

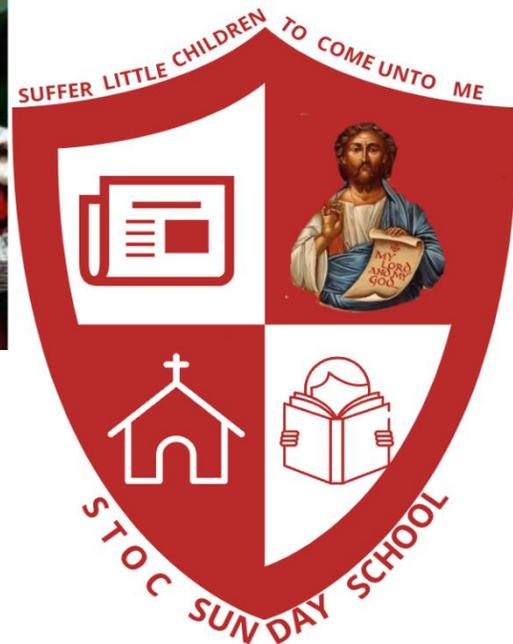
“Let the little children
come to me...”

St. Matthew 19:14

JANUARY 22ND, 2023- VOL. 2 NO. 1

STOCSS REFLECTIONS

*A Magazine of the St. Thomas Orthodox
Church, Toronto, Sunday School*



REFLECTIONS

MESSAGE FROM VICAR

Dear friends in Christ,

As we begin the New Year's Sunday School, I would like to draw your attention to the passage in the Gospel of St. Mark 10:13-16:

“People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.”

Consider what it says about our Lord's encounter with children and how others interacted with them. The disciples did not seem interested in ministry to the children because they saw them as a bother and perhaps even insignificant. Somewhat similar is the attitude of adults of modern-day Parishes! It has been said that children are the future of the church. As we study the Bible and read church history, we find that children have played a vital role, as they do even in the church today. Jesus spoke a lot about children and how we are to treat them, as well as the lessons that we can learn from them. There is a proverb that says children are like wet cement: whatever falls on them makes an impression. This is so true. It is also true that children can make a great impression on us if we allow them. The above bible passage demands four things from a believer:

1. BRING them to Jesus (verse 13a).

The first thing that we need to do in order to raise kingdom kids is to bring them to Jesus. It is not enough to just drop them off at church. Children need a touch from the Lord just like adults do. Notice that this was not optional.

2. AVOID the too busy attitude (verses 13b-14a).

The disciples did not seem interested in bringing children to Jesus because they saw them as a bother and undesirable duty.

3. BECOME willing to learn from them (verses 14b-15).

Jesus says that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like children. Some things that we can learn from children include faith, forgiveness and humility

4. BLESS them with words and actions (verse 16).

One meaning of the word "to bless" is to speak well of. Jesus spoke well of the children. The blessing had an element of both present and future senses. If we say negative things to children, if we make dire predictions of what they will become, this is damaging. We ensnare the children and ourselves by our words. The opposite of a blessing is a curse. We need to be mindful of what we say and what we do with our children. Whatever we do for little children, we actually do for Jesus. What a great way to lay up eternal treasures!

May God bless us all.

Thomas George Achen



“With us everything should be secondary compared to our concern with children, and their upbringing in the instruction and teaching of the Lord.”

— St. John Chrysostom

MESSAGE FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dear Parents, Teachers and Sunday School Students,

As we begin the new year, let us remember the words of Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This verse serves as a reminder that with faith in Jesus Christ and trust in his strength and guidance, we can overcome any obstacle that may stand in our way. It is a source of hope and encouragement, as we look forward to the new year with optimism and determination.

As we reflect on the past year, we are reminded of the challenges we faced and the strength and resilience that our community has shown. I am grateful for your continued support and for the way in which we have been able to come together as a church family to support one another.

I would like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to all of those who have contributed to the compilation of this newsletter. Your hard work and dedication have made it possible for us to keep our community informed and connected.

As we move forward, let us continue to keep our faith strong and to support one another in our community. I am excited for the opportunities and possibilities that the new year holds and look forward to the ways in which we can continue to serve and grow together.

Wishing you all a blessed and prosperous new year.

Let's work together to make it a great one.

“

Throw your weaknesses before God, and the Lord will become your strength.

-ST. MOSES THE STRONG

@ORIENTALORTHOXCHURCHES



With prayers,

Justin Alex
Principal, STOC Sunday School
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PLANNED ACTIVITIES 2023

Academic Year 2022-2023

In January, we resumed in person Sunday School classes for one Sunday; starting in February, we will have Sunday School in person every Sunday. As we have been provided a new curriculum which will be shared amongst the American dioceses, we ask parents and students to continuously review the various resources provided on the following site <http://talmido.org/>.

