



GREGORIAN GAZETTE



JANUARY 2007

VOL:III

ISSUE I

May God Lead You to Many Wonderful Things in the Year 2007

Fr. George Pulikkottil, D. Th.

Welcome to the New Year! I hope it will be the happiest you have ever known and that it will be a year filled with dreams come true.

According to the liturgical calendar January is the time of remembering the nativity period of our Lord. According to the Scripture, He was circumcised on the eighth day of His birth, which we remember on the 1st of January. On the 6th, the Church celebrates the Feast of Epiphany, or the Feast of Light, when Christ the true Light was revealed by the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Baptism of our Lord in the river Jordan by John the Baptist. On the 7th, we have the day of remembrance of John the Baptist and, on the 8th, St. Stephen.

The readings of this period clearly show that John the Baptist himself drew the attention of his disciples from him to Jesus Christ and slowly retreated in order to witness Christ and get prepared for the establishment of the Kingdom of God. We should take this lesson to heart this New Year and make this a time when our focus moves from ourselves and our lives to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

May God bless you and guide you throughout this year and years to come. *Muti anno benedicto* (Many, many blessed years).

Orthodox Christianity- An Overview

Fr. C.C. Cherian, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam

Part 1: Christian Faith

Christian Faith is expressed through the life of people who confess the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God, the Living Father Almighty. Even though we believe that the fullness of the God-head was revealed in Jesus Christ (Col 2:9), we are still unable to completely grasp that "fullness" because of our human limitations. Yet, we put our trust in the Holy Spirit, who is our guide and counselor, to lead us to the fullness of all truth (St. John 16:13). We cannot grow in the knowledge of God, unless it is granted to us by Him (St. John 6:65).

CONTD PG 6

Prayer for the American Dream or the Kingdom of God?

Fr. Bijesh Philip

As the famous psychologist Viktor E. Frankl's popular book *Man's Search for Meaning* teaches, expectations, purposes, and dreams encourage people to face all challenges in life. The greatest dream or goal set by Jesus for us is the Kingdom of God. By Kingdom of God, Jesus meant a new life which is totally faithful to God. It refers to freedom from evil and addiction to false gods like wealth, profession, position, sex, etc. It denotes serving the world as God loves it and a

CONTD PG 2

INSIDE

Editorial	1
Calendar	3
MGOCSM	4,5
News & Notes	8-10
Kids' Korner	11

FROM FRONT PG commitment to a just and peaceful world. Fulfillment of life through obedience to and communion with God, leading to peace and joy, is important in the Kingdom of God, but there are many who misunderstand the Kingdom of God only as a life-after-life experience. During Christ's time, many misunderstood it as a geographical kingdom centered in Jerusalem. Likewise, there are people who identify the kingdom of God with prosperous and developed countries like America. Profit, prosperity, pleasure, success, etc. are the watchwords of the "American Dream." Those who consider this as the highest goal are ready to sacrifice anything to fulfill this dream, but Jesus' exhortation is to consider the Kingdom of God as the supreme goal which demands our total acceptance of God's rule.

Televangelists like Joel Osteen popularize prosperity gospel in line with the 'American dream.' Prayer is used quite often by many as requests to receive more material gains only. Those who have an idolatry of success and comfort understand their God mainly in terms of more and more prosperity and luxury. Some people pray mainly for emotional satisfaction or for ensuring social status. We can pray for anything at any time, but the central petition of the Lord's Prayer -Thy Kingdom come-which is explained in the next one "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," gives us an orientation in prayer. Here "on earth" refers to the world in which we live and specifically to our houses, churches, offices, schools and colleges, cities, villages, etc. It is fulfilled not merely by our own planning but by God who transforms us through our prayers and uses us to transform the society. Committed Christian leaders in America, like Jimmy Carter, are trying to spread this dream of Jesus.

Personal prayer, family prayer and public worship together constitute an Orthodox Christian prayer life. Giving too much importance to one of these while neglecting the others can weaken our spiritual growth. All prayers, especially personal or private ones, can be used as unceasing spiritual breathing for the life and nourishment of the inner being of each one of us. Each sentence of a prayer is like a finger with which we touch God. Those who touch Him are being liberated from selfishness and become compassionate, humble, understanding and committed to the enlightenment of the world like Jesus.

