

# The TORCH

*A Parish of The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America*

## CHRIST IS RISEN!

*Fr. John Winfrey, Pastor*



It has been a wonderful Holy Week here at Saint George's. The general attendance was much better this year than it

has been in the last several years that I have been here. It was only on Monday and Tuesday evening that we had less than 100 people present (86 and 38 respectively). By the time we came to Holy Wednesday we were pretty well full every night from that point on with no fewer than 150 or so. The Vesperal Liturgy on Saturday morning was lovely (and again, quite full).

I served every morning at Saint Nicholas Church from Monday through Thursday in addition to all of the services at Saint George. I'm pooped and I find that I'm getting a little older every year. Imagine!

One might be tempted to say that "it's finally over!" But what a loss that would be. Yes, the fast is over. Yes, the intensity of the Lenten Services and Holy Week is over. But, in reality, we have now finally come to the **beginning**. Now it starts! Now everything is new! Now this dying world comes face to face with Life himself, risen from the tomb!

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This is what all of our preparation has been about: the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection from the dead. This is why we sing the Paschal troparion before and at the end of every service and blessing throughout Paschaltide: ***“Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!”*** The words are powerful and touch the deepest part of our existence. They reach the core of our nightmares.

The hymn begins in the tomb, the graveyard. Graveyards have come to be seen as spooky and dark places in our modern culture. They are the stuff of horror movies, all dark and foreboding. But surely this is not the historic understanding of a Christian graveyard. Burial practices are tremendously interesting.

In many places in the Middle East (so I'm told by a former parishioner who came from the Damascus area) and in Greece the places for burial are very small. The faithful are usually buried within the day of death and are unembalmed. It is a very common custom to bury the departed in the grave for very brief time (perhaps only six months to two years) until they have lost their flesh. The bones are then uncovered and placed carefully and reverently in ossuaries. The skulls are often labeled with the person's name. All of the skulls are placed together, all of the ribs, the femurs, and so forth. There is deep love and reverence for the departed's remains. It is also interesting to note that this is one of the reason that the incorrupted remains of the faithful have been found in those parts of the world. One wonders how many have we never found due to our practice of embalming and burial customs?

In the country of my ancestors, the graves are dug in the lawn around the parish church. To get into the church, one walks through the cemetery. It is well known that there was in Medieval England a very strong notion of death. Figures of skulls and skeletons can be seen in carvings inside the church. The black death scarred the soul and psyche of the English (and all the world) in ways that we can scarcely grasp.

One of the most interesting scenes that was commonly painted on the walls was called the story of the three Princes. It usually featured three young, handsome princes on a hunting party. In the woods they come upon three corpses in varying degrees of decomposition. Scrolls

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come from the mouths of the departed to bring the punch to the scene. The first says, "What ye are now, we once were." The second said, "What we are now, ye shall become." Pretty sobering thought. There is a long tradition of the remembrance of our death as being necessary for our salvation. Without knowing that we shall only have a brief time of this earth to set our souls for eternity, we should probably never repent and live a righteous and holy life.

But this is not the sense of the "church yard," as those cemeteries are called. Church yards were places of respect, solemnity and a secret joy. Joy? Absolutely! This is a common Christian notion that has been understood by the Orthodox since the beginning. In Russia, the custom on Pascha is to go to the cemeteries, light candles at the graves of their ancestors and have a family feast! Christian cemeteries are not dark places, but they are places of anticipation. They are places that, if we could see them with the eyes of faith, are beginning to shine forth with the light of Christ even now. Isn't it interesting that it was not until the "Age of Enlightenment" that cemeteries became the places of trepidation? Perhaps, secular "enlightenment" or scientific knowledge (vs. the Church's "illumination") knows that the grave remains unanswered and undefeated in their lives.