Mid-term Exams

Our midterm exams for Sunday School classes will be taking place on March 5th. Details to follow.

Liturgical Song Training

This year we will resume our Sunday School Liturgical Song Training sessions in January, led by our Choir director Sujith Abraham along with Sneha Varghese. These sessions are aimed at training our students in the various hymns of our church so as to encourage active participation during Liturgical Services. We thank our students for their engagement during these sessions and ask for your continued support for all upcoming sessions which will be happening twice a month.

Children's Forum

The Children's Forum provides an opportunity for our students to share their various musical and creative talents. We will be conducting these forums in person, bi-monthly. We look forward to the students' active participation.

Lenten Retreats

This year we plan on conducting a Lenten Retreat for the Sunday School students. As we journey through the Lenten Season, the retreat will provide the students an opportunity to understand and reflect on the meaning of the Great Lent: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. More details are to follow.

Monastery Visit

We are planning to visit St. Kosmas Monastery, Bolton in the spring of this year. It will be a one-day retreat in which we plan to bring both Sunday School and MGOCSM. The date and more details are to follow.

***We thank our students and parents for their continued support of our various Sunday School Activities. If there are any questions or concerns regarding any of the above-mentioned activities, please contact our Sunday School principal.**

FEAST OF EPIPHANY- BR. SANJAY MATHEW



Twelve days after Christmas, on January 6th, the Orthodox Church celebrates the Baptism of Jesus Christ which is called the Feast of Epiphany or Theophany. On this feast, we see Christ being baptized by John the Baptist on river Jordan. Only after His Baptism does Jesus embark on His earthly ministry. The word Epiphany means a shining forth or manifestation; Theophany, the manifestation of God.

The Baptism of Christ marks an important moment in the ministry of Jesus Christ for many reasons, one being that during this event the Trinity - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - is revealed to the world. In fact, in the early Church this feast was celebrated together with the feast of Nativity and the feast of Circumcision of Christ. When we examine the Gospel narratives, we see that when the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended on Christ in the form of a dove. Then a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy" (Luke 3:21).

This revelation not only manifests the Holy Trinity, but also identifies how Jesus Christ is not merely a human with special or magical abilities; it makes known Christ's human and divine nature united in one composite nature. Here we see God the Father proclaiming that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, confirming His divine nature. This feast is also called the festival of lights, since God is light, and has appeared to illumine the world.

The Baptism which John the Baptist performed was different from the current Christian sacrament of Baptism. John's Baptism was based on repentance. In the Gospel according to St. Matthew, John says, 'Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near' (Matthew 3:2). Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI of blessed memory) indicates that the act of descending into the waters in the Jewish tradition includes a confession of guilt and a plea for forgiveness. It was Jewish custom to immerse oneself in water to wash away certain ritual impurities. Even today we see water as a sign of cleansing and purification, whether it be physical or spiritual. The Judaism of the day was familiar both with more general formulaic confession of sin, and with highly personalized confessional practice in which an enumeration of individual sinful deeds was expected¹. It is also a ritual during which one leaves behind their sinful life in order to start out on a new path. River Jordan played an immense symbolic value in

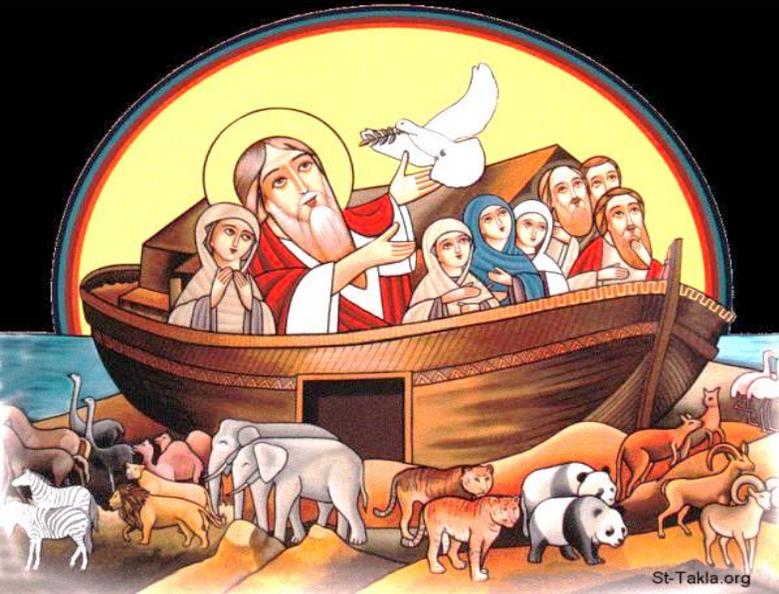


St-Takla.org

¹ Ratzinger, Joseph. *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 1st Edition. Random House Canada, p. 49.