CONTD BACK PG

Photographs in this edition of the Gazette courtesy of:

MGOSCM Bulls Charity Game— Sibyl Thomas

MGOSCM Basketball Tournament— Sherene Panicker & Sibyl Thomas

Christmas & New Year— Elizabeth Varghese

Sunday School Family Night— Elizabeth Varghese

Gazette Staff and Board

Fr. M. K. Thomas	George Varghese (Publisher)	Gladstone Mammen
Fr. George Pulikkottil	Stacy Thomas (Kids' Korner)	George Panicker
Liju Paul (Malayalam Ed.)	Elizabeth Varghese (News)	Thommen Poozhikunnel
Liju Varghese (English Ed.)	Paul Babu	Peter Varghese

1. Monday — New Year's Day**6. Saturday — Baptism of Christ (Denaha)****7. Sunday — Beheading of St. John the Baptist**

General Body Meeting

Reading — 1 Peter 3:12-17, Romans 8:35-39, St. Matthew 14:1-2

8. Monday — Feast of St. Stephen**12. Friday — MGOCSM Council Meeting Chicago Day 1****13. Saturday — MGOCSM Council Meeting Chicago Day 2**

Women of Faith @ Residence of Christy John

14. Sunday — Second Sunday after Denaha

First Collection for Sunday School Charity

Reading — 1 Peter 3:7-15, Hebrews 1:1, 2:4, St. John 1:43-51

20. Saturday — Sunday School Teacher's Meeting @11AM

Family Prayer Meeting @ residence of
Dr. George and Lizy Koshy, Skokie

21. Sunday — Third Sunday after Dehana

Sunday School Parent-Teacher's Meeting
after Holy Qurbana

Reading — Acts 17:16-34, 1 Cor. 3:16-4:5, St. John 3:1-12

28. Sunday — Fourth Sunday after Denaha

General Body Meeting for 2006 Report

Reading — Acts 18:1-4, 20:33-35, 1 Cor. 12:22-27, St. Mark 6:1-6

29. Monday — Three Day Lent begins**Planning Ahead**

February 4– Reading for Holy Qurbana: Acts 20:26-38, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, St. Matthew 24:42-51

February 17– MGOCSM Fellowship Day @ St. Mary's, Oak Lawn

February 19– Beginning of the Great Lent

March 17– MGOCSM Lenten Retreat @ St. Thomas, Chicago

Prayer Requests—Please send your prayer requests to www.1church.org/prayerteam.html. We will join you in bringing your requests before God. Questions or prayer requests - Please contact:

Julie Polachira-815.295.2469; jpalachira26@yahoo.com

Stacy Thomas-847.722.0446; stacy_thomas79@yahoo.com

Bulls Charity Night - Steve Thomas

On December 8th, 2006 the MGOCSM had a Bulls Charity Night outing to the United Center to watch the Chicago Bulls take on the Toronto Raptors. The purpose of this event was to raise money for charity as well as other regional MGOCSM events that will be held during the year. We were amazed at the demand for tickets from our MGOCSM members. We were able to sell 103 tickets as the time of the event came closer. Along with Thomas Achen, George Achen, Daniel Achen and Cherian Achen we started the trip to the arena at Bellwood Cathedral with prayer. We all jumped on the school buses as we anticipated tip-off at the game. We had a section reserved for us at the arena, so we were able to sit together and enjoy the fellowship, the food, and the game. We were surprised to be welcomed by the Bulls at halftime when they projected our name on the scoreboard. We all enjoyed the win and the time we had with each other, but we never want to forget how privileged we are to be able to have such an opportunity for this kind of event. God has blessed us with many things in our lives and it is our duty to give thanks to Him who gave us all that we have. With that, the Chicago MGOCSM would like to thank God for blessing us and watching over us during this event. We would like to thank all of our Achens who joined us as well as the members and family of the MGOCSM who came with us and prayed for us while this event was in its planning stages. Please continue to keep the Chicago MGOCSM, its events, and its members in your prayers.



Original articles from church members are always solicited, please submit your articles to info@gregoriangazette.com.

St. Gregorios (Oak Park) 2006-2007**MGOCSM Basketball Tournament Champions!!!** - Stanley Thomas

MGOCSM held its fourth annual basketball tournament on Saturday, December 23, 2006. Seven teams representing six churches participated in the whole-day event. The churches participating in the tournament included: St. Gregorios Orthodox Church, St. Thomas Orthodox Church, St. Gregorios Orthodox Cathedral, St. Mary's Orthodox Church, St. Peter's Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, & St. George Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church.

The tournament was held at the Elk Grove Park District Pavilion Center from 12.30pm to 7.30pm. The tournament had many memorable moments not just on the court, but off of it as well. One special moment was the surprise visit of our Diocesan Metropolitan, His Grace Mathews Mar Barnabas. Thirumeni, accompanied by his secretary Dn. Siby Kuruvilla, watched the tournament from courtside and gave our MGOCSM youth some words of encouragement. We would like to thank Thirumeni and Siby Chemachen for spending time with us during Thirumeni's Chicago visit.