Christ's resurrection has ended that ancient triad of sin, evil and death. Death has been annihilated! The grave has been mocked! We now go into the graves as those who are united to Life himself. We are joined to Life and so we enter the grave "making our funeral dirge the song, alleluia, alleluia alleluia!" (from our funeral service)

This does not negate the necessity of us continuing to repent our sins throughout our life, for if we sin, we voluntarily join ourselves to death again. If we sin, we brake the love of Christ and lose Life inside our veins. We need to be realistic, because the moral and ascetical struggle are absolutely essential in this life lest we die and are raised unto "the resurrection of condemnation." The three Princes stand out clearly here... and they should.

Yet we need to know that because of the Resurrection, Light has dawned and dispelled the darkness which once reigned. Now, because the Lord is Risen, we have the power of Light and Life. We are raised with him, because we are joined to him in our baptisms. Our failures and falls do not necessarily lead to death. The necessity is ended. We

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now have the possibility of repentance and life. We can now experience forgiveness and restoration.

Now it begins! Now we can find hope, even when there seems to be none around the corner. It is no surprise that I am gravely concerned and worried about the state of our current political and financial lives in the U.S., but it is not to the degree of being depressed or desperate. And the reason for that is that **Christ is Risen**, and Life truly reigns! Let us all then celebrate the Feast of feasts, and Season of seasons, the Resurrection of Christ for the full forty days of the season. Don't lose that joy because it has defeated this world and death.

## PARISH COUNCIL

*Michael Ellis, Parish Council Chairman*



Thankfully, many of our parishioners use hearing aids. And it has been brought to our attention that our sound system may cause “interference” when trying to listen to the service with the use of an aid. We are trying to determine how many parishioners experience this “interference.” If the problem is quite extensive, we will investigate the purchase of some equipment that will enhance our sound system and eliminate the problem. Please let Louie Rizkalla know if you are having this challenge.

Over the next several weeks, at the request of the Archdiocese, the Finance Committee will be reviewing all of the church accounts and the way we handle

our finances. It is imperative that we have good checks and balances and that all of our money handling is performed in a manner that puts the church (and its handlers) at the least risk possible. This includes weekly trays, special fundraising events, and the separate accounts of our various organizations. Please do not be offended by the review or any suggestions that may result from it. It is for the betterment of St. George!

“Vacation Bible School” is ON this summer! It will have a new name (Family Camp) and a new time (June 21-25). Children AND their families will be encouraged to participate. The plan is to teach both religious and cultural elements of the Orthodox faith. Father Winfrey

is leading this effort from St. George. More details to follow.

When you get a chance, please remember to thank the Deacons that volunteer to serve at St.

## SUNDAY SCHOOL

*Sheryl VanderWagen, Sunday School Superintendent.*



church school will be back in session April 18 after a 3 week break for Palm Sunday,

Pascha, and Spring vacation. It is our prayer that you had a blessed Pascha and a restful Spring break.

Our thanks to everyone who helped with the Lazarus Saturday brunch following the Divine Liturgy. Your contributions and assistance are greatly appreciated.

## THE LADIES

*Elizabeth Joseph, President.*



The Ladies met on March 21 and, again, we enjoyed good attendance.

The Lenten Bake Sale is on March 28 after church. This project will benefit the Midwest Project, The Convent of St Thekla, at the Antiochian Village. We are able to accept donations for this project until the end of April, so if you missed

George each week. They are Deacon David, Deacon Clem and Deacon Justin.

Happy Easter from the Parish Council.

The last day of church school will be Sunday, May 16.

High school seniors, you need to get your biography and a copy of your senior picture in to Fr. John and/or Don or Jennifer Kallil no later than April 20. If the information is not in by then, it will not be included in the Torch. Pictures should be in electronic format.

the bake sale, donations are always welcome. See Sheryl Vander Wagen or Liz Joseph.

We need donations of eggs for Easter. Please see Sheryl to let her know what you can bring.

Georgette Ike will be again chairing St. George's Day on April 25. Please see her to sign up to bring something.

Also on April 25 we will have a speaker with us to give a brief

talk about Habitat for Humanity. As mentioned in the last Torch this is one of the charity projects we have taken on for this year. More information will follow as the date to start this project gets closer.

Reminder: the sfeeha bake sale will be on May 2 immediately after Church.

