

## ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL



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My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray this message finds you all well and healthy.

Today, December 5th, we celebrate the feast day of St. Savvas the Sanctified who was born in 439 AD and reposed in 533 AD at the age of 94. From his early youth he was inclined towards the monastic and ascetic life of the holy Desert Fathers. At 8 years old, St. Savvas entered a nearby monastic community called Flavian, where he stayed for 10 years. Later, he went to the Eastern desert and joined a community-based monastery—also referred to as cenobitic (κοινόβιο)—where he was spiritually instructed and guided in the monastic life by St. Euthymius the Great and St. Theoctistus. The more St. Savvas grew in a life of monasticism and asceticism, the more he grew spiritually and cultivated the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which St. Paul lists as “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Galatians 5:22). His holiness attracted the Grace of God, and he was able to perform miracles to assist those in need. During his lifetime he founded seven monastic communities, and he served as a defender of Christianity by correcting patriarchs and emperors in matters of the Faith. He is loved, respected and venerated not only by Eastern Orthodox Christians, but, also, by the Venetians and the Genoese. His relics rest in the Holy Lavra of St. Savvas, which he founded in 478 AD, and it is under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, located in the Kirdon Gorge (between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea).

On December 6th we celebrate the feast day of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia. St. Nicholas was born around 270 AD in Patara of Lycia (modern-day Arsinoe, Turkey), and he was the only child of pious but wealthy parents who were childless prior to conceiving him and promised to dedicate him to God. His parents died when he was very young and he became orphaned and was raised by his uncle, who was Bishop of Patara at that time. Even at a young age, God gave him the wisdom to manage his family’s wealth and fortune in ways that showed mercy and gave comfort to the sick, poor and those in need. He was ordained to the priesthood by his uncle and, then, Bishop of Myra around the year 300 AD.

He fasted, prayed and gave alms and, through the Grace of God and his love for others, he was able to perform miracles such as healing the sick and suffering from their diseases, as well as saving human souls from instant and sudden deaths and evil deeds. His spiritual wisdom, humility, simplicity and kindness were so great that hundreds of thousands of souls were seeking his intercessory prayers towards our Triune God by calling his name even in his absence whenever they found themselves in great need. And because St. Nicholas was so holy and full of heavenly virtues, God always and instantly honored his prayers and the prayers of those who called his name to intercede on their behalf. He was imprisoned during the reign of Emperor Diocletian, but was freed during the time of St. Constantine’s rule when the Edict of Milan came into effect and Christianity became a legal religion. St. Nicholas was present during the First Ecumenical Council of 325 AD and spoke against the Arian heresy. He fell

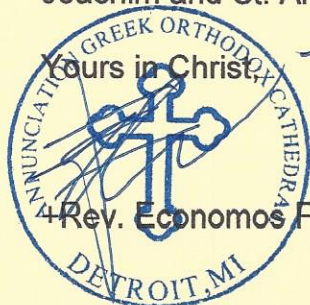
asleep in the Lord around the year 343 AD, and today he is loved by many Christians around the world. Many times, we see him depicted in the iconography of Orthodox Churches and, in the case of Russian Orthodox Churches, he is often included in the main iconostasis of the sanctuary to the right side of the icon of our Most Holy Theotokos.

On December 7th we celebrate the feast day of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. He was born in Gaul in 340 AD into an elite, upper-class family in the modern-day city of Milan. He was the son of the Roman prefect of Gaul and a lawyer by profession. In 370 AD he was made a prefect (regional governor) of Milan, which at that time was the most important position after the emperor's. Because he was a righteous man with moral integrity, he was well-respected and served as an inspiration for many people in Roman society. He was well-educated in philosophy, law and rhetoric, which complemented his efforts to acquire the heavenly virtues.

Despite having not yet been baptized a Christian, God called him to become one of His holy servants and shepherds of His Christian flock in the Roman city of Milan. In 374 AD while serving in his role as prefect, the Arian Bishop of Milan Auxentius died, and this led to a dispute between the Christians and Arians on who would be his successor. St. Ambrose wished to keep the peace and, so, he called an assembly of the people. In his opening speech, a voice cried out, "Ambrose for bishop!" and both sides acclaimed him as Bishop of Milan. Initially he attempted to refuse the position, but he conceded after realizing that it was God's Will. He was baptized a Christian and ordained soon afterwards. He was a gifted orator and his sermons were so powerful and spiritually-moving that they strengthened the faithful to follow God's Holy Commandments, led many to repentance and converted people to Christianity. In one such example, St. Augustine is said to have been baptized into Christianity following one of St. Ambrose's sermons, along with his young son Adeodatus.

On December 9th we celebrate the feast day of the Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos by St. Anna. This day marks the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets. The Conception of the Virgin Mary leads us to the coming incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—the prophesied Messiah of Israel, High Priest and Prophet. St. Joachim and St. Anna were blessed by our Trinitarian God in their mature age to give birth to our beloved and all-praised Most Holy Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary who, through the Holy Spirit and her selfless submission of her virgin flesh to the Will of God, became the vessel through which Jesus Christ could enter our world.

Let us all imitate the wondrous and spiritually-exalted ascetic life of St. Savva, who dedicated his life to prayer, fasting and the worship and glorification of our Trinitarian God. Let us venerate and ask for the intercessions of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker to spiritually strengthen our Christian souls and hearts, for the Glory of God. Let us imitate the righteousness and moral integrity of St. Ambrose of Milan and always remember that at the center of our learning and education is our Triune God—so no matter what our profession, we can always honor and serve Him with our Christ-like thoughts, words and deeds. And let us remember that hope in man is fleeting but hope in Christ is everlasting, so let us, as did St. Joachim and St. Anna, always seek our hope in our Resurrected Christ.



4 Rev. Ekonomos Fr. Georgios Manias

