

DECEMBER 19, 2020

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The National Herald
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The Season of Believing

Dear Readers,

We hope this unique – to say the least – holiday season finds you and yours well, safe, and preparing to celebrate Christmas in a meaningful and enjoyable way.

As we reflect on the past year, and look towards the year 2021, we are filled with hope for the future. Hope that this year will bring us all joy, good health, prosperity and remind us to stay connected to what matters most – each other.

At The National Herald, it is our goal for this holiday season and the year that lies ahead to be especially grateful for each and every one of our blessings. This year has demonstrated how quickly our daily lives and, frankly, our realities, can change.

This Christmas, I would like to remind you of St. Nicholas and his legendary habit of secret gift giving. While he may not be the one that leaves the presents under the tree, his spirit works through us each time we give



freely without expectation and each time we spread joy, love and light.

Thus, I leave you with this: give like you've never given before. Give with your hands, with your words, with your wallet, and always with your whole heart. One small act of kindness, one small gift in whatever form you choose to give it, will make an exponentially larger impact than the effort originally cast.

Each of you knows someone – friend, neighbor, or relative, here or in Greece – or some group or organization – church, charity, school – that has been hit particularly hard or helps others who have been. Seek them out. Give what you can.

This is the season of giving and of believing. So, believe in the Christmas magic; believe in St. Nicholas; believe in hope; and most importantly, believe that you will have an impact for a better tomorrow.

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TO YOU ALL.**



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MERRY CHRISTMAS HEALTHY AND HAPPY NEW YEAR

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*The president Lambros (aka Larry) Stassinou
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Happy Holidays

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*Μονή της Χώρας (Κωνσταντινούπολη):
“Η Γέννηση του Χριστού” - Εξωτερικός Νάρθηκας.
Ψηφιδωτό, 14ος αιώνας*

*Chora Monastery (Istanbul):
“The Nativity of Christ” - Outer Narthex.
Mosaic, 14th century*



Αγαπητοί μου αδελφοί και αδελφές,
Beloved Friends,

Γιορτάζοντας τη Γέννηση του Κυρίου μας Ιησού Χριστού, της σαρκωμένης αγάπης, ας στρέψουμε τις καρδιές μας με αγάπη ο ένας στον άλλον και ας αντικρύσουμε ο καθένας στον διπλανό του την ζωντανή εικόνα του Θεού.

Εύχομαι και προσεύχομαι να εορτάσετε το Άγιο Δωδεκαήμερο με υγεία και ασφάλεια και το Νέο Έτος 2021 να φέρει στον καθένα και στην καθεμία σας, αλλά και σε όλο τον κόσμο την ίαση, την ειρήνη και την ανακαίνιση.

As we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, Incarnate Love, let us all turn to one another with loving hearts and see in each other the face of God, living icons of the Divine.

I pray that you may celebrate the Holy Days of December in safety and health, and the New year of 2021 will bring to you and to all the world healing, peace, and restoration.

Μετά θερμών προσευχών και πατρικών ευλογιών
With blessings and fervent prayers,

† ο Αμερικής Ελπίδοφορος

† ο Αμερικής Ελπίδοφορος
Archbishop Elpidophoros of America





*Merry
Christmas
& Happy
New Year!*

Michael and Robin Psaros & Family





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Sharing Hope This Nativity

This Nativity, I'd like to offer a few words of encouragement to our community near and far. No matter what we face in this life, Christ's birth reminds us of the great hope that grounds us as His people.

Above all, we have our faith: the Orthodox Christian Church and 2,000 years of sharing and living the Gospel. Such a rich tradition points always to the hope of renewal. We have the blessings of family and friends; though many of us are experiencing those relationships in different ways because of the pandemic, the love and bonds that connect us are not dissolved. We also have our cherished freedoms as Americans, as well as our cherished heritage. All these gifts can offer hope as we thank God for them.

Another reason to be hopeful as Orthodox Christians in the US is International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and the good work this agency accomplishes worldwide, reaching out to people in dire need. Especially during this time of pandemic and global crisis, I am thankful for IOCC's diligence, persistence, and creativity in service. It is not an easy time, yet IOCC continues serving people in need—young and old, near and far—as they face difficulties only complicated by the pandemic.

We can all thank God for the service IOCC offers, extending a helping hand in our name and renewing hope because of Christ's love in situations where we cannot go ourselves, including right here across the United States.

A blessed, joyful Nativity—and many years of good health—to all of you and your loved ones.

— John G. Rangos Sr., Co-Founder
International Orthodox Christian Charities



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*Wishing you and yours
a Merry Christmas
and a Happy and Healthy
New Year
Maria Allwin*

2020 Christmas Dreams and New Year’s Meditations

By Constantine S. Sirigos

Like the difficult and disappointing Pascha we all endured this year, this will be a Christmas like no other. More than the great Feast of Spring, Christmas is the social holiday par excellence – and yet, those “auld acquaintances” will have to wait until next Christmas and New Years to be greeted, many of our friends will shout their “Merry Christmas” by phone or internet – and I have already endured painful thoughts of not being able to exchange warm and sweet holiday hugs with dear family members.

These will be holidays of solitude – but in addition to pangs and sighs, solitude brings chances to reflect – and make plans and prepare for that most challenging but worthwhile endeavor: reorienting our lives and setting out on new paths. In middle age, that often means a last chance for accomplishments that were once very important to us – but were set or swept aside for one reason or another.

Making New Year’s Resolutions are an integral part of the back end of the 12 Days of Christmas

Making New Year’s Resolutions are an integral part of the back end of the 12 Days of Christmas – what I want to do here is to urge you to populate your list not just with tasks rooted in guilt or practical considerations, but with the stuff of our dreams – day dreams ... and night dreams.

Think back to the daydreams of your teenage and college years – when you thought everything was possible. Before the post-college frustrations and disappointments melted away much of your ambition and optimism.

But, surprise! By your late 20s and 30s many of you accomplished more and greater things than you ever thought of – so if they were possible, what about realizing those early daydreams after all?

Time for an example that many of you would recognize.

First I must say that I would never denigrate the ability and success of our restaurateurs who are the core of our Diaspora communities, but while the some in the new generations embraced the industry and have taken the Community’s restaurants to new heights, their forbears had ... other plans.

I have yet to meet an immigrant restaurateur whose schoolboy dream was to open a restaurant. The had other dreams – and the energy and talent to realize them in a country that provided them with opportunities rather than obstacles, which was often the case in Greece, due to wars and depressions – and cronyism.

Many of those courageous Hellenes who took the terrifying journey across the seas and turned the lemons they often found there into lemonade could and should have been doctors and lawyer, artists and musicians – and entrepreneurs of corporate proportions. Most of them had within them seeds that were never allowed to germinate. I know of one hard-working man who co-owned a luncheonette in Brooklyn and in his limited spare time taught himself to play the mandolin – and made wonderful wood carvings. He was a man of hidden gifts, which brings us to the topic that inspired this article.

Notwithstanding that it is not the spiritual essence of the holiday, Christmas is a time of gifts. The activities surrounding the giving and receiving of gift has all but swallowed up the meaning of Christmas (that I believe this sad trend accelerated in the “greed is good” 80s is a topic for another time). Sometimes we spend time wondering, perhaps with a measure of guilt – or memories of past disappointments – about what our loved ones were planning to give us.

What I want to say, however, we have already been given fantastic gifts – by God or nature. We have a wealth of undeveloped talents – remember the day dreams – and talents undiscovered – that is where the night dreams come in.

Up to one third of our life is devoted to sleeping, but humanity has long known that those hours are not blank pages in our lives. Setting aside what Drs.



DEBBY HUDSON ON UNSPLASH



Freud and Jung told us about their deeper meaning, things on the surface of dreams also have value. There we see ourselves – or of people who represent our forgotten selves. We observe activities people are enjoying themselves doing – singing, dancing, building skyscrapers, you name it, you have dreamed it. Maybe they are symbolic – we are painting a house but we might really be able to become fine artists. We are carrying books but if we looked closely we would see that our names are on their covers. We dismiss those things and forget them, but I believe they are reminders or who we are or can be.

Dreams are serious. The bible passages about Christmas tell us so – and other Christmas elements. After the birth of Christ, St. Joseph was warned in a dream to take the Theotokos and Jesus to Egypt for safety. And there is that beloved poem we know from

the opening: “’Twas the night before Christmas,” and which then says “the children were nestled all snug in their beds; while visions of sugar-plums dancing in their heads” - those were dreams. And the Nutcracker, the herald and highlight of the holiday for many, is about ... a dream.

Take your dreams seriously, those that dominate our sleep and those that fascinate us when awake. They are gifts ...

"You don't know what's inside you until you reach down and pull it out."

often reminding us of our ‘gifts’. I have often told friends who dont believe they have this talent or that – artistic, musical, athletic – “you dont know what's inside you until you reach down and pull it out." One of my recent dreams got me thinking these thoughts.

I woke up with a tune in my head. That is not the interesting part – that has happened several times and I’m sure some of the music we love was born in dreams. The interesting thing is that I dreamed a complete tune with the harmony part in it – but when I am awake, I can’t sit down at the piano and play real harmony. The dream told me: “surprise, it’s in you.”

I can only imagine what is in all of you. But you – and your dreams, know better. You know about your forgotten or ignored gifts but unlike the toys we received as children, those gifts call for work, not play. They take time, but guess what? Coronavirus has given us some extra time – but it has also accelerated economic trends connected to fears of massive job losses. For many of us, our current jobs may disappear or become part-time gigs.