Our very own OPD (Oak Park Disciples) fielded two teams; the blue and green teams. Both teams played well with the blue team advancing to the championship game to face the 3-time defending champions, St. Thomas.

With great perseverance and an outstanding defense, the Oak Park blue team defeated St. Thomas 22-9 to claim our church's first MGOCSM Basketball championship!

The MGOCSM Basketball Committee would like to congratulate St. Gregorios (Oak Park) for their accomplishment. We would like to thank all the teams, referees and supporters for their participation. We would also like to praise God for giving us four successful years in running this tournament. We ask that you continue to PRAY for this sports ministry, so that God's grace can continue to bless us for many more years to come.

2006-2007 MGOCSM Basketball Champions**St. Gregorios – Blue Team**

Eugene Yohannan (coach)	Stanley Thomas	Jinu Alex	Liju Yohannan
John Geevarghese	Shaun Mathen	Justin Joy	Charles Yohannan
Saj Geevarghese	Mathew Mani	Tommy Yohannan	Anup Alexander

St. Gregorios – Green Team

Jason Thomas	Steve Thomas	Alex Geevarghese	Alwin Joy
Jimmy Panicker	Jerry Panicker	Jaison Panicker	Libu Yohannan
John Mathew			

FROM FRONT PG We are enabled by God to declare the true Faith as in the case of St. Peter, who confessed Jesus Christ as the Son of God. “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven” (St. Matthew 16:17). Therefore, we should not put trust in “our faith”, but in the grace of God the Father who attracts us towards Him and reveals to us the truth, stage by stage through the Holy Spirit. Our first step to grasp the truth is to lead a good life, pleasing to God the Father, who will grant us access to His heavenly company and will reveal to us the fullness of the God-head in Jesus Christ.

As the true disciples of Christ, we have the privilege of access to the mind of God. However, when we seek the truth from God, we have to consider these factors:

1. It should be based on the revealed word of God, as narrated in the Bible.
2. It should be based on a living experience along with Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of the Word of God, and
3. It should be subject to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As we are granted increasing wisdom, we have the responsibility of sharing those revealed truths to our fellow men. St. Paul and St. Peter remind us to be always ready to share this truth with other people (Col. 4:6 and 1 Pet. 3:15). The truth thus revealed to us should not be used for unnecessary quarrels and arguments leading to divisions. Any discussion should be done with those who are mature to receive the truth (Hebrew 5:14) and not to be shared with those who are not prepared to listen (St. Matthew 7:6). Remember the parable of the Sower (St. Matthew 13: 3-22); we have to make the “soil test” to see the nature of the mind of the people we approach before we share the truth of the “Word of God” with them.

Is a discussion on Faith necessary?

History of the Church clearly shows that many contradictions have crept into the true Christian Faith, due to unnecessary arguments and prejudiced leaderships. The fervor and courage of the Christians in keeping the Faith during the first three centuries, in spite of all persecutions and difficulties, still remain as the criteria and foundations for Christian life in the modern world. But these criteria have almost vanished from the Christianity today. “Almost all known Christians are mostly non-Christians.”

In order to reinstate the fervor and courage of Early Christians, we have to make an unbiased study of the Christian faith and the life of the undivided Early Church, during the first three centuries. If we keep the abovementioned principles of knowing and sharing the Christian truth, we may be able to reach a point where we shall be “one in Christ.” Let this attempt to study true faith be pleasing to God the Father, who calls us to be sheep of His Fold.

How did different faiths develop?

The strength and depth of the Faith deteriorated gradually through the centuries because of the following factors:

1. Failure in Christians' commitment and dedication

CONTD PG 7

FROM PG 6

2. Intellectual approaches to faith
3. Arrogance against the guidance of the Holy Spirit
4. Comfort and attractions of worldliness
5. Pleasure-seeking life style
6. Prejudiced leadership with selfish motives
7. National, political, social, cultural and linguistic barriers.

The Christian faith became a “bunch of sentences” as creeds to be uttered, and not a life to be lived. Arguments for and against the “words in the creeds” divided the Body of Christ, the Church, into many pieces. Thus, three major divisions occurred in the Christian Church: the Oriental Orthodox Churches parted in 5th century (AD 431, 451); Eastern Orthodox Churches in the 11th Century (1054) and the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century (1531). The Protestant Churches parted from the Roman Catholic Church through a worldwide revolt against the Pope and his policies. It is to be noted that all the Protestant Churches originated, not from the Orthodox Churches, but from the Roman Catholic Church, headed by the Pope of Rome. Since there was nothing to protest in the Orthodox Churches, they had a great role in bringing unity to the whole of Christendom. Even though each denomination claims to hold the Christian Faith, a study and discussion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit shall hopefully be done to open a door to Christian unity, which will in turn lead to Christian life and witness as pleasing to our God the Father Almighty. We may not reach a final statement of truth, but we may make sure that we are moving towards the fullness in the right way that Christ has shown us.

