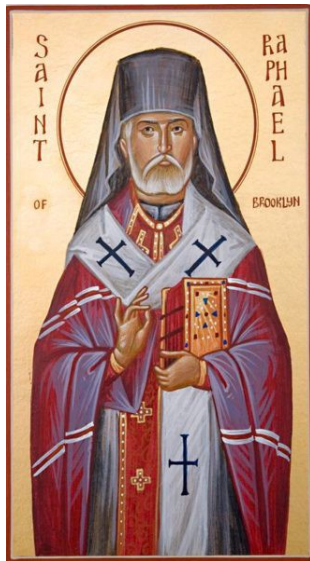


"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13

St. Raphael School Journal

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Newsletter
December 2023



Kontakion of St. Raphael the Bishop of Brooklyn

You were a guardian and a defender of the Church's teaching: you protected your flock from false doctrines and confirmed them in the true faith. O holy father Raphael, son of Syria and glory of North America, always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved.

Table of Contents

Welcome to the Christmas Edition of the SRS Journal! Although this special edition is an annual tradition, this year will be excitingly different. With new additions such as a school-wide holiday poll, quotes from your favorite holiday movies, a special Christmas Stump-the-Priest, our favorite Christmas movie review and even asking our staff to answer questions about their favorite Christmas experiences, this edition will be like no other. On behalf of the SRS Journal, we present to you the 2023 Christmas Edition Newsletter and all of us would like to wish all of you a blessed and joyous Christmas. Merry Christmas! Christ is Born!

The Newsletter is open and ready for submissions!

Do you have questions for a spiritual father, a piece of artwork for the Fine Arts page, or an assignment of which you are proud? Send it on in! We'd love to see what you've got.

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THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

KONTAKION:
(TONE 3)

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, / and the earth offers a cave to the

Unapproachable One! / Angels with shepherds glorify Him! / The wise men journey with a star! / Since for our sake the Eternal God was born as a Little Child!



TROPARION:
(TONE 4)

Your Nativity, O Christ our God, / has shone to the world the Light of wisdom! /

For by it, those who worshiped the stars, / were taught by a Star to adore You, / the Sun of Righteousness, / and to know You, the Orient from on High. / O Lord, glory to You!

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful,
Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting
Father, The Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6-15

Note from the Editor

Dear St. Raphael Journal readers, thank you for checking out our newsletter! It wouldn't be possible without all the amazing support from SRS teachers and staff. If you would like to see more student submissions, please explore the St. Raphael School Journal Website. *To submit names for the prayer list or a student submission, email the Newsletter team here.*

Gen Bell
Managing Editor & Website Coordinator

Genevieve Bell
Managing Editor

What Is Your Favorite Christmas Tradition?

My family does so many wonderful things for Christmas, but my all-time favorite is caroling. Every year on Saint Nikolas Day, the community of Saint John The Forerunners monastery in Goldendale, Washington, gathers with all the children and dresses in festive colors and carols all around the monastery. We visit the gift store, the bakery, and then the church to sing to our beloved Gerontissa. The love and joy put into this activity bring tears to my eyes every year. Watching all the children's bright rosy faces singing and giggling. Festive reds, greens, and ringing bells bring smiles to everyone's faces. Every year the crowd of families only grows bigger, the smiles are larger, and the love has spread by thousands. Christmas cheer is here!

What is your favorite Christmas treat?

Sugar cookies! This is my favorite treat every year and will never change. I love them with coffee, hot chocolate, anything! I make them with my friends and family every year; it is always so much fun! The sweet buttery softness of the cookie combined with festive colored fluffy frosting and sprinkles galore is my perfect Christmas sweet.

What is your favorite Christmas movie?

The Christmas season for me is so busy, but every year I always find time to sit down and watch White Christmas. I find this movie significantly special to me because I always used to watch it with my older cousin every year. She lives far away now, and I don't see her often, but watching this movie during Christmas always reminds me of her.

Does your church do anything special for Christmas?

