



## 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.

On December 27<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate the feast day of St. Stephen, Archdeacon and First Martyr. St. Stephen was born a Jew and believed that Christ was the promised Messiah, our God, who was Resurrected from the dead. He was elected to be one of the seven deacons of the Church of Jerusalem in order to serve the Apostles in their philanthropic work, which involved organizing suppers of love and feeding the poor, widowed, orphaned and needy. He was well-known among his fellow Christians of Jerusalem for his deep, strong faith and loyalty to our Trinitarian God. As a Christian, St. Stephen lived like an angel on earth, continuously offering himself as a spiritual instrument and vessel of God's revelation, love and philanthropy. He was accused by his fellow Jews of blaspheming against God and Moses. We can read his apologetic speech against his accusers in Acts 7. It is important to mention that St. Stephen emphasized the importance of not only knowing the law of God, but, also, obeying and following it in our daily lives. While being stoned to death by his accusers, his last words remind us of Christ's: With love for his enemies, he prayed "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." (Acts 7:60)

On December 30<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate the feast day of St. Anysia the Virgin-martyr of Thessaloniki who lived during the 3rd century and was the daughter of a very wealthy and pious family of Thessaloniki. She was orphaned at a young age, but she was old enough to use her wealth to provide philanthropy to the poor, for the Glory of God. Her good, Christian life soon became known to all the Christians of Thessaloniki, as well as the pagans. One day on her way to church, she was confronted by a pagan soldier, and she confessed to him her faith in our Trinitarian God. He began insulting Christ, and she spat in his face, prompting him to take out his sword and pierce her. St. Anysia martyred for her faith and joined God's holy martyrs in the Kingdom of Heaven. Her confession of faith for our true Triune God is still known to Christians today—1700 after her martyrdom.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, we celebrate the feast day of the Circumcision of our Lord. The Jewish tradition of circumcision comes from the Old Testament, and it pertains to God's promise to Abraham that God will free the Jewish nation from slavery to freely worship God in the Promised Land of Canaan. God's promise is found in the Old Testament (see Genesis 17) where God instructs Abraham to circumcise all the male children on the 8th day after their birth, as a sign of their loyalty, respect, honor and dedication to God's promise. We, also, find God's promise referred to in St. Stephen's apologetic speech during his martyrdom (see Acts 7). Christ was Incarnated and came to the world to fulfill His prophetic promise in the Old Testament by establishing the New Testament through His Holy, human-divine Person. For this reason, Christ obeyed, respected and followed the



law that was given by Him, His Father and the Holy Spirit to Abraham and to all the people who worshiped our Trinitarian God.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, we, also, celebrate the feast day of St. Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesaria in Cappadocia. He lived during the 4th century and he was born in the city of Caesaria. From his youth he was very well-educated and knowledgeable in many areas of study, such as astronomy, philosophy, mathematics, medicine and rhetoric studies. His deep understanding and knowledge of our Christian faith, both in theory and practice, led him to the position of bishop of Caesaria after the repose of Bishop Eusebios of Caesaria. Despite the fact that he was very young, his wisdom and Christian virtues were so great that he excelled at his position, and he established within his diocese a unique, philanthropic social assistance institute named Basiliad, which was a complex where the needs of travelers, as well as the orphaned, hungry, old, widowed, poor, sick, suffering and dying, were met.

Aside from his philanthropic deeds, he produced many academic and theological works, many of which were referred to in his epistles, sermons and ascetic and dogmatic writings. He wrote one of the two Divine Liturgies most commonly celebrated in the Orthodox Church—the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great. His Divine Liturgy is celebrated ten times each ecclesiastical year: on Christmas Eve, January 1st (St. Basil the Great's feast day), the Eve of Theophany, the first five Sundays of Great Lent and on Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday. And each year on the first day of January we make a Vasilopita to be blessed by the Priest in the Church, in memory of a miracle involving St. Basil the Great.

Let us all forgive those who have wronged us, as St. Stephen did when he martyred at the hands of own Jewish people. Let us all imitate St. Anysia's bold and courageous faith when she confessed the true Triune God to the pagan Roman soldier to the point of her death. Let us all accept the fulfillment and completeness of the Old Testament in the human-divine Person of the Incarnated Word of God, Jesus Christ, and follow the New Testament that He established as the new promise for eternal life in God's Heavenly Kingdom for all who obey His Will. And finally, let us all imitate St. Basil the Great's humble thirst for knowledge, both scientific and spiritual, and his dedication to the true Christian faith, both in theory and in practice, so that we may cultivate the fruits of the Holy Spirit, the Christian holy virtues and work towards our goal of Theosis.

I pray that you and your loved ones have a blessed, holy, healthy, joyful and prosperous New Year!

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Ekonomos Fr. Georgios Manias

