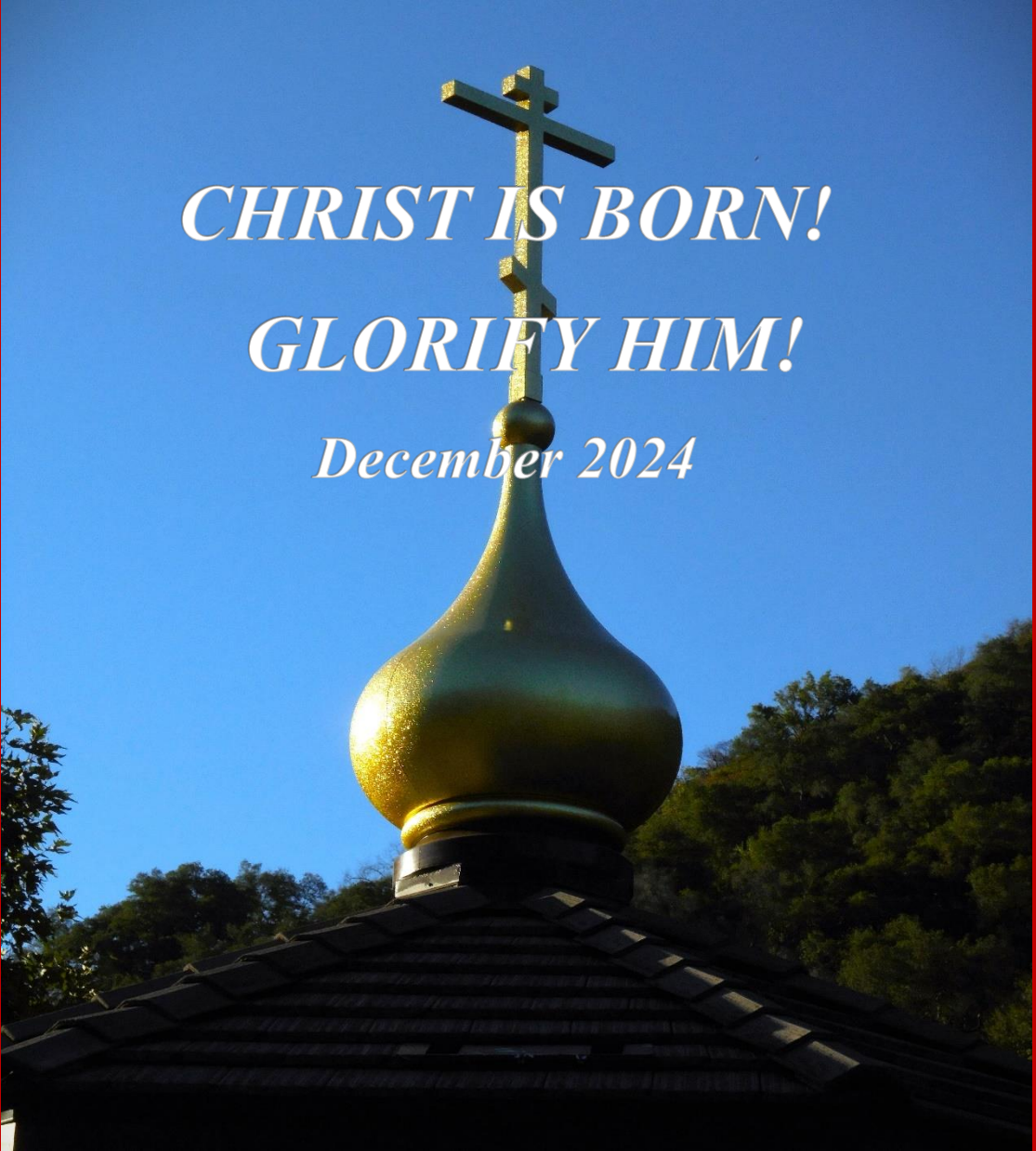


*St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery*  
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*CHRIST IS BORN!*  
*GLORIFY HIM!*  
*December 2024*





Dear Friends of St Barbara Monastery,

In a world that is captured by self-love and pride, what does Christmas set before us in contrast? Kenosis, i.e. self-emptying. Self-sacrificial love!

Could it be that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, entered into our fallen material existence, and deigned to become a tiny baby nestled in the flesh-and-blood womb of a young Jewish virgin named Mary? What wondrous Love is this that would undertake such a plan of salvation for us sinners!

Yet in the dark and silent womb of the Theotokos, a miracle takes place. She carries Him intimately in herself for nine months— carries God Himself within her!—and henceforth is known as “Theotokos”—the God-bearer who is “more spacious than the heavens.” In time, she and her betrothed protector, Joseph, travel to the City of David with difficulty, prompted by a census. Searching for lodgings, they settle in a rude stable of an inn in Bethlehem for there is no room to receive the King and his companions elsewhere. Arranging their humble and stark surroundings as best they can—one can smell the odor of barn animals around!—the Theotokos and Joseph (even while he struggles with doubt) prepare for the birth of this remarkable Child. This Child to be born is the Hope of all history, the Messiah foretold by the prophets of old, the Expectation of the Nations, the Lord and Savior of all. And where will He lay His tiny head? The King of Glory will sleep in a feeding trough.

