

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

# St. Raphael School Journal

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Newsletter  
February 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 February edition of the newsletter! Inside you will find an hilarious creative poem, a in-depth paper on one of C.S Lewis's wonderful books and much more. Enjoy, and have a blessed February!

### **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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## Prayer List

### Living

Fr. Peter  
Eleousa  
Phyllis  
Lynn  
Joseph  
Linda  
Andrew

### Departed

Barbara Joy  
Suzan  
Elliot  
Timothy  
Fr. Porphyrios  
Fr. Abraham  
Anna

“Joy is thankfulness, and when we are joyful, that is the best expression of thanks we can offer the Lord, Who delivers us from sorrow and sin.”

-Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica

## St. Scholastica of Italy



### Troparion

O God, to show us where innocence leads,  
You made the soul of your virgin St. Scholastica soar to  
heaven. Like a dove in flight.

Grant through her merits and her prayers  
That we may so live in innocence as to attain to joys  
everlasting. This we ask through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
your Son, Who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit.

## Feats of the Month

### Feb 1

*Our Holy Mother  
Brigid of Kildare*

### Feb 9

*Peter of Damascus,  
Hesychast*

### Feb 12

*St Alexis, metropolitan  
of Moscow*

### Feb 16

*Martyrs Pamphilius  
and those with him*

### Feb 17

*Great-martyr  
Theodore the Tyro*

### Feb 25

*St Tarasios,  
archbishop of  
Constantinople*

## 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.

Erika Kjendal  
Managing Editor & Website Coordinator

# Reflection of the Month

## Our True Identity in Christ

By Leeza Sleeper

Dear reader,

Lately I have been asking questions such as: “Who am I? What is my purpose in life? How am I to serve God?” I think this is quite common among young adults, when our life is changing, when we leave the home, when we become more independent. Sometimes, these questions can be so troublesome that they drive us into a state of despair. Thankfully, there is a lot of literature which might not give a direct answer, but will provide a solution to the dilemma. Such a book is the Screwtape letters. In it, the beloved C.S. Lewis reveals the cunning trickery of the demons when trying to tempt us. I would like to share some of the advice that I found in this book with you.

First of all, it is important to explain the law of undulation, which states that humans experience phases of “emotional and bodily richness and liveliness” and “periods of numbness and poverty”. According to Screwtape (the experienced demon/tempter), these periods of numbness, which he calls troughs, are not the work of demons but are just part of being human. Modern psychology affirms this and adds the following: teenagers experience troughs a lot more often than others...They are more likely to feel negative emotions as they grow up. Unfortunately, many, including me, attribute this state to some fault of their own. When I entered this state of spiritual numbness, it scared me, baffled me,

discouraged me. I tried to find a way to fix it but could not. During prayer, instead of focusing on God, I poured forth all my effort into producing certain emotions. This is exactly what the demons wanted me to do, as Screwtape explains,

*“Instead of focusing on God, as we should, we start focusing on ourselves.”*

“Whenever they are attending to the Enemy [God] Himself we are defeated, but there are ways of preventing them from doing so. The simplest is to turn their gaze away from Him towards themselves. Keep them watching their own minds and trying to produce feelings there by the action of their own wills. When they meant to ask Him for charity, let them, instead, start trying to manufacture charitable feelings for themselves and not notice that this is what they are doing... Teach them to estimate the value of each prayer by their success in producing the desired feeling; and never let them suspect how much success or failure of that kind depends on whether they are well or ill, fresh or tired at the moment.”

If we turn our prayers into what was described above, we will be succumbing to a subtle form of pride. Instead of focusing on God, as we should, we start focusing on ourselves.

