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## The National Herald

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Publisher-Editor  
**Antonis H. Diamataris**

Assistant to Publisher, Advertising  
**Veta H. Diamataris Papadopoulos**

Special Section Editor  
**Constantinos E. Scaros**  
Production Manager  
**Chrysoula Karametros**  
Marketing & Design Director  
**Anna Angelidakis**

37-10 30th Street  
LIC, NY 11101-2614  
Tel: (718)784-5255  
Fax: (718)472-0510,  
e-mail:  
english.edition@thenationalherald.com

Democritou 1 and Academias Sts,  
Athens, 10671, Greece  
Tel: 011.30.210.3614.598  
Fax: 011.30.210.3643.776  
e-mail: athens@ekirikas.com

# Christmas: Confirmation of the Historical Jesus and Celebration of His Divinity

By Dr. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou

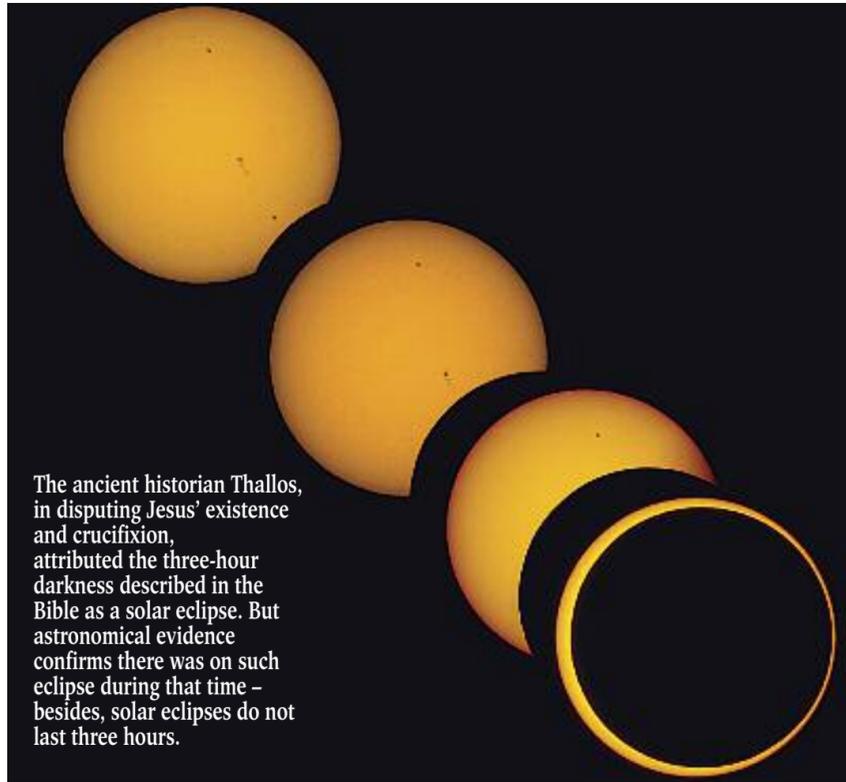
What is Christmas? It is the Incarnation of the Son of God, his birth as a human being. Some people enjoy making the statement that "all religions are basically alike." But nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, religions share common ethical teachings, but they are not at all alike in what they teach about who God is and who we are.

No other religion teaches that God loved the world so much that he became part of his creation. When he was born, he chose not to come as a king but in humility, as an example of loving service to his creatures. He was born for us, he lived with us, he taught us, he died for us and he rose from the dead for us. Only the Christian faith teaches that God became active in human history by becoming a historical person. At Christmas we celebrate his amazing and deliberate choice to insert himself into human history by becoming a human himself, exactly as we are, except for sin. Christ loves us and understands us because he is one of us.

In recent years people have rejected Christian claims about Jesus by saying that his story was just copied from other mythologies at the time. Is that true? Today, false statements are easily concocted on the Internet, only to be quickly and endlessly repeated. But the slightest research reveals that those assertions comparing Jesus to other gods or mythologies are not true.

## LIKE A VIRGIN

It is claimed, for example, that Christianity simply copied other myths by inventing the idea of a "virgin birth," implying that many stories similar to the birth of Christ exist in antiquity. For example, people assert that the gods Mithras and Horus were also products of a "virgin birth." But Mithras was born out of a stone and Horus was conceived by his mother Isis after his father Osiris was murdered and his body parts were scattered. Isis painstakingly retrieved the pieces of her hus-



The ancient historian Thallos, in disputing Jesus' existence and crucifixion, attributed the three-hour darkness described in the Bible as a solar eclipse. But astronomical evidence confirms there was on such eclipse during that time – besides, solar eclipses do not last three hours.

band's body except for his penis, but she was able to use magic to create a penis of gold and thus conceive Horus. Do either of these stories sound like a "virgin birth" to you? Isn't it misleading to say these are also stories of "virgin births"? They are nothing like the birth of Jesus Christ. These are just two examples of many false comparisons between the historical Jesus and mythologies which are being enthusiastically circulated on the Internet in order to discredit Christianity. The fact is, there is a great deal of difference between the life of Jesus and these mythologies. We ought to remember the most radical and monumental difference: Only Jesus was a real, historical person.

In my column for The National Herald's Religion & Spirituality Issue (Nov. 15), I explained some of the evidence for the historical existence of Jesus.

I explained that in fact, more independent evidence corroborates the existence of Jesus than many other famous historical figures, such as Moses or Socrates. Occasionally, people are dismissive of any historical Christian claims on the basis that people who lived long ago were much more prone to accept anything they were told. That is a ridiculous assumption. The supposition that people who lived in the past were foolish, less intelligent, or more gullible simply because they did not have technology is an unsupported fallacy which any thinking person should easily reject. This assumption is known as "chronological snobbery." How can it be true that people who lived in the past were less intelligent? How arrogant it is to think that we alone are intelligent! How is possible that the Ancient Greeks produced countless intellectual luminaries in

science, mathematics, philosophy, literature and law, not to mention remarkable architectural and artistic marvels? How is it possible that they could accomplish feats such as the construction of the Parthenon without cranes and without calculators? Does it make sense to accept the assertion that humans were less intelligent before the advent of technology? One could argue that the ancients were in fact more intelligent, since they were capable of such accomplishments without technology. If people were just as intelligent during the time of Christ, then it follows that we cannot dismiss the existence of Jesus or Christian claims on the basis that people who lived long ago were ignorant, stupid, and gullible.

In the last column I explained why it is illogical and unreasonable to expect Christians to produce the kinds of

"proof" of Jesus that would satisfy modern critics. One of the challenges of "documenting" Jesus and much of ancient history is that most of the writings which existed in antiquity have been lost, according to a famous Byzantine historian and scholar, Cyril Mango.

## ECLIPSING SKPETICISM

Nonetheless, some very surprising evidence exists to prove the reliability of the New Testament. For example, the earliest known reference to Jesus may be an obscure statement by a first century Greek historian who was challenging Christianity but today, his statements actually indirectly confirm the New Testament and a key event at the time of the crucifixion. The historian was Thallos, who wrote a three-volume history of the Eastern Mediterranean around the year AD 55. Although that work has been lost, we know that Thallos discussed Jesus and his crucifixion because Julius Africanus (a third century Christian author) quoted from Thallos in Julius' own work, called History of the World, written around AD 220. Julius' work has also been lost, however, it had been quoted by a Byzantine historian, George Syncellus, around AD 800, in his work called Chronicle, and that book has survived. Syncellus quotes Julius' discussion of the darkness which covered the earth while Christ was on the cross. Thallos was disputing the fact that the darkness which occurred on that day was supernatural. He said that the darkness was simply due to a solar eclipse. After checking the astronomical records, Julius responded that there was no eclipse that year and that no eclipse lasts for three hours. What is extraordinarily important about this discussion is that Thallos, writing only about 20 years after Christ's crucifixion, is trying to explain the unexplained darkness which occurred while Christ was on the cross. At the time Thallos was writing, that was a relatively recent historical occurrence. Thallos does not disagree that it oc-

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## The Christmas "Myth"

By Michael Haldas

Every year around this time when Christians (and many non-Christians as well) celebrate the joy of Christmas, some seek to remind us the event it is based on is simply not true. There was no virgin birth. There was no Star of Bethlehem or three wise men. Christ was not born in a manger. He probably never even existed. It's all a myth.

These are the types of thoughts and assertions you can easily encounter in any of the myriad Christmas specials run on the cable channels this time of year. You can also find them in many popular magazines as well. These shows and articles always seem to appear around Christmas or Easter giving, from a Christian point of view, the naysayers a forum to call our faith a lie.

These so-called experts (authors, historians, scientists, and even some disillusioned clergy) will point to many "facts" to support their position. For example, they will say or write that in the ancient world a virgin birth was considered a sign of a person's divinity. They will remind us that central figures from other religions predating Jesus supposedly involved virgin births such as Zoroaster from the ancient religion Zoroastrianism that is still practiced today; Horus from the Egyptian pantheon; Dionysus from Greek mythology; and Mithras from the one-time religion in the Roman Empire called Mithraism (all of these are debatable "facts.") They will tell us the reverence and honor to the Virgin Mary was in part a carry-over in Christianity from the earth-goddesses of ancient paganism (e.g., Greek, Roman, Norse, and other mythologies all had some sort of mother earth figure that the people worshipped). They will also remind us that there are flood stories that pre-date the story of Noah such as the Babylonian story of Ut-Napishtim who also built an ark and saved animals. They may even point out that the ancient Babylonian king Sargon was placed in a basket in the Euphrates River to save his life and that he pre-dates Moses.

As Christians, should this disturb us? Should it cause doubts in us about the validity of Jesus' birth, Christmas, and our faith in general? The answer is no. For me personally, this type of infor-

mation and the thoughts I wrestled with turned out to be a good thing because it led me to a healthy creative examination of my faith that included lengthy investigation, research, and prayerful consideration from which I drew some important conclusions.

First, I came to understand that we often conceive of something before it exists and it is not until it finally does exist that what we conceived is considered true. For example, storytellers and inventors conceived of submarines and spaceships long before they became a reality. Prior to their invention, they didn't exist except in their thoughts. Once they existed, they were reality. Virgin birth stories, for example, could be conceived in thought before one actually became a reality.

Secondly, I never forgot a conversation I read about between two of my favorite authors, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Before Lewis became a famous Christian writer and apologist, he was skeptical about God. He believed God existed and was fairly certain the events in the Gospels were likely true. He just didn't see how God and the events of a crucified man, or being, nearly two thousand years ago was relevant to his or anybody else's life. Tolkien was a devout Christian and held to a strong unwavering Christian worldview. It came through in his famous works, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion* and others, which dealt with the Christian themes of sacrifice, incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection, redemption, salvation and belief in God. Both men loved to read and study mythologies, stories, and pagan myths. The difference between them at the time was that Lewis believed myths to be lies whereas Tolkien had an opposite point of view, believing myths to embody elements of truth.

