



St. Christopher Hellenic Orthodox Church

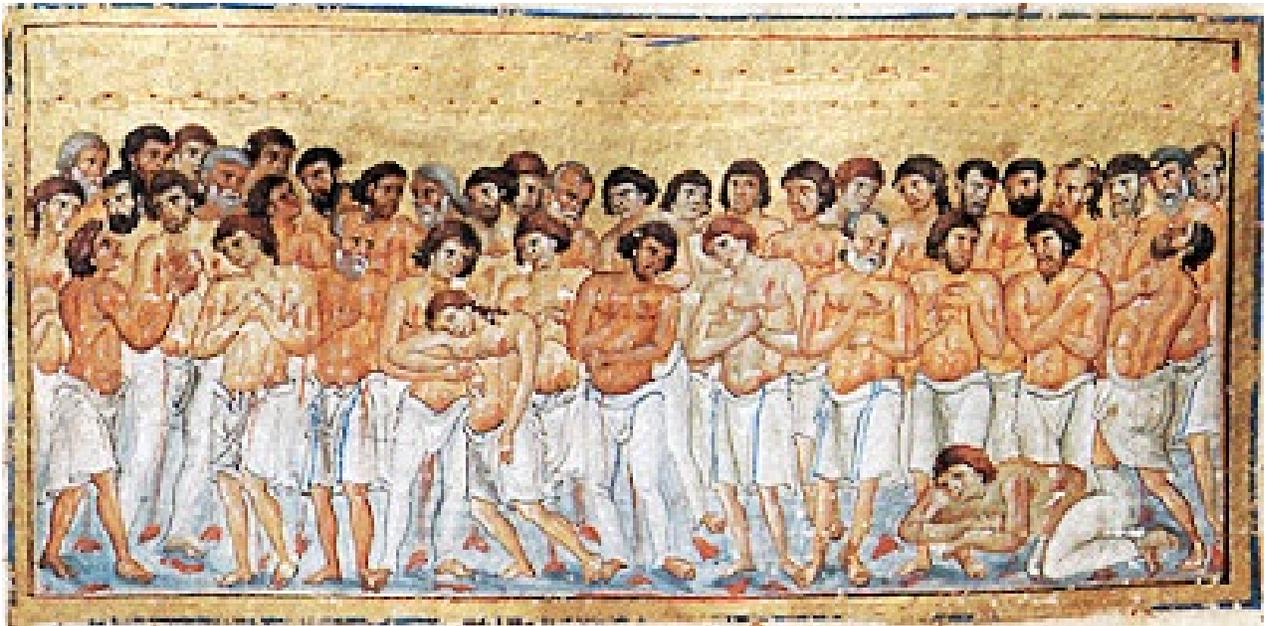
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Very Rev. Fr. George Tshakis, Pastor
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Pastoral Message from Fr. George, March 9, 2026

