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EMAIL ALL TESTAMENT SUBMISSIONS TO: TESTAMENT@STSOPHIAALBANY.ORG
Deadline to submit: First Monday of every other month
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Church Website: www.stsophiaalbany.org
Fr. Pat’s Insights

Saint Spotlight: St. Photios

Greek Language & Culture Academy

Church Calendar
No one really knows how Jesus had lived the first thirty years of his life. There were no records, photographs, or pictures to commemorate any events of His early childhood, adolescence, or early manhood.
It was as if He appeared out of nowhere. Yet there He was. He was not a figment of someone’s imagination, but a real person who had approached the river in silent confidence knowing full well this was to be the beginning of a special mission, and one which would turn history and mankind on a new path. The arid ground was not sandy and smooth, but course and rocky. The river was not a raging torrent, nor a babbling brook, shallow and narrow at some points, and wide and deep at other areas. It was the combination of two rivers merging into one, just as the approaching figure was two natures, but one.

It was a beginning.

Jesus approached the group of people standing in the river being baptized in the Jordan River to experience Himself this very special act being performed. The popular and respected John, however, immediately recognized the presence in His midst. This face-to-face meeting gave the leader of this sect following John pause, and he immediately proclaimed himself unworthy to perform this action stating emphatically that he was not even qualified to tie the laces of his sandal. This extraordinary meeting between John popularly called the Baptist, and Jesus of Nazareth marks the true beginning of the ministry of the man who would soon show Himself to be the foretold Messiah and the stepping stone for all mankind to a new and everlasting beginning we understand and recognize as salvation.

St. John the Baptist did perform the service as deemed necessary by Jesus, and there would be no turning back for the Son of man. He would go on to perform many great signs by healing all manner of infirmities, disabilities, sin, and even death. He would openly preach the teachings of the great Hebrew forefather Moses even though He had no formal education. He was proclaimed the “Light of the World,” and living water, overcoming darkness and thirst. He would be referred to as, “Teacher, prophet,” and “Messiah.” There was no one like Him, and for three very productive years, He would teach, preach, and heal anyone who was willing to listen, learn, and follow.

This man called Jesus had an ultimate purpose in life: to save mankind from diabolical destruction and to influence and guide us to everlasting salvation. This, unfortunately for us, was our choice to make, or not. Like Adam and Eve, who chose to believe in the intrigue whispered by the fallen angel of God and suffered expulsion from the Garden of Eden, everyone who listened or followed or was restored by Jesus also had to choose their path and not be forced to adhere to the tenets laid out.

This would prove to be very difficult, even with His amazing presence among the people. Certainly, some followed without hesitation, while many were threatened by the presence of Jesus among them. They were not as concerned with an unforeseen or unconfirmed everlasting future. No, they were consumed with their frivolities, position, power, and authority in their life. An afterlife of bliss in eternity? Nonsense!
Jesus would eventually be arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified as a common criminal. Still, in three short years, the followers who were strong in their faith and acceptance of the truth would lay the foundation of the Christian world and establish the Church that exists today. It was a new beginning.

However, be forewarned.

Our Christian society is quickly consumed by outrageous and brazen deniers of Jesus and his teachings. We have become self-consumed and have learned how to disqualify the truth. We have discovered the ways and means to profit and turn inward and selfish, rather than being helpful and supportive. We have allowed ourselves to be consumed by greed, hatred, laziness, and personal gain. We truly have become the embodiment of a, “dog eat dog,” mentality. Competition and victory drive us. Compassion and love are a waste of time. And we diminish in number.

What will it take for us to recognize and correct our course?

Christianity has dwindled throughout the world. Where once Christians were on a quest to work toward enlightenment, we are now on a mission to attain entitlement. We live in the greatest of times with so many opportunities to improve our quality of life, but we have forgotten who it is that allows us to prosper, who instills us with ability, and to whom we shall report to. We all seem addicted to our cell phones, social media, and a good time. We work less, are committed less, and expect more. We call ourselves Christians.

There is very little room for ego and a singular way of life, and yet these seem to be our goals in life. Look around and see. The world is crumbling before our eyes. Promises made capture our attention and promises broken are ignored. Truth is false, and lies are truth. Confusion is normal and normal is confused. We must look at what we are creating, adhering to, and following. This was not the intention of a man called Jesus who walked in the desert and preached to the masses. This was not the purpose of the Crucifixion. It was to save us, not give us Carte Blanche to run amok. And that is exactly what we are doing. But…

...Jesus is patient, compassionate, and loving. I hope we will all take the time to reflect on what we are doing to benefit mankind, and what we are doing to secure our place in that which is everlasting. This New Year, make a new promise rather than an insincere resolution to re-establish the only bond that saves us despite ourselves, our faults, shortcomings, errors, and mistakes. Find Jesus and spread his light throughout the world, and may God give us strength no matter the obstacles we place at the forefront of our lives. Jesus waits.

It is a new beginning.

Happy New Year.
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For questions email: marketing@stsophaialbany.org

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It was the apostles of Christ who extended their sight to the Kingdom of Heaven. Not long after St. Paul's appearance on Mars Hill before a gathering of the Athenians, Zeus and his fellow gods were supplanted by human beings who literally dwelled on the mountain, tranquilly searching for the company of God through the power of Jesus Christ. Hundreds of years after the appearance of Christ, another Mt. Olympos, this one in Asia Minor was transformed from the campsite of imaginary supernaturals to the quiet abode of pious monks.