Tolkien was an expert philologist who understood languages and their origins and meanings better than most (he wrote his stories and mythologies based on the languages he himself invented). As Professors Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara point out, Tolkien understood that the word "myth" comes from the Greek word "muthos" which originally meant "word" or "speech," not legend or fable, and was a near synonym for "logos,"

the word used in the Gospel of John to describe Jesus. Both words were used in antiquity to mean "account" or "story" of what was true. The verb "muthologeuo," from which we get our word "mythologize," meant simply to "relate word for word," that is to give an accurate or verbatim account of an event or speech. Eventually the only difference between the word muthos and logos was that muthos came to mean an account "through story" while logos came to mean an account "through reason or proposition." Muthos and the Greek word "phantasia," from which we get the word fantasy, originally meant "accurate representation" or "accounts of real things." Even when the words began to mean fictionalized account they still were understood to be communicating something that is true. It is only in more recent times, whether due to an impoverished sense of the worth of stories, or an inflated sense of the ability of modern science to help us know the world accurately, or both, that myth and fantasy have come to mean something not true. This is unfortunate since good fantasy like Tolkien's and Lewis's deal so much with truth though not facts.

Lewis had bought into the common thinking about myth until Tolkien explained to him that man, because he is created in the image and likeness of God, "is not ultimately a liar." Though man may pervert his thoughts into lies, he comes from God and it is from God that he draws his ultimate ideals. Lewis agreed with this statement and Tolkien pointed out that even what we invent in our imaginations, though off base and distorted at times, must then ultimately come from the ability to create given to us by God. Therefore our myths can show us glimpses of the truth.

Lewis was convinced by Tolkien's argument but Tolkien took it one step further, using Lewis' own love of the Norse myth of Balder, the dying god, to illustrate his ultimate point. According to Norse mythology, Balder was the god of light, joy, purity, beauty, innocence, and reconciliation. Loki, the trickster god who was evil, found out that Balder could only be killed by mistletoe and tricked Balder's brother into throwing a mistletoe dart at Balder that pierced his heart and killed him.



Hundreds of years before Jesus, Zoroaster was said to have been born of a virgin. Skeptics say they're both myths, but J.R.R. Tolkien wrote that pagan and other myths were God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using the images of their myths to express fragments of eternal truth, whereas the poet who invented Christianity was God, and the images He used were real people in history.

Tolkien explained that just as pagan and other myths were God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using the images of their myths to express fragments of eternal truth, Christianity is the same thing but with one huge difference. The poet who invented Christianity was God Himself, not a pagan or any other human being, and the images He used were real people in history. In other words, the Gospels, the Christmas story and all other aspects, are the myth come true, or "true myth" and Christianity is the full expression of truth for real. Christ was the real version

of the dying god Balder of myth that Lewis loved. In Christ, His virgin birth, and all other aspects of His life, the truths expressed subtly in myth, became real. The story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is an enacted myth, a story that is not only true symbolically but also true historically, as the central component to God's revelatory disclosure within history of the divine nature and divine purposes.

This resonated deeply with Lewis. He eventually transferred all of the love and appreciation he had for the myths and stories that taught him what abstract

theories and philosophies could not, to the truth of Christ and Christianity and truth of Christ's life and parables. He saw the relevance of God through Christ, allowed the truth of God to penetrate his heart, and went on to produce some great works that all Christians love.

The late Father Alexander Schmemmann echoes the same truth Tolkien expressed to Lewis when he writes about how the early Church kept as its own the Hebrew festivals of Passover and Pentecost. He says these feasts were reminders, before Christ, of Christ's resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. He goes on to make a point of how many religious celebrations prior to Christ that celebrated the world coming back to life again after the death of winter were all echoes of Christ and were consummated in Christ Himself when He came in the flesh.

The next time you read a book you love or see a movie or show that really moves you, you should ask yourself why you love it. You should ask yourself what about it touches you. I think you will find that deep down, it is because it echoes a truth. The movie *The Titanic* is one of the highest-grossing movies of all time. In my opinion, it is because of Jack's sacrificial, unconditional and redemptive love of Rose. He dies to save her. His death saved not only her life but gave her redemption and freedom from the bondage of the society in which she lived. She even states that he saved her in every way a person could be saved. This echoes the ultimate truth of the love Christ taught to us in the Gospels and communicated in myriad stories throughout time. Whether we are Christians or not, this truth resonates within us deeply because it is truth.

Myth and stories are necessary because reality is so much larger than rationality. Not that myth is irrational, it just easily accommodates the rational while rising above it. All deep and lasting stories are echoes or reflections of the true story which is the life of Christ, as once termed in a famous movie, is indeed the greatest story ever told.

Michael Haldas is the author of *Sacramental Living: Understanding Christianity as a Way of Life* (Eastern Christian Publications) and other works ([www.sacramentalliving.net](http://www.sacramentalliving.net)).



Illustration: The Birth of Christ - Detail (1458) of Beyond All Things, Athens

*For unto us a Child is born,  
unto us a Son is given...*

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and Prosperous New Year*



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# Christmas: Big Breakfast, Big Dinner

By Anna Skamangas-Scaros

This series of recipes is specifically for Christmas day. I have included a full breakfast and dinner. I recommend skipping lunch with the calorie bombs that will be hitting your plate! Ok, if you can't hold out, you can try a bit here and there and have a salad for lunch to hold you over. Enjoy!

## Overnight Tsoureki French Toast

This is truly a special treat that can be prepared the night before so that all you have to do Christmas morning is pop it in the oven next to the bacon.

Serves 6-9  
 Ingredients:  
 4 Tablespoons butter, melted  
 3/4 cup packed light brown sugar  
 1 loaf Tsoureki sliced into 1 1/2 inches thick slices  
 8 eggs, slightly beaten  
 1 cup 1/2 and 1/2  
 1 Tablespoon pure vanilla extract  
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 1/2 cup walnuts, measured then chopped  
 maple syrup

Directions:  
 In a small bowl combine brown sugar and melted butter and pour on the bottom of a glass 9x13 baking dish.

Arrange slices of bread in the baking dish, overlapping if necessary.

Combine milk, eggs, vanilla, and cinnamon in a bowl and pour evenly over bread slices.

Sprinkle chopped walnuts over bread slices.

Wrap tightly with plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator for 4-12 hours.

When you are ready to bake it, remove from the refrigerator for 15 minutes prior to baking. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F while you are waiting.

Bake French toast for 30-35 minutes. Do not overcook, as this will dry it out. The top should be golden brown.



Cool slightly before serving and drizzle with maple syrup.

## Caramelized Bacon Twists

The protein in the bacon is what will hold you over until dinnertime. Feel free to substitute healthier turkey bacon here.

Serves 6-8  
 Ingredients:  
 1 pound sliced bacon  
 1/2 cup packed brown sugar  
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Directions:  
 Cut each bacon strip in half widthwise. Combine brown sugar and cinnamon. Coat bacon strips in sugar mixture. Place on a foil-lined 15-in. x 10-in. x 1-in. baking pan. Bake at 350° for 15-20 minutes or until crisp, turning at the halfway point. Cool slightly and serve.

## Christmas Fruit Salad

The complex carbohydrates in fruit will give you sustained energy and the fiber will bind to the fat in the rest of this meal! This salad is fresh, which can be hard to find in the winter months.

Serves 6-8  
 Ingredients:  
 2 Granny Smith apples, cored, cut into bite sized pieces and sprinkled with a teaspoon of lemon juice to prevent browning  
 1 fresh pineapple, cored, peeled, and cut into 1-inch chunks  
 2 bananas, peeled and sliced  
 1 red Anjou pear, cored and cut into bite sized pieces  
 1 cup red grapes  
 2 kiwis, peeled, halved and sliced

Directions:  
 Prepare the Granny Smith apple first and treat it with the lemon juice to prevent browning. Combine the other fruit together and stir in the apple. Top with mint sprigs if desired.

## Visino Martini

The holidays wouldn't be the holidays without a great cocktail. The enzymes in sour cherries also have many health ben-



efits – including a natural remedy for hangovers. Stop it before it starts! Rim the glasses with some beautiful, edible glitter and you are all set to start your dinner.

Makes 1 martini  
 Ingredients:  
 1 ounce high quality vodka, like Grey Goose  
 1/2 ounce Triple Sec  
 3 ounces pure tart cherry juice  
 Ice  
 1 teaspoon visino (sour cherry) preserves  
 Edible glitter (found on amazon.com)  
 Lemon or lime juice to rim the glasses

Directions:  
 Rim martini glasses by dipping them in lemon or lime juice and then in the glitter.

Combine all ingredients except preserves and glitter in a cocktail shaker.

Shake and strain into the glass.

Slide a teaspoon of the preserves into the bottom of the glass for garnish.

## Oyster Soup

I love to incorporate seafood into meals that are traditionally

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**They Honor God and Christ  
 by Not Celebrating Christmas**

By **Constantinos E. Scaros**

Willard Louey reads the Holy Scripture every day. He has been doing so for the better part of 20 years now, and he has concluded that to fulfill the true wishes of our Heavenly Father, we should not celebrate Christmas, or Easter.

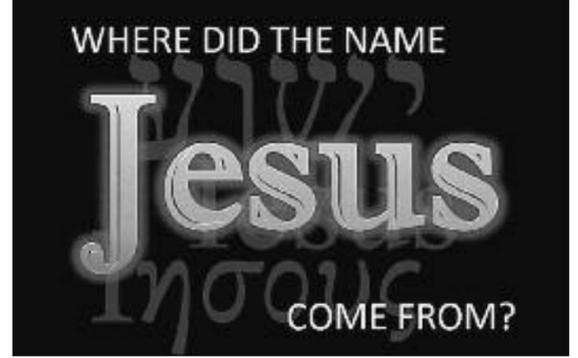
It is not that Louey does not believe in Jesus Christ – he most certainly does – but he also thinks to refer to the Son as “Jesus Christ” is wrong. Louey, and his fellow Nazarenes, are Biblical literalists who believe that their version of the Word makes the most sense and is the most congruent to the wishes of our Creator – Whom most of us call “God.”

“The name of the Father is Yahuah,” Louey told TNH, not ‘God’ or ‘Lord.’” To refer to Him as “God,” Louey says, places him in a category of a multitude of gods that have been worshipped over the centuries. “God,” then, is a generic term, just like “man,” “cat,” or “TV show.” The Creator, as described in the original version of what we call the Bible, Louey says, clearly states that His name is Yahuah.