We have decided to hold off on the home made candy sale

until May. Watch for more information on this.

Thank you to all of the ladies that ushered, passed trays and read the epistle during the month of March.

Our next meeting will be on Sunday, April 18 at 6:00 pm in the Church School Hall. Ladies, please join us!

## THE TEENS



THE Teen SOYO invites everyone to attend a Casual Haffi on Friday April 16th from 7:00-11:00 pm.

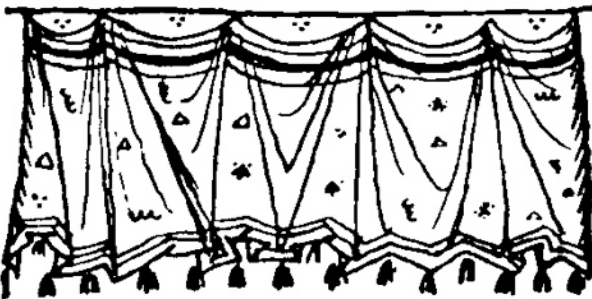
We will have desserts and snacks.

Times are tough and money is tight so we are trying to make this affordable for everyone to attend.

Instead of a set fee we will be collecting donations at the door to help the teens pay for camp at the Antiochian Village.

By going to Ohio we learned how important it is to spent time together.

Please come join us for this evening of dancing and fellowship.



# COFFEE HOUR AND HOLY OBLATION



PLEASE consider sponsoring coffee hour and the holy oblation for any of the open days shown below. It is a marvelous, time-honored, and pious practice to remember our loved ones at the altar.

If you are going to sponsor this and you would like to bring your own bread remember that you need to *get it to Father Winfrey before Saturday Vespers at 5:00 pm* so that it can be used. Also be sure to use only wheat flour, yeast, a pinch of salt and water in making your holy bread. *Do not* use machleb in the holy bread.

<i>April 4th</i>	<i>May 16th</i>	— open —
<b>Great &amp; Holy Pascha</b>		
<i>April 11th</i>	<i>May 23rd</i>	— open —
— open —		
<i>April 18th</i>	<i>May 30th</i>	— open —
Michael Haggai		
<i>April 25th</i>	<i>June 6th</i>	— open —
Leach/VanProoyen		
<b>St. George Day Celebration</b>	<i>June 13th</i>	
<i>May 2nd</i>		— open —
Samia Ghareeb	<i>June 20th</i>	
<i>May 9th</i>		— open —
The Jense's		

## GENERAL GOINGS-ON

- ❖ **The St. George's Day Celebration** will be April 25th this year. We will have our annual luncheon immediately after the Divine Liturgy next door in the Banquet Center.
- ❖ **The next sfeeha bake sale** will be May 2nd after church.
- ❖ **Don't forget that** the Festival will be coming soon. Be sure to speak with Steve Karris about your work schedule.

- ❖ **Many thanks to** everyone who extended their generosity and kindness to the Winfrey and Estephan families during the Paschal season.
- ❖ **Congratulations to** Michael and Robyn McAlister on the baptism of their daughter Lydia Ann. Many years!
- ❖ **Congratulations and Many Years to** Timothy Flanders and Jeremy Troy on their recent Chrismation as Orthodox Christians. Welcome home.
- ❖ **Wedding bells are coming soon for** Andy Vanbronkhorst and Debbie McDonald. Congratulations and felicitations! Many years!

## INTERCESSIONS

Of your great charity, please prayer the following people.

### *Those serving our country in the Armed Forces:*

Justin Abdoo, USA

Helena VanGilder, USN

### *Those who are ill, or are recovering from their illness:*

Stephanie Rowlader

Samir Karadsheh

Steve Maxim

James Sears

George Karrip, Jr.

James Cassis

Erin VanProoyen

George Cassis

Mallory McClintock

Linda Russell

Judy

Margaret Simon

Archpriest Alexander Atty

Aniseh Rizqallah

Liz Seraphis

Samir Karadsheh

### *Our Shut-ins:*

Ed David

Margaret DeBruine

Julia Maloof

Elizabeth Ellis