What to do? Those dreams. Reminders of your gifts. The things you once thought of doing on your own or with others. Listen to what your night dreams are telling you. Take more seriously the waking dreams – add the actions they suggest to you for New Year’s Resolutions. And like the ad says – maybe the writer dreamed it – “Just do it.” Merry Christmas, Happy New Year to all.



Merry Christmas
&
Happy New Year

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By Eleni Sakellis

The holiday dessert table is incomplete without the traditional favorites, melomakarona and kourambiedes. There are several different versions of the recipe for melomakarona or honey cookies, though all feature a quick dip in honey syrup for the freshly baked cookies. Melomakarona are also called ‘finikia’, depending on the region of Greece. The basic recipe is the same, but in some areas the cooking method differs – finikia are deep fried, while melomakarona are baked, and then dipped in honey syrup. In either case, the results are delicious, but baking offers the advantage of easy clean-up.



Kourambiedes, coated in powdered sugar, even look like the snowy season. Of course, the confectioners’ sugar will get everywhere, but the resulting cookies are worth the effort.

Melomakarona/Finikia (Honey Cookies)

- * 7 cups all-purpose flour
- * 1 cup farina
- * 2 teaspoon baking powder
- * 1 teaspoon baking soda
- * 1/2 cup sugar
- * 1 cup olive oil
- * 1 cup orange juice
- * 1 tablespoon finely grated orange zest
- * 1/4 cup Metaxa

- For the syrup:**
- * 2 cups honey
 - * 2 cups sugar
 - * 2 cups water
 - * 1 cinnamon stick

- For topping:**
- * 1 and 1/2 cups finely chopped walnuts
 - * 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, farina, baking powder, baking soda and 1/2 teaspoon of salt. In a separate bowl, whisk together the sugar, oil, juice, zest and cognac and add to the dry ingredients, mix until combined. Form the dough into ovals about two inches long. If desired, form the cookie with a walnut half in the center or a combination of finely chopped walnuts and ground cinnamon as a filling. Place the cookies on a baking sheet and bake in a preheated 350-degree oven about 20 to 30 minutes or until golden brown. Meanwhile, make the syrup. In a large saucepan, combine the honey, sugar, water and cinnamon stick, bring to a boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Dip the just-baked cookies into the syrup and allow them to absorb some of the liquid, but work quickly so they don’t dissolve in the syrup. Cool the cookies completely and garnish with a sprinkle of chopped

walnuts and a dash of ground cinnamon. Makes about 40-50 cookies.

Christmas Favorites: Melomakarona and Kourambiedes

Kourambiedes

2 cups unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
1/2 cup confectioners’ sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup blanched almonds, chopped, toasted and set aside to cool
4-5 cups all-purpose flour
Ouzo for sprinkling (optional)
Confectioners’ sugar for coating

Beat the butter with the 1/2 cup confectioners’ sugar until fluffy. Add 2 cups of the flour, the vanilla and the almonds and mix together. Add the rest of the flour, or as much as needed for the dough to form and not stick to your fingers, though not more than five cups. Do not overwork

the dough or add too much flour, or you’ll end up with tough cookies. Form half-moon shapes and place on cookie sheets. Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven for 20-30 minutes until lightly golden. Meanwhile, sprinkle a large piece of waxed paper with a generous amount of sifted confectioners’ sugar. When the cookies are done, remove them from the cookie sheet and immediately place them on the waxed paper covered with confectioners’ sugar. If using the ouzo, sprinkle the cookies at this point and then sift confectioners’ sugar on top to coat the cookies completely. Once cooled, place the kourambiedes on a platter or store them in an airtight container. Makes about 50-60 kourambiedes.



Tale of Two Orthodox Christmases

By Alexander Billinis

For me, Christmas first and foremost is where my wife and children are, and we have lived in many places. Christmas is also, for calendrical reasons, celebrated twice.

I am Greek Orthodox, my wife is Serbian Orthodox, we are a family divided by a common religion and Byzantine culture. Greeks, like Bulgarians and Romanians, by and large celebrate Christmas on December 25, whereas Serbs, Russians, Georgians, and other Eastern Christians celebrate on January 7. Wherever we have been, the holiday is twice.

When we lived in Greece (and then later in Serbia) we had the opportunity to celebrate both in the different venues, which allows for us to compare the different traditions of this common holiday. What follows is a composite of various times we celebrated between the two countries.

I must regret, as a Hydrriot, never having celebrated Christmas on my beloved island; all my Greek Christmases have been Athenian, usually celebrated at my cousin's house. Like so many Athenians, my cousin lives in a low rise 'polykatikia' (apartment building). In this case, three of the four floors are members of the same family, so the vertical family membership would meet in her dining room.



Usually there would be a Christmas tree, though she might have sported the Christmas ship more authentically Greek. The whole extended family is largely of island and merchant marine background, so we all should be decorating ships rather than trees.

The Greek Christmas fare is probably well familiar to the reader, so I will now move forward thirteen days to the Old Calendar Christmas celebrated by Serbian Orthodox. The distance from Athens to my wife's hometown of Sombor, in the extreme northwest of Serbia is about 800 miles, a quick flight and a two-hour drive from Belgrade if by plane.

The plane arriving in Belgrade is normally greeted by a thin coat of snow and temperatures easily twenty degrees colder than in Athens. The White Christmas that is rare in much of Greece is quite usual in Serbia.

Our ultimate destination, Sombor, is another 120 miles from Belgrade, north of the Sava and Danube Rivers, where the Byzantine domes and hills of the Balkans give way to the flatlands and baroque spires of Central Europe. This is Vojvodina Province, formerly part of Austria Hungary, so the culture and cuisine are a delightful mix of Byzantium and Austro-Hungarian. Serbians settled en masse here in the 1700s, defending the Austrian Empire



against Turkish attacks, and building thriving communities in a very multiethnic mosaic. Vojvodina retains this kaleidoscope of cultures – two dozen nationalities live in an area the size of Massachusetts.

Christmas Eve, which might begin in the yard of Sveti Jovan (St. John) Church, herein pictured, includes the burning of a 'badnjak' tree (analogous to a yule log), along with plenty of 'rakija', perhaps, given the season, rakija fortified with honey and served hot.

A Christmas Eve meal, likely as not at my mother-in-law's house, would probably be a fish dish, perhaps a paprikash, a fish

stew cooked, most traditionally, over a fire outside in a cast iron kettle, heavily laced with paprika, sweet or hot. In Sombor, about one fourth of the population is Hungarian, and its culinary influence is part of the local spice.

Christmas morning is usually spent in preparing a large meal, and in Serbia pork is usually preferred to the analogous lamb in Greece. Christmas trees are uncommon in homes, though municipal squares and buildings do have a standard-globalized array of Christmas decorations, including a large tree and plenty of baubles.

My wife remembers her

grandparents, who celebrated Christmas in a more traditional way. Rising early, her grandmother and family would clean their faces with a fresh red apple, to foster a ruddy complexion symbolizing health. She would also bless her fields and flocks, using wine and wheat. Two Christmas breads would be baked, a large one called 'zdravlje' (health) to be consumed with the Christmas meal, and a smaller bread with basil sprigs, saved to be cut and drank with wine a few days after Christmas.

The Christmas table would be set with the candle below the household icon, and the two

freshly baked breads. The Christmas meal would begin with my wife's grandfather saying a prayer, and at the same time tossing shelled walnuts, another symbol of prosperity and ubiquitous in any Serbian 'avlija' (garden).

Like everywhere else, these older traditions have subsided to a more commercialized, some might say Americanized, form of Christmas. We exchanged gifts, an activity normally reserved in Serbia for New Years Day, and set forth to a meal.

Few can match my mother-in-law's culinary expertise, with all ingredients locally sourced. We would start with 'Zuta Supa' (literally translated as yellow soup) wherein two meats (usually pork and turkey, both raised by my in-laws) would combine with parsnips, carrots, garlic, onion, and potatoes for a hearty soup. My mother-in-law taught me to cut hot peppers into the soup, perfect for a cold day and a natural antibiotic. Whereas for Easter pork would usually be roasted on a spit, for Christmas it would be an oven roast, likely as not with potatoes and vegetables.

When all of this was over, it would be time for sweets, and Vojvodina's position as a crossroads meant that it could be a mélange from baklava to the 'tortes' favored by Austrians and Hungarians, often paired with multiple shots of rakija, ostensibly for digestive purposes. More plausible digestive arguments could be made for Serbian mineral water, plucked from spas known and celebrated since Roman times. Nobody leaves a Serbian meal anything but satisfied, and a draught of 'kisela voda' is often just what is need to assist the stomach whose work has just begun.

After that, talk, fellowship, perhaps more rakija, and the pleasures of warmth derived from woodburning stoves make our dual Christmases a double delight.

The treasure of celebrating two Orthodox Christmases, in two Orthodox countries, over the course of a few years is something that will remain with us always. Here, on this side of the Atlantic, we do our best to continue the traditions of our dual Orthodox Christmases.

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of the Birth of
Christ the Son of God

Peace on Earth to all

The BEHRAKIS Family

No Drama Corona-Christmas Has Some Secretly Jumping for Joy

By **Leanne Italie**
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Corritta Lewis has a huge extended family. Her mom is one of 12 siblings. Usually, Christmas means that she, her wife and their 2-year-old son dig out their cold-weather gear for the schlep from home in sunny Southern California to Ohio and days of holiday chaos.

Not this year.

"We're happy to be saving money, spending more time together, and to just have a less stressful holiday," said the 31-year-old human resources analyst in Oceanside. "We don't have to deal with the crowded airports, stores and overall mania that the holiday brings. We're going to lie in our pajamas and watch movies all day."