Referencing his version of the Bible, which he believes to be the most accurate available version, Louey says that the Third Commandment states: “You do not bring the Name of your Elohim (god) to naught,” which more conventional versions convey as “you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.”

Louey, who became a Christian more than 15 years ago, after being a lifelong atheist, worshipped at a non-denominational Christian church in New York City. He believes that most of that church’s members, and even most people who profess to be Christians, do not realize that the Father’s name, as originally relayed, is Yahuah, and the Son’s is Yahushuah, not Jesus.

Does Louey acknowledge, however, that extensively-versed clergy, such as Greek Orthodox priests, fully understand that, but see nothing wrong with saying “Jesus” or its Greek pronunciation “Iisous” – and saying “God” or “Theos” to refer to the



Is it acceptable to refer to the Son as Jesus, or must we call Him only by His original Hebrew name: Yahushuah?

Father?

“Yes, I understand that,” Louey says, acknowledging that the Orthodox faith is steeped in a detailed understanding of Scripture. “And they can do what they like and say what they like, but as for me – I’m going to stick with the name.”

As a Biblical literalist, Louey believes that the Father specifically wanted us to say His name as He spoke it – he meant name, not title, not status, but the actual name. “If you tell me your name is George, I’m not going to call you John,” Louey says, to illustrate his point. “So, why would I not give our Heavenly Father the same respect?”

**BACK TO THE FUTURE**

When a friend of Louey’s gave him a book to read that explained this way of thinking – which the minister at his previous church never conveyed to the congregation – Louey says “it all began to make sense to me. Until that point, I had questions about the Bible, and I would ask my minister – and he’d just look at me and say, sarcastically – ‘you’re too smart,’ and then he’d simply dismiss my questions and say ‘see you next week.’ I was baffled: how could he simply ignore my questions? I thought of myself as the student, and he was the professor. What kind of professor simply ignores his student?”

Willard continued to study Scripture on his own, keeping

these four components in mind: the Name, the Sabbath, the Feasts, and the Torah (more on those, later).

He found another church to attend, also a non-denominational Christian church. “I began to attend Bible study there, and would refer to the Father as ‘Yah’ (an acceptable derivative of Yahuah, Louey says) instead of ‘God.’ The study leader told the minister, who asked me about it.” Louey is still amazed about what transpired next. “I showed the minister the four components of faith, and a tear came to his eye: ‘This is all true,’ he said, ‘but I do not teach any of this. I only teach the New Testament. If you bring this up (in class) again, I will have to ask you to leave.’” Clearly at a life-changing crossroads, Louey knew what he had to do: “I never went back.”

Since then, Louey has been studying this Nazarene interpretation of Scripture with a group of friends, “but they’re based in Florida,” whereas he lives in New York, and so they do not meet regularly.

**NAME, SABBATH, FEAST, TORAH**

In addition to a literal understanding of the Father’s Name, Louey also maintains that the Sabbath must be kept on the Seventh Day – aka Saturday. We explained that the Greek word

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**“She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)**

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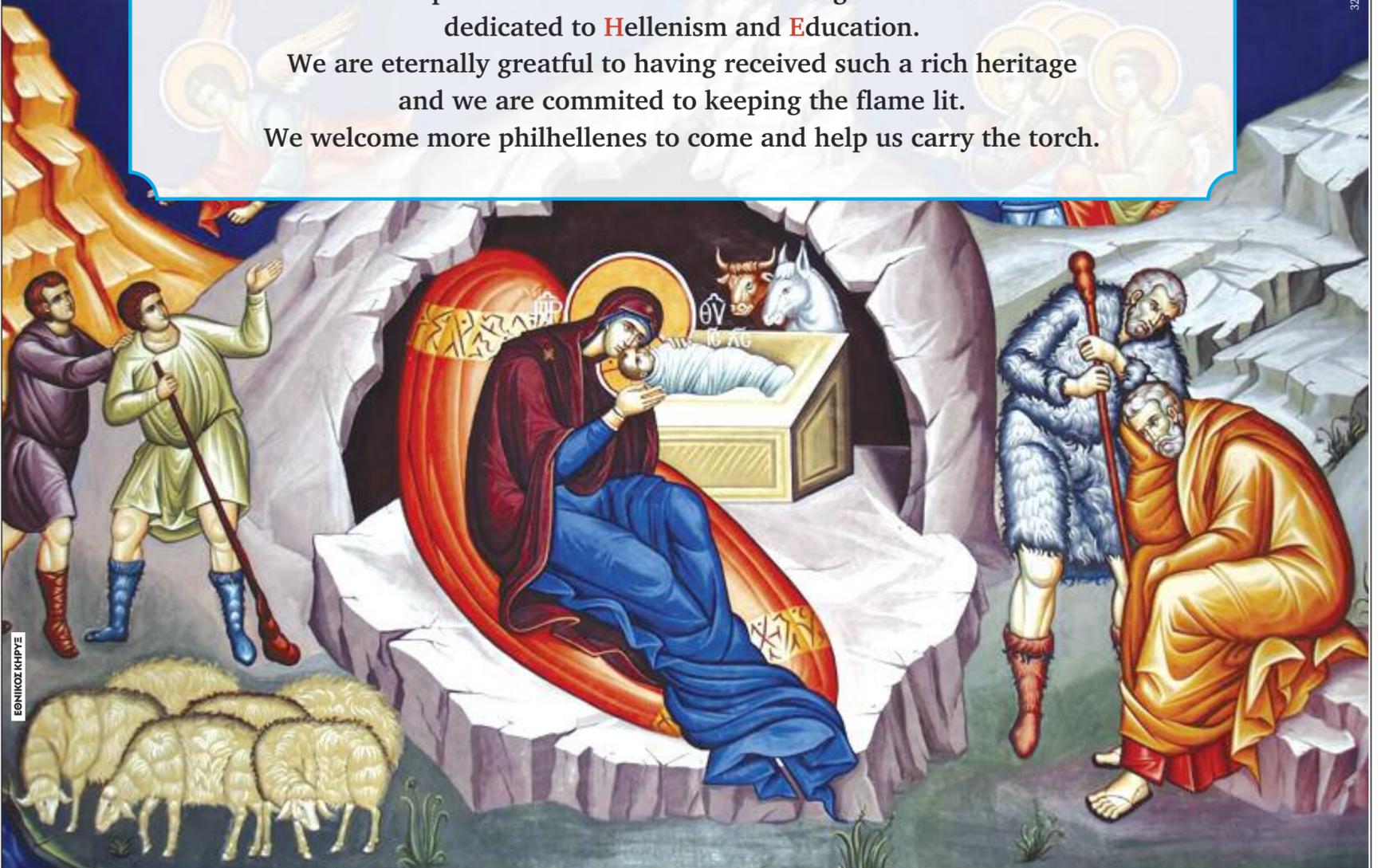
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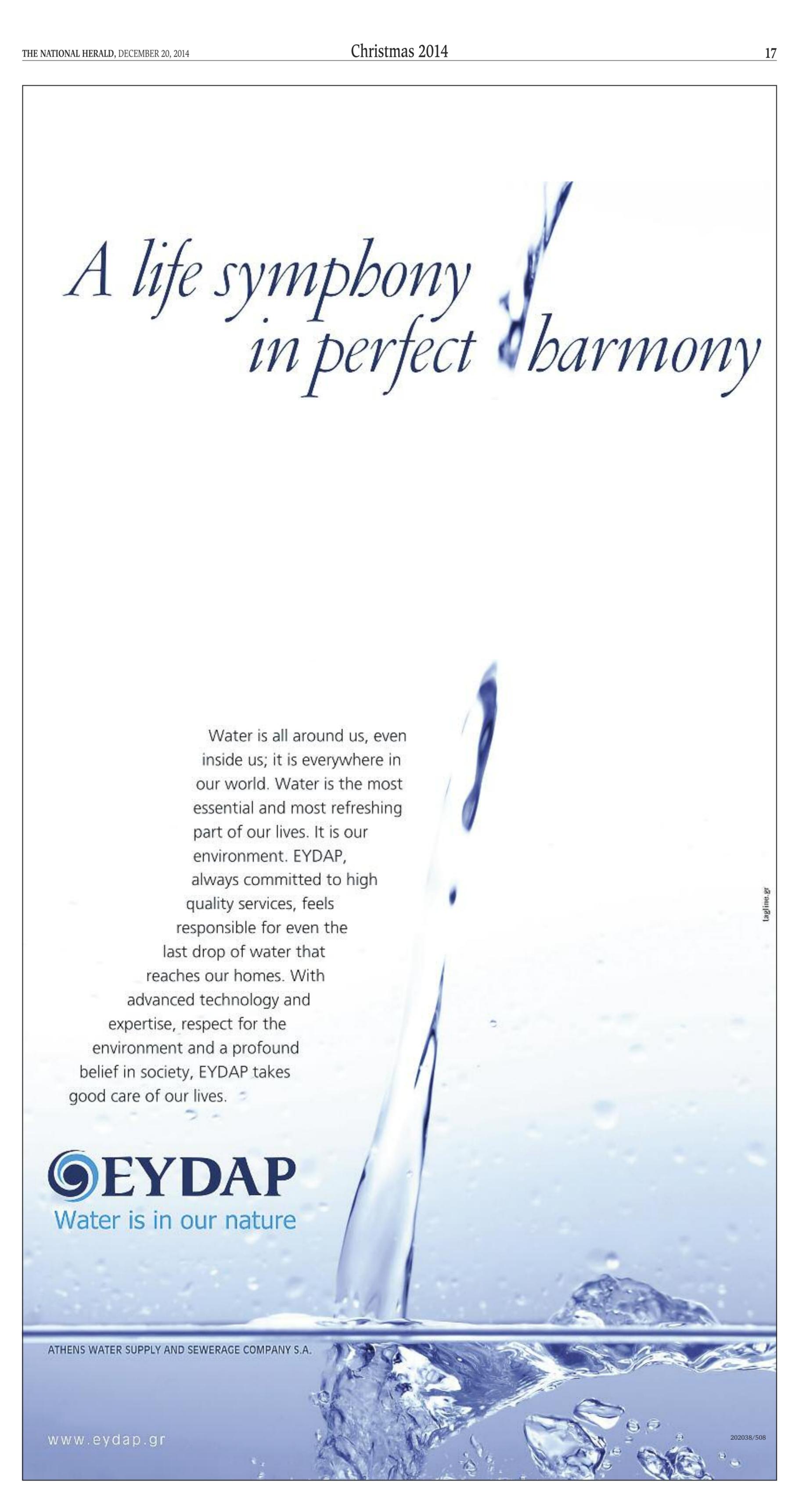
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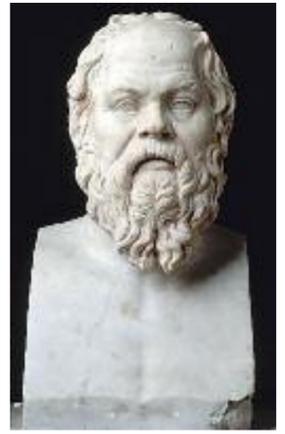
# Christmas: Confirmation of the Historical Jesus and Celebration of His Divinity

Continued from page 2

cured; he only disputes the cause. This means that darkness in fact actually did cover the earth for three hours on the day of Christ's death, supporting this detail of the gospel narrative.

