



THE ORTHODOX CHRONICLES

A Newsletter of the Atlanta Inter-Orthodox Parish Association
Vol. 1, No. 7, December 2022

The Atlanta Inter-Orthodox Parish Association (AIOPA) is a team of clergy and laity representatives from different canonical Orthodox parishes around the Atlanta area. The goal of AIOPA is to foster connections among different parishes and jurisdictions, to develop a strong sense of one local Orthodox Christian Family and, as such, to contribute to the unity of the Orthodox Church in the United States of America as defined by the Assembly of Bishops. AIOPA is a committee of the Atlanta Orthodox Clergy Brotherhood (AOCB), which seeks to bring people the knowledge of the Orthodox Church and to assist those throughout the city of Atlanta who are in need. Both AOCB and AIOPA use www.atlocb.org for communication.

In an effort to expand our knowledge and understanding of each other, each member of the clergy has been invited to write a monthly article for our edification. This will allow another opportunity to get to know the clergy in the Atlanta area.

Letter from Rev. Fr. Paul A. Kaplanis, Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOA)

We Can Trust in The Incarnation and Nativity of Our Lord

As Orthodox Christians living in a pluralistic society, our journey to celebrating the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can be a difficult one. We are inundated with ads, special offers, sales, etc. There appears to be a great deal of pressure to shop and shop early.

Of course, amidst the commercialization of this Holy Feast of our Church, we can be distracted and even tempted to lose sight of the essence of our true celebration. Another phenomenon that seems to repeat itself each year is the many questions surrounding the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the early church, there were several heresies surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ. Many of these same heretical thoughts seem to creep up each time we celebrate this transformative event. One of the accomplishments of these heresies in those early years was to push the early church to define and articulate more clearly what it believed. As we seem to be constantly challenged regarding what we believe today, Christmas provides us with another opportunity to strengthen and defend our faith. *(cont. on pg 2)*

(cont. from pg 1) Undoubtedly, we will see articles popping up on our electronic devices and elsewhere that attempt to cast doubt on Jesus becoming incarnate, dispelling His Divinity and Humanity and scoffing at the supernatural intervention of God in a miraculous virgin birth. Where can we turn in order to receive the theological reassurance that we need so that we can reaffirm with great confidence our belief in Jesus, who is the Christ, our Savior?

The Apostolic Fathers of the Church, of course!

The early Fathers of the Church addressed these important teachings with theological skill, but most of all with the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit.

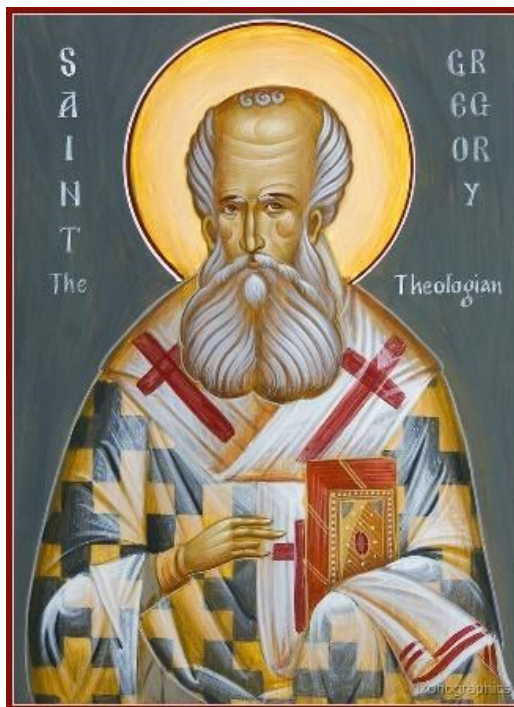
This article will focus on several Fathers of the late 1st – 4th centuries who seem to be speaking to us in the 21st century as we are challenged by our society for believing and embracing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. God humbled Himself by becoming human in its fullness, without sin. He remained God while also being Man in one person. St. Gregory of Nazianzus (The Theologian) was Patriarch of Constantinople at the time of the second Ecumenical Council, which took place in the city of Constantinople in 381. The following excerpt from his writings is an amazing tribute to the wonder of the mystery of the Incarnation.