Screwtape reveals this deceiving stratagem to another demon, “You must therefore conceal ... the true end of Humility. Let [them] think of it not as self-forgetfulness but as a certain kind of opinion (namely, a low opinion) of [their] own talents and character... The Enemy wants to bring man to a state of mind in which he could design the best cathedral in the world, and know it to be the best, and rejoice in the fact, without being any more (or less) or otherwise glad at having done it than he would be if it had been done by another...His whole effort, therefore, will be to get the man’s mind off the subject of his own value altogether...Even of his sins the Enemy does not want him to think too much: once they are repented, the sooner the man turns his attention outward, the better the Enemy is pleased”.

I think we will feel more natural when we forget about ourselves. Consider this: when have you felt the most like yourself? It was probably when walking through the woods, or helping someone else or spending time with your family, or enjoying any other pleasure not because it provided any personal gain, but because of “a sort of innocence and humility and self-forgetfulness”. Once we are able to forget ourselves, love our neighbor, sacrifice our will, then “God really gives [us] back all [our] personality, and boasts that when [we] are wholly His then [we] are more [ourselves] than ever.”

## Teen Perspectives on the National Antiochian Convention in Dallas

By Grace Wagner

I never imagined that I and two other teens would attend a National Convention for the election of a new metropolitan, until we were there. At 10am on Friday, January 13th the meeting commenced. “Blessed art thou O Christ our God...” The voice of His Eminence Metropolitan Antonios, Patriarchal Vicar, reverberated throughout the conference room. Chanting the Pentecostal Apolytikion alongside Metropolitan Antonios and hundreds of other delegates inspired awe within me.

I had never before experienced a gathering where representatives from every Antiochian Orthodox parish across our nation were under one roof. I realized that the Pentecostal Apolytikion was intentionally selected as the opening hymn, to ask for God’s blessing on the convention and the Holy Spirit’s guidance as we navigated the voting process. The resulting nominees for new Metropolitan were His Grace Bishop John Abdalah, His Grace Bishop Nicholas Ozone, and His Eminence Metropolitan Saba Ispier. After the convention, I spoke with the other teen delegates and they shared their experience attending such

a momentous occasion. Diocese of Los Angeles and the West teen SOYO president Sophia Salamy reflected that the convention was, “a great experience as a young teen [and] a great way to

*“I could observe Christ-like peace emanating from him.”*

experience the inner-workings of how the church functions financially as well as seeing how members handle a change in leadership. Transition periods are never easy, but it seemed the Antiochian Archdiocese handled it with class and elegance. It was also great to cast a vote and represent thousands of teens across my diocese and the Archdiocese...Overall it was a great period to learn about the archdiocese and myself as a leader through a spiritual sense.”

Next, I spoke with another teen delegate, Catherine Esper, who is the President of the Toledo and the Midwest Teen SOYO Board. When asked about her experience, she shared, “I had the opportunity to not only place a vote on behalf of our board but represent the Midwest at the Convention.

It was an honor as well as historic for me and the other teens present to experience an event such as this. Upon arrival, I was quickly greeted by a multitude of priests in black robes. With much anticipation for the events ahead, coupled with excitement to be reunited again with those in the Archdiocese, I was excited and happy to be there.” The most influential part of the Convention for her “...was being able to sit in the meeting room and experience the conversations, emotions, and overall atmosphere. It was also a blessing to be in the presence of His Eminence Metropolitan Antonios El Souri. I could observe Christ-like peace emanating from him.” The greatest challenge of the convention? The “need to maintain a business-like attitude while also being true to the faith.” While “this can pose a difficult challenge, it was addressed by those present with grace. Overall, the experience was enlightening and enriching, and it was wonderful to see friends and clergy again. This experience instilled in me a desire to continue to aspire to leadership positions in the Archdiocese.”

# ...To Be Continued...

## A Novel by Lobelia Lacewing

Theodore shivered. "G-gosh, Io," he stuttered. "I wish I could do something, really. That's awful!"

Io looked up at the blue sky and blinked. "Just tell your story."

Theodore stroked the white cat and wrinkled his nose, thinking.

"I don't even know where to start. I guess I could tell you that I'm a Jew. That explains most of why I'm here."