On Christmas Eve, we have liturgy in the morning, and after liturgy, everyone heads down to the trapaza, where the nuns hand out cookies and sing carols to us! It's such a fun and beautiful way to get everyone excited for the vigil later tonight to celebrate Christ's birth.

Is eggnog better than hot chocolate?

The wind is fiercely blowing, and the soft white powder swirls in the air. The cold that was fun to play in a few minutes ago now nips and freezes the tips of our noses. Trudging inside and peeling off layer after layer of clothing, the smell of chocolate wafts through the air. Sigh, on that sweet, warm smell of Christmas! Can you guess which I think is better? Yes, that's right! Hot chocolate! I love hot chocolate. Eggnog is great, but hot chocolate is my go-to Christmas drink.



"If you're worried and you can't sleep, count your blessings instead of sheep. Then you'll fall asleep counting your blessings."-White Christmas.



Sevastiane Archer



"God bless us everyone." -A Christmas Carol.



What is your favorite Christmas tradition?

One of my favorite Christmas traditions is making gingerbread houses with my Godsisters. Every year at Christmas we go over to their house and spend an extraordinary amount of time making the perfect gingerbread house! (Although most of the candy goes in their mouths not on the house!) It's so fun to see the ideas everyone comes up with! This year we'll have an addition with their baby brother!

What is your favorite Christmas treat?

My favorite Christmas treat is gingerbread! Not just eating it but decorating the little gingerbread men. My mom has a special recipe that she uses each year and it's the best gingerbread I've ever had. Sometimes instead of frosting, we make coconut whipped cream to go on top and it's so good! If we don't make gingerbread men we make almost better and just plain gingerbread.

What is your favorite Christmas movie?

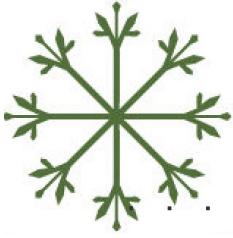
My favorite Christmas movie is Elf! I watch the movie Elf with my family yearly while decorating the tree! It never gets old and we laugh the whole time!

My favorite part is when Buddy gets a job at the fake North Pole and gets in a fight with Santa! It's been a movie to look forward to watching every year. I love how it's a balance of funny but also sweet.

Does your church do anything special for Christmas?

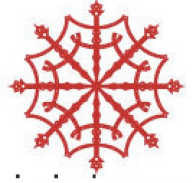
Every Christmas season our church has liturgy the night before Saint Nicholas Day. After we have a big potluck and the kids make Christmas ornaments and decorate Christmas cookies. The children leave their shoes out in the narthex and Saint Nicholas leaves chocolate coins in their shoes and then visits the children at the potluck.

Is eggnog better than hot chocolate? Hot chocolate is better than eggnog. With hot chocolate, you can add all sorts of toppings like candy canes, and marshmallows. It's a nice warm chocolatey drink that you can enjoy while doing all your Christmas activities. For chocolate lovers, it's the best drink possible. Especially if you add a little chocolate milk as well!



Anastasia Fahey

“Featured Essay” Column Writer



What is your favorite Christmas tradition?

A favorite? How do I pick one when there are so many great traditions? Making gingerbread houses, looking at the Christmas light displays, and celebrating St. Nicolas Day are probably my top three. The gingerbread houses usually resemble a square, but in the end, they are a mass of candies, icing, and gram crackers. They are enjoyable to create with your whole family. Visiting our local parks is another thing we do around Christmas. They display all sorts of light fixtures that are magical for small children to look at. As for St. Nickolas Day, my family participates in a variety of activities that range from attending liturgy to opening stockings and having a wonderful family dinner. St. Nickolas is the patron saint of our family, so it is quite special.

What is your favorite Christmas treat?

I'm not sure if this falls into the “treat” category but cranberry sauce is my choice since it is sweet. Can you imagine Christmas dinner without it? Cranberry sauce is one of those foods that I love but only show up a few times a year. When it makes its annual appearance, you can be sure there are no leftovers.

What is your favorite Christmas movie?

Absolutely without a doubt, “It’s a Wonderful Life”. My dad introduced it to my brothers and me a few years ago after he heard the shocking news that we had never watched it before. Ever since then, it’s been my favorite Christmas movie, as well as my favorite movie ever! We rewatch it every year, and every year I love it more.

