

The Good News

Elevation of the Holy Cross Orthodox Church, Sacramento

Rector's Reflection

God is with us, understand all ye nations, and submit yourselves, for God is with us! Isaiah 8.9

At the heart of Christmas – the Feast celebrating the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – is the good news that *God is with us*.

Long ago, the Prophet Isaiah foretold: *Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel, which translated is, God with us* (Is. 7:15). Of course, God was never indifferent to the plight of His fallen creation. Despite our first parents' Fall and the sinful proclivities of the human race, God never gave up on us. In ancient times, He spoke through the prophets and occasionally manifested Himself to holy people to call us back from our self-destructive ways, and to prepare humanity for His coming into the world.

And this is exactly what we celebrate at Christmas: God's coming down to us for our salvation. The Son of God comes to us in our fallen, broken and hopeless condition, as a little Child. He takes on all of our vulnerability and insecurity, all of our poverty and suffering, from the very moment of His Nativity. This little Child brings joy to the poor shepherds and to the wealthy Magi alike, both to the Jews and to the Gentiles, the young and the old. In short, all who hope for something more than this fallen world find it in the presence of this Divine Child.

If there's one thing the modern world wants us to forget, with its rapid pace of life and constant technological inputs, it's that *God is with us*. But if there's one thing we need to remember and remind each other of more than ever, it's that *God is with us*. To realize this, we have to slow down, unplug, and make time to pray, worship and adore Him.



Perhaps we've drifted away from Him, and let ourselves become overtaken by other concerns, anxieties and pursuits. If so, the Nativity of Christ is the perfect time to follow His star and make that journey back to Bethlehem with the Magi, back to the place where the Son of God is at the center of our life. The joy of Christmas is more than the joy of presents, more than the joy of family, and more than the joy of childlike surprise. It is the joy that comes from the knowledge that the Son of God has come to us to be among us, to show us the way, and to save us from death and sin. All other joys follow from this. For if we can rejoice in the Son of God born today for our salvation, then we'll be able to glorify God like the shepherds, give generously like the Magi, and rejoice with our loved ones with a pure and child-like joy.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Nativity Services

December 24 - Eve of Nativity

- ✦ 9:00 a.m. Royal Hours of Nativity
- ✦ 4:00 p.m. Vigil for Nativity

December 25 - Nativity of Christ

- ✦ 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy



Building Progress!

During the past several months, we've made significant progress toward getting our permits to move ahead with our building program work. Our site plan and architectural plans received unanimous approval from the Sac. County Design Review Architectural Committee on Sept 26th, as well support from the Agricultural Advisory Committee on Nov. 13th. We also held a neighborhood outreach event in October to share our plans with the nearby community. Our next steps include a final review of approval conditions with County staff in January, and then a final public meeting before the Planning Commission, tentatively scheduled in February. God willing, we'll get the green light that we need and finally be able to begin our site improvements work in prep for our new church and hall next year!

On the Fundraising side, we're fast approaching a major milestone: \$1,000,000 raised toward our new church, with about \$980,000 raised to date! We're also pleased to announce a \$10,000 matching donation Challenge during the Nativity Season, which is underway right now – please consider a year-end gift to help us meet our goals and reach this milestone! We've also had a number of successful fundraising events recently: Christmas Around the World in November, our Wine Stroll in October as well as the Brewfest/BBQ and second Yard Sale during the summer. In total, our events have raised about \$20,000 toward our building program this year – thank you everyone for your hard work and support!

Archangel Michael Food Closet

Our **Archangel Michael Food Closet** has continued to see record demand, typically distributing groceries to over sixty families a week now. At Thanksgiving, we gave out turkeys and groceries to over 160 families! Glory to God, and much thanks to all of our volunteers and supporters from Holy Cross and St. Athanasius. In recognition of our faithful service in meeting the increasing needs of our community, the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors also presented us with a letter of commendation.



Feast Day Recap

We had the joy of welcoming Archbishop Benjamin once again on our **parish Feast Day**, along with clergy and faithful from other local parishes. It was a beautiful day, but also bittersweet, as His Eminence announced his upcoming retirement in summer of 2025, making this likely his final archpastoral visit to us. We wish him strength and many years in his retirement!

School is Back in Session

School is back in session with strong participation. We looking forward to our annual Day of Service mini-retreat on Dec. 8th.

The **St. Nektarios Homeschool Co-Op** is continuing to meet regularly, with nearly 30 students in attendance. Lessons have included studies on the Elevation of the Cross and learning about our patron, St. Nektarios, including singing his troparion. A small group recently went on a day trip to the Calistoga Holy Assumption monastery and enjoyed learning about monastic life. Monetary donations are welcome and can be made to Holy Cross with "Homeschool Co-Op" in the memo line.



Our parishioners and clergy continue to support college ministry at the UC Davis Orthodox Christian Fellowship through providing meals and leading spiritual discussions; we also welcome many of the students to worship with us during their time at college. Sign up in the hall to help provide a meal for this great group of kids!



New Teen Group

Holy Cross and St. Athanasius Antiochian Orthodox Church have partnered together to begin a joint teen group. The group meet from 5-7pm at Holy Cross (2nd Sunday of each month) and St. Athanasius (4th Sunday). Each meeting includes dinner, group games, fellowship, and teaching from leaders and faithful from each parish. We've heard conversion stories, teaching from Holy Scriptures, lives of the saints, and learned to sing troparia from our respective musical traditions. As winter approaches, we are planning a trip to go ice skating and a pilgrimage to San Francisco to visit the relics of St. John of Maximovitch. Join us as we work to grow a culture in which each generation comes to know Christ and takes hold of the Faith for themselves. If you would like to join in or help serve dinner for 10-12 people at Holy Cross, contact Jeff Bassett.

Save the Date

December 8

- ✦ Day of Service Children's Retreat (RSVP to Kathy Pieracci in advance)

December 15

- ✦ Reception of the Basset Family into the Church
- ✦ Christmas Treats and Canned Creations Holiday Fundraiser benefiting the Building Fund

December 22

- ✦ Christmas Caroling and Fellowship gathering afterward