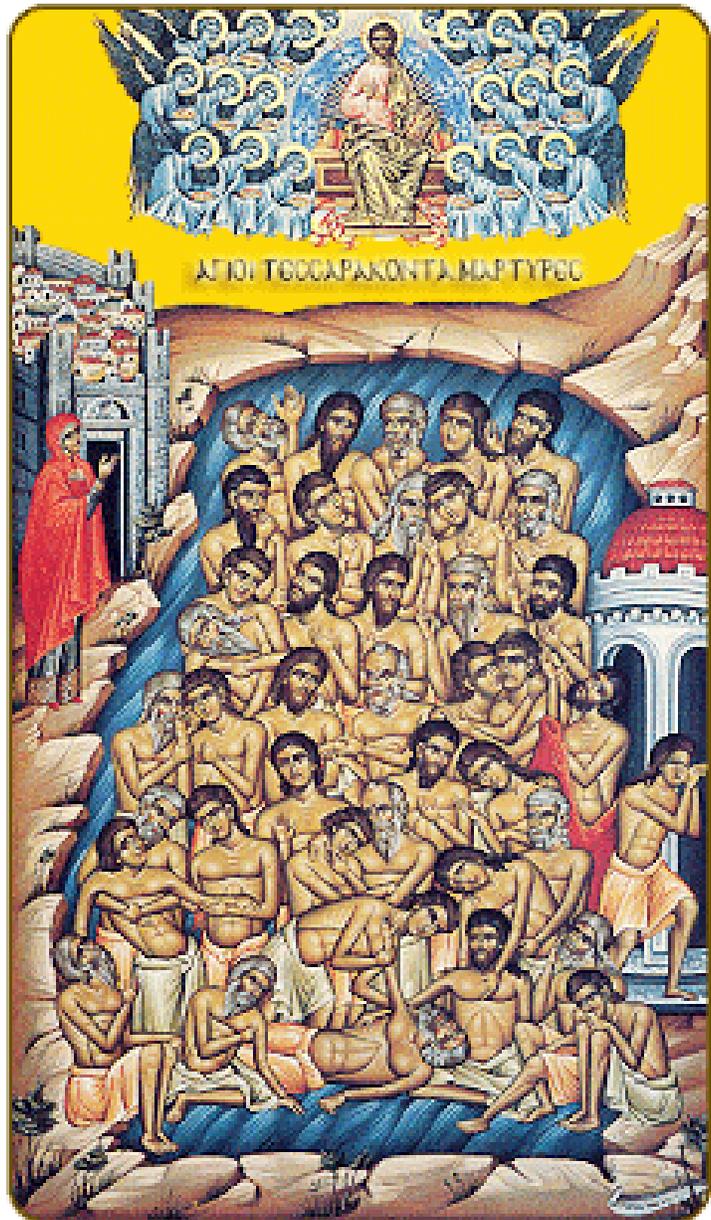


Beloved in Christ,

Today, March 9th, Orthodox Christians remember **The Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste** (located in present-day Turkey). In the Orthodox Sacrament of Marriage, our Church recalls the Holy Forty Martyrs when the Priest crowns the bride and groom,

because the martyrs' crowns of victory are the model for Christian marriage. Just as the Forty stood together in unity, courage, sacrifice, and unwavering faith, so the married couple is called to stand side-by-side and bear one another's burdens in the "martyria"—the witness—of daily love. Their crowns are not symbols of worldly royalty, but of *victory through self-giving*, reminding husband and wife that true Christian marriage is a shared path of sacrifice, fidelity, and endurance in Christ. The memory of the Forty Martyrs teaches that love becomes triumphant when it is steadfast, Christ-centered, and lived together to the very end.

Are we really supposed to believe that forty young soldiers—men in the prime of their strength—voluntarily stripped and stood all night in a freezing lake rather than deny Christ? Is this just a legend?



Actually, the Church doesn't ask us to embrace a myth, but to remember a historically solid event—attested by multiple early witnesses.

Gregory of Nyssa tells us he was a boy when their feast was already being celebrated and churches dedicated in their honor. He later preached on them and even desired to bury his parents near their relics. **Basil the Great**, preaching in a church named for them, gave us the earliest written account while people who remembered the night were still alive. And **Ephraim the Syrian**, a teenager at the time of their martyrdom, later composed a eulogy in their honor. In other words, this is a well-remembered, close-to-the-event testimony—a night of faith and courage the Church has never forgotten.

And now, as we approach the mid-point of our Lenten journey on Sunday, March 15th, we stand beside that icy lake in prayerful memory, asking: *what do these saints teach us about fear, faith, and following Christ to the end?*

A Short Account of Their Martyrdom

In the early 4th century, during the persecutions under Emperor Licinius, forty Christian soldiers serving in the city of Sebaste in Armenia were ordered to worship pagan idols. Though loyal and respected warriors, they refused to betray Christ. They were

imprisoned, threatened, and beaten, yet they strengthened one another with psalms and prayer.



Finally, the governor condemned them to a slow and bitter death. On a freezing winter night, they were stripped and forced to stand in the icy lake outside the city, while warm baths were placed nearby to tempt them to abandon Christ. One soldier faltered and ran to the bath—but he

died instantly from the shock. At that very moment, one of the guards was moved by divine grace, confessed Christ openly, removed his armor, and stepped into the freezing water to join the remaining martyrs, restoring their number to forty.

By dawn, they had surrendered their earthly lives but received the crown of glory. Their bodies were burned and their ashes cast into the river, yet the Church has honored their memory for

sixteen centuries as an example of unity, courage, and unshakable faith.

Today the Church lifts up the shining courage of the Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste—not philosophers or monks, but soldiers. Men trained for battle, disciplined in service, respected for their bravery. And yet, in the greatest battle of their lives, they fought not with swords but with faith.

When ordered to bow to idols, they refused. When flattered or threatened, they stood firm. When imprisoned, they only grew stronger. The Lord Himself appeared to them, encouraging them in their trial. In the cold of night, on the frozen lake, they stood as one body, one voice, one heart beating with love for Christ.

Their steadfastness calls each of us to look honestly at our fears—especially the fear of death. Because the Forty Martyrs preach to us, by their life and by their death, that a true Christian need not fear death.

1. The Fear of the Unknown

“What happens when I die?”

