

St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery
15799 Santa Paula Rd, Santa Paula, CA 93060
(805) 921-1563

*St. Barbara Monastery
Friends' Gathering
Sunday, August 27th, 2023*

4:00 pm Presentation:

*Pilgrimage to the Holy Land
in the Life of a Christian*

*Speaker: V. Rev. George Ajalat
Pastor, St. Simeon Orthodox Church
Santa Clarita, CA*

5:00 pm Vespers

6:00 pm Potluck



Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,

Yesterday amid a rare August tropical storm that besieged California, we were rocked by a powerfully felt earthquake with an epicenter situated about 3 miles away from the monastery. Registering at 5.1 in magnitude, this was the largest earthquake thus far this year in Southern California and the strongest one in our immediate vicinity since 1941. It was followed by over 30 aftershocks! The initial jolt felt and sounded like a powerful explosion followed by what seemed like a prolonged period of strong shaking—enough to rattle our bones and, more to the point, our nerves! Thankfully, besides broken glass, fallen bookshelves and items strewn all over the house, no one was hurt. The words of the psalmist echoed in our hearts: *Fear and trembling are come upon me! (Ps 54:5)*

Besides fear and trembling, such natural disasters and other tragedies can often leave us with an unsettling feeling of uncertainty and disabuse us of any notions that we are in control of our lives. We are humbled and realize how frail we really are. Such events remind us that this tender and beautiful thing we call “life” is, in fact, exceedingly fragile! Disaster can strike suddenly and death—in an instant.

Incidentally, every year the Church commemorates in our services a disaster known as the Great and Dreadful Earthquake at Constantinople in 740 A.D. One of the themes encountered in the texts of this service (celebrated on October 26) is that through such disasters, God calls us to humble ourselves, turn away from all evil, and turn again to Him. We are told that God shakes us—sometimes quite literally! — that we may once again be made steadfast in Him. If we are willing, He can shake us out of our spiritual slumber and make us firm and unwavering in the things that truly matter:

Let us cry: Alas! Let us stretch forth our hands unto God Most High, and let us cease to do evil any longer, for, lo! the Savior, in His displeasure, doth shake the whole earth, wishing to make us steadfast. (Menaion, Oct. 26, Matins, Ode VII)

Perhaps we’ve become a little too lax, a little too lazy and a little too comfortable in our lives. Perhaps we’ve become a little too confident in ourselves. For one reason or another, we could probably all use a good shaking in our lives at some point. If we are willing, God can shake us out of everything that keeps us from loving Him and our neighbor as we ought. Such disasters as He allows us to experience remind us that the coming Judgment is closer than we thought and encourage us to correct our lives before it is too late. May God have mercy on us all!

The Sisters
of St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery

Cover photo: 4-inch Yellow Garden Spider (aka *Argiope aurantia*) encountered in our lavender field.

BRINGING IN THE SHEAVES

This year's monastery lavender harvest is now officially complete. Over the course of three major harvests, and with the help of several enthusiastic monastery friends, we were able to harvest most of our main field and smaller secondary field, yielding over 220 lbs. of lavender florets for essential oil and hydrosol production and a good number of dried bouquets.

In a normal year, we would harvest lavender in various stages of its growth over a span of three months— from mid-June to mid-September. The earliest harvest occurs when the plants have come out of dormancy, spiked out their stems and produced buds. A harvest at this time would be used for dried bouquets because the plant retains its most vibrant color at this stage in its life cycle. The second harvest— for fresh bouquets— usually happens in



late June or early July when the buds are in the process of flowering. The final harvest takes place when the flowers have withered and what remains is the floret, which “glistens” in the sun because of the concentration of oil in it. When we see this tell-tale sparkle, we will harvest the florets for essential oil and hydrosol (the water portion of the distillation process). Besides producing oil and hydrosol, we also utilize these fragrant florets for lavender sachets.

This year, due to a largely overcast and unusually rainy spring season, our lavender was late in its cycles. Consequently, we were unable to supply fresh lavender bouquets to our customers at the Ventura Greek festival in late June as we have done in previous years.

Instead, we decided this year to reserve most of our main field for lavender oil and hydrosol, working overtime on August 18th and 19th to glean the remainder of our field and beat the predicted tropical storm that hit us the following day. By God's grace, mission accomplished! The bees have now gathered in their pollen, and we have met our quota of lavender to keep our customers happy with this blessed crop for another year.



AROUND THE MONASTERY



Top Left: *New chicks on the block*
Top Right: *If a tree falls in the forest...*

Bottom Left:
We can be messy, but an earthquake did this. Promise.

Bottom Right:
Michael Abi-Farah fixes a Cross damaged by the earthquake.



READERS' CORNER

Just after celebrating the Feast of Transfiguration, the sisters completed their reading and discussion of St. Cyril of Alexandria's treatise *On the Unity of Christ*. St. Cyril's main thesis will be familiar to anyone who has gone through a catechism class; we marveled that it took no less than three Ecumenical Councils during St. Cyril's lifetime to safeguard the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is both God and man, neither nature dominating the other. And we reflected that this truth is our very hope of being deified in Christ.

In the Dormition season, we will begin reading *On the Dormition of Mary*, a collection of ten patristic homilies. We will read and discuss it over two months, as the volume is quite thick. We invite you to read along as much as you are able.

SERVICE SCHEDULE NOTE:

Sunday Divine Liturgies will resume at the monastery beginning in September.