“The very Son of God, older than the ages, the invisible, the incomprehensible, the incorporeal, the beginning of beginning, the light of light, the fountain of life and immortality, the image of the archetype, the immovable seal, the perfect

likeness, the definition and word of the Father: he it is who comes to his own image and takes our nature for the good of our nature, and unites himself to an intelligent soul for the good of my soul, to purify like by like. He takes to himself all that is human, except for sin. He was conceived by the Virgin Mary, who had been first prepared in soul and body by the Spirit; his coming to birth had to be treated with honor, virginity had to receive new honor. He comes forth as God, in the human nature he has taken, one being, made of two contrary elements, flesh and spirit. Spirit gave divinity, flesh received it...Holiness had to be brought to man by the humanity assumed by one who was God, so that God might overcome the tyrant by force and so deliver us and lead us back to himself through the mediation of his Son. The Son arranged this for the honor of the Father, to whom the Son is clearly obedient in all things.”

St. Gregory used words to describe the indescribable God and they became the foundation for much of the Creed of our Church that we so proudly pray at our divine services. By examining the writings of the early Church Fathers, we can fully appreciate the clarity, which they offered in describing the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Their knowledge of both Old Testament and New Testament Scripture provides us with the authority and proof we need to understand the necessity of God’s intervention in our lives in this unprecedented way to raise us back to Him.

As St. Gregory states above, “Spirit gave divinity and flesh received it.” Some of what the Fathers have scrutinized we gratefully receive and is offered on the following pages. (cont. on pg 3)



(cont. from pg. 2) St. Justin the Martyr from the early 2nd century offers one of the most profound explanations proving so clearly through Old Testament Scripture and prophecies the coming of Christ through his extraordinary birth reaffirming why Christ is Lord. Coming from the Book of Isaiah the saint defines how these prophetic words suit Christ alone.

“Moreover, the prophecy, ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,’ was uttered respecting Him. For if He to whom Isaiah referred was not to be begotten of a virgin, of whom or, “why was it.” Did not the Holy Spirit declare, ‘Behold, the Lord Himself shall give us a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son?’ For if He also were to be begotten through conjugal union, like all other first-born sons, why did God say that He would give a sign which is not common to all the first-born sons? But that which is truly a sign, and which was to be made trustworthy to mankind,—namely, that the first-begotten of all creation should become incarnate by the Virgin’s womb, and be a child,—this he anticipated by the Spirit of prophecy, and predicted it, as I have repeated to you, in various ways; in order that, when the event should take place, it might be known as the operation of the power and will of the Maker of all things; just as Eve was made from one of Adam’s ribs, and as all living beings were created in the beginning by the word of God...[as the scripture expounds], ‘Behold, the young woman shall conceive,’ as if great events were to be inferred if a woman should beget from regular conjugal union: which indeed all young women, with the exception of the barren, do; but even these, God, if He wills,

is able to cause [to bear]. For Samuel’s mother, who was barren, brought forth by the will of God; and so also the wife of the holy Patriarch Abraham; and Elisabeth, who bore John the Baptist, and other such. So that you must not suppose that it is impossible for God to do anything He wills.”

What St. Justin has so precisely revealed is that there would have been no special prophecy given by God to Isaiah if the birth of Christ was your normal every day birth. St. Justin’s point is clear, why would God declare that a virgin birth be part of the equation for God taking on human flesh unless it was specifically and uniquely for the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of the world. This unprecedented birth was the impetus for the Son of God to take on humanity so that He could restore humanity back to God.

St. Ignatios, Bishop of Antioch who lived in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries, a student of St. John the Evangelist, wrote several epistle letters. In his epistle to the Antiochians chapter two, he describes Moses as another prophet who foretold and proclaimed the coming of Christ.