Jewish tradition, as it was the river through which Joshua crossed to lead the Hebrew people to the Promised Land. It is the river that the Hebrew people crossed to escape from bondage of slavery to the land of freedom. Thus, the baptism also symbolizes for us freedom from the bondage of sin.

St. Paul also emphasizes the importance of Christian baptism and how it differed from the



baptism of John. During Paul's third missionary journey, he asks people who received the baptism of John, whether they had received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-6); when the apostle learned they did not receive Holy Spirit, he insists that they receive another baptism. Receiving the Holy Spirit during baptism unites us into Christ as member of His united body.

As John the Baptist was commissioned to prepare the way for Christ, he used baptism as a form of spiritual cleansing so that people could be ready to accept the Messiah. But

Jesus Christ, who is God himself, was without sin. The baptism of Christ shows the faithful that He is indeed God's beloved son, who takes upon himself the sins of the world. Christ, who is without sin, submitted to Baptism, thus highlighting the importance of God's law for humankind; Christ is demonstrating for all humankind the importance of obedience to God's will and teachings. In addition, through His baptism the entire cosmos was cleansed. When God who is pure and sinless was baptized, the water and the cosmos became clean, setting up a stage for new relationship with Christ. Fr. John Behr teaches that through the baptism of Christ, the waters become a fountain of incorruption, a gift of sanctification and also the destruction of demons². This is further defined in the opening prayers of the Epiphany Service in the Syrian tradition, 'O Lord Jesus Christ, Self-Existent from the Father, who bowed down from the heights of his Godhead and was baptized by John, His preacher, in the River Jordan in order to sanctify the waters by His Holiness'. The baptism of Christ also underlines the humility of Christ, who, though he was God, insisted that His Baptism was vital in order to 'fulfill all righteousness' (Matthew 3:15), when John the Baptist was reluctant to baptize Him. This event shows the complete willingness of Christ to submit to the will of God. We see in this complete submission a foreshadowing of the Cross, when Christ willingly took upon Himself the sins of the world.

The feast of Epiphany is often minimized by many faithful, but it is a major feast day of the Church, as it reveals not only the Holy Trinity, but also the identity of Christ. During this feast we see a visible sign of Christ that He is in fact the son of the Father, while highlighting his Humanity and Divinity in one unified composite nature. As this feast reveals who God is, it is a Feast which illuminates humankind.

² Behr, John. *The Cross Stands While the World Turns*. Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2014, p. 132.

FEAST OF ST. STEPHEN-THE DEACON & PROTOMARTYR

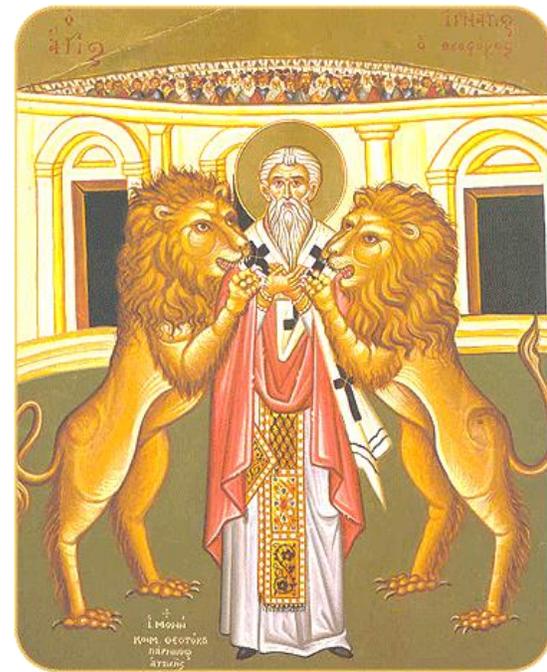


On January 8th the Holy Church celebrates the Feast of St. Stephen, the chief of the deacons and first of the martyrs. In Acts 6 we read that 7 men of *good* reputation were selected to aid the Apostles in their ministry. These men who were full of faith and wisdom included: Stephen, Philip, Prochus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolaus. The Apostles laid their hands on these men to serve as deacons of the Holy Church with the responsibility of overseeing the daily distribution of food and spreading the gospel. During this period of the first century, the Church was beginning to grow despite the constant threat of persecution from Jewish and Roman authorities.