Though Thanksgiving pleas to stay put were ignored by thousands, and authorities fear the same for Christmas and New Year's, many around the world are gleefully looking forward to spending the December holidays at home without the expense, family drama and travel headaches they normally endure.

Some plan to use the money they save to buy gifts for those in need as coronavirus deaths and hospitalizations rage on nearly 10 months into the pandemic.

Many who stayed home during Thanksgiving to keep safe already experienced the restfulness of opting out of holiday madness, said Maryanna Klatt, a professor of clinical family medicine at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and a facilitator of mindfulness classes.

"What has emerged is that many people discovered something via the Thanksgiving restriction of gathering with less people — they loved it. They thought they would feel a huge sense of loss from the inability to travel and the typical gathering with larger groups," she said.

Participants in her classes reported less anxiety without extended family and friends around, and deeper, more meaningful conversations with the smaller numbers left around them.

"COVID-19 and its ensuing collateral damage may have some realizations that sculpt future behavior, and not all in a negative way. We just need to

have our eyes open to these surprising realizations," Klatt said, falling short of the "silver lining" cliché.

In Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 33-year-old Shannon O'Reilly usually travels back home to New Jersey at Christmas, "and it never, ever feels like a vacation." She and her husband both have large extended families. Trying to squeeze in visits with all of them leaves little meaningful face time for any, she said.

"We're constantly house hopping and never really feel settled when we go back up there. Quite frankly, as soon as we land on the tarmac in Newark, we both look at each other every time and say, 'Why are we doing this?'"

This year, it will be just the two of them in 80-degree weather with "zero familial obligations."

As it did for Thanksgiving, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is urging people to avoid travel during the December holidays while the pandemic continues to surge. For those who don't heed the call, the CDC recommends travelers get tested for COVID-19 before and after their trips. Testing before travel is critical to help stave off asymptomatic spread of the virus, warns Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus response coordinator.

On the Upper East Side of Manhattan, 38-year-old Rosalin Siv can't say she's happy to be missing her annual holiday trip to Southern California with her husband and 4-year-old son to visit her parents, siblings, and extended family and friends.

But she's relieved.

"This year I'm pregnant, and the thought of juggling a busy work schedule with holiday and family activities is more stressful than usual," said Siv, the founder of an online bakery. "I can't say I'll miss all the logistics."

There's the 5- to 6-hour plane trip, for one, requiring numerous activities and snacks to keep their child calm and contented in transit.

The sentiments are shared around the world.

Ben Taylor, 43, lives on the Kent coastline of southeast England with his wife and two kids, ages 6 and 2. He calls their normal Christmas holiday a "crazy magical mystery tour" that lasts about a week. They usually travel



Holly Nordenberg, left, poses with her family, Gia Nordenberg, 3, from second left, husband Ross Nordenberg and Gwen Nordenberg, 5, at the Hann's Christmas Tree Farm in Oregon, Wis., on Nov. 25, 2020. Holly Nordenberg said her family will stay home and will focus on "gratitude and baking" at home.

by car, about four hours, to visit relatives and old friends in Norfolk.

"I've always felt a little envious because it feels like we visit house after house where people are relaxing, whilst not getting to do the same thing ourselves," he said. "Well, now it's our turn!"

Vaccines for COVID-19 are on

the way, but they won't come in time to save Christmas for most. Birx and other virus experts couldn't be clearer about the need to avoid travel and large gatherings, along with hugging and kissing loved ones outside of one's protective social bubble.

Nicoletta Barbata is an Italian who's been living on the Greek

island of Santorini for nearly four years. Christmas is usually her one and only trip home to Milan every year.

"I usually stay for four to six weeks," said the single Barbata, who's 39. "My time back to Milan is devoted to catching up with my family and friends, spending time with my parents and meet-



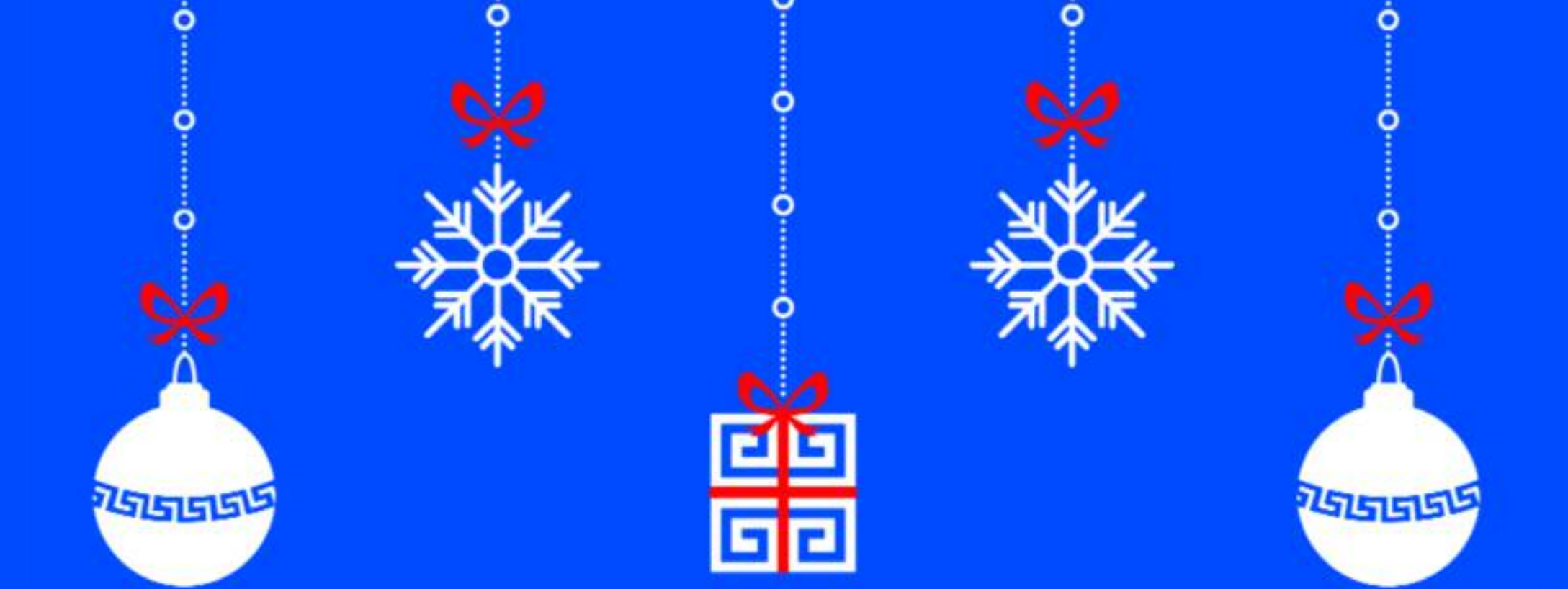
Corritta Lewis, center, and her wife Mea pose with their son Caleb, 2, in Oceanside, Calif., on Dec. 4, 2020. For some planning to stay home for Christmas, giving up the hassle and family drama of holiday travel isn't such a bad deal in the end. Corritta Lewis, who has a huge extended family in Ohio, says she is looking forward to staying home with her family and avoiding the overall mania that the holiday brings.

Merry Christmas
&
Happy New Year

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*Wishing you a
joyous Christmas and
a happy and healthy
New Year*

FROM THE FAITH ENDOWMENT



Amidst a year of unprecedented challenges and uncertainties, FAITH continued to support and celebrate our community's emerging young leaders and award over 130 scholarships in 2020. FAITH welcomed 57 of the brightest and most accomplished graduating high school seniors within the Greek American community into the FAITH Scholarship for Academic Excellence program and awarded 75 FAITH STEM scholarships to college STEM majors who maintained active involvement within their Greek American and Greek Orthodox communities while enrolled in college. In partnership with Tufts University, FAITH also inaugurated its "Strategic Leadership for Transformative Action" program to support the community's leaders, granting them an executive education certificate from The Fletcher School. We continue to keep those affected by the events of this year in our thoughts and prayers and extend wishes for good health, happiness and safety to you and your loved ones throughout the Christmas season and into the New Year.



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A JOYOUS AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR TO
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First Lady Urges Kindness during Holiday Clouded by Pandemic

WASHINGTON (AP) — Melania Trump is encouraging people to perform small acts of kindness to help lift the spirits of others who are feeling blue during the pandemic-tinged holiday season.

During an appearance Tuesday at the Marine Toys for Tots annual toy drive, the first lady noted that many people won't spend time with loved ones during the holidays because of the coronavirus, which has killed more than 285,000 Americans and sickened over 15 million in the U.S.

"This year more than ever, it is important for us to all remember to be kind this holiday season," she said, adding that "small acts of kindness," like calling friends and neighbors or delivering homemade holiday cards to nursing homes, "can go a long way in spreading cheer and helping those struggling with change."

Invoking the name of her youth initiative, the first lady added: "Let's all do our part to 'Be Best' in these difficult times."

She thanked the Marine Toys for Tots program for decades of work to make sure children have presents to open on Christmas. She also thanked men and women serving in the U.S. military who won't be with their families at the holidays because they are stationed overseas.

After her remarks, the first lady put on a face mask and helped dozens of children who participated in the event sort a variety of toys into separate



AP PHOTO/PATRICK SEMANSKY

boxes labeled for boys and girls. She also sat with groups of children at tables as they made Christmas cards, and later gave out bags printed with the "Be Best" logo.



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Donations Soar but Nonprofits Still Struggle with Pandemic

By Sally Ho

Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — The American spirit of generosity this holiday season may be no match for the coronavirus.

Despite record amounts of charitable donations this year, the effects of the pandemic are suffocating nonprofits across the country as organizations face soaring costs and demand for help, yet are largely without their own support systems, including volunteers and in-person fundraising events.