“For Moses, the faithful servant of God, when he said, ‘The Lord your God is one Lord’, Deuteronomy 6:4; and thus, proclaimed that there was only one God, did yet immediately confess also our Lord when he said, ‘Let Us make man in our image, according to our likeness... and so God made man; In the image of God He made him’. And that [the Son of God] was to be made man [Moses shows when] he says, ‘A prophet shall the Lord raise up unto you of your brethren, like me.’” Deuteronomy 18:15 (cont. on pg 4)

(cont. from pg. 3) Following the connection with Moses and his words concerning the Messiah, St. Justin the Martyr provides another biblical defense for proving that the place of birth of the Christ was also foretold by the Prophet Micah.

“And hear what part of earth He was to be born in, as another prophet, Micah, foretold. He spoke thus: And you, Bethlehem, the land of Judah, are not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Governor, who shall feed My people, (Micah 5:2). Now there is a village in the land of the Jews, thirty-five stadia from Jerusalem, in which Jesus Christ was born, as you can ascertain also from the registers of the taxing made under Cyrenius, your first procurator in Judæa.”

Taking into consideration all the scriptural prophecies concerning the Christ as offered by the early Church Fathers, there were still heresies in the first few centuries that attempted to question the reality of Christ’s Incarnation. Tertullian, a prolific early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, is the first Christian author to produce an extensive corpus of Latin Christian literature. In his Book against Marcion, Tertullian defends the Christian view of Christ against Marion’s adoption of Docetism that professed that Christ never had a physical body.

Beginning with the apostle Paul, the leaders of the early church had to address wrong-headed ideas that threatened the integrity of the gospel message and Docetism was one of the first heresies. Docetic comes from the Greek word meaning, "to appear." Those who

proposed this heresy maintained that Jesus really did not possess, or inhabit a physical body, but only "appeared" to have a body. The basis of Docetism is that Jesus was truly a spiritual being, and as such, could not have had a true body. When referring to Marcion’s heretical theology, Tertullian says the following,

“His Christ, therefore, in order to avoid all such deceits and fallacies, and the imputation, if possible, of belonging to the Creator, was not what he appeared to be, and feigned himself to be what he was not—incarnate without being flesh, human without being man, and likewise a divine Christ without being God! But why should he not have propagated also the phantom of God?”

Reading Tertullian’s commentary reveals his frustration with Marcion and his Docetic leanings once again reaffirming that there is no possible salvation for humankind if Jesus Christ is less than fully human and certainly less than Divine. Marcion’s teachings negate anything Christ did for our salvation. If He was only a phantom, if He did not take on our humanity to raise it back to immortality then His death and resurrection are also nullified says Tertullian. There are aspects of the New Testament that suggest Docetism was already a problem in the first century. Some scholars believe John's gospel contains some anti-Docetic texts, for example in chapter 21 where Jesus eats fish with disciples. It seems also that St. John’s Epistle may have been written to combat this heresy with the verse, *“...every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ comes in the flesh belongs to God.” 1 John 4:2*

(cont. on pg 5)

(cont. from pg 4) St. Ignatios of Antioch is clearly writing against Docetics when he says, **"He was then truly born, truly grew up, truly ate and drank, was truly crucified, and died, and rose again."** *Philippians 3*

In the classic work, by St. Athanasios in the 4th Century entitled, "On the Incarnation of the Word," he provides a stimulating account of the Incarnation. A pleasant feature of St. Athanasios' account is that it does not simply defend the doctrine; it provides a theological backing for it, explaining the theological motivations of the Incarnation. St Athanasios explains why God chose to approach his fallen people in human form. He states, **"The death of all was consummated in the Lord's body; yet, because the Word was in it, death and corruption were in the same act utterly abolished."** St. Athanasios resolves the paradox of the Incarnate by relying heavily on both Scripture and the teachings of the early Church.