### KING OF THE JEWS

Another bit of proof which supports the credibility of the gospels concerns the Star of Bethlehem. The appearance of a special star is yet another detail which has been dismissed as an unhistorical embellishment of the Christmas story. But astronomers are able to verify what a sky looked like in a given year even going back 2000 years ago. Although we do not know the exact year of Christ's birth, we know that he was born during the reign of King Herod, probably around 6 BC, approximately two years before Herod's death in 4 BC. Around that time, an unusual astronomical event took place which explains the presence of the Star of Bethlehem. To ancient people, planets looked like "wandering stars." Stars remain in fixed positions in the sky but planets travel in elliptical orbits. They looked like stars to the ancients because they also give off light. Around the time of Christ's birth, two planets came very close together in the sky. To the naked eye they seemed to create one very large, bright star. These two "stars" were the planet Jupiter, called "the King planet" because it is the largest planet, and Saturn, which was considered to be "the planet of the Jews" because of Jewish religious practices observed on "Saturday" (the day of the week named for Saturn) in other words, the Sabbath. When the Magi, Persian astronomers from the East, noticed the convergence of Jupiter and Saturn, which appeared to give birth to a new star, it was perfectly natural for them to inquire, "Where is he who is born King (Jupiter) of the Jews (Saturn)?"



Virtually no one questions the existence of Socrates, yet there is more historical evidence that confirms the existence of Jesus.

of the world. December 25th was deliberately chosen by the Church for the celebration of Christ's birth, even though he was not born on that date. Rather, that date corresponded with pagan birthday celebrations for gods, such as Sol Invictus (Invincible Sun). Choosing December 25th does not mean that details of Christ's birth or life were drawn from mythology. The Church was not taking ideas from the paganism. It was teaching its truth to the pagan world. The Church co-opted the birth of the Sun God and turned the focus on to Christ, with a simple message: Christ is the Light of the World. Don't worship the sun in the sky, which is a created object. Instead, come and worship the one who created the sun, the Sun of Righteousness, the one who enlightens everyone who is born into the world. Christ is Born!

Dr. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou is professor of Biblical Studies and Early Christianity at the University of San Diego, and author of the book *Guiding to a Blessed End: Andrew of Caesarea and His Apocalypse Commentary in the Ancient Church*.

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# Christmas, Rosh Hashanah, Naw-Ruz, Ramadan... and School

By Constantinos E. Scaros

## SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

If you're reading this on Christmas Day, you realize of course, that it is a Thursday, and you know that schools – not just private, religious ones, but also public ones, established and funded by the government – are closed.

If we remove religion from the equation for a moment and look at this strictly from a practical, self-serving perspective, what kid would complain about a day (in most cases, usually a week) off from school? Or what adult, for that matter, does not appreciate sleeping in on a Thursday morning, having an extended breakfast in robe and pajamas with the family around, kids gathered around the tree, opening presents with glee, instead of trudging through the cold, snowy weather, skidding on snow and stepping in ice-cold slushy puddles while rushing to work?

There are countless non-Christians – particularly Jews and even atheists – who decorate trees, sing carols, and exchange presents on Christmas Day. Essentially, their philosophy is: "just because I don't believe in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, why should I miss out on all the fun?"

There is a small minority, however – and whether it is comprised of noble, principled individuals or whiny attention-getters is a matter of opinion – that rails against the celebration of Christmas, invoking that in America "there is a separation of church and state!" Actually, there isn't. "But it says so in the Constitution!" Actually, it doesn't.

But before we get to the Constitution, which was not ratified until 1788 and not even established until 1787, after our nation tried its first attempt at self-government – and failed miserably – via the Articles of Confederation, let's take a look at the document upon which the United States was founded, in 1776: the Declaration of Independence. It states, early on, that "men" (i.e., all human beings, though "men" was used as the general term "are endowed by their Creator" with certain inalienable rights. Our country therefore, indisputably was founded on the basis that the government does not grant rights, rather, such rights are granted by God: we are all born with these rights, endowed by our Creator, and the government is a means by which to protect those rights.

Turning next to the Constitution, there is no explicit mention of the "separation of church and state." In fact, the original Constitution does not address the issue at all. But the Bill of Rights (the first ten Amendments), ratified en masse in 1791, explicitly state that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." (First Amendment) That's it. That's the language about religion. A logical analysis of that would mean that as long as Congress does not make such laws, state and local government are free to do as they wish. For example, it could mean that although the federal government might not be able to create a law that renders contributions to, say, the Presbyterian Church tax deductible, but not contributions to the Greek Orthodox Church, your state government can do that. It would mean, then, that New York State, for instance, could pass a law closing down all Greek Orthodox churches, if it deemed that another Christian denomination – or perhaps a different religion altogether – would be the state's official one.

Actually, early on in our nation's history, some states did have official religions. But, rest assured, that is no longer the



The Founding Fathers were believers in God, but not necessarily Christians. Thomas Jefferson presents the Declaration of Independence (Above), which refers to rights "endowed by their Creator," but in his Jefferson Bible (Right), he takes out references to Jesus' Divinity.



case. The ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 changed all of that, declaring that rights guaranteed under the Constitution apply to state and local governments as well. States, therefore, cannot deny freedom of speech, the press, right to a jury trial, etc. to its citizens, because such rights are guaranteed

to all Americans, regardless of state.

Accordingly, in light of the Fourteenth Amendment, we can now read the First Amendment as if it says: "government (federal, state, or local) shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

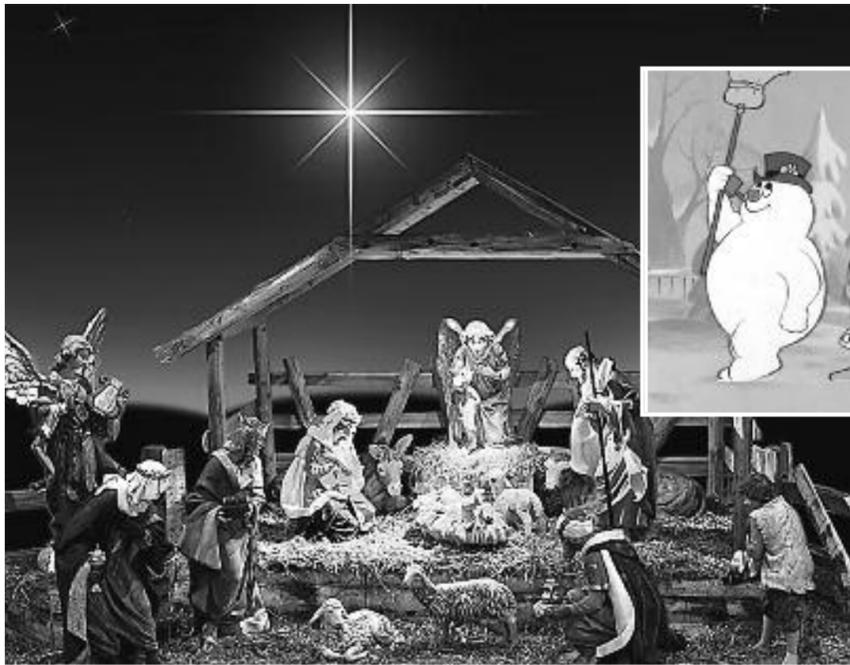
Government, thus cannot create an official religion, or any religion, for that matter. By the same token, though, it cannot prohibit the free exercise of religion. So, while New York State cannot in fact recognize Greek Orthodoxy as its official religion, it also cannot prevent Greek Orthodox from practicing their faith by attending church, etc. As with every Constitutional right, of course, there are exceptions. For instance, if the Greek Orthodox faith required its members to, say, rob a bank on Monday mornings, such practitioners could not avoid arrest and prosecution by saying: "I was merely practicing my religion." For that reason, terrorists who choose to fly airplanes into buildings cannot do so with immunity, even if they

are sincerely following what they believe to be their religion's canons.

### SO, WHY OFF ON CHRISTMAS?

Before considering why we get the day off from school or work on Christmas, let us distinguish between the private and public sectors. A private institution (a school, a company, etc.) certainly can incorporate religion into its rules and policies, including being closed on whatever religious holidays it so chooses. There is no dispute, then, that a private institution such as the St. Demetrios School in Astoria can be closed on Christmas Day. But how is it that a public school – such as P.S. 173, George Washington High School, or Arizona State University – or a public agency – such as the Massachusetts Board of Elections – can close on Christmas Day? Isn't that an "establishment" of religion by the "government," insofar as public institutions are respecting a particular religion?

Continued on page 22



Apart from being a religious holiday, Christmas is woven into the fabric of American history and culture, which is why there is no problem with displaying Frosty the Snowman (Left) in public schools, whereas a nativity scene (Right) is subject to time, place, and manner restrictions.



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# Christmas, Rosh Hashanah, Naw-Ruz, Ramadan... and School

Continued from page 20

This is where it gets a bit more complicated. The U.S. Supreme Court has long recognized that Christmas, although a celebration of the birth of the Son of God Jesus Christ, is certainly rooted in religion, it also has secular aspects to it – hence the present-wrapping, tree-decorating atheists – that are integrally woven into the fabric of American history and culture. For that matter, so is Thanksgiving Day which, of course, is a celebration of the tradition of the Pilgrims offering their thanks to God.

The reason, then, that we can have the day off on Christmas even if we work for, or attend classes at, a public institution, is because of the secular nature of Christmas. That is also the reason that Frosty the Snowman and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer can be displayed on public property without reservation, whereas nativity scenes are subject to time, place, and manner restrictions. Again, we're talking about



Why are public schools closed for Rosh Hashanah (Left) but not for Naw-Ruz, a main holiday in the Baha'i faith, whose House of Worship in Illinois is shown here (right)? Not for religious reasons, but practical ones: if a school has many students and teachers of a particular faith, it is easier to close the entire school as many would take the day off, anyway.



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public displays by the government (schools, government buildings) as opposed to private institutions, which can do virtually whatever they like.