December is typically the most important month for non-profit revenues, as Christmas and end-of-year tax deductions drive a flood of charitable giving. The holiday campaign season that charities big and small rely on is underway in full force amid a resurging pandemic that has infected more than 16 million people and claimed nearly 298,000 lives in the U.S. alone.

The Salvation Army, already down 18% in funding this year, projects its Red Kettle campaign will net half as much as it did in 2019. That's a \$60 million drop for the iconic fundraising drive being crippled by the pandemic in numerous ways.

Thousands of kettle locations were eliminated because the businesses that once hosted them have closed and foot traffic has diminished as much of the public opts to stay at home. Its pool of volunteer bell ringers is smaller, as many older helpers — some who dress up as Santa Claus — are unable to participate because they're at high-risk for COVID-19. There's even a national coin shortage, in part because pandemic shopping has turned increasingly digital.

The Salvation Army's thrift stores as a separate funding stream are also projected to take a \$150 million hit this year.

The Christian social services charity expects 6.6 million people — a 155% increase over last year — will seek their help between Thanksgiving and Christmas, for food, toys, and rent assistance as eviction moratoriums expire.

¹"The numbers in terms of the people who we are serving are simply off the charts and how we're going to meet the increased need is causing us to be concerned about the giving lev-



AP PHOTO/ELAINE THOMPSON

ABOVE: Salvation Army bell ringer Michael Cronin staffs the charity's red donation kettle in front of a grocery store on Dec. 8, in Lynden, WA. Despite record amounts of charitable donations this year, nonprofits across the country are being suffocated by the effects of the pandemic.

RIGHT: Meals on Wheels volunteers sort prepared meals prior to delivery to seniors on Dec. 9 at the Renton Senior Activity Center in Renton, WA, south of Seattle. Nationally, Meals on Wheels America said its 5,000 community programs are, on average, serving more meals this year compared to in 2019, and nearly all of them are facing financial strain because the COVID-19 pandemic has also forced them to buy additional safety equipment and pay drivers to replace volunteers.

els we're seeing so far," said Kenneth Hodder, the U.S. national commander for the Salvation Army.

But multiple studies and surveys say more people than ever are giving and at greater amounts than usual.

The GivingTuesday Data Commons estimates there was a 23% jump in the number of people who participated in the movement to donate on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving in the U.S.

The organization said 16.8 million people across the country gave a collective \$2.47 billion on Dec. 1 — a 25% increase in total dollars compared to Giving Tuesday last year. That's

coronavirus took hold of modern life in March.

The IRS is urging the public to utilize a special \$300 tax deduction that can be claimed next year for cash donations in 2020 to tax-exempted nonprofits. The initiative allows non-itemized filers to get the tax break only for 2020, as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act passed by Congress last spring.

Big philanthropic players have also stepped up.

The Ford Foundation said it has already surpassed last year's total giving with \$580 million in grants. It's giving another \$400 million through a bond. Ford and four other foundations announced earlier this year they would borrow \$1.7 billion through bonds to help keep afloat donations-dependent nonprofits through the crisis.

"Even in the best of times, even the most well-known nonprofits live on the edge financially," said Hilary Pennington,

an executive vice president at Ford.

That all might not be
enough.

When stay-at-home orders were first issued in March, Adam Porter, the Meals on Wheels director for the non-profit Sound Generations in Seattle, feared the worst because volunteers typically deliver more than half of the hundreds of thousands of meal kits the organization provides to the elderly.

"I said to myself: 'Well, game over. We gave it a good shot but we won't have a program without our volunteers,'" Porter said.

The program has made do with 40 fewer active volunteers this year compared to last, while Sound Generations has raised \$200,000, or nearly 10%, more in donations overall. The remaining volunteers, Porter said, have taken on more work to ensure there's no waitlist for food.

Nationally, Meals on Wheels America said its 5,000 community programs are, on average, serving 77% more meals this year compared to 2019, and nearly all of them are facing financial strain because they've also had to buy additional safety equipment and pay drivers to replace volunteers. Though the national organization has given emergency grants worth more than \$31 million to local programs since April, increasing donations are simply not bridging the gap in many cases.

The nonprofit tracker Candid also projected in July that 22,000 or 7% of nonprofits in the U.S. may close because of the coronavirus crisis.

Among those struggling the most are arts organizations, which have collectively lost an estimated \$14.6 billion in revenue to date this year, according to the Americans for the Arts. The national advocacy group projects 12,000 arts and cultural nonprofits are at risk of being wiped out forever.

But as the world recovers from the isolation of the pandemic, Rosenbaum of GivingTuesday said, arts and social services organizations that draw people together will be among the most integral to rebuilding a sense of community.

"They have a role of community," Rosenbaum said. "And a role of healing."



AP PHOTO/TED S. WARREN



AP PHOTO/TED S. WARREN

Fred Delaurenti, a volunteer driver with Meals on Wheels, prepares to make a delivery on Dec. 9 in Renton, WA.

*Wishing you a blessed and glorious
Christmas
with peace, joy and hope
in the New Year 2021*

Καλά Χριστούγεννα και Καλή Χρονιά

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There's No Place Like Home for the Holidays... and that's what makes the pandemic's winter surge particularly devastating

By Frank T. McAndrew
Knox College

(THE CONVERSATION) While Christmas playlists often include cheesy favorites like "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" and "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus," there are also a handful of wistful tracks that go a little bit deeper.

Listen closely to "I'll Be Home for Christmas" or "White Christmas," and you'll hear a deep yearning for home and sorrow at having to spend the holidays somewhere else.

During no holiday season in recent memory have these songs resonated so deeply with so many. The pandemic has up-ended holiday traditions, and for those who eagerly anticipate annual visits to their hometowns to celebrate with loved ones, the cancellations of these plans are yet another blow to

endure in a long, grinding year. Strip away the cursory Christmas rituals – the TV specials, the lights, the gifts, the music – and what remains is home. It is the beating heart of the holiday, and its importance reflects our primal need to have a meaningful relationship with a setting – a place that transcends the boundary between the self and the physical world.

CAN YOU LOVE A PLACE LIKE A PERSON?

Most of us can probably name at least one place we feel an emotional connection to. But you probably don't realize just how much a place can influence your sense of who you are, or how essential it is for your psychological well-being.

Psychologists even possess an entire vocabulary for the affectionate bonds between people and places: There's "topophilia," "rootedness" and "attachment to

place," which are all used to describe the feelings of comfort and security that bind us to a place.

Your fondness for a place – whether it's the house where you lived your whole life, or the fields and woods where you played as a child – can even mimic the affection you feel for other people.

Studies have shown that a forced relocation can elicit heartbreak and distress every bit as intense as the loss of a loved one. Another study found that if you feel a strong attachment to your town or city, you'll be more satisfied with your house and you'll also be less anxious about your future.

Our physical surroundings play an important role in creating meaning and organization in our lives; much of how we view our lives and what we have become depends on where we've lived, and the experiences

we've had there.

So it's no surprise that architecture professor Kim Dovey, who has studied the concept of home and the experience of homelessness, confirmed that where we live is closely tied to our sense of who we are.

AN ANCHOR OF ORDER AND COMFORT

At the same time, the concept of home can be slippery. One of the first questions we ask when we meet someone new is "Where are you from?" But we seldom pause to consider how complicated that question is. Does it mean where you currently live? Where you were born? Where you grew up?


Environmental psychologists have long understood that the word "home" clearly connotes more than just a house. It encompasses people, places, objects and memories.

So what or where, exactly, do people consider "home"?

A 2008 Pew study asked people to identify "the place in your heart you consider to be home." Twenty-six percent reported that home was where they were born or raised; only 22% said that it was where they currently lived. Eighteen percent identified home as the place that they had lived the longest, and 15% felt that it was where most of their extended family had come from.

But if you look at different cultures across time, a common thread emerges.

No matter where they come from, people tend to think about home as a central place that represents order, a counterbalance to the chaos that exists elsewhere. This might explain why, when asked to draw a picture of "where you live," children and adolescents around the world invariably place their house in



the center of the sheet of paper. In short, it's what everything else revolves around.

Anthropologists Charles Hart and Arnold Pilling lived among the the Tiwi People of Bathurst Island off the coast of Northern Australia during the 1920s. They noted that the Tiwi thought their island was the only habitable place in the world; to them, everywhere else was the "land of the dead."



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The Zuni of the American Southwest, meanwhile, have long viewed the house as a living thing. It's where they raise their kids and communicate with spirits, and there's an annual ritual – called the Shalako – in which homes are blessed and consecrated as part of the year-end winter solstice celebration.

The ceremony strengthens bonds to the community, to the family – including dead ancestors – and to the spirits and gods by dramatizing the connection each party has to the home.

During the holidays, we might not officially bless our home like the Zuni. But our holiday traditions probably sound familiar: eating with family, exchanging gifts, catching up with old friends and visiting old haunts. These homecoming rituals affirm and renew a person's place in the family and often are a key way to strengthen the family's social fabric.

Home, therefore, is a predictable and secure place where you feel in control and properly oriented in space and time; it is a bridge between your past and your present, an enduring tether to your family and friends.

It is a place where, as the poet Robert Frost aptly wrote, "When you have to go there, they have to take you in."

The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts.

‘Diples’: A Holiday Dessert Favorite Recipe from Kalamata

By Eleni Sakellis

A Greek holiday table is not complete without the many delicious traditional pastries made with recipes passed down through the generations. In the Peloponnese, and especially in Kalamata, ‘diples’ are a staple of the dessert table at every Christmas feast. Though the following recipe is relatively simple, it may take a few tries to get the exact folded shape. The crispy, honey-sweetened pastry is always a treat. If preferred, other shapes can be rolled out, or the pastry can be made using a pizzelle mold, but the folded or rosette shape is the most popular.

