

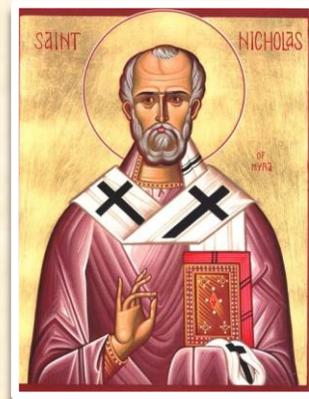
St. Nicholas Albanian Orthodox Church

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Upcoming Events

October 26

**St. Demetrios
Mirovlitis "The Myrrh
Gusher"**

November 21

**The Entrance of the
Mother of God into
the Temple**

Dear Families and Friends,

Autumn has just made its "entrance" and we are already enjoying some bright and warm colors splashed on the trees.

However, I would like to draw our attention to another "entrance" much more important. I'm referring to one of the major feasts on the church calendar that is "**The Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple**". The church celebrates this feast on November 21st. As many of you might know, the Holy Virgin was a "miracle baby" born of two aged parents (Joachim and Anna) who had been married for some decades and were still childless. St. Mary was a baby born as a fruit of much fervent prayer and supplication to the Lord. Her parents vowed that they would dedicate the child to God. So when St. Mary was still at the tender age of three, her parents took her in Jerusalem and dedicated her to the Temple of God, where she would remain until she reached 12 yrs. of age. It is precisely this event, this Entrance into the Temple that the church celebrates on November 21st. Why is this event so important as to be considered one of the twelve major feasts? What relevance it has for us Christians living in the 21st century? There are certainly many aspects to be considered on this event, but I would love to focus this time just on one, the parents of the Holy Mother of God. I believe this might be very relevant for us, Christian parents, trying to raise our children in piety (in the faith) amidst a society that is growing ever more hostile to Christian values. (Continues on page 3)

Important Announcement

The **Religious Education** class starts after the Divine Liturgy at **11:30 am**.

The classes and curriculum of the Religious Education

Since we started in September, the children have been assigned based on age and level of knowledge in three different classes. **The first level** with the youngest children (age 3-5) are in class with **Mrs. Venera Tako** and the curriculum book is **"Me and my world"** plus other age appropriate materials and activities, through which they first explore the elementary notions of what it means to be human and how God has created everything we see, included us. For the moment we do not have children registered in this level, but anyone who is interested can submit a registration form and we can start the classes.

The second level is adapted for children (age 6-8) which are still in the beginning of learning about their faith. They are in class interchangeably with **Ms. Beatrice Tuda** and **Ms. Erla Teli**. The curriculum book is **"Sharing God's World"**. The children have started to explore the concept of **Creation**. The objective is to teach our children the **Orthodox** perspective on how we see the world and everything created as a gift of God and how we can see God's doing through everything He has created, and many other related topics, such as sharing our blessings with others and taking care of the environment, etc.

The third level is comprised by children (age 10-13) who have completed most of the curriculum books. The children are in class with **Mrs. Sofia Panajoti**. So far we are working with a zine which is part of the curriculum entitled **"Facing up to peer pressure"**. As it is obvious from the title we have been expounding on the concept of "peer pressure", both positive and negative. The children have shown much interest and we've had interesting discussions during class. We shall use this material for the months ahead and discuss many relevant issues that our children face in today's society.

Please encourage your children to talk about what they have learned in the class by asking them open ended questions and reinforce a daily routine of Bible reading and prayer as a family.

Even two minutes of Bible reading every night before bed time goes a long way.



Projects

The Christmas Play!

I know it looks like Christmas is still far away, but time flies and I would like to make arrangements (costumes, role assignment, etc.) as soon as possible, in order to have enough time to prepare the children and rehearse the play.

This year I would love to extend the invitation to ALL the children of St. Nicholas church (regardless of the fact that they participate or not in the Religious Education) to be part of the Christmas Play.

Please reach out to your friends or relatives who have children age 4-14 yrs. Invite them to be part of this wonderful project!

For further info, please contact me via email or leave a message with the church office.

(Continues from page 1)

Parenting is a sacred calling. When we look at the example of the parents of the Holy Mother of God, Sts. Joachim and Anna, we see the epitome of what Christian parenting looks like. **They were both faithful to God and diligent in following God's commandments.** They lived a life of virtue through prayer, almsgiving, fasting and centered on love of God and neighbor. According to the Church Tradition, Sts. Joachim and Anna would give one third of their income into the Temple of God (for us Christians today that would be the Church), another third they would give it to the needy and they would keep the one third remaining for their own daily needs. So they would give in charity two thirds of their wealth! This was far above the required tithing (one tenth) according to the Law of Moses. This is just one example of how this holy couple practiced a life of virtue. And I would like to emphasize here that we should not be so much concerned with figures as much as to tend our hearts and nurture a sincere predisposition of giving and sharing with others the material blessings that we have received as a gift of God.

To these holy people God gave a very special child, the Holy Virgin Mary, who would become a blessing for the whole human race. And here we see in a striking way the spiritual maturity of these parents. Imagine for a moment that you were one of them, waiting and longing for a child your whole life (being a childless couple at that time was considered in the Jewish culture as being unfavored from God or even as a curse; imagine the stigma and the pressure that Joachim and Anna had to face every single day?!).

And finally, your prayers are heard, a sweet little baby is given to you as the greatest gift from God. **But for Sts. Joachim and Anna, the greatest gift of God is His infinite Love.** With this thought deeply rooted in their hearts it came natural to them (not without any struggle or heart pain) to offer back to God this precious gift. And God gave her back to the whole human race as the most wonderful human being that has ever lived on earth, the Most Holy and Pure Mother of God, through whom Christ would be incarnated and salvation would dawn for us.

These two holy parents understood that a child is not something that we possess. A child belongs first and foremost to God. **Parents are called from God to be His special and personal collaborators in preparing a child for an eternal life of communion with God.** There is nothing more important that we can do for our children than raising them up in faith and love for God. As parents, we might fulfill this sacred calling by showing our children through our example, through our Christ centered lives what it means to love God and neighbor in truth, or unfortunately we might hinder the spiritual growth of our children by pursuing the ways of the world and making choices which show that our priority is not "seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness".

"Form the soul of your child aright, and everything else will be added hereafter." (St. John Chrysostom)

With Love in Christ,

Religious Education Program Staff