



Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America  
**Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church**  
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**January 2019 Newsletter**



### **A Word from our Council President, George Yurchak**

I hope everyone had a great Christmas Season to finish 2018 and a Happy New Year with resolutions that focus on church and family. In this newsletter, we have an article from Fr George Tsahakis, Chancellor for the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Atlanta. We will highlight Virginia Freeman's Journey to Orthodoxy. George Yurchak will describe some of his Russian Christmas memories. Santa and his Elf gave out some Christmas Gifts at our Christmas Program. Virginia Freeman's daughter, Lilly, received the coin during the cutting of the Vasilopita. Holy Trinity continued with one of our missions – Christmas on a Ship, where we celebrate Russian Orthodox Christmas with the Russian/Ukrainian seamen on their ship that comes into the Port of Gulfport around January 7. We had a special opening celebration for Dr George Loukatos's Urgent Care clinic. Metropolis of Atlanta ratified elections and Oath of Office given to 2019 Parish Council.

### **A Message from Fr George Tsahakis, Chancellor**

*With Valentine's Day being Sunday, I am wondering if any of us will sparkle more than we did last Sunday . . . !* How many of us will celebrate Valentine's Day with a little bit of "bling!?" The holiday that elevates the warmth of our love and the softness of our hearts also pushes us to give a gift of something cold and hard — a diamond.

Diamonds, we are continually reminded, are forever. That's why they are worthy of a significant financial investment. Diamonds are expensive because they are rare, elusive, and found only in tiny bits and pieces. Yet if you could travel 50 light years away from Earth, to star BPM 37093, located in the Centaurus constellation, you would arrive at "Lucy" — a burned out sun, a "white dwarf," whose entire central core is a planet-sized chunk of crystallized carbon — a diamond — 10 billion-trillion-trillion carats worth, to be precise. This "space diamond" was named "Lucy" after the Beatles hit, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds." By comparison, the largest earth-diamond, the Golden Jubilee Diamond, is 545 carats — a sandal toe full of diamond "sand" on one of Lucy's dunes.

Diamonds are a chosen and cherished gem because of their sparkle and glow. They ignite with a kind of inner fire when the light hits them. Unfortunately for "Lucy," that means that the solid diamond core of that dwarf star is as unremarkable and unassuming as any other stone. You could take a drawer full of exquisite diamond gemstones and dump them in a drawer and — without the gift of reflective light — you wouldn't know you had anything different than a box of rocks.

The miracle of reflected light is what our goal in life is all about – to become transfigured in our Lord Jesus Christ. We begin Great & Holy Lent on Monday, March 11th. With just over a month, that gives me time to begin planning strategies that will enable me to journey toward Christ in a deliberate and committed manner. It is my prayer that the miracle of God's divine light will "transform" and "transfigure" each of our lives so we grow closer in union and harmony with Him. As we travel our 2016 lenten journey together, may the brilliance and purity of the light that illumines Jesus attract our attention.

Transforming our lives in the image and likeness of our Lord is a central part of Orthodox theology. Just as He transfigured Himself and appeared to His disciples in divine glory on Mt. Tabor shortly before His last days leading up to His Crucifixion and Resurrection, I pray that we consider this miraculous event as proof that Jesus Christ is the light and glory coming from God, our Heavenly Father. Through Christ's voluntary passion for each of us, He assured us of the voluntary nature of His suffering and death for the salvation of the world.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ invites every human being to seek to attain spiritual transfiguration in order to be granted eternal life and everlasting paradise. Each day, may we consider what kinds of things we can do to share God's love, compassion, and charity to others so that our Lord judges us worthy of this gift. Amen!

### **Virginia Freeman's "Journey to Orthodoxy"**

I have searched for most of my life for a church that I felt welcome in and a place that I could call home; a place that honors and worships God respectfully and appropriately. My first visit to Holy Trinity was Holy Thursday 2015. I immediately felt at peace, welcomed and at home, most importantly I felt the presence of God. The



overwhelming sense of needing to be here at every service came over me, even to the present day. When I am unable to be present I become homesick. I am truly grateful to God and all the parishioners at Holy Trinity for accepting me and my daughter Lilly. From the day we started attending liturgy until the day we were baptized, Lilly would ask me, "When are we going to be sacrificed?" I love the way she words things. Extremely happy that Lilly (Angela) and I (Michaela) were baptized (sacrificed) November 8, 2015 by Fr Ezekiel. Especially grateful for our Godmothers, Nancy Malek and Akaterina Vamvakas, who are teaching us about the Orthodox way. We are learning so much and we will continue to do so until God takes us from this temporary life.