‘Diples’

* 4 cups all-purpose, unbleached flour, plus more for rolling out



- * 2 teaspoons baking powder
- * 1/2 teaspoon salt
- * 6 eggs
- * 1/2 cup brandy
- * 3 tablespoons sugar
- * 3 cups Greek honey
- * 1 1/2 cups water
- * 2 cups finely chopped walnuts
- * Canola oil for frying
- * Cinnamon

In a mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Make a well in the center and set aside. In a separate bowl, beat the eggs with the brandy and sugar. Add the egg mixture to the flour and stir together. Knead on a lightly floured work surface until the dough is smooth. If the dough is too sticky add a little more flour. Cover the dough with plastic wrap and set aside to rest for about 15 minutes. Using about a quarter of the dough at a time, roll out to 1/8 inch thickness. With a pastry cutter or sharp knife, cut the dough into

strips 1 1/4 inches wide and about 9 inches long for the rose shape or wider for the traditional folded shape. Continue with the remaining dough.

To fry, fill a large deep pot with canola oil or preferred oil for frying to about 3 inches deep. Heat until the oil is about 375 degrees F. Place the strips into the heated oil and using two forks turn them so they form diples, or folds, like a rose. Fry until golden brown on all sides. Remove from oil with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels to absorb any excess oil. Continue with the remaining dough until all are fried.

For the syrup, in a saucepan heat the honey and water up to a simmer, place the fried ‘diples’ in for a minute or two then remove to a serving platter and sprinkle with the finely chopped walnuts and cinnamon. Serve immediately. If preferred, allow them to cool completely and store at room temperature for a week, though they will not be as crispy as on the first day, they will still be a tasty dessert.

To make ‘diples’ in other shapes, use pizzelle irons. Dip the pizzelle iron mold into the batter and then place in the heated oil and fry until the cooked dough drops off the mold. Remove from the frying oil with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Wipe any excess oil from the mold with paper towels before dipping it into the batter again to ensure the cooked dough drops off properly when fried. Dip into honey syrup as above and top with walnuts and cinnamon. Serve immediately.



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Theater Uses Its Creativity to Defy Pandemic and Stage Shows

By MARK KENNEDY
AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — There's theater on Broadway. You just have to adjust your sights.

More than a hundred blocks north of Manhattan's shuttered theater district but on that same famed thoroughfare, an actor recently read his lines from a huge stage.

But there was no applause. Instead, all that was heard was a strange command for the theater: "And cut!"

Tony Award-winner Jefferson Mays was performing multiple roles for a high-tech "A Christmas Carol" that was being filmed for streaming this month at the empty 3,000-seat United Palace.

The one-man show is an example of how many who work in theater are increasingly defying COVID-19 by refusing to let it stop their art, often creating new hybrid forms.

"Because it's such a roll-up-your-sleeves business, theater people figure it out," said Tony Award-winning producer Hunter Arnold, while watching Mays onstage. "Of everything I've ever done in my life, it's the place where people lead from 'how?' instead of leading from 'why not?'"

The coronavirus pandemic shut down theater and the TV/movie industries in the spring. Film and TV production have slowly resumed. Live theater is uniquely tested by the virus, one reason it will be among the last sectors to return to normal. Props and costumes are usually touched by dozens each night, an orchestra is crammed into a pit, backstage areas are small and shared, and audiences are usually packed into seats. New ways are needed.

Mays' "A Christmas Carol," which was filmed on a high-tech LED set, veers much more filmic than most other streaming theater options and is raising money for suffering regional theaters — one stage production helping others during the pandemic.

Other green shoots include radio plays, virtual readings, online variety shows and drive-in experiences that combine live singing with movies. The cast of the musical "Diana" reunited on Broadway to film the show for Netflix



Tony Award-winner Jefferson Mays performs during a one-man high-tech “A Christmas Carol Live” that is being filmed for streaming this month at the empty 3,000-seat United Palace. The one-man show is an example of how many who work in the theater are increasingly defying COVID-19 by refusing to let it stop their art.

before it opens on Broadway.

The San Francisco Playhouse recently offered screenings of Yasmina Reza's play "Art," an on-stage production captured live by multiple cameras, with a crucial wrestling scene reimagined to keep social distancing. A musical version of the animated film "Ratatouille" is being explored on TikTok.

"We will conquer it. We are theater people. By God, we will conquer it and get it done," says Charlotte Moore, the artistic director and co-founder of the acclaimed Irish Repertory Theatre in New York City.

Her company has put on a free streaming holiday production of "Meet Me in St. Louis" with a dozen cast members, each filmed remotely and then digitally stitched together. Moore directed it — appropriately enough — from St. Louis. Other theater pros are calling to ask how she did it.

The cast was mailed or hand-delivered props, costumes and a green screen. They rehearsed via Zoom and FaceTime. A masked and socially distant orchestra recorded the score, and the sets

were beamed onto the actors' screens.

"You learn minute by minute by minute along the way what works, what doesn't, what to do, what not to do," said Moore, who starred in the original Broadway run of "Meet Me in St. Louis" in 1989. "It's torture and it's thrilling — thrilling torture."

Like many other theatrical hybrids venturing into the digital world these days, it's not clear what to call it. It's not technically live theater, but its soul is theatrical.

"It's not definable in our current vocabulary," Moore said. "It has to have a new definition, truly, because it's certainly unlike anything that has been done."

One of the companies to show the way forward was Berkshire Theater Group in western Massachusetts, whose "Godspell" in August became the first outdoor musical with union actors since the pandemic shut down productions.

Artistic director and CEO Kate Maguire refused to entertain the notion that the company — established in 1928 — would have

an asterisk beside 2020 that said no shows were produced that year.

"We're theater makers, we're creators, she said. "We should be able to figure out how to create something."

So they used plexiglass partitions between each masked actor. The performers were tested regularly — at a cost of close to \$50,000 — and had their own props and a single costume. Each was housed in their own living space — bedroom, living area and little kitchenette. In an open-air tent, they managed to pull off a crucifixion scene without any touching or lifting, itself a miracle.

Audiences underwent temperature checks and were separated by seats. Staff were placed in three protective bubbles: artistic, production and front-of-house. And there was monitoring: Last year it was an intimacy officer; this year it was a COVID-19 one.

Maguire thrashed out a 40-page agreement with the stage union Actor's Equity Association. "We never had a positive test," Maguire said. "We had five false

positive tests," which was "harrowing."

She thanked grants for allowing her to keep her staff on payroll, making the stress level tolerable. It was clear audiences were hungry for theater: "I would watch people shoulders shaking as the show started because they were weeping," she said. They're doing another outdoor show now — "Holiday Memories."

Since that first brave step, other theater companies have plunged into the void. Play and musical licensor Concord Theatricals says theater companies across the country are looking for flexibility in case of virus restrictions.

"We're seeing many groups applying for small cast, easy to produce, plays and musicals. They're even seeking casting flexibility and asking for permission to perform with or without an ensemble," said Sean Patrick Flahaven, chief theatricals executive.

"There's also a trend for groups to apply for both live performance and streaming rights. Many amateur theaters are pro-

ducing single virtual performances to keep revenue flowing."

Playwright Natalie Margolin decided to write a new play during the pandemic but not a conventional one. She imagined what the world would look like when it was a given that all social life existed on Zoom.

Hence "The Party Hop," a play specifically to be performed on Zoom that's set three years into quarantine in which three college girls hit the town — online. It became her first published play, and she got stars such as Ben Platt, Kaitlyn Dever, Beanie Feldstein and Ashley Park to perform in an online version, currently on YouTube. She hopes high schools and colleges will be attracted to a play reflecting the era.

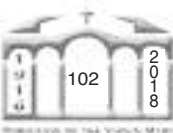

"It was just exciting to take part in something where it wasn't a placeholder or a replacement, and no one needed to imagine they were anywhere else than where they were to fully realize the piece," she said. "It's been exciting and heartwarming to see different ways theater has reinvented itself during this time."

Theater makers have also leaned into the storytelling part of their craft, making The Broadway Podcast Network a hub for everything from audition advice to behind-the-scenes stories.

Launched shortly before the pandemic with 15 podcasts, the theater shutdown initially wiped out its revenue streams, advertising and sponsorship. The network has since righted itself and is growing with some 100 podcasts — from the likes of Tim Rice and Tonya Pinkins — plus benefits, show reunions and original programs, like the digital theater-based frothy soap opera, "As the Curtain Rises" with stars Alex Brightman, Sarah Stiles and Michael Urie.

"Even though we had lost all of our advertising, we just knew that this was important to our community, to keep our community connected and continue to tell stories," said Dori Berinstein, co-founder of the network and a four-time Tony-winning Broadway producer. "It's not anything that will ever replace live theater, but it's an extension. It's a different way of doing that."

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>



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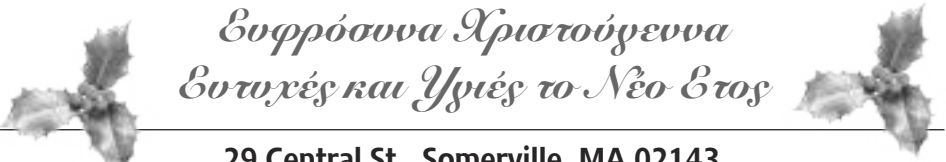
Christmas and Easter are the most popular feasts celebrated in this country and around the world. The celebration of these two magnificent feasts is so popular not because they are significant historic facts. Nor is it because we have a nostalgic feeling about these phenomenal events. The importance of God becoming human and the importance of His victory over death is eternally significant and do not fade as a result of space and time.