St. Athanasios offers the following reason for God becoming man saying, **"The Word of God came in His own person, because it was, He alone, the Image of the Father, Who could recreate man made after the Image."** To accomplish this, He had to do away with death and corruption and assume our humanity so the eternal death could be finally destroyed. St. Athanasios provides an illustration of connecting a painting that has been damaged through external stains to our damaged relationship with God as a result of the Fall. He says the artist does not throw away the panel. Instead, the subject comes back for another sitting and the likeness is re-drawn on the same material. God did not discard us or start over with another type of being, instead He offered a way to "fix His Painting." Jesus being the Image of God the Father, the Artistic Creator, St. Athanasios says, **"Came and dwelt in our midst in order that He might renew mankind made after Himself and seek out His lost sheep, even as He says in the Gospel: 'I came to seek and to save the lost.'"** Luke 19:10 St. Athanasios concludes with the following,

"Wherefore, in all naturalness and fitness, desiring to do good to men, as Man He comes, taking to Himself a body like the rest; and through His actions done in that body...He teaches those who would not learn by other means to know Himself, the Word of God and through Him the Father."

St. Athanasios also answers several objections to his account, many of which are still raised against Christians today by those outside the Church. On the Incarnation of the Word was highly recommended by modern writer and Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis, who suggested that contemporary Christian audiences could benefit from reading more ancient classics. One thing we know for sure as Orthodox Christians is that the truth is not relative. It is unchanging and as revealed to us by God. We proclaim this at the beginning of each Orthros Service as we chant, **"God is the Lord and He has revealed Himself to us. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord."**

So, when we find ourselves immersed in the season and Lenten Period leading up to the celebration of our Lord's Nativity, let us not be influenced by the heresies of our day. May we once again recall the words of St. Ignatios and be strengthened in our faith that, **"He was then truly born, truly grew up, truly ate and drank, was truly crucified, and died, and rose again."**

May we pray for God to keep us solid in our beliefs and not be dissuaded by those who try to water down the real purpose of celebrating the Nativity of our Lord. The best gift we can receive each year is God becoming Man to save us!

A Blessed Nativity to all!

AIOPA updates

January Presentation for Assembly of Bishops

The annual meeting of the Assembly of Bishops will be January 28-31, 2023. On Monday, January 30th, at 9:00 PM EST, members from AIOPA will present our progress, including successes and challenges. The topics will include highlighting events from the 5 workgroups:

- ⊗ Charity: Children's Healthcare of Atlanta
- ⊗ Religious: Christmas Candlelight Service and Concert
- ⊗ Communications: Chronicles and Website
- ⊗ Development: Survey to AIOPA members
- ⊗ Social: Chattahoochee Bend Divine Liturgy and Picnic

AIOPA members are asked to continue to attend each other's events and to make sure the Hierarchs are kept well-informed of ongoing AIOPA progress and the upcoming presentation at the AOB.

The **monthly AIOPA meeting** will be held on the last Tuesday of every month at 7:00 PM on Zoom. This was the time that worked best for everyone through a Google poll. Please plan on attending if you are in the workgroups!

The Hierarchs' blessings, guidance and support are critical to maintaining the momentum for the AIOPA work. His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel of ROEA/OCA, gave his blessing to send the following link (<https://bit.ly/declarationunity>) to "A Declaration for Orthodox Christian Unity in America". He was the first to sign the document and asks that you consider signing it and sharing it with your parish. We are looking forward to expanding and maintaining the direct dialog between parish representatives and their respective Hierarchs for all parishes participating in the AIOPA effort.

We have continued **featuring our clergy** in [The Clergy Spotlights](#), sharing a little bit about where they came from, their journey in becoming a priest, hobbies and family.

Visit

<https://www.atlocb.org>
for up-to-date information
about the AOCB and AIOPA
and a calendar of events.

Past Events

Holy Transfiguration Young Adult Retreat at Diakonia Center

On November 11-13, young adults from Holy Transfiguration (GOA), Cathedral of the Annunciation (GOA), St. Elias (Antiochian) and Sts. Raphael, Nicholas, and Irene (GOA) spent a weekend at the Diakonia Retreat Center in South Carolina.