Does your church do anything special for Christmas?

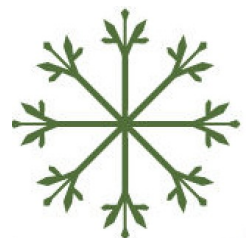
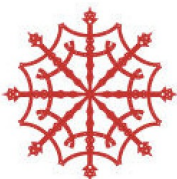
My church hosts an Appalachian Christmas concert, which we’ve been doing for a few years now. Our neighbors, the monks from Holy Cross Monastery, join our choir at Christ the Savior to form an amazing group. We sing a variety of Christmas carols like the classic Joy to the World, shape note carols, and some lesser-known ones that are still beautiful. Around Christmas, we have a yolka at my church too. It is sort of like a talent show, where anyone can display something they enjoy and are good at. In the past, we have had people perform plays, sing carols, play instruments, dance part of a ballet, and even spin a basketball.

Is eggnog better than hot chocolate?

In the seventeen years of my life, I’ve had eggnog only once, unfortunately, whereas I’m more experienced in the field of hot chocolate. I really do like eggnog but a warm cup of hot chocolate just hits the spot.

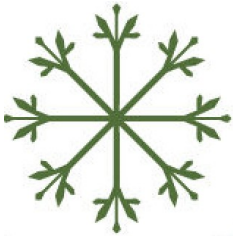


*“Every time a bell rings, an
angel gets his wings.” - It's a
Wonderful Life.”*

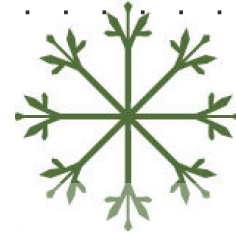


Thomas Bean

"Current Events" Column Writer



What is your favorite Christmas tradition?



Is eggnog better than hot chocolate?

My favorite Christmas tradition is having a very blessed dinner with my family.

As a Floridian where I experience no cold or snow whatsoever, I must side with eggnog. Eggnog is the greatest, vote eggnog!

What is your favorite Christmas treat?

Kourambiethes, a traditional Greek treat.

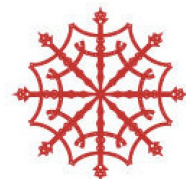
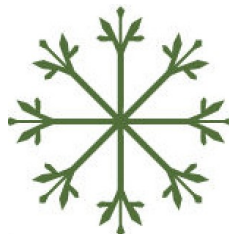
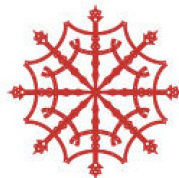
"I never thought it was such a bad little tree. It's not bad at all really. Maybe it just needs a little love." —A Charlie Brown Christmas.

What is your favorite Christmas movie?

A Charlie Brown Christmas

Does your church do anything special for Christmas?

We go caroling at a hospital for seniors.



Mary Kjendal

“Once Upon a Time” Column Writer

What is your favorite Christmas tradition?

Our family doesn't really have a lot of traditions I can think of, but something we do every year (which I suppose makes it a tradition) is eating Swedish tea rolls and bacon and chocolate from our stockings for breakfast and then gathering around the Christmas tree and handing out our presents in age order, the youngest picking out a present to give someone first, then the next youngest, etc.

What is your favorite Christmas treat?

Krumkake! One hundred and ten percent. They're thin cookies that look like waffles rolled into a cone, and they have a strong smell and taste of cardamom, one of my favorite spices! They remind me of my great-grandmother, who was 100% Norwegian because she would always make them for Christmas.

What is your favorite Christmas movie?


My favorite Christmas movie is probably Elf, starring Will Ferrel, or The Grinch with Jim Carrey. Home Alone is also a must-watch every year, as is White Christmas and a few others.

Does your church do anything special for Christmas?

My church used to go caroling every year, and we kids would put on a Christmas pageant. I just moved across the country this fall, though, so I have yet to see what special things my new church does for Christmas!

Is eggnog better than hot chocolate?