In Acts 6-7, we read about the ministry of St. Stephen who completed many signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit. Stephen was falsely accused of blaspheming the Jewish faith, and forced to stand trial before the scholarly Jewish authorities (Sanhedrin). In one of the greatest defences of the Christian faith, Stephen explained how the Jewish peoples have failed to keep the commands of God and ultimately rejected the Righteous One, Jesus Christ. Beginning from the time of Abraham, Stephen highlighted the continued sins of the Hebrews, who failed to obey the laws of Moses and the instruction of the prophets. In hearing this, the Jews became enraged at Stephen and

stoned him to death. While he was being stoned, he prayed for his persecutors, asking God to forgive them of their sins. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen saw the heavens open with Jesus Christ sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

St. Stephen is the first Christian to die for his faith in Jesus Christ, giving him the title protomartyr. Even in the 21st century, the Church continues to be persecuted by religious, political and social authorities. In Greek, the term martyr means 'witness', referring to those who are called to stand before a judge in order to provide a defence of their actions or beliefs. One well known early Christian martyr was St. Ignatius of Antioch, whose feast is celebrated on December 20th. While chained on his way to martyrdom in Rome, St. Ignatius wrote 7 pastoral letters to various Christian communities. In his address to the Church in Rome, Ignatius reminded the community to remain faithful even during times of persecution, as he considered personal trials a means of joining in the passion of Christ. Ignatius would eventually reach Rome and be thrown before the wild beasts of the Flavian Circus, which is where Christians were publicly persecuted to entertain pagan audiences. Many Christians during times of persecution often lapsed in their faith by offering incense and worshipping pagan gods in order to be spared from death. Ignatius saw his own martyrdom as a means of attaining true life as he quotes Jesus in stating, "For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, but lose his own soul?"



We are all called to be true witnesses of Christ whether at home, in school or at work. Our trials are opportunities to do what is good regardless of the sufferings we may endure whether that be from friends, family members or colleagues. When we are persecuted for doing good, Christ reminds us, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

MAY THE PRAYERS OF ST. STEPHEN THE PROTOMARTYR AND ST. IGNATIUS BE A STRONGHOLD FOR US ALWAYS!

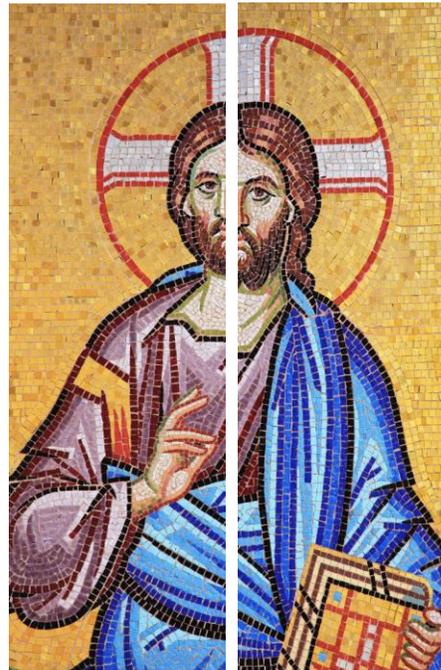
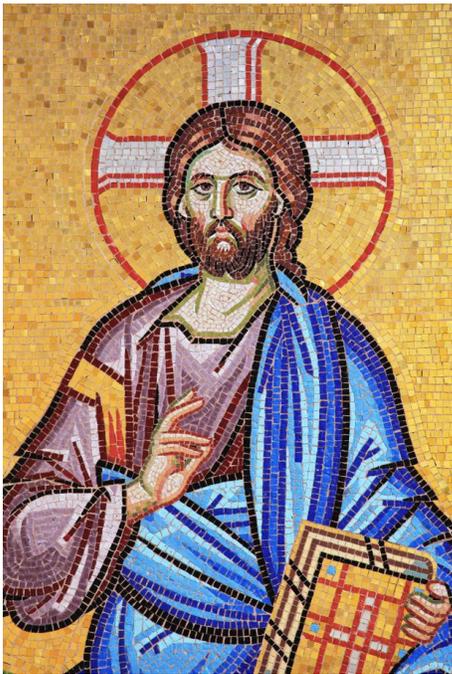
***With Martyrs and Confessors Who Endured Torments and Pains
Make Us Worthy to Sing Praise to You O Lord God.***

CHRIST THE PANTOCRATOR- MR. VARGHIS MATTHEW

This icon is a specific depiction of Christ Pantocrator (also spelled Pantokrator as a more literal translation of the Greek), and is usually translated as "Almighty" or "All-powerful".

The icon of Christ Pantocrator is one of the most common religious images of Orthodox Christianity. The oldest known Pantocrator icon was written in the sixth century. It was preserved in the monastery of St. Catherine in the Sinai desert.