The retreat combined fellowship, service opportunities and liturgy. On Saturday, the young adults volunteered with cleaning projects in the chapel and attended vespers, followed by a bonfire. On Sunday, the group attended liturgy and wrote Christmas Cards to incarcerated people to be distributed by

the Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, followed by brunch. The beautiful setting of the Diakonia Center provided an opportunity for spiritual growth and new friendships.



Charity Opportunities

November 1-30| Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Click for Kids| AIOPA Online Charity Campaign

Your support has the power to make a difference.

Each year, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta treats hundreds of thousands of kids. As a not-for-profit, generous contributions from fundraisers help to ensure that CHOA can continue to provide the best possible care to kids now and in the future.

By fundraising through [Click for Kids](#), you can make a greater impact than ever before. It's simple and fast and gives you the chance to help CHOA by contributing via our [existing AIOPA campaign](#).

You can donate with this link:

<https://www.atlocb.org/events/2022/11/1/childrens-healthcare-of-atlanta-click-for-kids>

December 17| Family Toy and Food Box Event| St. John the Wonderworker Orthodox Church | 543 Cherokee Avenue Southeast Atlanta, GA, 30312

Greetings from St. John the Wonderworker and the Loaves and Fishes Program! We are planning this year to host our annual Family Toy and Food Box Event on Saturday, December 17, from 9AM until noon (or thereabouts). Once again we will provide each family with a food box with Christmas dinner fixings, plus, we hope, enough extras to make a meaningful contribution to a week's worth of meals.

We will have purchased gifts chosen by the parents for each child ahead of time, and those gifts will be ready and waiting to go home with the families on the 17th.

Our website at saintjohnwonderworker.org will provide an easy way to donate to the program as well as to sign up to volunteer. Questions can be delivered to Mat. Rebecca Myers at rebeccamorrismyers@gmail.com or (404)693-4443.

We find we will be unable to host our Christmas Day Meal this year. Thanks to all of you who have made it such a wonderful event over the years. We hope to have the resources to resume this joyous tradition in 2023!

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE



*presented by the
Atlanta Orthodox Clergy Brotherhood
Sunday, December 18, 2022 at 5:00 pm*

*at the
Greek Orthodox Cathedral of
the Annunciation*

*2500 Clairmont Road, N.E.
Atlanta, GA 30329*



*His Eminence Metropolitan
Alexios of Atlanta
will officiate at this
Pan-Orthodox Service*

*Christmas Concert following the Service featuring:
Choirs from the Annunciation Cathedral, St. John the Wonderworker,
SS Constantine and Helen, the Men's Choir and Chanters
from the Annunciation Cathedral, along with Choir Members from area parishes.*

Refreshments to follow

THE ANNUNCIATION CATHEDRAL OF ATLANTA
DANCE MINISTRY PROUDLY PRESENTS

NEW YEAR'S EVE

20 • BASH • 23

TABLES & TICKETS

\$100 TABLE RESERVATION
*Includes 2 bottles of wine;
admission NOT included*

PRESALE **\$50**
DOOR **\$60**
KIDS 12 & UNDER FREE

SCAN FOR TICKETS
or visit www.atlgoc.org/nye



FACEBOOK UPDATES 
SEARCH: HELLENIC CENTER NEW YEAR'S BASH

DECEMBER 31
DOORS OPEN AT 9:30 PM

**KARTOS BALLROOM
HELLENIC CENTER**
2500 CLAIRMONT RD - ATL, GA 30329

ENJOY TOGETHER
HORS D'OEUVRES • CHAMPAGNE TOAST
VASILOPITA CUT • CASH BAR
MIDNIGHT BREAKFAST • LIVE DJ

In His High Priestly Prayer to His Father, Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ prayed for His disciples, the members of the Church that He established ... "that they all may be one; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that You have sent Me" (John 17:21).