Hot chocolate (when made right) is so much better than eggnog, hands down. I used to really despise eggnog, and though I don't mind it now, I would choose hot chocolate over eggnog any day. I know eggnog can have Christmas-y flavors, but it never really reminded me of Christmas or winter in general. Hot chocolate reminds me of Christmas day, sipping some with my Swedish tea roll, as well as of snowy days, playing outside and sledding only to come inside to the smell of hot cocoa and receiving a steaming mug with marshmallows floating in my cocoa.



“The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear.”





Georgia Knowles *"Reflection Essay"*

What is your favorite Christmas tradition?

Happy December and Merry Christmas
Everybody!

I would say that my favorite Christmas tradition is baking with my family. Because, when my family ends up piled together inside an enclosed area-or more specifically, the kitchen-things....begin to happen. Not the more traditional sort of things where the grandkids make sweet memories baking with grandma, or aunts and uncles teach the nieces and nephews a new recipe....no, not these sorts of things. Rather, when my family gathers together in the kitchen various ingredients decide to fly off the counter at unexpected moments, the suspicious scent of burnt something-or-other seeps out from the oven, and more than likely, a civil war of rag-snapping breaks out. In general, chaos with a few tokens of success are the product of a day of baking with the family.

Does your church do anything special for Christmas?

Yes it does! At St. Joachim and Anna Mission, we have a Christmas vigil that starts around 9:30pm. Afterwards, we all break the fast together with a big Potluck feast with dancing to follow!

What is your favorite Christmas movie?

Based on how often this movie is referenced within our household, I would call 'Elf' my favorite Christmas Movie.

What is your favorite Christmas treat?

My favorite Christmas treat is most definitely eggnog!

Is eggnog better than hot chocolate?

Yes. Eggnog is undoubtedly, irrevocably, absolutely, definitely, positively, unconditionally, truly, unquestionably, downright, unequivocally better than hot chocolate.

Anyone who states differently ought to be taken to court.



"This is Christmas. The season of perpetual hope."-Home Alone



Saint Raphael School Journal

Christmas Movie Review! *A Charlie Brown Christmas*

By Thomas Bean

-This joyous holiday classic showcases the world of Peanuts with Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, and Lucy as the main protagonists. The movie begins with Charlie Brown doubting the joy and fun of Christmas. He does not understand what Christmas means or why he is so glum during the holiday season. Eventually, he finds his way to Lucy's Psychiatric booth and tells her about his dilemma. Lucy suggests he become the director for the Christmas play that the kids have been trying to organize. Charlie Brown accepts and shows up to the auditorium finding everybody dancing and having fun. He demands order and tries to communicate to everybody to stop the dancing and begin practicing. After some time, Charlie Brown gives up trying to stop their dancing and goes with his best friend Linus to go get a tree. They go to a lot that has metal trees, and no real ones seem to be in sight... until Charlie Brown sees a small, shabby tree in the very back of the lot. Although Linus is unsure about getting the tree, Charlie Brown immediately picks it up and brings it all the way back to the auditorium. When everyone sees the tree, they start picking and laughing at Charlie Brown because the tree was so small and ugly. Charlie Brown doesn't understand why he can't do anything right and why everyone seems to not care about him during Christmas. While in his state of confusion, Linus steps into the middle of the stage and starts telling the story of Christ's birth.

He talks about the Wisemen, the shepherds, and God's message of a Savior for the world. After finishing, he goes over to Charlie Brown and tells him that the Birth of Christ is why we celebrate Christmas. This brings a warmth of understanding to Charlie Brown, who leaves the auditorium carrying the tree, and he takes it all the way to Snoopy's doghouse and places it outside. He tries hanging an ornament on the tree, but its limbs are so weak that the ornament bends the tree to the ground. All his friends from the auditorium who made fun of him and the tree come to the spot where the tree stands. They take pity on the tree, and they give it love by decorating it. Linus even places his beloved blanket to hold the tree up. The tree transforms from an ugly tree by 'modern standards' to a beautifully fully decorated tree. Charlie Brown returns and is blown away by the sudden beauty of the tree. Then all of the kids gathered together and started singing around the tree with everyone's hearts filled with love and joy, knowing that the Savior had been born into this world to save us all. The End.