Io looked over. "You're a Jew? I thought Jews wore funny hats!"

Theodore rolled his eyes. "Sure. And I thought all Japanese wore silk."

"Stop being ridiculous," Io snorted.

"Just let me get on with my story, ok? I lived in a nice enough neighborhood with my mom and dad and six siblings. It was so loud, and I complained a lot. I mean, we all did, you know? I yelled at my siblings, my siblings yelled at each other, my parents raised their voices— there wasn't a quiet room in the place, ever. I mean, to be sure, we all loved each other, but we didn't always say it every day. In fact, we said the opposite more often than not. But all the same, life went on in our messy townhouse. Until the war broke out in Europe. That's when the hate started building up against Jews—"

"Wait a second!" Io interrupted. "People don't hate Jews here, in America! Only Germans do, right?"

"Maybe if you let me tell my story, you'd find out! Jeez! Anyway, boys on our street would yell at us when we walked past, blaming the war on us, somehow. They were just mad about the war, I guess. Well, the hate built up. They would throw rocks in our window and do other stupid stuff. But what could we do? One of those boy's dad was the local police chief, and he did nothing to stop them. Well, my dad told us all to be brave and soldier through it, but my mom said she'd had enough of it. They couldn't agree, so my mom left with my little siblings, all four of them. I'm the second oldest, you know. My older . It was from my brother, telling me to catch up to them at a motel a couple hours away. That's all well and good, I thought, but how on earth will I get there? I was furious that I had been abandoned. I figured that if they could do without me, I could do without them.

So I moseyed over to my Aunt and Uncle's house, telling only half the truth, and now they're letting me stay with them, for now. They're not Jewish. They're not loud. But the truth is, I-I miss my family. And now I don't know— I don't know if I can find them again. I don't even know if they miss me or not! So I just kind of saunter around town, dragging my feet and stuff.

And trying to stay away from my Aunt and Uncle as much as I can, because they really don't want me. I guess one of these days I'll just leave them and go off somewhere. I know a nice old couple that live downtown." Theodore stared off into space. Then he cleared his throat. "Well, anyway, that's all I've got." Io frowned. "Looks like we both abandoned our families, didn't we?"

"I did not! They abandoned me!"

"You ran off to begin with. We both did. Look where running away brought us."

"Well, I didn't mean for my family to disappear. I just meant to take a minute to cool off."

Io sighed. "I guess so. Now we're just vagabonds. Practically orphans."

Theodore looked down at his hands. "Yeah. Practically orphans."

"Well! Let's make a plan then! What are we waiting for?" Io jumped up and brushed off her skirt. She grinned down at Theodore.

Theodore hesitated. "We're a team now? Says who?"

"A team? Seriously? We'll be a family. It'll be fun!"

"Us? I messed up enough when it was just me. What makes you think this'll be any better?"

Io shrugged. "Because now you have an older sister to watch out for you."

"Okay, I guess." He reluctantly got up and hoisted the purring cat over his shoulder.

The three of them, the girl, the boy, and the cat, walked down the sidewalk; the afternoon sun shone on their backs, the leaves crunched underfoot, and the cat purred.

... TO BE CONTINUED ...

# Student Submissions

## Poetry

### St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco: A Ballad

By Elizabeth Wood

Saint John was born in Ukraine  
Not so very long ago  
His given name was Michael  
That's how his story goes

He grew up in an era  
When Christians were a no  
So his family moved away  
From all the unchristian foes

#### Chorus:

**Oh St. John of Shanghai  
Your faith in God you won't deny  
Caring for orphans big and small  
Praying for us all**

St. John studied theology  
And then became a monastic  
He was ordained a deacon  
Which was quite fantastic

He was given the new name John  
And one day rode a train  
To watch another John  
As a bishop become ordained

But when he arrived  
It was soon explained  
That HE was the John  
To be ordained!