In the meantime, magi from the East have been divinely alerted by signs in the heavens to the coming birth of a king unlike any other and begin their to journey towards Bethlehem. Soon, the enemies of the Lord will hasten to array themselves against Him. There will be rivers of blood— the blood of all male infants 2 years old and under— shed by Herod’s men. Great will be the lamentation in the land— Rachel weeping for her children because they are no more. The Christ Child will escape with His family to Egypt in due time.

For now, as we write this, He is ensconced safely in Mary’s womb and she rests her weary body in a stable in Bethlehem. Joseph ponders all these things silently and makes ready to receive the King of Glory.

O, what a mystery to ponder! What a strange sight to behold in our mind’s eye! Our hearts cannot help but be taken by awe and wonder at this miracle each and every Christmas. May Christ’s Nativity in the Flesh fill our lives once more with His life-giving grace!

—The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery

## CELEBRATING THE MONASTERY'S ALTAR FEAST

The feast of the Great-Martyr Barbara was celebrated with splendor by Archbishop Benjamin and numerous clergy and faithful, coming together to honor her. As our sisterhood was somewhat ailing with winter sniffles and coughs, it was a special blessing to have the presence *and voices* of Abbess Melania and four sisters from Holy Assumption Monastery in Calistoga, all of whom began their monastic journey at St. Barbara Monastery. (Their presence and help were a heavenly boost!)

Archbishop Benjamin and V. Rev. Yousuf Rassam served the Vigil with the litya (the blessing of bread, wine, wheat and oil). A few dozen pilgrims partook in the festal meal following. It is always wonderful for us to sing the hymns to St. Barbara for which His Eminence himself composed the musical setting over 30 years ago!

The Divine Liturgy and Cross procession on December 4th saw the participation of 9 priests along with His Eminence and approximately 100 faithful. After a meal outside, the children listened to the life of St. Barbara as expertly told by V. Rev. Nicholas Speier and received goodie bags from the monastery.

Nevertheless, it was with heavy hearts that the sisters saw His Eminence depart, as he had officially announced his plan to retire in July. We hope to see him for Lazarus Saturday as usual, and we pray for him every day with thanksgiving for many years of pastoral care for our monastery.



## ***IT'S BEGINNING TO SMELL A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS!***

If you visit the monastery the week before Christmas, you won't see Christmas lights, manger scenes or even a Christmas tree here. It is the tradition of the monastery to wait until just a day or two before Christmas to put up our Christmas tree and to adorn the monastery with festive decorations.

So, besides the wonderful liturgical services beforehand, how do we get into the Christmas spirit?

At this monastery, we bake cookies! Dozens and dozens of cookies, of all types and sizes. The smell of them baking, the non-stop bustling around the kitchen, and the fun of decorating them, fill our monastery. We take plates of cookies to our



friends and neighbors, wishing them a blessed celebration.



Our Lord Jesus Christ will soon be born in a stable. Mary will hold our King in His humble state as a baby. Joseph will protect them in this busy town. We have anticipated His coming in our Advent services and now He is born!

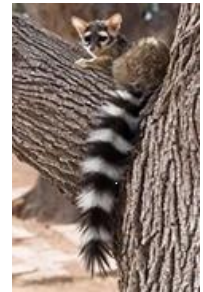
And finally, we celebrate Christmas for twelve days— with a jeweled tree, twinkling lights, a fire in the fireplace, and immense gratitude to God in our hearts.

## ***WILD KINGDOM***

Our adventures with wild neighbors continue! No, not the human ones...

First, our beloved black bear (or perhaps its relative) came back for a quick visit. A visiting monastery friend saw it on our bridge in broad daylight— standing tall on its hind legs and sniffing the air purposefully. For a moment, our friend thought it was one of the sisters! We don't know what the bear thought of our friend, but it quickly clambered away on all fours in the opposite direction.

We did not see the next intruder. Unfortunately, this one did real and repeated damage to all of our chicken coops, killing our beautiful rooster and a few hens in the process, and traumatizing the rest of the flock. This happened in the middle of the night with no witnesses. We suspect a raccoon or perhaps a small bear.



Lastly, our monastery helper, Michael, spotted a most unusual visitor in the forest trees after hearing loud rustling in the dead of night. He couldn't identify it then but was able to record some remarkable footage. It turned out to be an elusive ringtail cat! Most of us had never heard of such a creature, much less seen one. The ringtail cat is a small, sleek mammal with large eyes, large ears and a flowing raccoon-like tail. For our part, we feel very blessed that such a beautiful creature would choose to live at our monastery!