Theodora Ciuca

"Theosis Through The Arts" Column Writer

"Tomorrow is Christmas! It's practically here!" -The Grinch

What is your favorite Christmas tradition?

One of my favorite Christmas traditions is building a gingerbread house with my brother. We've been doing it every year since we were kids. It's something I always look forward to. As we got older, I learned to appreciate it a lot more and it's always nice to spend a bit of bonding time with him with how busy our usual school year gets. I also love going to the annual Handel concert with my mom. It was a nice tradition we started a few years ago and even through tiring midterm exams and busy weeks, we always manage to make it.

What is your favorite Christmas treat?

I absolutely love Lebkuchen (German gingerbread)! My mom buys it every year for Christmas and it's always the first sweet treat to go in our house. I have made many attempts to make it myself but have failed everyone. Maybe I'll try again this year.

What is your favorite Christmas movie?

I really love The Grinch movie. I've only seen the animated version but I always love watching it before, during, and even after the Christmas season.

I find the movie so vibrant and sometimes, the Grinch's moods are a little relatable. I find that the animated movie has a nice lesson to learn from both the Grinch's aspect as well as Cindy Lou's perspective.

Does your church do anything special for Christmas?

Our church has a teenagers/young adult group that learns ethnic Romanian carols and then we go caroling to our church's parishioner's homes. I have just joined this year but I find it a really good way to involve the youth of our church. We also have a children's choir and an only teenagers group that sings after the Christmas Eve service on the 24th.

Is eggnog better than hot chocolate?

I would probably have to say hot chocolate. While eggnog is really good, the thick texture always seems to get to me. I like eggnog but on a cold, gray, winter day, nothing cheers me up like a hot cup of cocoa, especially when my mom makes it.

Natasha Richart

“Poetry Corner” Column Writer



*“It's because I'm green, isn't it?”
-The Grinch*



What is your favorite Christmas tradition?

Oh, I love getting up at 6 AM with my three younger siblings and racing downstairs to see what goodies our stockings hold. It's a rule in our household that we can't open any gifts until our parents get up, and we can't wake up our parents until 7 AM. Usually, one or two of us get up really early and then wake up the other two. Trying to be as quiet as possible (so not quiet), we delight in the stuffed stockings and Christmas tree lights.

What is your favorite Christmas treat?

Every year, my mom makes seven-layer cookies. The DELICIOUS treats are made with coconut, butterscotch chips, regular chocolate, and much more. It's always torture to see her make them and smell the mouthwatering scent during Lent when I know I have to wait until Christmas Day to try one. These treats are four times as good as a candy cane and ten times as good as a sugar cookie.

What is your favorite Christmas movie?

I really like the new animated Grinch movie and Home Alone. Watching those movies as a family is so nice. My little brother loves the Grinch and begs us to watch it even when it's not Christmas (that includes when we're on summer vacation).

Does your church do anything special for Christmas?

Our church does the usual Christmas services. We aren't a big congregation (my extended family is a little less than half of it when the church is full), and we only have one priest, who happens to be my uncle.

Is eggnog better than hot chocolate?

Personally, I like hot chocolate better. The eggnog is good; there is something about the cold sliminess running down your throat that is a little weird. Also, who wants a cold drink during winter? You can always count on hot chocolate to be warm, sweet and chocolatey; plus it goes great with whipped cream and a candy cane.

Stump the Priest

Stump the Priest!

Answered by Fr. Noah Bushelli

Q. *What was the historical, spiritual, and overall significance of the shepherds in the birth of Christ? -Anonymous*

A. "In the areas of divine revelations, there are many levels of meaning; especially in the birth of Christ. In the case of historical significance, the birth of the Lord was threatened by Herod when he unleashed his murderous rampage on all newborn's in the land. The spiritual significance can begin with one important detail, that Christ was born in a cave that acted as a stable. Christ was born in a humble manner, the shepherds were humble in the case that they answered the angel's song and found their way to Christ. The shepherds were supposed to shepherd the animals, which is a mirroring of the people of Israel.