#### Chorus

St. John moved to China  
And served for many years  
Building Churches for the faithful  
Finding orphans and drying all their tears

Then he built an orphanage  
With the ladies of his parish  
He taught all of the orphans  
About the God he cherished

#### Chorus

When their faith was threatened  
They all moved West  
and settled in San Fran  
and there they stayed to rest

On the streets of San Fran  
he was known to roam  
he built the Joy of All Who Sorrow  
as his new home

#### Chorus

He was loved by all who knew him  
but he knew his time had come  
and into the arms of Christ  
he now had to run

Up in Heaven he praises God  
after all of these years  
he worships his Savior  
with no scrapes or tears

He's known throughout the world for many  
miracles he's worked  
and in the corner of his Church  
his bodily relics still lurk

#### Chorus

### Haikus for Winter

By Sasha Florenz

#### Snow Falls

Snow falls through the sky  
Numbs our exposed nose and toes  
But we still love it

#### Winter is Here

Snow falls through the sky  
The icicles are freezing  
Winter is now here.

#### Winter Farm

Winter on the farm  
The kids hurry to do chores  
To go back inside

#### New Year

New Year's Day is here  
It's 2023  
Celebrating now.

# Student Submissions

## Why 360 Years on Earth was a Blessing

By Ilinca Doris

We all know the prayer of St. Symeon: “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word” (Luke 2:29). Was St. Symeon the God-receiver tired of this world? God gave Symeon a long life, about 360 years, in order to let him see a crucial prophecy he had doubted fulfilled. He likely expected it to happen within a normal lifespan at first, but his 100th passed, then his 200th, then his 300th, and Symeon was still alive and waiting. I’m pretty sure, however, that Symeon didn’t resent the wait. It was a huge blessing. We needn’t assume he kept aging at a normal pace until he was 360; he was well enough to walk and hold Jesus at that age. With his long life, Symeon got to spend years on the good earth instead of in Hades, and he got the wish of every faithful Jew at the time: to see the Messiah.

Saint Symeon was a scholar in the Great Sanhedrin, and, when he was of ordinary age, he and 71 other Jewish scholars were commissioned by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the Greek King of Egypt, to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek. This translation, made in the third century BC, is known as the Septuagint. As Symeon was translating, he came to Isaiah 7:14: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son.” That a virgin could ever conceive struck Symeon as out of the question, so he concluded that the prophet must have meant “young

woman,” not “virgin,” and moved to translate the word so. Before he could begin, an angel appeared to him, and said “You shall see these words fulfilled. You shall not die until you behold Christ the Lord born of a pure and spotless Virgin.” And so, Symeon lived through the age of the Maccabees, and into the bleak Roman occupation of Israel, waiting for the Messiah.

Despite the hard times, Earth was still the closest thing to Heaven available. When we die, we hope for life in the Kingdom of God. Before Jesus’ death and resurrection, however, death was no bridge to life. All the departed went to Hades, the realm of death. The Jews knew this, and awaited their resurrection (John 11:24). In the meantime, Earth was the place most like Heaven. That’s why long life was always an amazing blessing in the Old Testament. Symeon was blessed not only with a long life, but with one longer than anyone’s since the time soon after the flood (Genesis 11:16-17), when the world had not been fallen for long. Every year he lived was a year would never spend in Hades. Symeon would not have wanted his death to come when he saw the years go by. When, upon seeing Jesus, he asked God to let him “depart in peace,” he could do so only because he foresaw that Jesus was the Messiah, “A light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of [God’s] people, Israel” (Luke 2:32), Who would bring His

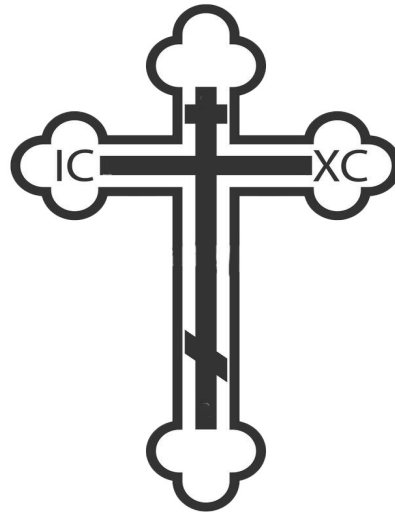
people life.