**Love and God's peace to y'all.**

## **“Russian Christmas Memories” by George Yurchak**

What I remember most about Russian Christmas is going back to my childhood, celebrating Russian Christmas on January 7 at my grandmother’s (Baba’s) house in a small coal mining town of Coaldale, Pennsylvania. What made this special was all the Yurchak family getting together for Holy Night Supper on Christmas Eve, my mother and her sisters helping Baba cook the special foods that made up the twelve course dinner which is symbolic of the twelve Apostles. She cooked it on a coal burning stove.



This meal begins when the first star has appeared in the evening sky. Everyone, adults and kids gathered around the 3 tables set up, lights were turned out and a tall white candle lit, which symbolized Christ as “the light of the world.” An empty chair would also be set at the head of the table in case a stranger should come in, considered a sign of good luck to the home. Each dinner course had a special meaning. Everyone had to eat at least a part of each course, even though we did not like it, and of course we did. It was family, it was fun and it was all about the true meaning of Christmas.



And then one day while at the Greek Festival in Mobile in 2010, I ran into John Collins. We talked about Holy Night Supper and we decided then and there that we would bring this Russian Orthodox custom to Holy Trinity for all to experience. John, Sheila and I cooked the 12 course dinner for the Christmas Eve Holy Night Supper. It felt wonderful to do this. The Sun Herald did a newspaper story on this special tradition to take place at Holy Trinity and all those of the Orthodox faith on the Gulf Coast were invited. We had over 70 people attend and had enough

food for all. It was a lot of work cooking the courses. The meaning of each course was explained for all when the courses were served.

*So bring back your memories  
And enjoy the meaning of Christmas*

### **Cutting of the Vasilopita**

An Greek tradition is the cutting of the Vasilopita, a sweet bread of basil, baked specially for the New Year, in which a coin is inserted. It is one of the most inspirational traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church. It symbolizes that the New Year will be filled with the sweetness of life, liberty, health, and happiness for all who participate in the Vasilopita. Virginia Freeman’s daughter, Lilly, received the coin in her piece of the Vasilopita. Lilly was thrilled as you can see in the picture.



## Russian Christmas on a Ship Celebration

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church supported the International Seamen Center "Christmas on a Ship Program." Several members celebrated Russian Christmas with Russian/Ukrainian seamen when their ship came into Gulfport Harbor. Our parishioners gave them gift bags, said "The Lord's Prayer" in Russian, sang Christmas carols and songs in Russian with the crew, enjoyed each other's fellowship before getting a tour of the bridge. Captain Steffen and his crew were so happy we were able to bring them a little Christmas joy while they were so far from their homes and families this Christmas. It was a great day. Thank you Tamara Manley, Larisa LeVaugh, Natalia Petrovskaya, Olga Sakhno, Valentina Kalinovskaya, Elena Shilova, Sheila and George Yurchak, Jerry Strickland and Robert Brouillette.



## Christmas Program

Holy Trinity has a wonderful Christmas Program for all to enjoy which followed the Divine Liturgy. A great Christmas Fellowship Luncheon was prepared for all with plenty of great food. Santa (Rodney Bridges) and his Elf (Sheila Yurchak) had a fantastic time giving out Christmas gifts to the children, Fr Dean and Brandi Donohoe.





**Dr George Loukatos's Grand Opening of Alpha Urgent Care Clinic**

Dr. George Loukatos and his family were joined by other Holy Trinity parishioners for the grand opening of his new clinic, Alpha Urgent Care Clinic in Biloxi.



## **2019 Parish Council Given Oath of Office**

Metropolis of Atlanta ratified the new 2019 Parish Council for Holy Trinity. Fr Dean gave the Oath of Office to the 2019 Parish Council – George Yurchak, Craig Henderson, Rodney Bridges, Brandi Donohoe and Donna Collins. George Yurchak was elected President, Craig Henderson Vice President. Rodney Bridges Treasurer, Brandi Donohoe Secretary and Donna Collins Assistant Treasurer.



***Happy Valentines Day***