The icon is deliberately asymmetrical (not symmetrical) to symbolize Christ's dual nature, divine and human. As we look at the image, the left side (i.e. our left) is symbolic of his human nature with his features depicted as much softer and lighter, whereas the right side is symbolic of his divinity with his stern look and intense features, and showing the Blue robe. Blue stands for heaven or the Kingdom of God which is not on this earth; it is a symbol of another everlasting world. Additionally, it shows the infiniteness of the sky. Christ's eyes themselves are different in shape and size; also the hair on his left side is swept behind his shoulder. Here on His right side, Christ is shown dressed in a purple robe—a colour commonly chosen to represent those of imperial status and royalty. This choice of color for his robe is representative of his status and importance. It is intended to show the glory of Jesus Christ. Christ is depicted raising his right hand to make the sign of a blessing. The three fingers touching each other is a symbol of the Trinity. Finally, in his left hand he holds onto a book, we can assume this book is most likely a Gospel because it is adorned in jewels in the shape of a Cross.



“In former times, God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake.”

- St. John of Damascus

RESOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR- DR. RAJAN GEORGE

It's 2023, a New Year, and time for the word RESOLUTION to be uttered and, in some cases, practised for a few days, weeks, months and, in a few cases, till the end of the year. Resolution typically means a firm decision to do or not to do something - the quality of being determined.

Historically, the first recorded people to set new year pledges, later to become known as resolutions, are the Ancient Babylonians some 4,000 years ago. The Babylonian civilization is also the first to hold recorded celebrations in honour of the new year.

We see a mention of the new month in the Old Testament, Exodus, 12:2, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you." The scriptures say that God made resolutions, and he has followed them. There were actions He resolved to perform, commitments He made for the everlasting good of believers. God's resolutions were made long before the beginning of a new year, and His resolutions will last longer than those made by human beings. It is human nature to follow one's resolutions for two weeks, a month or even a few months. God's resolutions were made before the beginning of time, and they are good FOREVER. God has resolved never to leave us or forsake us. When we have God, we have all we need.

There is nothing wrong with deciding to eat healthily, exercise more, save money, or help charitable causes in the new year. These resolutions may enhance and improve our lives.

My term of reference in this narration on resolution are three:

- Behavioural modifications
- Spiritual resolution to worship God and to read and to practice His Word
- Forgiveness

Behavioural modifications

Throw away the material things that are of no value to our existence and growth. Do not hoard or clutter your space with things of the past. Clear the clutter of things that you don't need. For example, if in your closet you have not touched a dress or a shirt for a few years, give it away or discard it. Likewise, throw away disturbing and hurtful emotional baggage like anger, procrastination, jealousy, and selfishness. Such material things and disturbing thoughts are barriers to living a joyful life. According to Romans 12:19, ESV: Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

People around us don't hold the key to our happiness. And the stresses we daily face - situations like an urgent assignment that was not delivered or a project whose deadlines was missed at or a position that we may not have been granted. All these are stress creators or conflict generators. We must not carry the judgments and worries of what others think or say about us. This will stress us; it will create anxiety, and we will fail further. The social media "likes" on our posts aren't the validation of who we are; they are merely chatter. Ignore the chatter in our life; they are distractions that will ultimately bring us down. Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:6-7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be known to God; and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Spiritual resolution to worship and practice His word

I did not take time to seriously examine my new year's resolution until I blended it with my faith. Spiritual resolutions are decisions or goals to ignite our spirituality and grow closer to God. Although the Bible says nothing about making New Year resolutions, it does give us wise advice about making our lists. In 1740, the Englishman who founded the Methodist movement, John Wesley, along with his brother Charles, began a New Year's Eve service at the church called the Covenant Renewal Service. We also worship on this day to welcome the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our life must be known by what we stood for and what we did to pursue this goal even beyond our time. This is the legacy we want to leave through our spiritual practice and make this life that God has given us worthwhile. We must stay humble about our plans and achievements. These achievements are His grace that we earned through our practice of the faith. Unlike God, we do not have the power to fulfill all our resolutions. According to Proverbs 27:1, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring." Life can change from one moment to the next. We may look successful with wealth and all the gifts of good health, but by our boasting, we may lose these gifts and more.

Forgiveness

Why is forgiveness important for relationships? This is a crucial resolution to resolve conflict. We often ruin our lives based on past situations and decisions we might have taken in those situations. It is worth asking the simple question: How did Jesus resolve conflict? Jesus loved Peter, who undermined His mission and then betrayed him. Jesus frequently entered many prophetic debates and accepted invitations to eat in the homes of religious leaders, who were trying to trap him. Even on the Cross, he connected to his enemies by asking his Father to forgive them.

Forgiveness isn't an easy resolution. If our new year's resolution is to let go of chatter and negativity and be on the journey of seeking strength in worship, forgiveness is the ultimate level to cleanse ourselves. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart," (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

Paul in Ephesians 4:32 says: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven you." In this sentence, Paul has summarized the biblical message: we must be kind, compassionate and forgiving. In Matthew 18: 21-22, it is said, "Forgive your brother for sins done against you as many times as your brother needs forgiving." Colossians 3:13 (NIV) says: "Bear with each other and forgive one another if you have a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

In summary, remember that to keep a resolution, we must change our behaviour and make sure our resolutions are reasonable. Resolutions will fail if there is a lack of accountability.