In addition to saving him the anguish of Hades for some additional 200 to 300 years, Symeon’s long life gave him every pious Old Testament Jew’s wish: to see the Messiah. Since many did not recognize Jesus for Who He was, it might seem like they had stopped waiting. They hadn’t. Roman oppression only made people more eager for redemption, and the reason barrenness was seen as such a curse, as we see in the stories of Anna and Elizabeth, is because one’s children might live to see the Messiah - or might even be the Messiah. Symeon’s long life assured him what people had been waiting for since Adam and Eve.

St. Symeon the God-receiver was blessed with a very long life and a chance to see the Messiah, God Himself. God turned his doubt of the prophecy of the Virgin birth into an opportunity for him to see it fulfilled. In giving Symeon long life, God let him escape Hades for centuries and see the Messiah, God Himself. Why would Symeon resent that? Some 300 years after doubting the prophecy of Isaiah, Symeon saw Jesus Christ (Christ means Messiah), born of a Virgin. He recognized Him right away, and soon departed. He had seen his and all the world’s Salvation, Emmanuel, through Whom those who walked in darkness would see a great light.

## Stump the Priest!

*Answered by Fr. Nikolai Meyers*



*Q. How should we pray for the departed who are non-orthodox? - Anastasia Fahey*

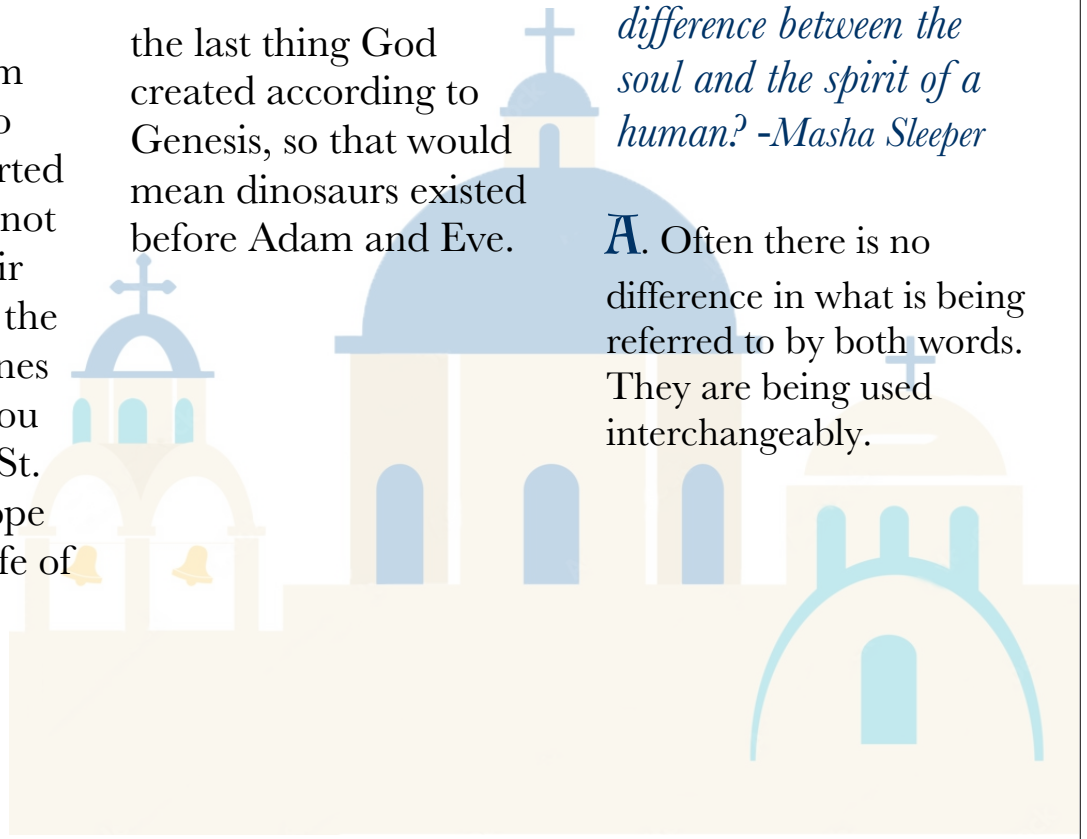
**A.** We can pray for them in our own prayers when we are at home or during our day or when we go to Church. We have a number of stories from the lives of Saints who prayed for their departed loved ones who were not Orthodox and by their prayers God brought the Souls of their loved ones into His Kingdom. You find this in the life of St. Gregory Dialogos, Pope of Rome and in the life of St. Thekla.