We humans have never been comfortable with the concept of death and we have never accepted the idea of finiteness of human life. Throughout the millennia of human life on earth, people have tried to conquer death by creating different religions, by building pyramids, by mummifying human bodies, by writing their names in the book of death, and at last pursuing in full force the path of science.

None of the above mentioned explorations have given a complete or satisfactory answer to death and suffering. By our own efforts, we have only been able to ease the pain of the realization that one day we also will lay in the grave, and that if all we have in this world is this material body then our logical end is a pile of dirt in a green lawn of a cemetery also.

It was in the manger of Bethlehem that the Hope of salvation was born. It was in that manger that the glory of God and the peace on earth was revealed. It was from that manger that the Incarnate God revealed the way of eternal life.

In this world of constant worries and dangers hanging over our heads, let us invite the incarnate Christ to the manger of our hearts so that we also will have part in him. In this way, we will begin our journey with Him who is the Way and the Life, who came and lived as a man, and laid down His life for us so that we may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10-10)



**Ευφρόσυνη Χριστούγεννα
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Christmas Tree-Lighting in Bethlehem a Muted, Virtual Event

BETHLEHEM (AP) — Only a few dozen people attended the lighting of the Christmas tree in the biblical city of Bethlehem on Saturday night, as coronavirus restrictions scaled back the annual event that is normally attended by thousands.

A small group of residents and religious leaders participated in the tree-lighting ceremony at Manger Square near the Church of the Nativity, where Christians believe Jesus was born. Others watched it virtually due to restrictions prompted by the virus pandemic.

Some officials, including Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, attended in person and addressed event participants watching online.

Shtayyeh said the Palestinian leadership is receiving the new year with determination to "confronting the (Israeli) occupation more firmly" and ending the internal political division with the rival militant Hamas group. He said the Palestinians would "defeat the settlement"-building in the occupied West Bank despite the pandemic.

Bethlehem Mayor Anton Salman said Christmas is being observed this year in ways like no time before.

"We resorted to modern technology and to the virtual world to celebrate the lighting of the Christmas tree, wishing hope and optimism would flutter upon Palestine and the world," Salman said.

Thousands of pilgrims and tourists typically visit Bethlehem, fill hotels and dine at restaurants during the Christmas season, bringing the area a much-needed injection of cash.

Christians take photos inside the Grotto of the Church of the Nativity, traditionally believed to be the birthplace of Jesus Christ, in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, Monday, Nov. 23, 2020. Normally packed with tourists from around the world at this time of year, Bethlehem resembles a ghost town — with hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops shuttered by the pandemic.



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202347/247

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202477/296

State Senator

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202063/329



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Happy New Year!

*Dennis and Karen
Mehiel*

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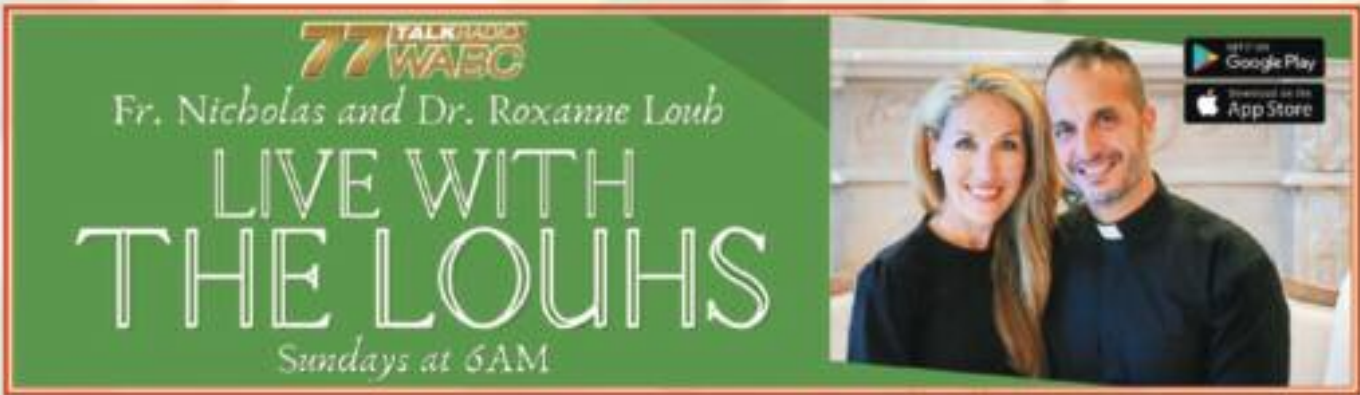


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NBC/APPLE/HBO MAX/NETFLIX/DISNEY + VIA AP

Holiday Movies, Music Specials Arrive to Light a Bleak Year

By **Lynn Elber**
AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Bring on the sentimental holiday rom-coms, the chorus of Christmas music specials and the nostalgia of last century's animated charmers. We'll take any and all feel-good moments in a year of scarcity. Mariah and Dolly and Charlie Brown are among the comforts TV is offering this month, and not a moment too soon. Here's a sampling from broadcast networks, cable and stream-

ing services, all times Eastern unless noted.

HOLIDAY HARMONY

— "My Gift: A Christmas Special From Carrie Underwood," now streaming on HBO Max. The singer performs tunes from her new holiday album and traditional songs, backed by her band, a choir and an orchestra led by Ricky Minor.

— "Garth & Trisha Live! A Holiday Concert Event," 8:30 p.m. EST live (8

p.m. PST, taped), Dec. 20, CBS. Brooks and Yearwood will perform holiday songs chosen from among fan requests submitted beforehand via Brooks' Facebook Watch show.

MERRY MOVIES

— "The Princess Switch: Switched Again," now streaming on Netflix. The saga continues as look-a-likes Stacy, a Chicago baker, and Lady Margaret, heir to the Montenaro throne, swap lives once more. Vanessa Hudgens again conveniently fills both roles.

— "Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey," now streaming on Netflix. Forest Whitaker is one of the big names in this tale of a toymaker in need of a miracle, with Hugh Bonneville, Anika Noni Rose and Keegan-Michael Key in the cast.

— "It's a Wonderful Life," 8 p.m. Dec. 24, NBC. Jimmy Stewart's George Bailey is floundering amid self-doubt, but family, neighbors and Clarence the angel come to the rescue in filmmaker Frank Capra's 1946 enduring favorite.

STOCKING STUFFERS

— "The Lights Before Christmas: Raidance by Rail," Dec. 22, BritBox. Take a virtual trip through rural England aboard an eight-carriage, 1940s train cruising by illuminated station displays and through the landscape of Shropshire county.

Lynn Elber can be reached at lelber@ap.org and is on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/lynnelber>.

Greek City to Use Christmas Money for More ICU Beds

By **Costas Kantouris**

THESSALONIKI, Greece (AP) — A city in northern Greece hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic said it will scrap plans to set up Christmas decorations and a nativity scene this year to donate the money to the local hospital's intensive care ward.

"We have decided to use the funds to pay for two additional ICU spaces, three medical monitors, and 1,000 protective suits for medical staff," the mayor of Serres, Alekos Chrysafis, told The Associated Press.

City officials said the donation to the state-run Serres General Hospital was expected to total 110,000 euros (\$130,000.) They added that a tree would be put up in the center of the city of nearly 60,000 people.

Cities in northern Greece have been the hardest hit by the pandemic. The

daily number of cases in the country's second-largest city, Thessaloniki, remains higher than those reported in greater Athens — an area with a population more than three times larger.

Theofilos Kallinikidis, a pathologist in charge of coronavirus wards at Serres General Hospital, said he welcomed the donation, which came at a critical time for the hospital.

The hospital started with just six beds in its ICU, but is now near capacity with 16 out of 17 beds occupied, he added.


Greece has suffered more than 3,600 COVID-19 deaths. The country has confirmed a total of some 125,000 cases since the start of the pandemic.


A child looks at Christmas decorations at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, in Athens, on Wednesday, Dec. 2.



AP PHOTO/PIETROS GIANNAKOPOULOS

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and a healthy, peaceful
and prosperous
New Year!

Konstantine M.

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and your families
all the blessings
for Christmas
& the New Year

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ΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ ΚΗΡΥΞ

202533/101

Pandemic Doesn't Break First Lady Holiday Hospital Tradition

By Darlene Superville

WASHINGTON (AP) — Melania Trump isn't letting the coronavirus pandemic break a decadeslong tradition of first ladies visiting a Washington children's hospital at the holidays.

She planned her fourth and final holiday visit as first lady to Children's National on Tuesday, continuing a tradition begun more than 70 years ago by first lady Bess Truman.

The hospital tweaked the holiday program to safely accommodate the visit.

The first lady will still sit in a chair in front of a towering Christmas tree in the hospital's atrium. But she'll read to a small, socially distanced group of children rather than a big crowd of patients and their families, hospital staffers and singers and dancers.

Her reading of the children's Christmas story "Oliver the Or-



First lady Melania Trump participates in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve's Toys for Tots Drive at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling in Washington, Tuesday, Dec. 8.

AP PHOTO/PATRICK SEMANSKY

nament Meets Marley & Joan and Abbey" will be broadcast over the hospital's closed-circuit television system so patients can tune in from their rooms.

"During each of my visits to Children's National, I have felt the warmth that these brave children bring, seen the joy in their eyes and the smiles on their faces," Mrs. Trump told The Associated Press in a statement. "It always reminds me that the spirit of Christmas is truly alive in each and every one of these courageous children."

Kurt Newman, president and CEO of the hospital, said it was "particularly special" that Mrs. Trump prioritized visiting when many holiday events and traditions have been scrubbed or otherwise disrupted by a pandemic now responsible for more than 300,000 U.S. deaths.