There must be a periodic assessment of how we are doing with our behavioural changes and how we are addressing our spiritual hunger. Lack of planning causes a last-minute rush and stress. Live life easily and at your pace with perfect resolutions that you can undertake.

Lastly, preparing to excel in whatever we do starts with calling upon our Lord, coming to God in a relationship, praying, and seeking the Lord with all our hearts. Our faith is not one more item on a "to-do" list. Our faith forms our "to be and to do" list.

Glory and honor to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Respected Achen, Sunday school teachers, parents, and dear friends.

This Sunday, on which we recall the birth of the last major prophet of Old Testament times, St. John the Baptist, is also known as “Children’s Day”. The readings for this week remind us of the importance of children, how precious they are, and what a great responsibility we have!

There are many important themes in this Gospel passage (St. Luke’s Gospel 1:5-80). Let me outline four brief ideas we should keep in mind during this week.

1. The birth of St. John the Baptist represents the fulfillment of prophecy – God keeps His promises to us and hears our prayers. We know the story of how Zacharias and Elizabeth were both greatly aged and without children. Their sincere prayer was that God would provide them a child. God did finally answer their prayer. God is faithful to us even when we are not faithful to Him – that is the sign of true love.



Do we possess that kind of love, where we can love each other regardless of what is said or done to us? It takes a great deal of humility and a generous heart. We also have to remember that our prayers are always heard by God if sincere, and will be answered in His time and according to His will. St. John Chrysostom said, “Even if God does not immediately give us what we ask, even if many people try to put us off our prayers, let us still go on praying.”

2. When the angel Gabriel came to tell Zacharias of the news that he and Elizabeth would have a son who was to be called John, Zacharias questioned him, bewildered and perhaps even confused. In a sense, his faith wavered even though it was an angel of the Lord who was delivering the good news. As a sign to Zacharias and those around him, he was made mute until all had come to pass. When the child came to be born, Elizabeth and Zacharias’s friends and relatives came to celebrate the day on which the babe would be named. When Elizabeth said that the name is John, they turned to Zacharias, sure that he would pick a family name. Upon writing that “His name is John,” Zacharias’s tongue was loosened. His prayer was answered and he, in obedience, named his son as the angel instructed him.

Similarly, when we go through trials and tribulations in life, we need to have the patience and faith of Job, someone who lost all that he had, endured many trials and hardships, and yet remained faithful to God.

Do we have that kind of patience and faith, to continue to trust God even through difficult times? Because Job was faithful, he was blessed with much more than he had originally. We too have to go through the desert of despair before we can enter the land of milk and honey.

3. In verses 67-79 of St. Luke chapter 1, we see an expression of the joy of Zacharias in what is commonly called the "Benedictus." In it, he offers praise to God for His grace and redemptive acts. He also speaks of the role his son, John, will play in preparing the way of the Messiah "to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of God...to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death." (St. Lk. 1:77-78).

Do we offer proper praise and thanksgiving to God when we experience His grace and blessings? We receive a shower of blessings each and every moment in life. Every day should be a day of thanksgiving.

4. We are here to be changed by the church – we are here to be transformed and divinized, realizing the great potential that exists within us - that we are created in the image of God. It all begins with a heart of confession and tears of repentance. Are we ready for such a transformation? During this time of lent (Advent), we have a great opportunity for such a transformation.

Today is the fulfillment of a prophecy about the birth of John the Baptist. We should have the patience and faith of Job, and, like Zachariah, offer our praise to God for his grace and redemptive acts.

May today's celebration of Children's day bring us joy and may the peace of that first Christmas be with us and transform us into true Orthodox children of God.



"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Impress them on your children.

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

-Deuteronomy 6:6-7

CHRISTMAS PROGRAM 2022- MR. KOSHY RAJAN

St. Thomas Orthodox Church celebrated Christmas 2022, on December 17th at Del Salle Auditorium. The program started at 5:30 pm; Rev.Fr. Dr. Thomas George and Philipose Achen lead the evening prayers. Secretary Reuben Thomas welcomed the distinguished guests, visitors and church members and then introduced the MC's of the evening – Digno Justin and Elvin Koshy. The MC's did an incredible job by engaging the crowd with their theme of "The Christmas Journey through the Lives of Kariachen & Mariamma". Their skillful handling of the various situations, transitions, jokes, and quizzes allowed everyone to fully enjoy the pageant and raised the Christmas spirit for the event.