It is true that a general or secular methodology cannot be applied to study the depth and breadth of faith. It is only through our life being acceptable to God that we can know His mind, and assess the status of the different beliefs and practices of the various denominations and even other religions of the world.

Moreover, we must search for the context and climate of the time when deviations appeared in the history of the Church. Also, we should protect ourselves from our own possible deviations in the process of evaluating other faiths. We should be considerate to other faiths, giving due respect to their arguments. We must make sure that we are communicating with each other and reaching a common ground. Even if we do not approve their arguments, we should have a courtesy to agree to disagree.

When we study the past history of the Church, the “Custodians of Faith” argued in such a way that they could never communicate properly due to linguistic barriers, religious arrogance, and geographical and cultural distance. But in our modern era, these barriers have been overcome to a certain extent. The thing we need to acquire is the mind of Christ, who seeks the bondage of divine love, which He expressed in His life. This should be our motto, even when we discuss and argue for Orthodoxy.

The second and final installment of this series by Fr. C.C. Cherian will appear next month with part two: “What is Orthodoxy?”

Christmas and New Year

This year we were blessed to have His Grace Mathews Mar Barnabas with us for Christmas on his annual episcopal visit to our parish. After celebrating the Holy Qurbana at St. Mary's Church on Christmas Eve, Barnabas Thirumeni led our Christmas service. Notable in this year's service was Barnabas Thirumeni's use of a "beema" (a raised platform, in this case a chair, put in the middle of the church so that the celebrant can still be visible while blessing the church) and the Agni Susroosha (the service of the fire flames) to the eastern end of the church on the namaskaram mesha from the west end on the floor as we traditionally have done.

On New Year's day, we were also blessed to have the Holy Qurbana celebrated by Fr. Bijesh Philip. Achen, visiting from Princeton Theological Seminary, is a professor at Nagpur Seminary and he is the founder and director of Prerana Center for the Mentally Challenged in Nagpur.

Let's hope the blessings we received as this year began serve as a portent for the great things to come! We hope you all had a Merry Christmas and have a wonderful and blessed New Year!



Sunday School Family Night

On Saturday, December 30, our church held its annual Sunday School Family Night program. The evening started off with prayer at 5.45pm, followed by a potluck dinner.

The program started around 7pm, with Justin John and Muth Varghese as the emcees for the evening. We were blessed with the presence of Bijesh Philip Achen. Achen gave the message for the evening, focusing on the love of God. Achen emphasized that the greatest gift to man from God is His love and that it is seen through Jesus Christ. Therefore, we as Christians should be able to spread that love to the rest of humanity.

The first of the programs was the dance performed by the students at the Ecumenical Christmas program. Following the dance, several Sunday School classes presented skits and songs in relation to the Christmas theme, portraying the Good News of Jesus' birth on Christmas. There were also songs and dances presented by people of various age groups.

Thank you to the coordinators and participants, to those who prepared food and helped arrange the basement, to those who helped setup and cleanup, and to all the achens, church members, and guests who were able to come out and enjoy the show!

Women of Faith

The first WOF meeting of the year will be held on Saturday, January 13 at 11AM at the residence of Christy John. We will be starting a study of the Gospel according to St. Mark. For more information or rides, please contact Christy John.



- The Mid-Term Exams were held on Sunday, December 31st in the classes.

- The Charity Drive program for this academic year has been launched. The target is to collect \$1,500, with \$500 going towards educating a boy and girl at Bethel in India. The first collection day will be January 14th. Zip-loc bags have been distributed to the students to bring whatever they collect to church that Sunday.

- The second Parent-Teacher's Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 21st immediately after the Holy Qurbana. All parents are requested to attend.

- The monthly Teachers' Meeting will be held on Saturday, January 20th at 11AM.

Managing Committee 2007

The General Body unanimously decided to extend the term of the 2006 committee members for one more year. All members accepted except for Gladstone Mammen from Ward 1, Minnie Jacob from Ward 4, and Alexander Panicker from Ward 5. To replace them, the General Body elected: Mathew Geevarghese (Ward 1), George Panicker (4), and Thomas K. Varghese (5). The new Youth Representatives are Shaun Mathen, Roy Mathew, and Jerry Panicker.