The slopes of Mt. Olympos came to be occupied by many pious men, monks, hermits, and prelates, whose combined spiritual efforts were to glorify the Christian religion. In some instances, miracles were worked through the Holy Spirit. In the era before Mt. Athos became famous, Mt. Olympos achieved great renown and produced many extraordinary spiritual figures, among whom was the little-known Neophytos.

“The ancient Greeks were looking in the right direction when they gazed toward the summit of lofty mountains such as Mt. Olympos as the dwelling place of their gods; but for centuries the focus of the Greeks was short.”

Neophytos was born into a society of early Christians whose depth of faith and whose sacrifices were such magnitude that it is little wonder that all Christians of the first three centuries were not recognized as saints. The quiet courage of Neophytos in the face of unspeakable horror set the example for his contemporaries in their unshakable faith.

Under circumstances which would have discouraged one of weaker will, Neophytos enthusiastically accepted the word of Christ at an early age. Although Christians were cruelly persecuted at that time, he pursued the happiness of Christian religion with undiminishing zeal. From very early youth he participated in the church services which the faithful held underground to escape their persecutors. He grew to comprehend fully the word of God and the truth of Jesus Christ. One day an angel of the Lord appeared in a vision to the parents of the young Neophytos and advised them that their son would be called to the service of God. The very next day Neophytos approached his parents and said he felt he should enter the monastic life to find God.

Neophytos chose the heights of Olympos, thousands of feet above sea level, as his new dwelling place. When not in the company of the many monks who sought sanctuary there, he lived in a skete of his own where he strove to attain the "perfect life" through piety, asceticism, prayer, and meditation. His commitment to God was total, yet never did he lose sight of his responsibility to his fellow Christians, whom he served with care and devotion. While reading the Scriptures one day, he was visited by a holy messenger who informed him that his parents were ailing and near death. Ignoring the fact that the most coveted prey of the pagans was a holy man of Mt. Olympos, he hastened to his parents in the city of Nicaea, comforting them until each had passed on.

The watchful eye of a centurion brought the gentle Neophytos to trial and a swift punishment for his Christianity. When Neophytos refused to disavow Christ and worship the pagan idols, he was subjected to inhuman tortures. Afterwards he was thrown into an arena in which the wild animals refused to attack him. Neophytos earned the martyr's crown when a soldier's lance ended his earthly life on January 21.

There have been countless imitators of St. Neophytos, many of them well-meaning and deserving; but most of whom very soon discovered that mountain-climbing did not necessarily bring a closer proximity to God and, thus discouraged, turned to more worldly and safer pursuits. Neophytos enjoyed a proximity to God at any earthly level and his sacrifice would have been made in the name of the Lord at any height or any depth. Scaling a height for the Lord was one gesture; giving his life to Christ was another.
Classes are in session:
January 7, 14, 21 and 28
February 4, 11, 18

No class on Feb. 25 for winter break
Happy New Year to all!
Καλή Χρονιά σε όλους!

The pomegranate is a symbol of abundance, fertility and good luck and that is why in many regions of Greece it is hung on the door until the New Year. On New Year’s, the family breaks the pomegranate on the door shouting “Happy New Year!”

Happy New Year

Reminders

We want to wish a continued happy school year 2022-2023 to all our children, parents and teachers!

Lainie Damaskos-Christou - Director/Teacher
email: greeklanguageacademy@stsophiaalbany.org
www.stsophiagreekschool.org
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<td>9:30 AM DIVINE LITURGY</td>
<td>9:30 AM EVE OF THEOPHANY DIVINE LITURGY</td>
<td>9:30 AM HOLY THEOPHANY DIVINE LITURGY</td>
<td>9:30 AM ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST DIVINE LITURGY</td>
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<td>9:30 AM SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY DIVINE LITURGY</td>
<td>7:00 PM AHEPA MEETING</td>
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<td>9:30 AM 12TH SUNDAY LUKE DIVINE LITURGY</td>
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<td>9:30 AM STS. ATHANASIOS AND CYRIL DIVINE LITURGY</td>
<td>6:30 PM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION</td>
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<td>10:00 AM SUNDAY SCHOOL</td>
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<td>1:00 PM TRI-CITY PHILOPTOCHOS AND DAUGHTERS HOLIDAY LUNCHEON</td>
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<td>9:30 AM CANAANITE WOMAN DIVINE LITURGY</td>
<td>9:30 AM THREE HIERARCHS DIVINE LITURGY</td>
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St. Sophia Mission Statement – St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church, Inc. is a not-for-profit religious community under the leadership of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, through the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople whose mission is to: (1) maintain, practice, and proclaim the Christian Orthodox faith, enhancing the spiritual growth of its communicants; (2) develop and operate programs, activities, and services for the Parishioners which serve and further the religious educational, cultural, philanthropic, and social ministries of the community as well as to protect and continuously develop the physical buildings and religious property as deemed necessary; (3) dedicate the promotion of Christian Fellowship and values between the evolving diversity of cultures and its people.