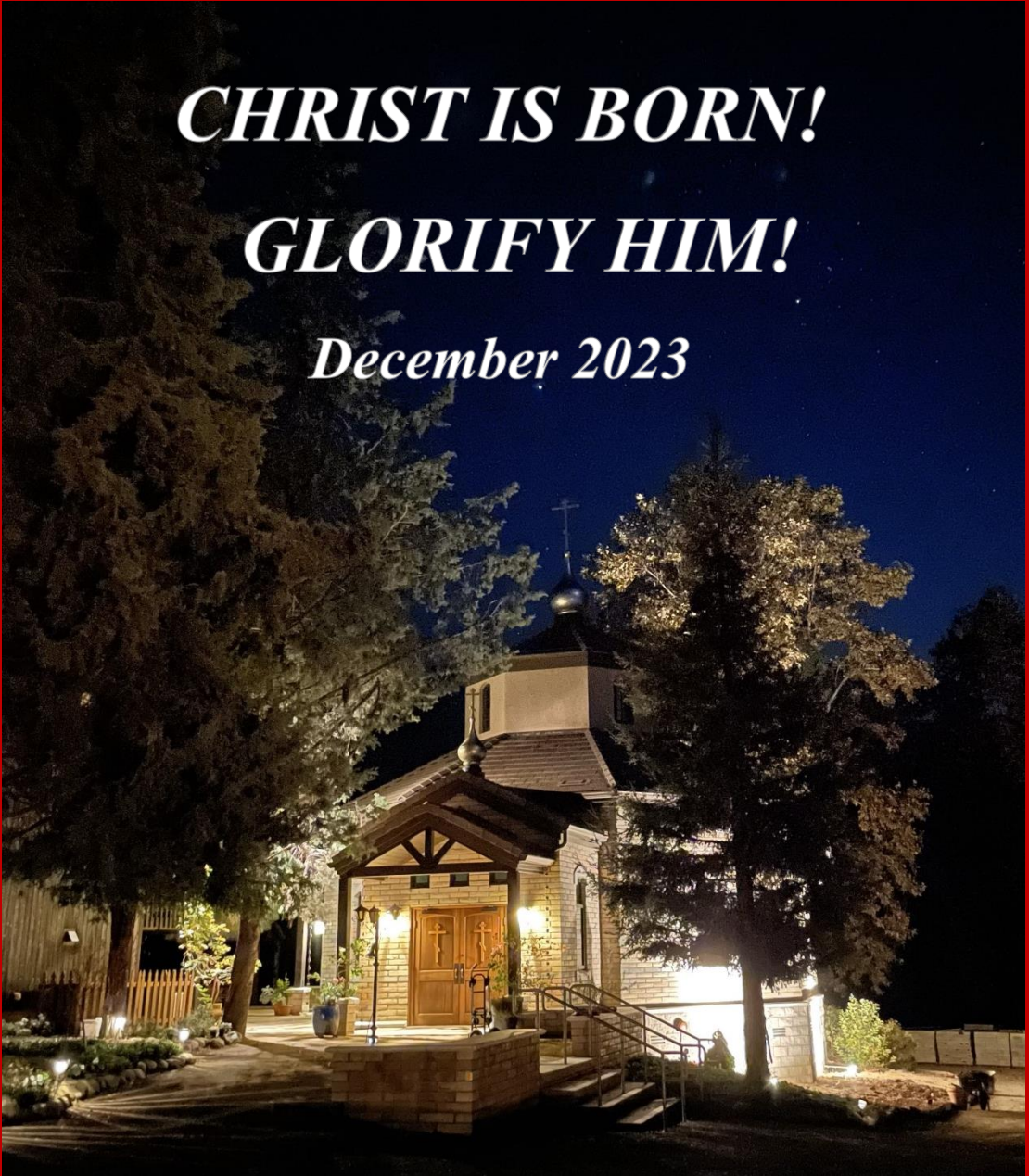


St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery
15799 Ojai Rd, Santa Paula, CA 93060
(805) 921-1563

CHRIST IS BORN!

GLORIFY HIM!

December 2023





Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,

Our monastery is situated in the city of Santa Paula, whose patron saint, St. Paula, a 4th century disciple of St. Jerome, lived and died in Bethlehem, the birthplace of our Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This Christmas in Bethlehem, however, there will be no public festivities to celebrate our Savior's birth. No streets filled with singing, lights and celebration, no bustling shops and restaurants filled with pious pilgrims—none of the usual festive revelries. The current sufferings in the Holy Land have made this so.