*Q. Did the dinosaurs exist before Adam and Eve? -Sadie Kepple*

**A.** Adam and Eve were the last thing God created according to Genesis, so that would mean dinosaurs existed before Adam and Eve.

*Q. What is the difference between the soul and the spirit of a human? -Masha Sleeper*

**A.** Often there is no difference in what is being referred to by both words. They are being used interchangeably.





# Student Submissions

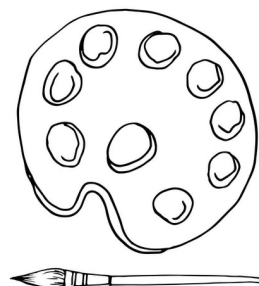
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Graphics by Theodora Cuica  
and Mary Kjendal



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ORTHODOX FAITH OR THE CHURCH AND OUR  
PRIESTS WILL DO OUR BEST TO ANSWER THEM!

PLEASE EMAIL US AT:  
[RAPHAELSHCOOLJOURNAL@GMAIL.COM](mailto:RAPHAELSHCOOLJOURNAL@GMAIL.COM)



# Theosis Through the Arts

## Parts of the Church

By Theodora Cuica

Good morning! Good afternoon! Good evening! Welcome to the column "Theosis Through The Arts"! I pray that you all had a blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year! I look forward to writing for you all another year! Today I have the words straight from an article about some of the parts of the church. I enjoyed reading it and I hope you do too!

"The interior of the Orthodox Church building is particularly styled to give the experience of the unity of all things in God. It is not constructed to reproduce the upper room of the Last Supper, nor to be simply a meeting hall for people whose life exists solely within the bounds of this earth. The church building is patterned after the image of God's Kingdom in the Book of Revelation. Before us is the altar table on which Christ is enthroned, both as the Word of God in the Gospels and as the Lamb of God in the eucharistic sacrifice. Around the table are the angels and saints, the servants of the Word and the Lamb who glorify him - and through him, God the Father - in perpetual adoration inspired by the Holy Spirit. The faithful Christians on earth who already belong to that holy assembly enter into the eternal worship of God's Kingdom in the Church. Thus, in Orthodox Practice, the Narthex or Vestibule symbolizes this world. The nave is the place of the Church understood as the assembly and people of God. The altar area, called the sanctuary or the holy place, stands for the Kingdom of God.

In the Orthodox Church the icons bear witness to the reality of God's presence with us in the mystery of faith. The icons are not just human pictures or visual aids to contemplation and prayer. They are the witnesses of the presence of the Kingdom of God to us, and also of our own presence in the Kingdom of God in the Church.

The iconostasis or icon screen in the Orthodox Church exists to show our unity with Christ, his mother and all the angels and saints. It exists to show our unity with God. The altar table is placed behind the so-called royal gates, between the icons of the Theotokos and Child and the glorified Christ, showing that everything which happens to us in the Church happens in history between Christ's coming as the Savior born of Mary, and his coming at the end of the age as the King and the Judge.