The priests, levites, and prophets were supposed to shepherd the people. The shepherds are reminders to the people of how their leaders were hypocrites of themselves. Even though the shepherds were uneducated and not influential at all, they answered the call. The shepherds understood the importance of Christ's birth because of their role as 'shepherds of Israel' while also being able to take in God's creation by living in the wilderness. The shepherds waited in the peaceful quietness of the outdoors which provided them a prepared and comforted soul to accept and go to the birth of Christ."

Q. *What was the significance that the Wise Men had in the Birth of Christ?*

A. The significance of the wise men is that pagan astrologers (maybe even Zoastrians?) from Persia (not "kings"...even if it's a favorite carol of mine...) came and recognized the birth of Christ as something special, while the religious elite of Jesus' time, who only lived a few miles away in Jerusalem, were completely ignorant of it. God revealed it to pagans and unlearned shepherds and hid it from the "professional religious" to show that in simplicity and humility, with purity of heart, you can see God.

It also shows that this wasn't just for the Jews, but "a light to enlighten the Gentiles" showing that everyone was called to salvation through the saving Incarnation of Christ. What an amazing thing!

Poll Results!

What is your Favorite Christmas Tradition?

1. 27.7% Decorating the Christmas Tree!
2. 18.1% Watch Christmas Movies!
3. 17% Singing Carols!

What is your Favorite Christmas Treat?

1. 20% Sugar Cookies!
2. 18.9% Candy Canes!
3. 17.9% Gingerbread Cookies

What is your Favorite Christmas Movie?

1. 16% A Charlie Brown Christmas
2. 13.8% Elf!/It's a Wonderful Life!
3. 9.6% A Christmas Story!

Does Your Church Do Anything Special For Christmas?

"We put up a giant Christmas tree up in front of our church. We also have a Christmas Pageant and our choir has a Christmas Concert." (Age 11)

"Yes they do! They have a Christmas service at a beautiful historic theater here where I live and usually a couple thousand people attend. (I am baptist so it is a little bit different)" (Age 13)

"Burn the "badnjak," and drink hot/cooked rakija (brandy)" (Age 31)

"This year we are doing a Christmas on the Streets with the homeless!" (Age 17)

"Our church Sunday School always presents a Nativity/St. Nicholas pageant the week before Christmas! We narrate the Nativity scene and interject it with various carols and instrumental pieces." (Age 16)

And the answer to our debate question is...

Hot Chocolate!
With 65% of the total vote!
While eggnog finished with 35%
So cozy up by the fire with a yummy cup of hot chocolate 'and have yourself a merry little Christmas!"



Meet the Newsletter Team!

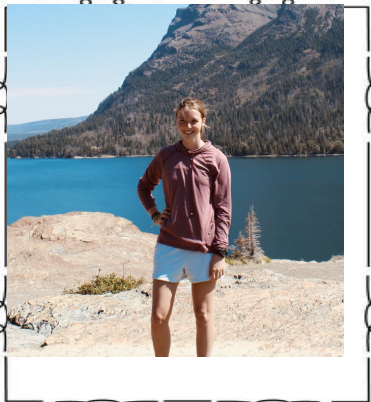
Theodora Ciuca



Assistant Editor

*"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
- Philippians 4:13*

Mary Kjendal



Column Writer

*"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."
Winston S. Churchill*

Georgia Knowles



Column Writer

*"If you don't come back, sir, then I shan't, that's for certain."
- Samwise Gamgee*

Genevieve Bell



Managing Editor
Website Coordinator

*"To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world."
- Dr. Seuss*

Thomas Bean



Column Writer

*"A generation which ignores history has no past and no future."
Robert A. Heinlein*

Anastasia Fahey



Column Writer

*"God can't give us peace and happiness apart from Himself because there is no such thing."
C.S. Lewis*

Natasha Richart



Column Writer

*"All grown-ups were once children...but only few of them remember it."
- The Little Prince*

Sevastiane

Archer



Secretary

*"Prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation of cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness."
- St. John Chrysostom*