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!

Without all the usual outward trappings and joyful activities connected with this season, while surrounded by suffering and war, loss and death, we may well ask the question: *What exactly happened in this little corner of the earth 2,000 years ago?*

The answer to this question, although we may have heard it many times before, still remains utterly astonishing and mindboggling:

God became man in order to save us!

What wondrous love is this that our God would empty Himself and condescend to assume our human nature in order to redeem it? It beggars imagination. Although He is King of all creation, He was born of a virgin in a cave in Bethlehem with neither glory nor splendor, pomp nor circumstance, as befits a king. Instead, the hymnody of the Church tells us:

Calling the Magi by a star, heaven brought the first fruits of the Gentiles unto Thee, a Babe lying in the manger: and they were amazed to see neither scepter nor throne but only utter poverty. For what is meaner than a cave, what is humbler than swaddling clothes? Yet therein shone forth the wealth of Thy divinity: glory to Thee, O Lord!

God is with us! The Babe in the manger *is* God incarnate Himself! He Himself, and not some other, came to rescue us from the darkness of sin, death and the evil one.

This means that, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, we are never alone, but the One who loves us best is near at hand—nearer than we thought. As each of us bows down before Christ our God in the silent cave of our heart this Christmas, may He come and fill us once again with His secret joy and confirm us in His unfailing love ever more.

--The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

A WAVE OF WONDERFUL WORK PARTIES

Since our last newsletter, the monastery has hosted three groups from nearby parishes. 30 parishioners from St. Luke Church, Garden Grove, 9 young adults from St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles and 35 parishioners from St. Simeon Church, Santa Clarita, showed up to work on successive weekends in November. Doing everything from planting trees, cleaning, pruning lavender, weeding, chopping fruit, clearing, assembling lavender products, labeling, moving debris, digging, and fixing broken things around the monastery, these industrious friends of the monastery labored together, prayed together, lunched together, and learned together. God reward them for their selfless labors!



GLORIFICATION OF MATUSHKA OLGA OF ALASKA

On November 8th, the holy synod of the Orthodox Church in America, proclaimed the forthcoming glorification of the righteous servant of God, Matushka Olga Michael of Kwethluk, Alaska. This humble priest's wife, beloved by the faithful of Alaska who knew her to be a saint, Matushka Olga was known to them for her piety, generosity, love, and selfless care for the peoples of the Kuskokwim River villages and, after her repose, many throughout North America and the world. Her feast is to be celebrated on November 10th. We rejoice greatly at the addition of another North American saint to our church calendar!

O holy mother Olga, pray to God for us!



CHRISTMAS SERVICE SCHEDULE

Friday, Dec. 22nd: Royal Hours (7 am: 1st & 3rd Hours, 12 pm: 6th, 9th Hours & Typica)
3 pm Vespers, 6 pm Great Compline

Saturday, Dec. 23rd: 8 am Matins, 12:15 pm 6th Hour, 6 pm Vigil

Sunday, Dec. 24th: 9:30 am 3rd & 6th Hours, 10 am Divine Liturgy, 6 pm Christmas Vigil

Monday, Dec. 25th: 9:30 am 3rd & 6th Hours, 10 am Divine Liturgy

CELEBRATING ST. BARBARA

Although the monastery's feast day fell on a Monday this year, the faithful turned out in large number on December 4th to commemorate the monastery's patron saint, the great martyr Barbara. While the rest of the world left for work or school on a Monday morning, friends of the monastery joined His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin and fourteen priests in worshipping God and honoring His martyr, St. Barbara. The hierarchical Divine Liturgy was followed by a procession around the church, a festal meal, and a retelling of the life of St. Barbara by Fr. Nicholas Speier to the children who, afterwards, received St. Barbara goodie bags to commemorate the day.

Besides the day of the feast itself, the vigil service the evening before was equally well attended by a sizeable crowd about which His Eminence remarked, noting how he had not seen so many people turn up for the feast before.



We thank His Eminence, the clergy, and faithful pilgrims, as well as a handful of stalwart volunteers who made this a glorious day of rendering due honor to God who is truly wondrous in His saints! *O holy martyr Barbara, pray to God for us!*