**WHAT ABOUT THE OTHERS?**

Recently, an American Muslim woman whose child attends public school complained that the kids were off not only on Christmas Day, but also on the Jewish Holiday Rosh Hashanah, and insisted that it was unjust for the school not to grant an identical privilege to Muslim holidays, such as the end of the monthlong fast Ramadan. Even if we account for the secular component that permits Christmas to pass First Amendment muster, how does that explain Rosh Hashanah? And if Rosh Hashanah is also exempted then why not the end of Ramadan, or for that matter, particular holidays of countless other religions, such as Naw-Ruz, the new year in the Baha'i faith. (The Baha'i, by the way, are a centuries-old monotheistic religion that recognizes Moses, Abraham, Buddha, Krishna, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and the Baha'u'llah as God's core prophets.)

**JUDEO-CHRISTIAN BUZZWORD**

Defenders of why Rosh Hashanah (or, generally, the Jewish faith) belongs in that exempt category along with Christmas, and Christianity, often refer to America's "Judeo-Christian" heritage. By using that term, they set special standards for the Jewish and Christian religions in one fell swoop. But that is not why Christmas is a federal holiday, or why many public schools are closed on Rosh Hashanah.

Considering that the overwhelming majority of Americans – over 80 percent – are Christians, there is no doubt that we can accurately refer to the United States today as a "Christian nation." But it was not founded as a Christian nation, or a nation of any religion. "But the Founding Fathers were Christians," some insist. Well, some of them were, indeed. Others were Deists – who believe in God but not necessarily in the Bible or, more generally, in the Divinity of Jesus Christ. In fact, quite famously, Thomas Jefferson edited the Bible (commonly referred to as "the Jefferson Bible"), in which he removed any of Jesus' miracles, including the resurrection.

Therefore, while it is safe to say that our Founders were predominantly believers and, in fact, founded this nation based upon

rights endowed by our Creator, neither were they unanimously Christian nor did they incorporate Christianity or any other religion into the Constitution.

The "Judeo-Christian" argument, therefore, stems from the Christian religion itself which, of course, was founded in Judaism. Jesus was a Jew who quoted the Old Testament, after all. But our nation, by its very premise of not being a theocracy, cannot adhere to a specific religion, and thus celebrating Easter or Passover, for example, unlike Christmas, do not withstand First Amendment scrutiny.

Why, then, can – and do – so many children have off from school on Rosh Hashanah and Good Friday?

Actually, that is more of a practical matter. Neither Rosh Hashanah nor Good Friday are recognized federal holidays, such as Christmas and Thanksgiving. Because in some areas (New Yorkers are particularly familiar with this) where there is a heavy Jewish population in schools, Jewish teachers and students alike, consistent with the First Amendment, can take off certain days from school, and so closing on Rosh Hashanah makes practical sense, as too significant a portion of the population would not be present. In other parts of the country, however, where Jews are scant – they comprise about 2% of the population nationwide, and only about half of that involves Jews who self-identify as practitioners of the faith – schools are not closed for any Jewish holiday.

All of this is why Orthodox Greek-Americans students, for example, can take off the day from public school on Orthodox Good Friday, or on their name-days, but should not expect the public school to close down on those occasions, even though it can – and does – close for Christmas.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS!**

One final note, as I wish you all – my Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Baha'i, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Confucianist, Zoroastrian, atheist, agnostic, etc., friends – a very Merry Christmas, keep in mind that all the rants about saying "Happy Holidays" instead of Merry Christmas ignore the non-religious cultural and historical aspects of that holiday in American society. To prohibit saying "Merry Christmas" just as if prohibiting "Happy Thanksgiving" or "Happy Fourth of July," would be downright un-American.



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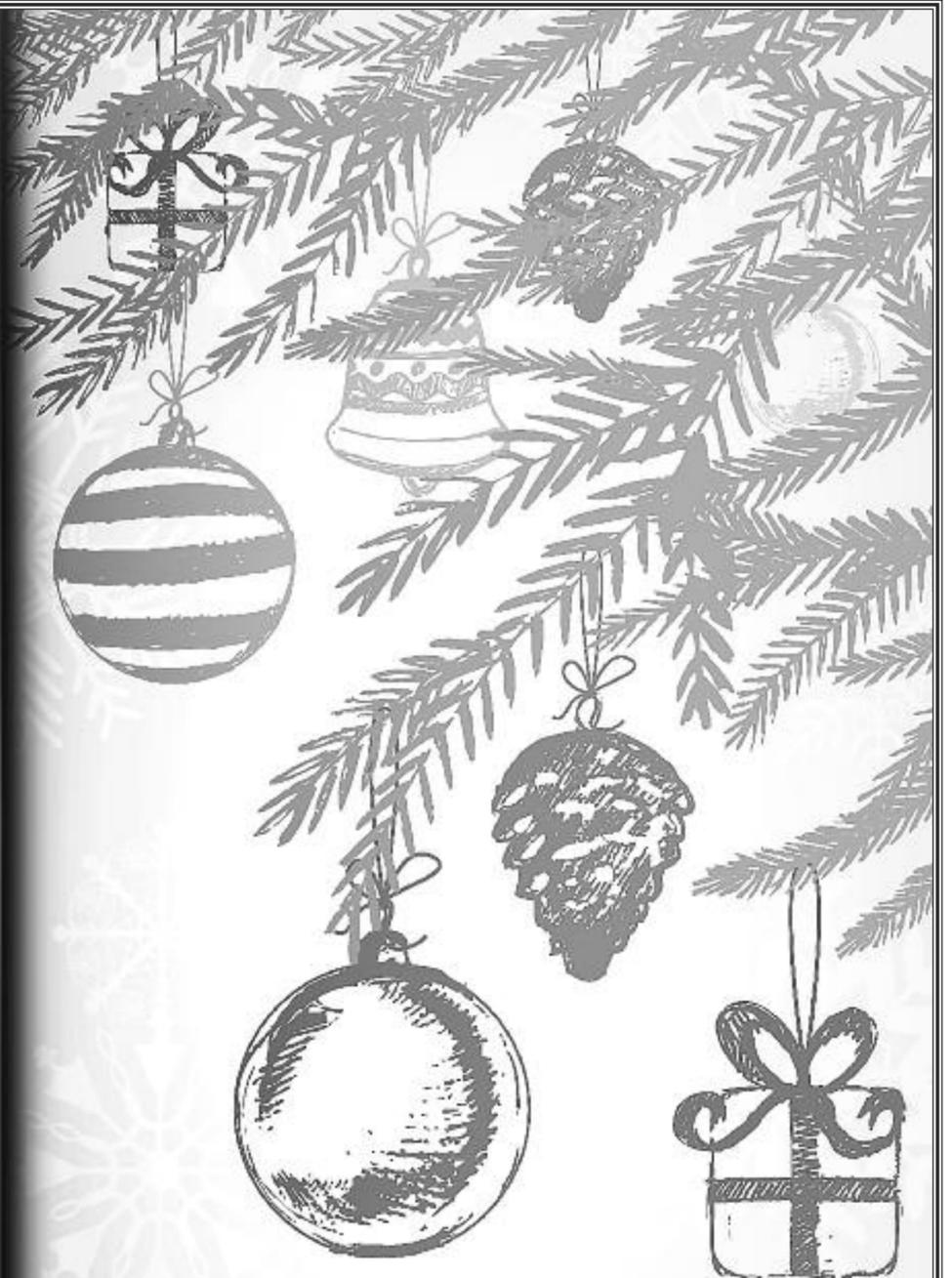
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and a peaceful, healthy  
and full of grace and progress  
New Year to all.*

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Ειρηνικό, Υγιές  
και πλήρες χάριτος και προόδου  
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# They Honor God and Christ by Not Celebrating Christmas

Continued from page 10

for Saturday is "Savato" which means Sabbath, and is not named after the planet Saturn (which in Greek is "Kronos."). That Friday is "Paraskevi" which is the day of preparation, and that Sunday is not the day of the sun, but "Kyriaki," the day of the Lord. Louey agrees that "Savato" is the appropriate word, but states that "Lord" comes from a word used to signify kings – bad kings, evil kings – and so it should not be associated with either the Father or the Son. As for a special day to honor the Lord, apart from the Sabbath, Louey says whatever the Father specified is what we should follow – no more, no less.

And that is precisely why Louey does not celebrate Christmas, or Easter, and does not believe that we ought to celebrate them, either. There are seven Feasts that we should observe, he explained:

1. Passover
2. Feast of the Unleavened Bread – the Son's burial

3. The First Fruit – offering of harvest, when the Son rose (resurrection)

4. Shavuot – what Christians call Pentecost

5. Yom Kippur (Feast of atonement)

6. Young Terah (Feast of trumpets)

7. Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles)

Again, Louey understands the distinction between some less experienced Christian leaders, who think the Son was actually born on December 25, and more experienced ones such as the Greek Orthodox, who understand that December 25 was a pagan holiday, and that the early Christians specifically chose to celebrate Christmas on that day so as to dissuade the pagans from continuing their rituals on December 25 while celebrating the birth of Christ on another day. But it is still not one of the Seven Feasts, he maintains.

The final component is the Torah, which Louey explains is not only the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus,



The Feast of the Tabernacles is one of seven Feasts we should celebrate to honor our creator, says Nazarene Willard Louey. Seven: no more, no less. And Christmas and Easter are not among them.

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), but a wider range of teachings, including the numerous letters of the Apostle Paul. "But they are not really 'Old' and 'New' Testaments," Louey points out. The correct terms are "Original" and "Renewed," referring to various Christians sects that teach the New Testament exclusively, contending that it has replaced the Old. "It does not replace," he says, "they are to be read together. It is not lineal, it is circular, it starts from the Father

and returns to the Father."

#### WHY SUNDAY SERVICES?

Louey and his fellow Nazarenes are not unique in acknowledging the Sabbath is really Saturday, not Sunday – so why do Christians have church services on Sunday? As Louey believes, "Yah is testing us. Do churches have services on Sundays because more people will attend? Because they party on Fridays and Saturdays and wouldn't give that up to go to church – and so the churches

don't want to lose those people?"

More importantly, we asked, what's the difference? What if the faithful choose to worship on a Tuesday, or a Thursday? Does it really matter? Yes, it does, Louey says: "Yah specified the Seventh Day for a reason."

It is this Biblical specificity that compels Louey to no longer celebrate Christmas. Even if the intentions are good, he says, Scripture calls for seven feasts – no more, no less. "We don't celebrate Chanukah, either," he

says. "That's man-made, too."

#### MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY?

We ended the interview with an obvious question: throughout the history of the world, there have been countless religions, and countless denominations within them, all with distinct interpretations of the supernatural, and how we ought to live our lives. Specifically turning to the supreme beings which most of us call "God" and "Jesus," there are varying interpretations of Their will by the Orthodox, the Catholics, the Baptists, the Christian Scientists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Mormons, Presbyterians, and a host of others. And each of them, of course, think they have it right. Surely no group would say: "I don't think my religion is correct, I think another is more correct, but I like to believe incorrect things." To that end, what makes Louey think that his interpretation is correct? "Because it is the only explanation that I have found which, when I apply it, the Bible makes complete and absolute sense to me."



wishes

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# Christmas: Big Breakfast, Big Dinner

Continued from page 8

land-based. This oyster soup is the perfect beginning to Christmas dinner.

Serves 6-8  
**Ingredients:**  
 2 Tablespoons flour  
 1 1/2 teaspoons Greek sea salt  
 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground pepper  
 2 Tablespoons cold water  
 1 pint fresh oysters  
 1 pint whole milk  
 1 pint 1/2 and 1/2  
 4 Tablespoons butter  
 Freshly chopped chives to garnish

Combine the flour, salt, pepper and water and stir to a smooth paste. Put the oysters and their liquid into a 1 quart saucepan. Stir the paste into the oysters and continue stirring until it boils. Let simmer over low heat until the edges of the oysters curl.

Scald the milk and 1/2 and 1/2 in a 2 quart pan. Spoon oysters and liquid into the scalded milk. Stir. Remove from heat and let stand at least 15 minutes. Add the butter. Allow to stand while the butter melts. You can also prepare this the day before and heat when ready to serve. This technique also improves the flavor of the soup.



golden on the outside.

Toss the asparagus with the lemon zest, olives, lemon juice, olive oil, salt and pepper.

Arrange the asparagus mixture in a bowl and top with shrimp and avocado slices.



## Garides (shrimp) and Elia (olive) Salád

Ease up on the richness with this light salad. Asparagus abounds at fresh markets around Christmas time. Take advantage of this delectable vegetable!

Serves 6-8  
 12-16 extra large shrimp, peeled and deveined  
 3 bunches thin asparagus, trimmed  
 1 avocado, peeled and thinly sliced  
 2 Tablespoons lemon zest  
 1 cup mixed olives, pitted  
 Juice of 2 lemons  
 Extra virgin olive oil  
 Sea salt  
 Freshly ground pepper

**Directions:**  
 Steam the asparagus lightly. Run under cold water to stop the cooking process. Heat a grill to medium-high. Grill shrimp until they turn pink and are

## Roasted Christmas Goose

Have you ever wanted to cook a Christmas goose, but had no idea how to go about it? Here is your step by step guide to cooking the perfect goose. Brining the goose will make sure the meat is flavorful and moist.

Serves 6-8  
**Ingredients:**  
 1 1/2 gallon cold water  
 1 cup sea salt  
 1/2 cup brown sugar  
 2 bay leaves  
 1 teaspoon black peppercorns  
 1 (10-12 pound) goose, fully thawed  
 Salt and pepper to taste  
 1 orange, quartered  
 1 lemon, quartered

**Directions:**  
 In a small saucepan, dissolve the salt and sugar in 2 cups of water. Add the 1 1/2 gallons of cold water to a stockpot large enough to fit the goose and brine mixture. Add the

salt/sugar water, bay leaves, peppercorns, orange and lemon, and stir to mix well. Unwrap the goose and remove anything in the cavity. Rinse and trim any excess fat from the neck and/or tail end of the goose and place into the brine so that it is completely submerged. Cover and refrigerate overnight, or up to 24 hours.

Remove the goose from the brine and pat dry, inside and

out, with paper towels. Sprinkle the goose cavity generously with salt and pepper.

Place the goose, breast-side up, in a large roasting pan with rack, to keep the bird at least 1 inch off the bottom.

With a large needle, and at an angle, prick the goose skin all-over, especially where you can see and feel fat under the surface. Be careful not to pierce the flesh. This will allow the fat

to drain during the cooking and make for a crisper skin. Salt and pepper the goose to taste, and add 2 cups of water into the bottom of the pan.

Roast at 350 degrees F. for 2 1/4 to 3 hours, until it reaches an internal temperature of 170 degrees F. Remove from oven and cover loosely with foil and let rest for at least 25 minutes before carving.

## Wild Rice Stuffing

This stuffing veers a little from tradition, but compliments the goose perfectly.

Serves 6-8  
**Ingredients:**  
 4 cups cooked wild rice  
 2/3 cup toasted hazelnuts, chopped  
 2 Jonagold apples, peeled, cored and chopped  
 1 small onion, chopped fine  
 2 teaspoons poultry seasoning  
 3 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped

## Gingered Carrots

We have to squeeze something healthy into the holiday meal, right? Your guests won't even notice with these yummy carrots!

Serves 6-8  
**Ingredients:**  
 2 pounds baby carrots  
 3 Tablespoons chopped crystallized ginger  
 3 Tablespoons butter  
 3 Tablespoons maple syrup  
 1/2 teaspoon salt  
 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 1/4 teaspoon pepper  
 2 teaspoons orange zest for garnish

**Directions:**  
 Steam carrots until tender. In a saucepan, combine the other ingredients and stir until it thickens and starts to bubble. Add the carrots and stir to coat. Top with orange zest.

## Eggnog

Nothing says Christmas like a good eggnog. I love this recipe for its creaminess!

Serves 6-8  
**Ingredients:**  
 2 cups whole milk  
 3 teaspoons vanilla extract  
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 6 egg yolks  
 1/2 cup evaporated sugar cane juice  
 1 1/4 cup good bourbon  
 2 cups 1/2 and 1/2

**Directions:**  
 Combine the milk, vanilla and cinnamon in a saucepan. Heat over the lowest setting for about 5 minutes. Bring to boiling point and then set aside.

In a large bowl, combine egg yolks and sugar. Whisk together. Whisk hot milk mixture slowly into the egg mixture until the egg mixture is steaming. This will prevent the eggs from curdling.

Pour mixture into saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly for 3-5 minutes, or until thick and steamy. Do not allow it to boil.

Allow to cool about at least an hour. Stir in bourbon and cream. Refrigerate overnight before serving. Sprinkle with additional cinnamon before serving.

*For unto you is born  
 this day in the city  
 of David a Saviour,  
 who is Christ the Lord.  
 Luke 2:11*

*Annette and Demetrios  
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# What Christmas Means to Me

## By Students of the St. Demetrios School of Astoria

The National Herald asked Greek-American students to share their thoughts on the topic: "What Christmas Means to Me." We suggested that they could submit their essays in Greek or English, and all of them chose Greek!

We share them here, as they are all worthy of the community's attention. They are listed in alphabetical order, by the author's last name.

### Christina Katehis 11th Grade

Τα Χριστούγεννα είναι μια πολύ σημαντική γιορτή για πολλούς ανθρώπους και για μένα όμως τα Χριστούγεννα έχουν μεγάλη αξία. Αυτή την ημέρα γεννήθηκε ο Χριστός μας στην βηθλεέμ. Γεννήθηκε για να φέρει αγάπη και ειρήνη σε όλον τον κόσμο. Είναι μια ημέρα που την περνάμε με την οικογένεια μας και γιορτάζουμε τον Χριστό, την αγάπη, και την ειρήνη. Όλα αυτά τα μηνύματα είναι για μένα Χριστούγεννα.

Ο Χριστός έφερε αγάπη και ειρήνη σε όλον τον κόσμο και αυτό είναι πολύ σημαντικό. Πρέπει να σεβόμαστε τους άλλους και να ευχαριστούμε τον Χριστό κάθε μέρα που μας κρατάει υγιείς και μας προσφέρει μια καλή οικογένεια και ένα καλό σπίτι για να ζούμε. Τα Χριστούγεννα όλοι οι άνθρωποι προσφέρουν την αγάπη τους και περνάνε τα Χριστούγεννα με τις οικογένειές τους. Πιστεύω πως τα Χριστούγεννα είναι μια πολύ σημαντική γιορτή και κάθε μέρα πρέπει να δείχνουμε την αγάπη μας και να ευχαριστούμε τον Χριστό για όλα που μας έδωσε.

Αυτή η ημέρα μας υπενθυμίζει τον λόγο που βρισκόμαστε σε αυτόν τον πλανήτη. Είναι μια ημέρα που πρέπει να σκεφτούμε ποια στάση ζωής και σκέψης πρέπει να κρατήσουμε. Είναι η πιο χαρούμενη εποχή για όλους. Ο κόσμος στολίζει τα Χριστουγεννιάτικα δέντρα τους και δίνουν δώρα στην οικογένειά τους. Είναι μια μέρα που την περνάμε με την οικογένεια μας. Την ημέρα των Χριστουγέννων δείχνουμε αγάπη και ειρήνη. Όμως όχι μόνο την ημέρα των Χριστουγέννων αλλά και κάθε

μέρα μπορούμε και πρέπει να δείχνουμε την αγάπη και την καλοσύνη που υπάρχει στην ζωή μας, μπορούμε να εκφράσουμε την αγάπη που έχουμε για τους άλλους. Μπορούμε να έχουμε ειρήνη με το να σεβόμαστε τον άλλο και να μην θέλουμε να του κάνουμε κακό. Είναι σημαντικό να έχουμε αγάπη και ειρήνη στη ζωή μας για να είμαστε πιο κοντά στον Χριστό και για να γίνουμε καλοί άνθρωποι, για να είμαστε καλό παράδειγμα για τους άλλους ανθρώπους στον κόσμο. Αυτή είναι η πιο μεγαλύτερη σημασία των Χριστουγέννων. Μακάρι να μπορούσαμε να φιλακίζουμε το πνεύμα των Χριστουγέννων στην ψυχή μας για να υπάρχει αγάπη και ειρήνη στον κόσμο κάθε μέρα.

### Dimitra Kokkinidou 9th Grade

Τα Χριστούγεννα είναι μια περίοδος που οι άνθρωποι γίνονται πιο εξωστρεφείς, αφήνουν για λίγο τους εξωπραγματικούς ρυθμούς της δουλειάς τους και στρέφονται στους άλλους. Τότε μόνο οι άνθρωποι μπορούν να υπακούσουν στο ένστικτό τους και να εκφράσουν τα συναισθήματά τους χωρίς να νιώθουν άβολα. Με λίγα λόγια τα Χριστούγεννα είναι μια ευκαιρία για κάθε άνθρωπο να είναι ο εαυτός του. Την εποχή των Χριστουγέννων είμαστε πρόθυμοι να ξεχάσουμε ό,τι έχουμε κάνει για τους άλλους συνανθρώπους μας και να θυμηθούμε ότι έχουμε κάνει αυτοί για εμάς. Είναι μια ευκαιρία να φέρουμε στο νου μας τους ανθρώπους που μεγαλώνουν μόνοι. Είμαστε πρόθυμοι να πιστέψουμε ότι η αγάπη είναι ό,τι δυνατότερο στον κόσμο. Πιο δυνατό και από το μίσος και από το κακό και από το θάνατο ακόμα. Μόνο τότε μπορούμε να ζήσουμε τα Χριστούγεννα.