Phillipose Achen, the keynote speaker, gave a thought-provoking, informative Christmas message. Many Volunteers worked selflessly to make the event a success, Jessy John who found the facility, Reuben – visiting the facility, Ramon – in charge of decorations, Jerry Mani & Sanjay on the audio settings and food arrangements, Suja and Asha on food serving, Thomas on the financials and the Managing Committee supported the event.

Various mind blowing, invigorating performances were the highlights of the event. The St. Thomas Choir performed songs under the leadership of Sujith. St. Thomas Gospel Music Band– Elvin, Leanne, George, Megha under the guidance of Benson. The Sunday School nativity skit under the leadership of Justin, Rincy, Sherin, class Teachers; the various skit properties made by Rincy, Biji and Diana. The Focus skit under the guidance of John and the MMVS Skit - Maria -the under the leadership of Minu. The young talents – Shawn James, Ivana, Rehanna, Johan, Joshua and George performed various songs and skits. The program ended with Koshy Rajan's vote of thanks and benediction by Philipose Achen.



SYNERGIA 2023- MR. VARGHESE GEORGE

Synergia 2023: Youth in Spirit was an event that took place in a spacious venue in Brampton. The event was a one-day team-building retreat that aimed to connect the youth and help them develop stronger connections with one another.

The day started with breakfast and morning prayer, which set the tone for a day filled with reflection, learning, and fun. The first session was led by Kaleigh Sainthill. Kaleigh Sainthill is the senior director of transformations at RBC. She spent the morning talking to the group about the stresses of post-university life and provided valuable strategies for coping with these pressures. She also provided advice on strategies for happiness in your work and job.

Following this, there was an engaging and interactive session with the vendor Quiz Coconut, which included a general knowledge quiz, a workshop where teams used household items to recreate images, and a music guessing game. The energy and participation from everyone present was truly impressive and made for a memorable experience.

The program was expected to bring the youth together to start the year. With a mix of team building exercises and discussions, the goal was to understand the needs of our youth in order to appropriately plan for future activities in the church.

Given that we were able to organize 36 youth in attendance on short notice, it was a good way to start the year. As we start to come out of COVID restrictions, we haven't had many opportunities to meet up. Additionally, there was a great opportunity to get feedback from the youth regarding their expectations going into this year. We don't often have large-scale discussions on the direction of events which we want to coordinate. It was good to hear the perspectives beyond assigned council members.

Sincere gratitude to Aswathy aunty, Sujith uncle, Koshy uncle, and Jerry uncle for organizing this event and making it such a success. We would also like to thank all the parents who attended and supported the event, as well as Thomas George Achen for his invaluable presence. Lastly, thank you to everyone who has supported the program financially and/or with their prayers.



Evanna Binu Abraham -Christmas Morn

by
Evanna
Binu
Abraham

Christmas Morn

Shall I tell you what will come
to Bethlehem on Christmas morn,
who will kneel them gently
down before the Lord new-born?
One small fish from the river,
with scales of red, red gold,
One wild bee from the heather,
One gray lamb from the fold,
One ox from the high pasture,
One black bull from the herd,
One goatling from the far hills,
One white, white bird.

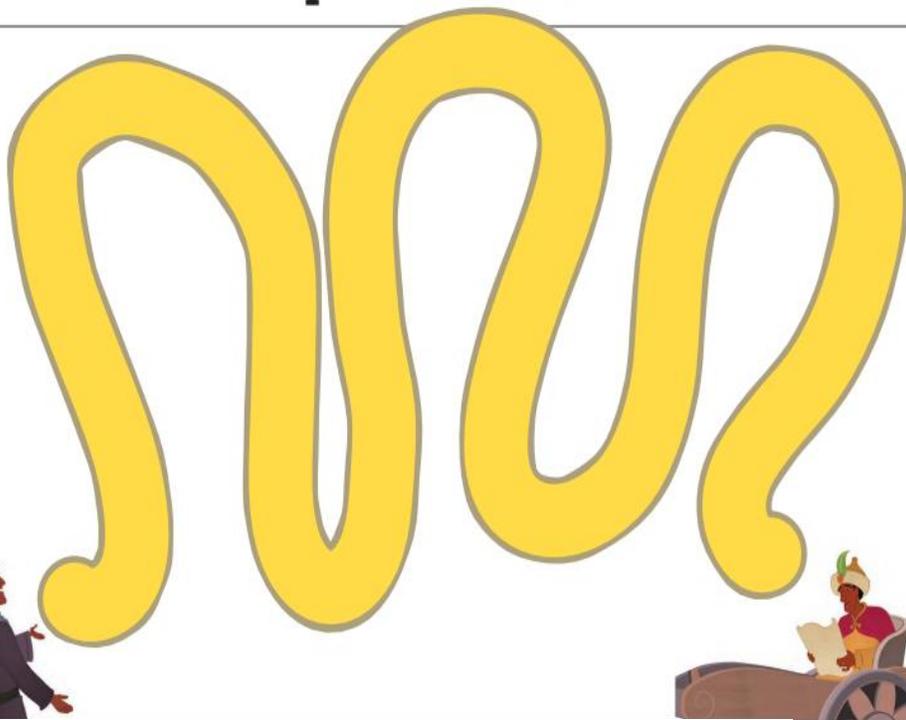
And many children-God give them
grace, bringing tall candles to

Johan George- Yeshu Pithrusudhane



ACTIVITIES

Philip Told About Jesus



Activity Page "Philip Told About Jesus"

Instructions: One copy per child. Children follow the path with a crayon or marker from Philip to the royal official.

BELOW ACTIVITIES TAKEN FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL ZONE:

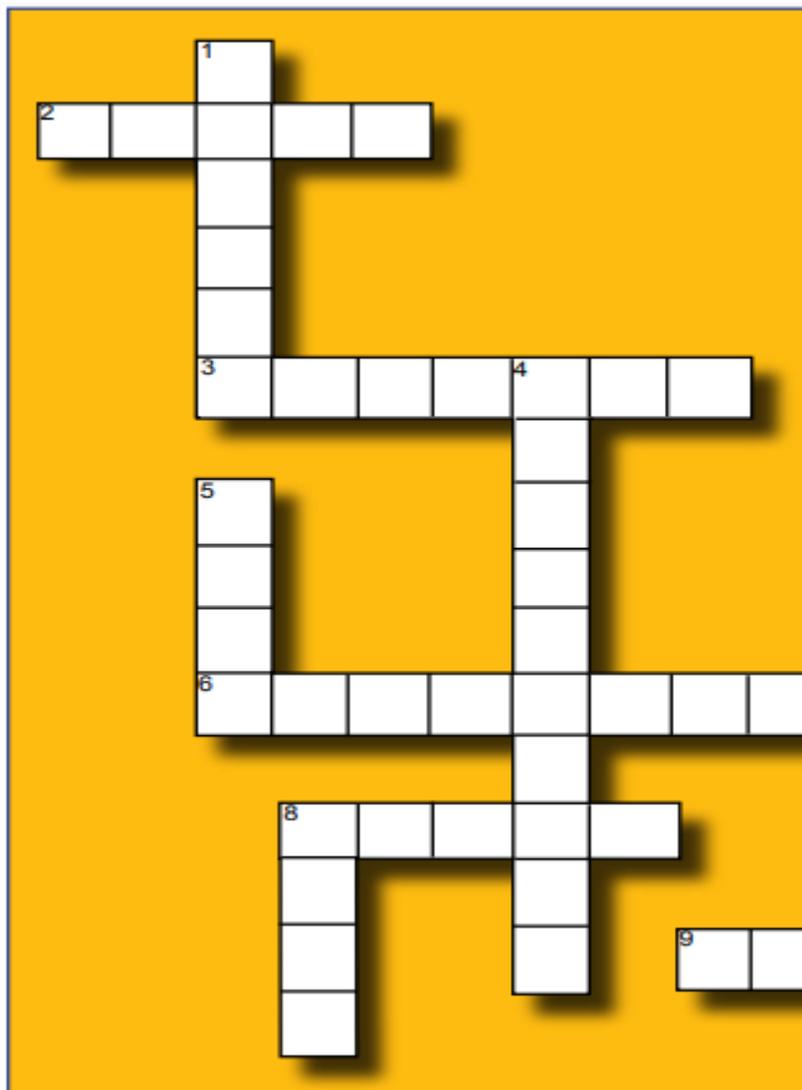
<https://sundayschoolzone.com>

ACROSS

2. Jesus said that those who worship God must "must worship in spirit and _____."
3. When we want something to drink, we are _____.
6. Jesus' companions
8. Opposite of man
9. All _____ are important to Jesus.

DOWN

1. This holds water or sand.
4. People of Samaria are known as _____.
5. What do we eat?
7. Jesus is the _____ of the world.
8. A deep hole in the ground with water in it



RESOURCES

Important Links:

Indian Orthodox Sunday School Northeast American Diocese - <https://nesundayschool.org/>

IOSS NE American Diocese Facebook Page - <https://www.facebook.com/IOSS.NEAMERICANDIOCESE/>

Ministry of Liturgical Resource Development - <https://www.youtube.com/c/LiturgicalResourceDevelopment/videos>

Orthodox Terminology - <https://stgregorioscathedral.com/orthodox-terminology>

Project *Graphē* (Fr. Rijo Geevarghese) - <https://projectgraphe.wordpress.com/>

Overshadow my body

With Your right hand, which formed it

May Your fortress of mercy

Be a shield surrounding me.

Bo/utho of St Ephrem the Syrian

Graphē



@rijogeevarghese

Rijo