy Qurbana on Sunday. On Saturday evening, it was a truly blessed experience as we converted the hall into a meditation space and allowed all to sing and pray and prepare our minds and body for Holy Qurbana.

EVENTS

JANUARY

13

Click to
Join

FAITH & FAMILY SESSION

on “the importance of a family altar”
for parents and teachers

FEBRUARY

10

TEACHER’S MEETING

virtual session, flyer pending