Many fear death because they are unsure of what comes next. But the Christian does not live in uncertainty. Christ Himself has

told us that the grave is not the end. And more than telling us—
He proved it by rising from the dead.

If Jesus has conquered death, then our future is secure in Him.

The Forty Martyrs knew this truth deeply. They had prayed to
God on earthly battlefields and were delivered. Now, as they
stepped into icy waters, they cried out again, trusting the One
who gives victory over every enemy—even death.

2. The Fear of Judgment

“Am I ready to meet God?”

Another fear troubles the human heart:

If life continues, then I must face God’s justice—and I know my
sins.

But here is the freedom of the Gospel:

Jesus Christ has taken our sins upon Himself.

His Cross is our shelter. His Blood covers our shame.

In Confession we are washed.

In Holy Communion we receive the pledge of eternal life.

The true Christian says:

*“Jesus died for my sins. Therefore I do not fear the arrows of
judgment. I am clothed in the mercy of Christ.”*

Like the martyrs, we stand before God not boasting in our strength, but trusting in His love.

3. The Fear of Losing Earthly Blessings

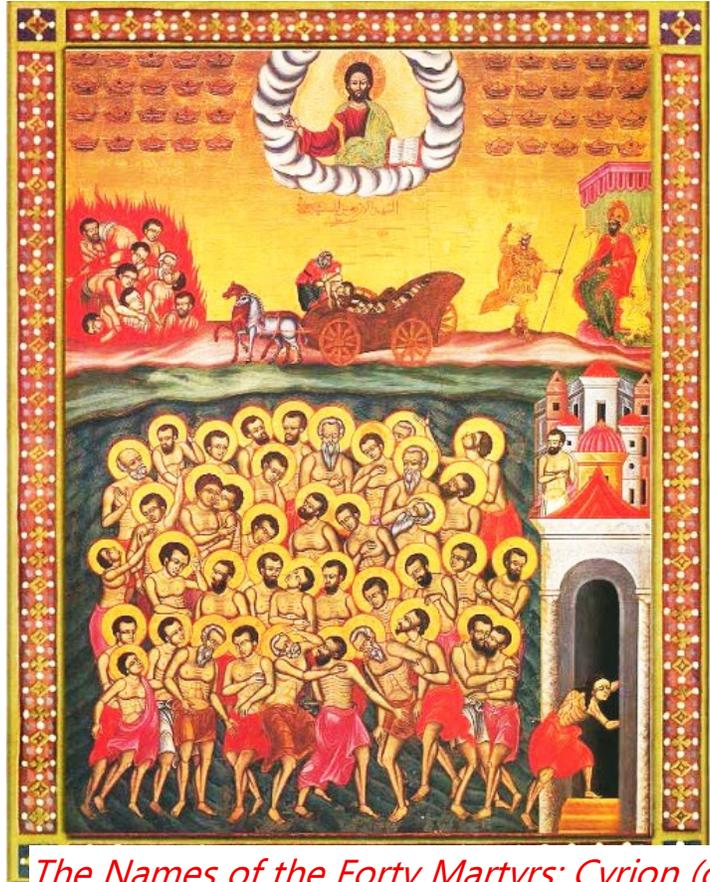
"Must I give up everything I love?"

Even faithful Christians sometimes cling to this world because it holds so many good things: family, beauty, friendship, meaningful work, and joyful experiences.

But heaven is not a poorer life—it is the fullness of life. Christ promises us:

"Eye has not seen, ear has not heard... what God has prepared for those who love Him."

We do not lose everything in death—we gain more than we can imagine.



The Names of the Forty Martyrs: Cyrion (or Quirio), Candidus, Domnus, Hesy chius, Heraclius, Smaragdus, Eunocius (Or Eunicus), Valens, Vivianus, Claudius, Priscus, Theodulus, Euty chius, John, Xanthius, Helianus, Sisinius, Aglaius, Aetius, Flavius, Acacius, Ecdicius, Lysimachus, Alexander, Elias, Gorgonius, Theophilus, Dometian, Gaius, Leontius, Athanasius, Cyril, Sacerdon, Nicholas, Valerius, Philoctimon, Severian, Chudion, Aglaius, and Meliton.

The Forty Martyrs stepped from the cold lake into the warmth of Paradise.

What they gained far outweighed what they left behind.

Becoming True Christians

Yet, beloved, let us be honest:

It is pointless to speak bravely about death if the seed of eternal life is not growing in us.

Death is not terrible for the true Christian—but for the Christian in name only, it is far more frightening.

So what must we do?

- **Live our baptism daily**—turn from sin and turn toward Christ.
- **Confess regularly**—let the Lord remove the filthy garments and clothe you in grace.
- **Receive the Holy Eucharist with preparation and faith**—this is the Bread of immortality.
- **Practice active love—for God and neighbor**; let mercy and generosity be our Lenten fragrance.
- **Keep prayer alive**—the Psalms, short prayers throughout the day, and the name of Jesus on our lips.

- **Above all, love Jesus Christ**—for perfect love casts out fear.

Today we have many friends and comforts.

But at the hour of death—when all earthly voices grow silent—there will be one Comforter, one Friend, who will not leave our side:

Jesus Christ.

The Forty Martyrs trusted Him unto the end.

May we do likewise.

Closing Prayer As We Continue Our Lenten Journey

Let us pray to the Lord.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our Strength and our Salvation,
as You sustained the Holy Forty Martyrs in their night of suffering, strengthen us also in this sacred season of Great Lent. Grant that as we walk the path of repentance, we may stand firm against every temptation, every fear, and every weakness that seeks to separate us from Your love.

Purify our hearts as we fast,
renew our minds as we pray,
and soften our spirits as we give alms.
Teach us to love You above all earthly things,

and to love one another with the self-sacrificing love that Your martyrs revealed on the frozen lake of Sebaste.

As we journey toward the bright dawn of Pascha,
fill us with courage to embrace the Cross,
confidence to trust in Your mercy,
and hope that looks beyond this life to the Kingdom that never ends.

At the hour of our own trial—
whether small or great—
let us hear, as the martyrs heard,
Your voice saying,

"Do not be afraid, for I am with you."

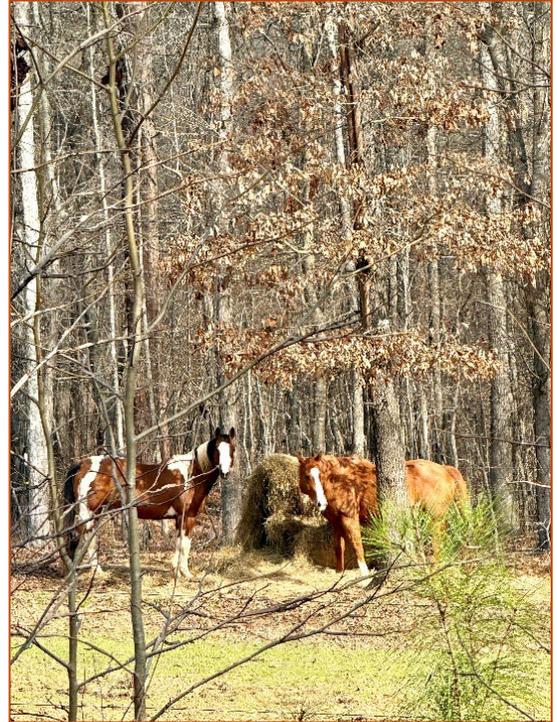
Keep us faithful, keep us watchful,
and lead us at last into the joy of Your holy Resurrection,
where every tear is wiped away and death is no more.

For You are our Life and our Hope,
and to You we give glory,
together with Your eternal Father
and Your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit,
now and forever, and unto the ages of ages.

Amen.

Thanks and Glory to God for Enabling Us to Begin Construction of our New Church Last Week!

As our new church soon rises from the ground, even God's creatures pause to take notice. Two horses stand nearby, quietly watching with interest where the future home of Saint Christopher Church will soon stand in Peachtree City, GA. We are deeply grateful to all who have labored, prayed, and sacrificed to bring us to this sacred moment.



May this place become a house of worship, welcome, and hope for

generations to come. **Mark your calendars for our official groundbreaking event with His Eminence**



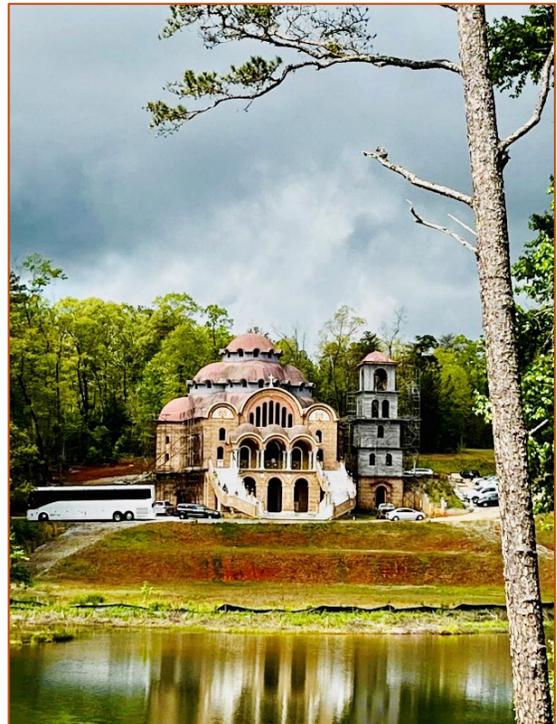
Metropolitan Sevastianos of Atlanta on Saturday, May 9th, patronal feast day of Saint Christopher during Mother's Day weekend. We will be joined by metro Atlanta's Orthodox clergy and laity and those who have supported us through the years. **Glory to God always!**



We offered a prayer of Thanksgiving on Friday asking for God's blessings to guide and direct those assisting build our church. We are thankful to each of you, our architects, engineers, construction workers, bankers, and donors.

Supporting Our Alexis Retreat Center

I thank our families that have generously supported our parish goal of \$5,000 to complete the construction of Panagia Chapel at the ARC in honor of Former Metropolitan Alexis and appeal to everyone to help. If we can raise more than our goal, that is a greater blessing, as it will enable smaller parishes who are not as blessed with some leeway so that in the end Panagia Chapel is completed.

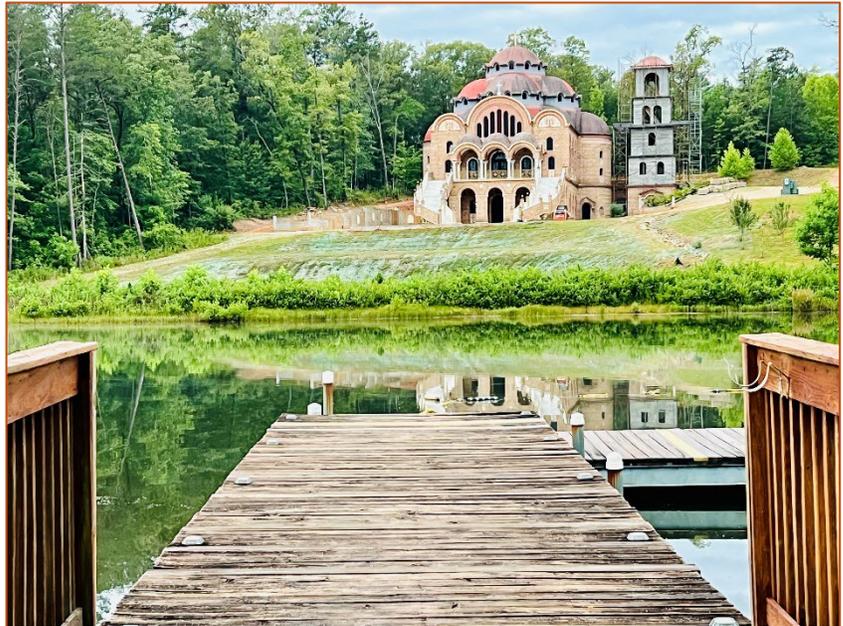


If you feel inspired to support this Lenten effort, I thank you and invite you to do two (2) things:

1. Designate your willingness to offer a pledge [using this link](#) to share your family name and pledge amount.
2. Place your check in the Narthex collection tray with the memo: "ARC Gift." If you prefer to give online, include "ARC Gift" as a note with your payment.

I hope to collect all family offerings by the Friday of the Akathist Hymn to the Theotokos (March 27, 2026) so that our parish may present one unified check on behalf of the faithful of St. Christopher Church. Your donation will appear on your St. Christopher giving statement as an extra donation in addition to your stewardship and building fund gifts. Our joint parish offerings will be forwarded to the Alexios Retreat Center to help complete the construction of the Panagia Chapel.

Thank you, as always, for your generosity, your love for our Metropolis, and your desire to strengthen the ministries that nurture and renew the Holy Body of Christ. Through the prayers of the Theotokos—whose Chapel bears witness to



her love and devotion to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—may God bless and guide us in this sacred effort.

With gratitude in Christ's service, +Fr. George

Bank Loan Successfully Closed



It is with a profound sense of gratitude that Maria Cahill shared some monumental news with all of us. On Friday, March 6, we officially signed the loan closing documents for our \$2.7MM construction loan. As you know, this milestone is the culmination of 20+ years of prayer, persistence, and unwavering faith by our parish. To see this vision finally transition from a long-held dream into a tangible reality is a testament to what we can

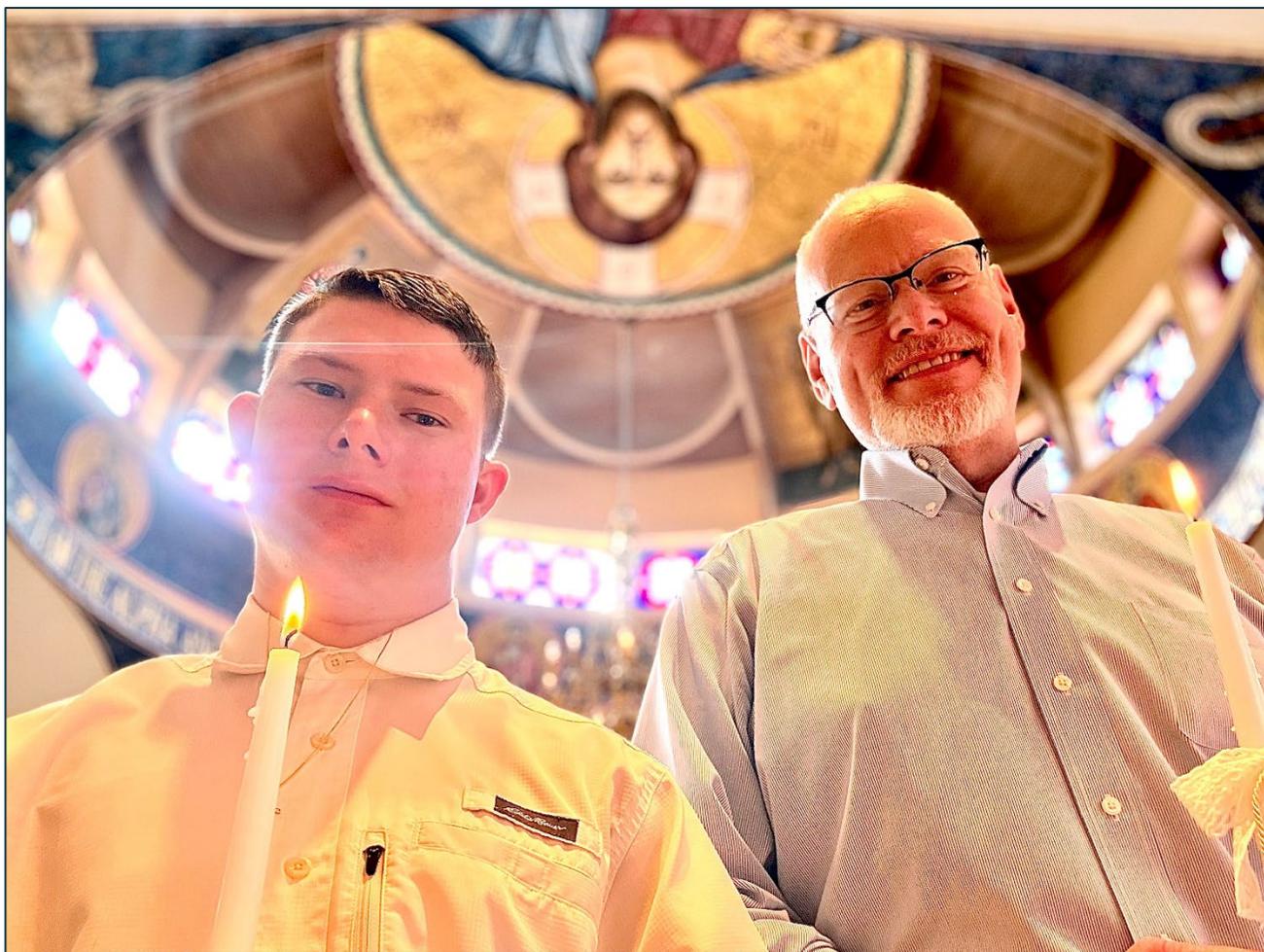
achieve together through God's grace. These photos are from the signing. Looking at these images, it's clear we aren't just documenting a loan—we are witnessing the culmination of decades of faith and solidifying the legacy that will serve our children and community for generations to come. Thank you, Fr. George and the Parish Council for your steadfast leadership and for never losing sight of the "why" behind this project. We are finally breaking ground on a new chapter. With heartfelt thanks and blessings. Glory to God!

Philoptochos Community Support



Helen Psihountas reported that Philoptochos members had a lovely morning at Bloom Our Youth on Saturday, March 7th. They had a fun time working in the "hive"! Pictured is their presentation of items collected in the drive and the check for \$5650!

Congratulations to our Newly-Baptized Parishioner



"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." - Galatians 3:27

On Saturday afternoon, March 7th, at Archangel Michael Chapel in Atlanta, God's servant Tanner chose to be baptized with the name Michael, entering the life of the Orthodox Church surrounded by prayer with his family and friends. Standing with his Godfather, he begins a lifelong journey of faith, guided by God's love, grace, and the living tradition of the Church.





"Grant unto him illumination of soul and body, and preserve him in Your holiness all the days of his life." Amen!



Great Lent Is A Season of Healing



The church is a hospital, and not a courtroom, for souls. She does not condemn on behalf of sins, but grants remission of sins.

St. John Chrysostom

This beautiful image, paired with the words of St. John Chrysostom, gently reminds us of what Great Lent truly is: **a season of healing, not condemnation.** The Church is not a courtroom where we gather evidence against one another, rehearse old wounds, or justify our resentments. The Church is a *hospital*—a place where Christ Himself tends to the brokenness of our souls

with patience, mercy, and love.

Lent invites us to step into that healing. It is a sacred opportunity to reconcile with family members, friends, and fellow parishioners—to lay aside harsh judgments, soften hardened hearts, and let Christ stitch together what has been torn. In the same way that a hospital welcomes the injured without shaming them for their wounds, so the Church calls us to welcome one another with compassion, forgiveness, and humility.

As we journey through these holy days, let us remember that every act of reconciliation, every apology, every step toward peace is an offering to God. It is allowing grace to do its quiet work within us.

And it is choosing to live the truth St. John Chrysostom teaches: that the Church heals by mercy, not accusation; by forgiveness, not fear; by love, not division.

May this Lent be for each of us a time of restoration—both in our souls and in our relationships.

Ways to Reconcile During Great Lent

1. Begin with prayer for a softened heart

Reconciliation rarely begins with the other person—it begins with God working in us.

A simple Lenten prayer is:

“Lord, heal what is broken in me, and heal what is broken between us.”

This opens the soul to grace and helps dissolve pride, fear, and defensiveness.

2. Make the first move—even if you think it’s not “your turn”

Lent teaches humility.

If you sense even a small prompting from God to reach out, obey it. A text, a card, a gentle conversation after Liturgy—small steps can reopen large doors.

3. Use “I” language rather than blame

Instead of

“You were wrong” or “You hurt me,”

try

“I value our relationship and I don’t want this distance between us.”

This keeps the conversation focused on healing rather than accusation.

4. Seek peace even if full agreement isn’t possible

Reconciliation doesn’t always mean that every detail must be resolved.

Sometimes the holier step is simply to say:

“Let’s move forward in peace and love, even if we see this differently.”

5. Ask forgiveness—and offer it freely

Forgiveness is a Lenten discipline.

It is not weakness; it is Christlike strength.

The words *“Forgive me”* spoken sincerely can melt years of coldness.

6. Invite someone back into your life in a simple way

- Share a Lenten meal
- Sit together at church
- Attend a service together
- Offer a ride, a kind note, or a word of appreciation

Small gestures rebuild trust.

7. Pray for the person daily throughout Lent and Holy Week

Prayer softens hard hearts—sometimes theirs, sometimes ours. By Pascha, many find that wounds they thought were permanent have begun to heal.

8. Go to Confession and name the divisions honestly

Confession is not merely personal cleansing—it is relational healing. Bringing strained relationships before God is often the first step toward reconciliation with others.

9. Remember the purpose of Lent: healing, not winning

We fast, pray, repent, and give alms not to “be right,” but to be **renewed**.

Lent is God’s invitation to rise above old quarrels and rediscover the love that unites us.

10. Ask Christ to be the Physician of the relationship

Where human strength ends, divine grace begins.
Christ heals wounds we cannot heal by ourselves.

A Pastoral Closing Thought

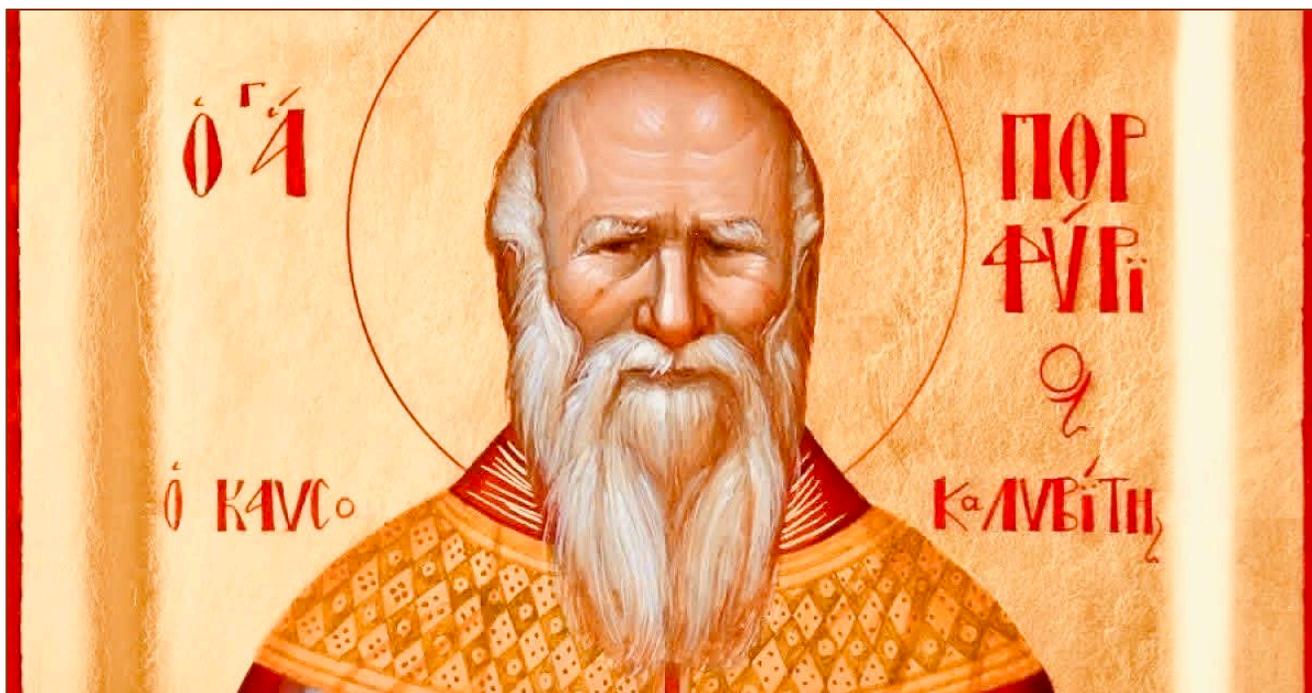
During Great Lent, the Lord is quietly asking each of us:

“Whom do you need to forgive?”

Whom do you need to approach with humility and love?

Where can My peace enter if you simply open the door?”

If reconciliation is a hospital for the soul, then Lent is the healing season—and the Church is the place where broken relationships can be restored through the mercy of Christ.



Many say that the Christian life is unpleasant and difficult. I say that it is both joyful and easy, but it requires two conditions: humility and love.

St. Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia

Join Us Often with Your Family

Wednesday, March 11, 3rd Wednesday of Great Lent

8:00 a.m. Service of the 9th Hour & Presanctified Liturgy

Friday, March 13, 3rd Friday of Great Lent

8:30 a.m. Salutations Service

Saturday, March 14

9:00 Church Clean-up Day – *Please join us for a few hours...*

9:30 Central District Oratorical Festival at Holy Cross Church in Macon, Georgia - *Come support our parish youth speakers.*

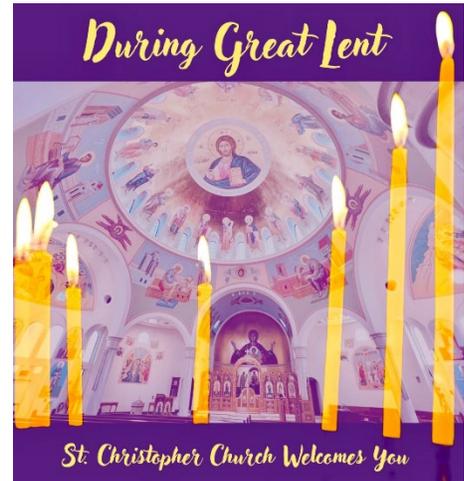
Sunday, March 15, Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross

8:00 Orthros

9:00 Service of the Veneration of the Holy Cross & Divine Liturgy

10:30 Philoptochos Membership Drive

11:00 Religious Education Classes (for all ages)



Hands of Love 2026	
These are hands on events	
 <p>Jan- March Youth Services Chairs: Aimee Panos 1. Vasilopita 2. Bloom Our Youth Event</p>	 <p>April- June Backpack Buddies Of Newnan Chair: Dedee Panayis Event Coming Soon</p>
 <p>July-Sept North Carolina Assistance Chairs: Pres. Marinda Event Coming Soon</p>	 <p>Oct-Dec Soldiers Angels Chair: Paula Price Event Coming Soon</p>