Αλλά ποτέ δεν θα μπορούσαμε να ζήσουμε τα Χριστούγεννα μόνοι μας. Τα Χριστούγεννα συμβολίζουν τη δημιουργία ευτυχισμένων στιγμών για το αύριο και την αναβίωση στιγμών από το παρελθόν. Πόσο όμορφο είναι να στολίζουμε μαζί με την οικογένειά μας το Χριστουγεννιάτικο δέντρο με πολλά στολίδια και φωτάκια! Αρκεί να δει κανείς τη χαρά των παιδιών όταν στολίζουν το δέντρο για να αποκτήσει αμέσως εορταστική διάθεση.



Την φετινή χρονιά καθώς θα στολίζετε το δέντρο μαζί με την οικογένειά σας περάστε μερικά μαθήματα στα παιδιά σας, συζητήστε για το νόημα της αγάπης, εξιστορώντας τους τα γεγονότα και εξηγώντας τους το θαύμα των Χριστουγέννων. Διαβάστε Χριστουγεννιάτικες ιστορίες και μέσω αυτών μπορείτε να περάσετε το μήνυμά και την αξία των Χριστουγέννων, δηλαδή την αγάπη, την φιλαλληλία, την συντροφικότητα και την προσφορά. Η αναφορά στα ήθη και στα έθιμα καθώς και η εκμάθηση των καλάντων είναι ένας τρόπος για να ψυχαγωγηθεί το παιδί και να νιώσει το νόημα των γιορτών.

Τα παιδιά θα κρατήσουν τις αναμνήσεις από αυτά τα ευτυχισμένα Χριστούγεννα για όλη τους τη ζωή. Αυτές θα τις έχουν σαν οπλοστάσιο στις κακές περιόδους της ζωής τους. Μέσα από αυτές τις αναμνήσεις των ευτυχισμένων Χριστουγέννων της παιδικής τους ηλικίας θα βρουν δύναμη και κουράγιο για οποιαδήποτε δυσκολία αντιμετωπίσουν.

### Maria Kokkinidou 11th Grade

Το νόημα των Χριστουγέννων για μένα, είναι να βρισκείται κανείς με την οικογένειά του αυτές

τις γιορτινές μέρες, γιατί πιστεύω ότι είναι η μεγαλύτερη γιορτή αγάπης προς την οικογένεια. Η ατμόσφαιρα που υπάρχει στα γιορτινά σπίτια είναι ευχάριστη και ταυτόχρονα συναρπαστική γιατί βρίσκεται κανείς κοντά με ανθρώπους που αγαπά. Η θαλπωρή της σπιτικής φιλοξενίας στα σπίτια μας συνδιάζεται με την επιθυμία για φιλανθρωπικές πράξεις στις καρδιές μας.

Σύμφωνα με την εκκλησία, τα Χριστούγεννα έχουν πνευματικό νόημα. Χάρη σε αυτά, γιορτάζουμε το γεγονός της γέννησης του Χριστού αναμεσά μας. Έτσι, έχουμε την εμφάνιση του Θεανθρώπου στην ιστορία. Η εποχή των Χριστουγέννων είναι ευλογημένη καθώς, κατά την διάρκεια τους, ο κόσμος ενώνεται κάτω από τα δεσμά της αγάπης.

Τα Χριστούγεννα είναι η πιο αγαπημένη εποχή των παιδιών γιατί κάθε χρόνο παίρνουν τα δώρα τους από τον Άγιο Βασίλη. Η εμφάνισή του εδώ και αρκετά χρόνια αποτελεί μια διεθνή συνήθεια, με το μοίρασμα των δώρων σε παιδιά και ενήλικες που υπήρξαν καλοί όλη την διάρκεια της χρονιάς. Ο στολισμός του Χριστουγεννιάτικου δέντρου δίνει μια ιδιαίτερη χαρά στα παιδιά και ο ενθουσιασμός τους φαίνεται στα μάτια τους καθώς το στολίζουν. Αυτή η εικόνα του στολισμένου δέντρου δίνει μια ευχάριστη διάθεση στα παιδιά δημιουργώντας παιδικές χρι-

στουγεννιάτικες αναμνήσεις. Ωστόσο, τα Χριστούγεννα είναι μια ιδιαίτερη γιορτή για τους ανθρώπους δίνοντας αγάπη και καμώμελα σε συνανθρώπους μας που το χρειάζονται. Το μήνυμά που περνάει η γιορτή των Χριστουγέννων είναι να δίνεις αγάπη σε όλο τον κόσμο που το έχει ανάγκη δείχνοντας του καλοσύνη και γενναιοδωρία από τα βάθη της καρδιάς μας.

### Vasilis Kontodimas 9th Grade

Για άλλη μια φορά όπως και κάθε χρόνο τέτοιες μέρες η λέξη Χριστούγεννα θα μονοπωλήσει το ενδιαφέρον στις συζητήσεις μικρών και μεγάλων, θα κξει στα στόματα των ανθρώπων, θα εμφανιστεί σε οθόνες και βιτρίνες καταστημάτων. Όμως, η γέννηση του Χριστού τι πραγματικά είναι; Μήπως είναι τα κάλαντα, οι φωτισμένες εκκλησιές, η διακοπή από το σχολείο; Πάντως τα χρωματιστά φωτάκια, οι κόκκινοι φιόγγοι των δώρων, οι τεράστιες βιτρίνες των μαγαζιών και οι χιλιάδες ψεύτικοι Αι-Βασίληδες κυριαρχούν. Για μένα, όμως, τα Χριστούγεννα είναι ο μικρός, φτωχός Χριστός.

Αναρωτιέμαι πώς ακόμα και δεν αλλάξε η εικόνα του μικρού Χριστού. Ολά τ'άλλα έχουν αλλάξει. Το έλατο πήρε θέση μπροστά - μπροστά κι ως μην υπήρχαν πουθενά έλατα στη Βηθλεέμ. Τα ακριβά δώρα τυλιγμένα με όμορφα χαρτιά έγιναν οι εκπρόσωποι της αγάπης για την εποχή μας. Σήμερα, έχει τιμή η αγάπη κι έτσι μπορούμε άνετα να την αγοράζουμε και να την πουλούμε.

Μόνο που ο μικρός Χριστός είναι ακόμα σε φάτνη με άπια πάνια τυλιγμένος. Δεν έχει γύρω του χιλιάδες άχρηστα και άψυχα παιχνίδια, μόνο φτωχούς βοσκούς και τα ζώα τους. Ναι, τα Χριστούγεννα είναι μόνο αυτός ο μικρός, φτωχός σε πράγματα Χριστός. Αυτός ο αιώνια μικρός Χριστός που ακόμα με κάνει να ελπίζω ότι μία μέρα δεν θα υπάρχουν παιδιά να πεινούν - ούτε εδώ, ούτε στην Ελλάδα της κρίσης, ούτε πουθενά. Αυτόν τον μικρό Χριστό που μόνο η αγάπη ζεσταίνει και που η Παναγία βαστάει μόνη της, χωρίς νταντάδες, αυτή είναι η δική μου εικόνα των Χριστουγέννων και με μαθαίνει πως δεν μπορώ



## BYZANTINE HISTORY AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN STUDIES

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Dear Friend of Greek Culture:

As we pass through fall, on to the Christmas holidays, to the New Year, our minds engage in trying to identify, through our thinking and dialogue, what our pressing concerns are, children, school, house payments, other expenses, parents, world events. As Greek Americans, no matter how much removed from the time our kin came to this country, we are reminded by parents, grandparents of how the Hellenic people have always had to fight for its (our) survival as Hellenes.

During today's troubling times ... times of dangerous resurgence of hunger and turmoil in the holy land while the historical landscape and areas of our fathers are also going through and intensifying in bitterness, turmoil, anger and revenge ... it remains more important than ever that we Greeks fight back with resolve, solidarity, purpose, and money.

Greece and Cyprus have almost always been in the hot zones of world politics. Think and visualize how close various Greek islands and Cyprus are to the Turkish mainland; think and ponder that Macedonia (nee FYROM) has claims on the city of Salonica and the Greek State of Macedonia; that Turkey occupies 1/3 of Cyprus; how the Albanian Government mistreats the Greek minority in Albania; punitive over flights by Turkish planes of Greek territory, and the growing mutiny of Moslems in Thrace, and you quickly realize how vulnerable the tiny country of Greece and Cyprus, about 11 million people, is to its threatening and aggressive neighbors.

Sadly, too many Greeks today have grown complacent and renounced their Greekness and Orthodoxy. Prayerfully, dear reader you have not been laid back. You continue to resist and fight back for Hellas and for Orthodoxy and for that I applaud you gracefully.

These ongoing happenings, incidents, and skirmishes should motivate us to do even more for Hellenic survival of its culture, history and language by making a valuable contribution to the Greek Chairs at the University of Missouri- St. Louis. Our success depends upon your continued support. We cannot allow the Greek language (which already comprises over 30% of the English language) to wither and fall into language death.

Your Chairs at UMSL are an important ingredient in the preservation of the Greek language and culture. Right now the Greek language is literally on the ground in 100 countries on six continents, making we Greeks uniquely global, national, and local all at the same time. We must work hard to keep and enhance this coverage. Your continued generosity in the Greek Chairs at UMSL supports this vital work and keeps the Greek spirit alive.

Hellas Lives!

Nick Karakas, Chairman

P.S. If you are able to make a special additional contribution to the UMSL Greek Chairs today, it would be truly appreciated. The future of our language and culture rests on your ongoing commitment, leadership and support.

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ν'αγοράσω ούτε να πουλήσω τα πάντα.

Τα Χριστούγεννα δεν ζητώ δώρα από τους γονείς μου. Έτσι κι αλλιώς στην εποχή του υλικού ευδαιμονισμού έχω πάντα ο,τι θέλω, δεν περιμένω τις γιορτές για να πάρω κάτι. Επιθυμώ να έχω μόνο χρόνο μαζί με την οικογένεια μου για να γέλασω, να παίξω, να συζητήσω, και να σκεφτώ το αύριο, το σήμερα, το παρελθόν. Θέλω να'μαι ελεύθερος, απ' την πίεση του χρόνου και να καταλάβω το σωστό και να πράξω αυτό που πρέπει. Θέλω να έχω τη δύναμη αυτά τα Χριστούγεννα να κοιτάξω στα μάτια ένα φτωχό, άστεγο και να τον δω πραγματικά σαν άνθρωπο κι όχι να στρίψω αλλού το κεφάλι μου. Ελπίζω κι εγώ με τη σκέψη του μικρού, φτωχού Χριστού να τα καταφέρω. Ελπίζω φέτος μαζί με όλους να περάσουμε Χριστούγεννα αυτή τη φορά γεμάτα Χριστό.

**Maria Panikidis**  
10th Grade

Τα Χριστούγεννα είναι μια από τις μεγαλύτερες γιορτές της Χριστιανισμής. Ο μήνας Δεκεμβρίου είναι γεμάτος χαρά και αγάπη γιατί οι άνθρωποι ανυπομονούν για την ημέρα των Χριστουγέννων. Όταν ήμουν μικρή περίμενα τα Χριστούγεννα γιατί έφερναν μαζί τους τον Άγιο Βασίλη και τα δώρα του. Όπως όλα τα παιδιά την ημέρα αυτή είχα μεγάλη αγωνία και χαρά να ανοίξω τα δώρα που με περιμεναν κάτω από το Χριστουγεννιάτικο δέντρο.

Τώρα όμως που μεγάλωσα έμαθα και κατάλαβα την πραγματική σημασία των Χριστουγέννων. Έχω μάθει πώς τα Χριστούγεννα δεν είναι μόνο για τα δώρα που θα πάρεις και για τα δώρα που θα δώσεις στην οικογένεια και στους φίλους σου, αλλά είναι η γέννηση του Χριστού που αποτελεί μια πολύ σημαντική στιγμή για όλη την ανθρωπότητα.

Σαν Ελληνίδα που μένει στην Νέα Υόρκη,

θένω τους συνανθρώπους τους. Και να προσφέρουν με ότι τρόπο μπορούν. Η αλήθεια είναι ότι όλοι με τον τρόπο μας μπορούμε να βοηθήσουμε τον διπλανό μας, και αυτό μας φέρνει πιο κοντά στο Χριστό.

Τα Χριστούγεννα είναι η αγαπημένη μου γιορτή και έχω ένα ιδιαίτερο μέρος στην καρδιά μου γιατί μας φέρνουν όλους πιο κοντά, και μας γεμίζουν με αγάπη και θετική διάθεση.

**Konstantinos Saganas**  
11th Grade

Η γιορτή των Χριστουγέννων είναι μια από τις μεγαλύτερες και σημαντικότερες γιορτές του χρόνου. Στις 25 Δεκεμβρίου γιορτάζουμε τη γέννηση του Ιησού Χριστού. Είναι μια χαρούμενη γιορτή γεμάτη χαμόγελα, χρώματα και δώρα. Όμως γιατί γιορτάζεται η μέρα αυτή; Ποιό είναι το πραγματικό νόημα αυτής της γιορτής; Η απάντηση στο ερώτημα αυτό δεν είναι κάτι που μπορεί να δοθεί με αντικειμενικά κριτήρια παρά μόνο με υποκειμενικά. Όμως αυτό που μπορούμε να σιγουριά να απαντήσουμε είναι το ποιά είναι η βασική ιδέα της γιορτής.

Κατά τη διάρκεια των Χριστουγέννων τα μαγαζιά είναι στολισμένα και οι βυτρίνες τους σε προκάλουν να μπεις μέσα και να αγοράσεις, χωρίς να λογαριάζεις α γ α θ ά όπως τα λεφτά, δ ω ρ α γ ι α τους

πρέπει να δείχνουμε την αγάπη μας για τους άλλους με πράξεις και όχι με ακριβά δώρα. Ακόμα πρέπει να είμαστε φιλικόι με όλους τους ανθρώπους ανεξαρτήτως κοινωνικού επιπέδου ή συγγένειας. Πρέπει να δείξουμε την πραγματική αγάπη μέσα από πράξεις.

Τα Χριστούγεννα είναι μια γιορτή που πηγάζει από τη καρδιά μας. Τα δώρα πρέπει να είναι δώρα αγάπης με ιδιαίτερη σημασία. Πρέπει όλοι να ανοίξουμε τις καρδιές μας και να αφήσουμε το πνεύμα των γιορτών να μας απελευθερώσει από τα υλικά αγαθά και να μας επιτρέψει να αγαπήσουμε και να αγαπηθούμε.

**Evangelia Tsagaris**  
9th Grade

Τα Χριστούγεννα για μένα δεν σημαίνει να ανταλλάξουμε δώρα με τους συγγενείς και φίλους μας. Είναι μια μέρα που ξεχνάμε τις στεναχώριες μας και αφήνουμε τις διαφορές μας. Αφιερώνουμε το χρόνο μας με την οικογένεια μας και τους αγαπημένους μας. Όμως, το σημαντικότερο είναι ότι γιορτάζουμε την γέννηση του Ιησού Χριστού.

Σ'αυτόν τον αιώνα που ζούμε, ο κόσμος έχει χάσει την αληθινή αξία και σημασία των Χριστουγέννων που έχουν υλικό χαρακτήρα. Τα παιδιά ανυπομονούν ποτέ θα κιονήσει για να φτιάξουν χιονάνθρωπο και να παίξουν στο χιόνι και γράφουν γράμματα στον Άγιο Βασίλη διαβεβαιώνοντας πως ήταν καλά παιδιά όλη την χρονιά. Ζώντας με την ελπίδα απόκτησης ενός ακόμη δώρου που θα παίξουν για λίγο και θα βαρεθούν ελπίζουν ότι το γράμμα τους έφτασε στο Βόρειο Πόλο. Τα σχολεία και οι σύλλογοι οργανώνουν Χριστουγεννιάτικο πάρτι με φαγητά, γλυκά, μουσική, και χορό. Οι μητέρες περνούν ώρες στις κουζίνες για να ετοιμάσουν κουλουράκια και γλυκά. Οι γονείς αναλώνονται στην αναζήτηση δώρων στα μαγαζιά. Το βράδι της Παραμονής Χριστουγέννων τα παιδιά αφήνουν κουλουράκια και γάλα στο τραπέζι για τον Άγιο Βασίλη, ενώ την ημέρα των Χριστουγέννων τα παιδιά παίζουν με τα παιχνίδια τους και βλέπουνται νιές όλη μέρα.

Αυτή δεν είναι η αξία και το νόημα των Χριστουγέννων. Τα Χριστού-



εγω και η οικογένεια μου έχουμε συνδιάσει έθιμα και απο τις δύο χώρες. Στολίζουμε το σπίτι μας, φτιάχνουμε παραδοσιακά Ελληνικά γλυκά όπως κουραμπιέδες και μελομακάρονα, αλλά και γλυκά και φαγητά απο αυτή τη χώρα. Τα Χριστούγεννα σημαίνουν πολλά, δεν είναι μόνο μια γιορτή, αλλά είναι ένα κομμάτι του εαυτού μας. Μας γεμίζει χαρά και αγάπη για όλους τους ανθρώπους. Επίσης για εμένα σαν μαθήτρια που είμαι, τα Χριστούγεννα σημαίνουν διακοπές και ξεκούραση απο τα μαθήματα. Τα περιμένω με μεγάλη αγωνία και χαρά για να βρεθώ με τους φίλους και την οικογένεια μου.

Έχω παρατηρήσει ότι οι άνθρωποι αυτη την περίοδο των γιορτών είναι πιο φιλικόι και πρόσχαροι. Τους αρέσει να βο-

αγαπημένους του ώστε να μπορεί να αποδίξει για ακόμη ένα χρόνο με δώρα. Λόγω αυτού ο καταναλωτισμός αυτές τις λίγες μέρες γιορτής και χαράς "χτυπάει" κόκκινο. Έτσι μπορούν οι καταστηματάρχες να πουλήσουν πανάκριβα αγαθά στους ανθρώπους που νομίζουν ότι τα ακριβά δώρα είναι το νόημα των Χριστουγέννων.

Τα Χριστούγεννα σήμερα είναι μια γιορτή που έχει αρχίσει να χάνει το πραγματικό νόημα της λόγω της υπερκατανάλωσης αλλά και λόγω των ανθρώπων που διαρκώς χρειάζονται υλικά αγαθά για δώρα ώστε να μπορέσουν να καλύψουν τις ψυχολογικές τους ανάγκες και να είναι χαρούμενοι. Τα Χριστούγεννα είναι γιορτή αγάπης και κατά την προσωπική μου άποψη κατά τη διάρκεια των Χριστουγέννων

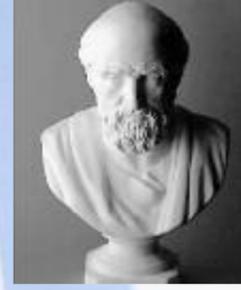
γεννα είναι η εποχή της αγάπης επειδή ο Θεός είναι ο Θεός της αγάπης. Τα Χριστούγεννα είναι μια μέρα που τη γιορτάζουμε με χαρά. Τα Χριστούγεννα είναι η μέρα να μοιραστούμε στιγμές και αναμνήσεις που θα μας είναι πολύτιμες για πολλά χρόνια. Είναι ο καιρός για να δώσουμε σ'εκείνους που έχουν ανάγκη.

Τα Χριστούγεννα είναι μια νέα αρχή. Είναι ο καιρός για να ξεκάσουμε τις Πληγές του παρελθόντος και να αρχίσουμε ξανά από την αρχή. Είναι η ημέρα που αφιερώνουμε τον χρόνο μας με τους αγαπημένους μας. Είναι μια σημαντική μέρα για όλους μας γιατί γιορτάζουμε την γέννηση του Χριστού, του Θεού της αγάπης.

Ελπίζω όλοι να ζήσουν φέτος το αληθινό νόημα αυτών των Χριστουγέννων.

The President  
of the Federation of Hellenic Medical Societies  
of the United States & Canada

**Spyros G.E. Mezitis, MD, PhD**



wishes to all Hellenes and Philhellenes  
a Very Merry Christmas  
and a Happy and Healthy New Year 2015

May the New Year bring strength to Hellenic Education,  
unity in the Greek American Lobby,  
and synergy among the Greek-American Societies!

For Greece, may the New Year bring  
hope, prosperity and social justice.

**Spyros G.E. Mezitis, MD, PhD**  
Endocrinology, Diabetes and Thyroid Diseases  
The New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill-Cornell Medical Center  
Lenox Hill Hospital

220 East 69th Street, New York, NY 10021  
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