We have mentioned that the entire church building is centered around the altar table. The altar table does not merely symbolize the table of the last supper. It is the symbolic and mystical presence of the heavenly throne and table of the Kingdom of God.

The Book of the Gospels is perpetually enthroned on the altar table. It is on the altar table that we offer the "bloodless sacrifice" of Christ to the Father. And from the altar table we receive the Bread of Life, the Body and Blood of the Lord's Passover Supper. This table is the "table of God's Kingdom." (Luke 28:30)"

"The cross is the central symbol for Christians, not only as the instrument of the world's salvation by the crucified Christ, but also as the constant witness to the fact that men cannot be Christians unless they live with the cross as the very content of their lives in this world. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34)." If you would like to read more, here is the [link!](#) Thank you so much for reading and have a blessed Valentine's day!

## A Dreary February Afternoon

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By Natasha Richart and Miriam Helmueller

It was a dreary February afternoon  
By the shore of a lagoon.  
And out of the lake,  
Rose a monster eating cake.

The Loch Ness monster was he,  
And he ate cake for afternoon tea.  
The cake was green  
And so was his sheen.

But the next day,  
To his very dismay,  
He got indigestion  
From his sweet confection.

His Granny requested  
That he rested  
And fed him chicken soup  
Soon after, he rejoined his troop.



## Course Spotlight on Languages

Collected and Edited by Annalise Dawson

### Greek Alphabet and Grammar Primer

Greek Alpha Grammar Primer students have been learning the cornerstones of the Greek Language learning the alphabet, colors, numbers, and more! They enjoyed the interactive activities like learning various songs and hymns, creating projects, and writing stories. Students are reading, writing, and speaking GREEK!

- Contributed by Presb. Maria

### Russian

Students in Russian levels 1, 2, and 3 have been having a great time learning this complex and beautiful language this semester. In Russian 1, students have been showing mastery of basic vocabulary, and are getting ready for their second creative project of the year. The small, 5-student Russian 2 class has been learning academic vocabulary and is preparing to start delving into more complicated grammar. Russian 3 is composed of 2 groups, the more advanced group is working on a project, the translation of Orthodox saints' lives for children, and the less advanced group. The more advanced group is working on a project, the translation of Orthodox saints' lives for children.

- Contributed by Nektaria Miller

### Arabic

In Lower School Elementary Arabic, we have been busy learning the alphabet. Which includes learning how each letter appears in the words. In Arabic, the letter form can change depending on where it is located in the word. We have learned common greetings, questions, and responses. The class memorized a song and a prayer, along with playing games that help us to learn information. We have been learning to write this beautiful language by copying common vocabulary words.

In the third quarter, we will continue to read, write, and speak Arabic. As well we will learn more conversational questions and pronouns and prepositions.

- Contributed by Rebekah Ward

*“They enjoyed the interactive activities like learning various songs and hymns, creating projects, and writing stories.”*

*-Presb. Maria*

# Meet the Newsletter Team!

Leeza Sleeper



Column Writer

*"The things that transcend one's thought are always more than those one thinks that one has grasped."* -St. Athanasius.

Theodora Cuica



Column Writer

*"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

- Philippians 4:13

Natasha Richart



Column Writer

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

- The Little Prince

Annalise Dawson



Assistant Editor

*"To love beauty is to see light"*

-Victor Hugo

Erika Kjendal



Managing Editor

Website Coordinator

*"My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness."*

- 2 Cor. 12:9

Genevieve Bell



Column Writer

*"Poetry is when an emotion has found its thoughts and the thought has found words."*

- Robert Frost

Grace Wagner



Column Writer

*"You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me."*

- C.S. Lewis

Julia Sheridan



Column Writer

*"Is there any pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a good fire?"*

-C.S. Lewis

Mary Kjendal



Column Writer

*"Kindness is the language the deaf can hear and the blind can see."*

- Mark Twain