A hearty thanks to the members of last year's committee and congratulations to the new members! Please continue to pray for the Managing Committee as they continue working for the church.



The MMVS elections for 2007 were held on Sunday, December 24, 2006. The new trustee is Mrs. Minnie Jacob and the new secretary is Mrs. Marykutty Mathews. The next meeting will be held on Sunday, January 17th after the Holy Qurbana. Please contact your ward members for any additional information.

Divyabodhanam

Divyabodhanam classes restart on January 14th for the Sunday group and January 16th for the Tuesday group; get ready! Please contact Mr. George Molayil, Mrs. Marykutty Mathews, or George Achen for more information.

2007 Winter Service Project — Sara Mathew

Start the New Year off on a positive note by participating in our 2007 winter service project! This year we will be helping families in need by collecting household items and non perishable foods and giving it to the Ronald McDonald House. This is similar to our can food drive, but the donations are specific to a family with very ill children. Look for stars on our bulletin board and make a family's wish come true! Feel free to buy all the items shown on the star or just one or two. The Ronald McDonald house charities are known for their dedication to families and children in need and participating in this service project will help a family get through this winter season. Grab a flyer and see what items you can bring in on Sunday; we will be collecting items throughout January. With God's blessings and our participation, we can make this a very successful service project, and bring blessings to families that need some help this season. Thank you for your support and please continue to pray for this project.

For more information please contact:

Muth Varghese (thenga90@yahoo.com) or Sara Mathew (saraluv87@hotmail.com)



What historical event does this icon depict?

Contest is open to Sunday School students only. If multiple submissions have the same number of correct answers, the prize winner will be selected at random. Please submit the entries with your name in the Gregorian Gazette Submissions box in the library.

Answers to last month's quiz: Across— 5) Angels, 7) Joseph, 9) Manger, 10) Christ, 11) Incense, 12) Wise men, 15) Advent, 16) Jesus, 17) Gold; Down— 1) John the Baptist, 2) Myrrh, 4) Herod, 6) Shepards, 8) Bethlehem, 11) Immanuel, 13) Mary, and 14) Star.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 2. Kripa Poozhikunnel | 21. Thomas Varghese III |
| 2. Joshua George | 26. Jucy Panicker |
| 3. Elizabeth Rajan | 27. Nathan Kuruvilla |
| 5. Balu Babu | 28. Kevin Panicker |
| 7. Justin John | 29. Benson Thomas |
| 8. Anju Easo | 31. Sheena Panicker |
| 14. Charlie Yohannan | |
| 17. Philip Punnoose | |
| 21. Shiny Chacko | |



FROM PG 2

To make any prayer effective, it is necessary to bridge the gap between mind and mouth during the prayers. As we grow spiritually we can have communion with God even without any structures and sentences. Human life can be a continuous mystical union with God, but for most of us who have not achieved such maturity, the written prayers are also very helpful. One who prays needs to use the prayers not as prayers of the author but as one's own prayers. Prayers make us like Jesus and holy instruments of the Kingdom of God on earth. Divinization (theosis) of individuals and communities is the result of constant communion with God.

A genuine wish to submit to God's will to fulfill our being and to make this world God's Kingdom of freedom, justice, and peace brightens our prayers. Even without our petitions God knows what is necessary for us, but our prayers equip us to receive the blessings for which we ask. Too much contentment with the dream of a paradise in life-after-life or a paradise built on the achievements of science and technology on earth weakens the vision of the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus Christ to constantly seek the renewal of the world according to God's wish. A genuine prayer helps to strengthen us to participate in this ongoing struggle to renew us and transform this world. God is ready to help everyone who takes this struggle seriously. Our prayers are means to ensure that divine help and grace.

The church is supposed to be the sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God. Each parish is to be a sign of perfect fellowship and an instrument to transform people with love in action. I wish and pray that St. Gregorios Orthodox Church, Oak Park could progress as an effective medium of God's Kingdom. It is important not to replace or identify the Kingdom of God with the "American Dream." Let us continue our cooperation with God who strengthens us to serve His Kingdom with its full-fledged experience beyond history. The vision of the Kingdom of God liberates us and this world from the enslaving impact of the "American Dream" and enables us to appreciate and use the prosperity and opportunities in America in a meaningful and creative way.

PUBLISHED BY REV. DR. M. K. THOMAS LIBRARY,
ST GREGORIOS ORTHODOX CHURCH,
1125 N. HUMPHREY AVE, OAK PARK, IL 60302
TEL: (708) 848-4120 WEB: WWW.ICHURCH.ORG
FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY