



ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

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January 2, 2022

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray this message finds you all well and healthy.

On January 2nd we celebrate the feast day of St. Seraphim the Wonderworker of Sarov. St. Seraphim was a Russian Orthodox priest-monk and hermit who was born in Kursk in 1759. From his youth he had an inclination towards the monastic life. At the age 19 he became a novice monk at the Monastery of Sarov, and at the age of 27 he was tonsured a monk and given the name Seraphim. He is very well known for his ascetic life. He lived isolated in a forest for many years (from around 1794 to 1810), and it is during this time that he sat on a rock for a thousand days and nights praying unceasingly to our Trinitarian God to grant him victory over the evil one that assailed him. At the age of fifty, he returned to the monastery and he lived, once again, as a recluse until 1825. During the last eight years of his earthly life, he accepted pilgrims, instructing them and giving them spiritual guidance, as well as performing miracles and healing them of their illnesses. Due to his humble, simple and prayerful asceticism, God gave him the spiritual virtue to see the secrets of the heart of those who visited him in order to help uplift them spiritually and cleanse them of their sinful passions and habits. After 60 years of dedicating himself entirely to God through his spiritual struggles, as well as through his spiritual counsels and prayers for those in need, St. Seraphim reposed in the Lord on January 2nd, 1833, at the age of 74.

On January 3rd we celebrate the feast day of Malachi the Prophet. He lived during the 5th century BC, and he was a descendent of the Tribe of Levi around the time when the Jews were freed from Babylonian captivity. Prophet Malachi is well known for his prophetic word about the coming of St. John the Baptist and Forerunner, as well as the judgement of the sinful clergy of the temple of Jerusalem. From his youth he lived an angelic life in word and deed, and it is believed that all his prophetic sayings were told to him by an angel of the Lord (which only a few holy Jews were able to see and hear). Malachi means 'angel' in Hebrew or 'an angel is with us.' He lived an angelic life full of prayer and thanksgiving, and he continuously worshipped and glorified God. For the monastic community, Prophet Malachi's life became an ascetic example of spiritual struggle, prayer and philanthropy, both for the Glory of God and the spiritual prosperity of his people.

On January 4th we celebrate the feast day of St. Nikephoros the Leper. He was born Nicholas Tzanakakis in 1890 in Sirikari of Chania in Crete. At the age of 13 he became orphaned and went to the city of Chania to make his living close to his grandfather. Between the ages of 13 and 16 years Nicholas began showing symptoms of the disease of leprosy. When the signs of leprosy started to appear more noticeably on his body, he went to Alexandria of Egypt and then to the Island of Chios. St. Anthimos Vagianos showed compassion, philanthropy and love to the young Nicholas and supported him during his stay at the leper hospital on Chios. At the age of 26 the young Nicholas was

tonsured a monk and took the name Nikephoros. He was instructed in the ascetic life by his elder St. Anthimos and lived a life of obedience and fasting. When the leper hospital in Chios closed in 1957, St. Nikephoros went to live at a home for lepers in St. Barbara of Aigaleo (just west of central Athens). Despite the excruciating pain, bleeding wounds, joint stiffness, disfiguration and blindness that St. Nikephoros endured, he showed great patience and was pleasant and kind to all who visited him to receive his blessing. St. Nikephoros reposed in the Lord on January 4th, 1964, at the age of 74, and when St. Nikephoros's relics were exhumed from his tomb, they smelt like incense, which is a sign of holiness and glorification in the name of our Trinitarian God.

On January 6th we celebrate the feast day of the Epiphany of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ traveled from Galilee to the Jordan in order to be baptized by St. John the Baptist and Forerunner. When Jesus stepped in the Jordan River it reversed its flow, and this was a sign that nature recognized its own Creator. As perfect man and perfect God, Jesus was sinless, and, so, when He stepped into the Jordan River He was baptized instantly without the need to confess or repent for any sin. When He arose from the water, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended upon Him, which was followed by a voice from heaven declaring, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). The word 'Theophany' means 'manifestation of God,' which revealed to us God's divine revelation of the Three Persons of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore Jesus Christ's Baptism became, for all human beings, a true and unquestionable witness of the Trinitarian identity of our God.

Let us all imitate the divine thirst of St. Seraphim the Wonderworker of Sarov which was revealed through his asceticism, spiritual struggle, prayer and love for all. Let us continually reflect within ourselves Prophet Malachi's holy life in order to spiritually progress in faith, love and divine wisdom, in Christ. Let us all pray to St. Nikephoros to give us patience, comfort, healing and love during this challenging time that we are faced with, which has affected us and our loved ones, and request that he intercede for us during this time and grant us enlightenment and repentance. Let us all manifest the truth of our Trinitarian God by living our lives according to His Word and Holy Will, as we struggle spiritually towards Theosis with faith, patience and love.

I pray that you and your loved ones have a blessed, healthy, prosperous, joyful and spiritually-edifying New Year and 2022!

Yours in Christ,



+Rev. Economos Fr. Georgios Manias

