



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

In the New Year of Our Lord, 2014

Beloved Family in Christ,

I greet you in the name of the Prince of Peace who “so loved the world” that He assumed the lowly manger, mounted the scandalous cross, revealed the empty tomb and gave us “eternal life”. How many of us spent even a single “silent and holy night” with the Christ Child this past Christmas? How many instead celebrated a shallow holiday season without any awareness of the presence of Christ in our festivities? How would you feel if you invited your family and closest friends to celebrate your birthday, only to be overlooked and marginalized by these same invited guests who, while enjoying the merrymaking moment, took for granted you, the very host, who created the party in the first place?

As I was thinking about writing you this Christmas, I realized that I had fallen into this “taking for granted” mentality as well. I presumed that God would bless me with great health and I would simply write my usual Christmas greeting and my loved ones would naturally be there to read it. However, with the “ever” unexpected passing of my wife’s mother, our Ayia Big Yiayia, came her painful absence at our Thanksgiving and Christmas table. And with the death of many close friends over this past year, it became quite clear that the every day miracles of loved ones should never be taken for granted. Thus, I purposely decided to write you, in their memory, after Christmas and before the New Year.

As Saint Augustine so eloquently pointed out: “People travel to wonder and delight at the height of the mountains, at the huge waves of the seas, at the long course of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars, and yet, they pass by overlooking themselves [their loved ones, family and friends], without any sense of wonder at all.”

Xanthi and I pray that the Bethlehem Child will grant you the gift of childlike wonder allowing you to see, cherish, and truly value the precious people around you that make life worth living. We also pray that you will use the time given in the New Year to reconnect with our Heavenly Father, the Creator of all things visible and invisible, Who created us as human *beings*, not merely human doings. For, as it has been written, we don’t know how or when the narrative of our lives will end, but we do get to choose how wisely or foolishly we use the interval of time granted us between now and the moment we meet our Creator. May we never take for granted the One, the Alpha and the Omega, Who is the beginning and the end.

Wishing you a joyous and health-filled New Year, I remain,

Faithfully yours,

Father Alexander Karloutsos
Protopresbyter