For more than seven decades, first ladies have "brought holiday cheer to children who are hospitalized and can't be home during this special time of the year," Newman said.

Todd Zimmerman, who is writing a series of children's books featuring the Christmas-time adventures of Oliver the Ornament, said the stories also serve to teach children about kindness, especially in the face of bullying.

Zimmerman said he was glad Mrs. Trump's visit would help take the children's minds "off of what they're going through, if only for an hour."

Millennial Money: De-stress Holiday Debt with a Payoff Plan

By Sean Pyles
NerdWallet

In a holiday season that many of us will spend apart from loved ones, gift-giving might feel even more important than usual. After all, if you can't travel to see family, at least you can see them unwrap gifts over a video call, right?

And just as many families will use a video service for holiday celebrations this year, many will also turn to credit cards to cover their expressions of love. Three-quarters of holiday shoppers are planning to use credit cards to purchase gifts this year, according to a NerdWallet survey of 2,049 U.S. adults conducted online by The Harris Poll.

Using credit cards can be a great way to earn rewards or get cash back, but make sure you know how to dig out of the debt you ring up. Otherwise, you might be still paying off the debt late into next year, something 33% of 2019 holiday shoppers who used credit cards

said they were still doing when surveyed in September.

Here's how to handle holiday debt.

TAKE STOCK OF WHAT YOU OWE — AND WHAT YOU CAN PAY

First, catalog your holiday debt. Log into each credit account and note the balance and interest rate. Consider creating a simple spreadsheet or using a debt tracker to keep accounts organized. If you have debt that's not on a credit card, such as a shopping loan from a company like Klarna, list that, too.

With your debts sorted, turn to your budget. The 50/30/20 budget is an easy template. With this approach, half of take-home pay goes toward necessities, like housing and groceries. Then, 30% goes toward wants, like takeout or a nice bottle of Champagne to celebrate bidding farewell to 2020 on New Year's Eve. Lastly, 20% of your income goes toward debt and savings.

As you hash out your budget, pin down how much money you can allocate toward debt each

month. Divide the total debt by that amount to estimate how fast you can rid yourself of debt, keeping in mind that accruing interest can increase the balances.

Focusing on what you can pay monthly helps make your debt more manageable, says Kathleen Burns Kingsbury, a Vermont-based wealth psychology

Three-quarters of holiday shoppers are planning to use credit cards to purchase gifts this year, according to a NerdWallet survey

expert who helps people understand the personal factors of money decisions.

"Ask what you can reasonably pay off each week or each month and really work at achieving it," Burns Kingsbury says. "From a psychological standpoint, this helps you feel a sense of success, and the more successful you feel, the more motivated you are to continue that behavior."

FIND YOUR PAYOFF PATH

Your best route to resolving

holiday debt depends on your cash flow, credit score and personal preferences. Here are a few:

— **PAY OFF THE FULL BALANCE WITH THE FIRST STATEMENT:** If you have the cash, this is the fastest way to deal with debt — and the cheapest, since you avoid paying interest. According to the Nerd-

Wallet shopping survey, 35% of holiday shoppers who added credit card debt in 2019 took this approach.

— **ROLL A SNOWBALL OR KICK OFF AN AVALANCHE:** The "debt snowball" and "debt avalanche" are two popular debt payoff methods. Which is right for you depends on your financial priorities.

With the debt snowball method, you focus on paying off the smallest balance first, then roll the amount you were paying on that first debt into the

next largest. The amount you're paying on the focus debt keeps growing, like a snowball rolling downhill. You might choose this if you need the early wins from paying off the first accounts to keep you motivated.

The debt avalanche method may be best if you want to pay as little in interest as possible. With this route, you prioritize paying off the debt with the highest interest rate first, regardless of balance size. Again, when that first debt is done, you put the amount you were paying on that into the next highest interest account, repeating until you're debt-free.

— **CONSIDER A BALANCE TRANSFER CARD:** To avoid costly credit card interest, look into taking out a balance transfer credit card with a 0% APR promotional period, says Mike Cocco, an Equitable financial adviser based in Nutley, New Jersey.


"Once you have that, you're eliminating interest, which can allow you to pay off debt a lot quicker," Cocco says. "Then, be cognizant of when the 0% APR

period runs out and work backwards to create a reverse Christmas Club for paying off your debt. If you have \$1,000 on the card and 12 months interest-free, you have to pay at least \$83 a month."

To get a 0% balance transfer offer, you'll need good to excellent credit. In general, that means a score of 690 or higher, although credit scores alone don't guarantee approval. Issuers will look at your income, existing debts and other information.

Regardless of which debt payoff method you choose, the important thing is to find a plan and commit to it. Taking decisive action to resolve your debt can ensure you are debt-free faster — and maybe let you start building up savings for the 2021 holiday season.

This column was provided to The Associated Press by the personal finance website NerdWallet. Sean Pyles is a writer at NerdWallet. Email: spyles@nerdwallet.com. Twitter: @SeanPyles.




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From
the Daughters of Penelope
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to our Omogeneia praying for all of our loving Lord's
abundant blessings as we celebrate His glorious Nativity.

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και
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MERRY CHRISTMAS
&
HAPPY NEW YEAR 2021!!!

202129/449

Cheers! Or Not: 'Scandalous' 1st Christmas Card Up for Sale

By William J. Kole
Associated Press

The first commercially printed Christmas card is up for sale — a merry Victorian-era scene that scandalized some who denounced it as humbug when it first appeared in 1843.

The card, being sold online starting Friday through a consortium run by Marvin Getman, a Boston-based dealer in rare books and manuscripts, depicts an English family toasting the recipient with glasses of red wine.

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You," it reads. But for teetotalers — and there were plenty of those in the 19th century — the imagery included a bit too much holiday cheer: In the foreground, a young girl is pictured taking a sip from an adult's glass.

That didn't sit well at the

time with the puritanical Temperance Society, which kicked up such a fuss it took three years before another Christmas card was produced.

"They were quite distressed that in this 'scandalous' picture they had children toasting with a glass of wine along with the adults. They had a campaign to censor and suppress it," said Justin Schiller, founder and president of Kingston, New York-based Battledore Ltd., a dealer in antiquarian books who is selling the card.

Getman, whose brokerage had shifted online before the coronavirus pandemic disrupted traditional touring book fairs, said the hand-colored lithograph is believed to have been a salesperson's sample. Only 1,000 copies were printed and sold for a shilling apiece, and experts believe fewer than 30 have survived, he said.

The card, intended to double as a greeting for Christmas and New Year's Day, was designed by painter and illustrator John Callcott Horsley at the suggestion of Sir Henry Cole, a British civil servant and inventor who founded the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. Cole is widely credited with starting the tradition of sending holiday cards, a multimillion-dollar industry today.

It's believed to have gone on sale in the same week in December 1843 that Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" first was published.

Christie's auction house in London also is selling one of the rare cards and says it expects the item to fetch between 5,000 and 8,000 pounds (\$6,725 to \$10,800.)

Also being sold by the Boston consortium is "Santa Claus," a handwritten poem by Emily



This 2017 photo provided by Battledore Ltd., of Kingston, N.Y., shows the first commercially produced Christmas card dated December 1843. The card, a hand-colored lithograph designed in England by John Callcott Horsley, is among the rare holiday-themed items being sold online through a consortium run by Marvin Getman.

Dickinson about the jolly old elf. Parental warning: Dickinson's take is a little bleak for youngsters.

"She's basically saying Santa Claus has died, but the children shouldn't feel badly because he's with the angels in Heaven," Schiller said.

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201874/490

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202529/110

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200203/358

Merry Christmas
and
a Happy New Year!

From
The George Zalantis Family
Staten Island, NY

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202535/107

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& Healthy
New Year*

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3160/416

*Happy Holidays
and a
Healthy New Year
to all!!!*

Marcy Pedas-Sigler
New York, NY

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202570/357

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NEW YEAR!

SUPPORTER
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και Ευτυχισμένος ο Νέος Χρόνος*

Gifts to Give

Mentis Estate Extra Virgin Greek Olive Oil & Mediterranean Sea Salt

TNH Staff

NEW YORK – Add your personal touch with a customized label displaying an image or logo of your choice, just in time for the holiday season.

Mentis Estate Extra Virgin Greek Olive Oil and Mediterranean Sea Salt make great gifts for family and friends as well as company promotions.

More information on making Mentis Estate Olive Oil your own private brand is available via email: amentis@mentisestate.com and by phone: 646-302-3171.

A Pure Unblended Olive Oil, Mentis Estate has produced olive oil for three generations harvesting the Athenolia olive variety.

The resulting olive oil is an aromatic and fruity nectar with an acidity of less than 0.5%. Its well-balanced characteristics are described as pine, floral, nutty, buttery, and pungent – with a hint of artichoke.

Mentis Fleur de Sel 200 gr is 100% Hand Harvested Mediterranean Sea Salt of the finest quality with full complement of minerals.

The delicate taste of the Mediterranean Sea enhances flavors, improves the texture of food and renders far more delicious meals.

A special gift from the Laconia region of Greece.

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For these special services, order directly via email: amentis@mentisestate.com.

Mentis Estate Olive Oil offers customized labels for great gifts.



THI Executive Director Peter Poulos.

THI: Keep Greece in Your Thoughts This Holiday Season

TNH Staff

ATHENS – The Hellenic Initiative (THI) continues its efforts for Greece and reminds supporters to give during this holiday season when so many are in need. THI Executive Director Peter Poulos sent the following message via email noting the ongoing fundraising for the worthy organizations that do so much in Greece:

Dear Friends of THI,

These are trying times for all of us and especially for our brothers and sisters in Greece. After 10 years of a prolonged financial crisis, Greece was finally set to see the light of day only to have it darkened again by COVID-19. And to make matters worse, the one bright spot in its economy, tourism, has taken the most serious blow, worsening the economic situation for thousands of individuals and families.

As a crisis relief organization, THI has a duty to respond to this new challenge. So, as we approach the holiday season, and 2020 comes to a close, The Hellenic Initiative would like to thank you for your support and also ask you for your help.

With just \$10 Prolepsis can provide a child with lunch for a week.

We are raising funds to continue supporting our programs on the ground in Greece providing life-saving support to people who are struggling. And we are doubling down on our efforts to create jobs and build a strong, sound business environment. You can read about the programs we are supporting on the attached list of THI's funded charitable organizations.

A \$50 donation to Enaleia can help a new fisherman jumpstart his/her career.

As you reflect on this past year, please consider making a tax-deductible donation to The Hellenic Initiative. 100% of your donation will be directed towards our programs in Greece.

With \$1,000 Agigma Zois can help ease the burden of treatment for a cancer patient.

Please join us in helping our fellow Greeks. On behalf of the Board of Directors of The Hellenic Initiative, we would like to thank you once again for your continued support.

Oli Mazi – All Together,

Peter J. Poulos
Executive Director

More information is available online: <https://www.thehellenicinitiative.org/donate-now/>.

From Ancient Greek to Christian Holidays

By Rev. Demetrios J. Constantelos, Ph.D.
Special to The National Herald

The calendar of the Christian Church includes feasts whose dates coincide with the dates of celebrations of the ancient Greco-Roman world. This article will be limited to only the two major holidays of Christmas and Epiphany (or Theophany). We celebrate Christmas on December 25 and the Epiphany on January 6.

The first evidence for the celebration of Christmas on December 25 is in the chronicles of Dionysius Filokalos, calligrapher and Registrar of Bishop Damasos of Rome (366-384). Filokalos includes in the list of bishops of Rome much important information about the city of Rome and the Roman Empire in general. He includes mention of Christian feasts and the lives of martyrs. Thus we learn that the birth of Christ was first celebrated on December 25 in the year 336.

It is known that when Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, became sole emperor after 324, he issued various laws by which Christian holidays were designated, such as the Sunday holiday. The conversion of Constantine, the new religious tolerance after the Edict of Milan in 313, but also the favorable position taken by the Church toward the cultural heritage in which it was born and developed, as we see from the writings of the Church Fathers, did not destroy religious beliefs, traditions and observances of the ancient Greco-Roman world. On December 25 the Romans celebrated, among others (such as Saturnalia, also known as Broumalia) the celebration of the ‘invincible sun’, a very popular celebration, particularly with the Roman army. It was a feast of orgies, drunkenness, and loose morals.

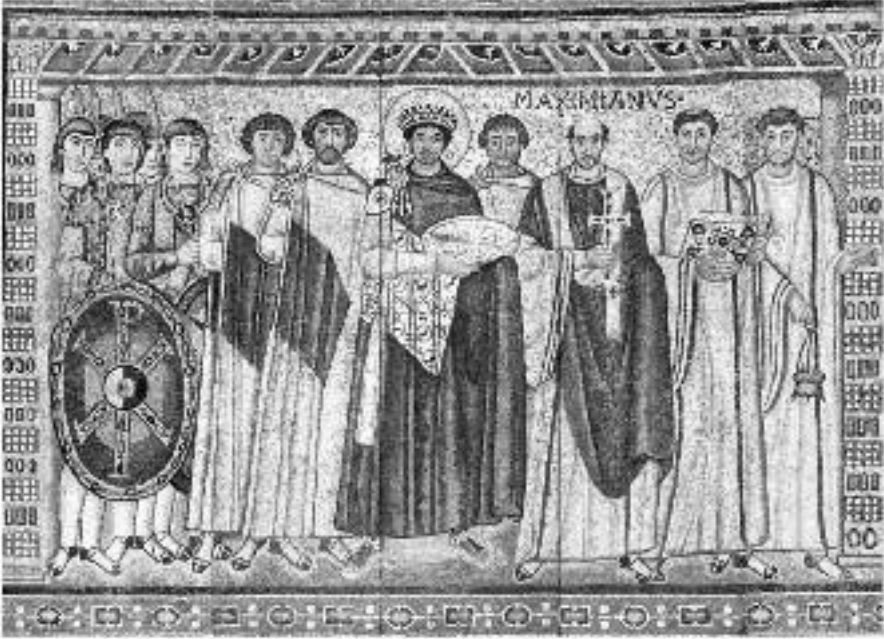
Many Christians who came from the same cultural background were not excluded and isolated from the rest of society. There are many indications and reports that religious customs and popular festivals of ancient Greek or Roman origin were also celebrated by Christians. The Church, in order to protect its flock, replaced pagan festivals with Christian ones, particularly those that had a name and content that was related to the Christian teaching. This explains why since the time of Constantine the Great, the feast of the Invincible Sun, i.e. the unconquerable, undefeatable sun, was replaced with the celebration of the birth of “the Sun of Righteousness,” the anticipated Messiah, as written by the prophet Malachi (Malachi 3:20, Septuagint; or 4:2, Hebrew text), namely Jesus Christ, the truly invincible sun and light of the world (John 1:9, 8:12).

From Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, where the feast of Christmas was first celebrated on December 25, it was introduced to other local churches in the Latin West but also in the Greek East. Until then, Christmas and Epiphany were celebrated together. Some great fathers took the initiative to make the change and divided the two holidays, Christmas and Epiphany. In the Greek Christian East around 375, Basil the Great introduced into his diocese the feast of Christmas as distinct from Epiphany. His bosom friend Gregory the Theologian, Patriarch of Constantinople fixed Christmas as a special holiday in the year 379.

The Church of Antioch followed, making the distinction between the two festivals around 386. In one of his most significant speeches, St. John Chrysostom wrote that of the great feasts of the Church, Christmas, Epiphany and Pascha stand apart. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, adopted the change about 433, and the Church of Jerusalem about 550. Around 543, by decree of Emperor Justinian, Christmas was established as a national holiday.

Despite the changes introduced by great churchmen of the fourth and fifth centuries, and the decree of Justinian, the joint celebration of Christmas and Epiphany, which took place on January 6, continued in some provincial areas for many more centuries, as is done today with the Church in Armenia.

Not only Christmas, but also the feast of Epiphany was kept on a day that was also an ancient Greco-Roman holiday. Epiphany was introduced into the Christian calendar around 300 as the day on which “the goodness and love for mankind



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Emperor Justinian and Members of His Court.

of God our Savior has appeared" (Titus 2:11) and also for the event of the Holy Spirit's appearance at the baptism of Christ.

But even among non-Greek speakers of the ancient Christian era, a feast of 'Epiphany' was celebrated on January 6, commemorating the return and the appearance of Apollo from the northernmost countries. In a special festival that took place at Delphi, the priests there displayed statues of Apollo, Artemis, and other gods to the faithful for honor and worship. This ancient feast especially honoring Apollo, the sun god, was pan-Hellenic, and as recounted by Herodotus, also esteemed by the Persians. For the Greeks of Egypt, January 6 was the day on which the birth of

the patron god of Alexandria, 'Eternal', i.e. eternal time, was celebrated.

So two major festivals of Christianity, Christmas and Epiphany, replaced two major festivals of the ancient Greco-Roman world. This should not seem strange to us, much less surprise us. Christianity is based on divine and supernatural revelation, but it is a revelation within history and accomplished by historical figures and events which appeared in time and space, which was born from the heart of Hellenized Judaism but developed within the geographical context of Greco-Roman world.

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, grew up in Nazareth of Galilee, but acted and taught in the deeply Hellenized Galilee, which due to its broad Hellenization was named by the conservative Jews of Judea, the southern part of Palestine, "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matthew 4:15). The Gospel of Christ was preached through the Greek language in Greek-speaking cities, from Greek-speaking missionaries. It was within a Greek domain that Christianity first came to fruition. The first Christians were Hellenized Jews, but many other Christians were genuine or native Greeks. The Greeks saw in the person of Christ the incarnate "unknown god" (Acts 17:23), or the “Most High God” about Whom their ancestors, their philosophers and thinkers had written.



PUBLIC DOMAIN/ THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

The Nativity, ca. 1406–10 by Lorenzo Monaco (Piero di Giovanni).

Christmas Traditions in Greece

On Christmas Eve, children travel from house to house offering good wishes and singing kalanda which are the same as carols.

Greek families leave a fire burning to keep away the “kalikantzari.” The “kalikantzari” are goblins that emerge from the center of the earth and slip into people's homes through the fireplace. This is the reason people, especially in villages, keep the fireplace lit during the 12 days of Christmas. They are more trouble makers than harmful.

In Greece, presents are exchanged and often brought to children by Aghios Vassilis / Άγιος Βασίλης (Saint Basil) on January 1.

In Greece, St. Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors. He saves sinking ships from the angry sea.

The Christmas feast consists of pig and christopsomo or “christ bread.” This bread is made in large sweet loaves and the crust is ‘engraved’ to portray the family's profession.

Traditionally, most homes decorated a Christmas tree with tinsel and a star.

One of the most meaningful traditional Christmas symbols of Greece is the ship. Greece has been a seafaring nation since ancient times, still boasting one of the largest fleets in present day maritime economics. The ship is still used throughout Greece as a Christmas-time symbol, and boats are decorated with Christmas lights during the holiday season.



EUROKINISSI/ YIORGOS KONTARINIS

The Christmas karavaki, or little boat.



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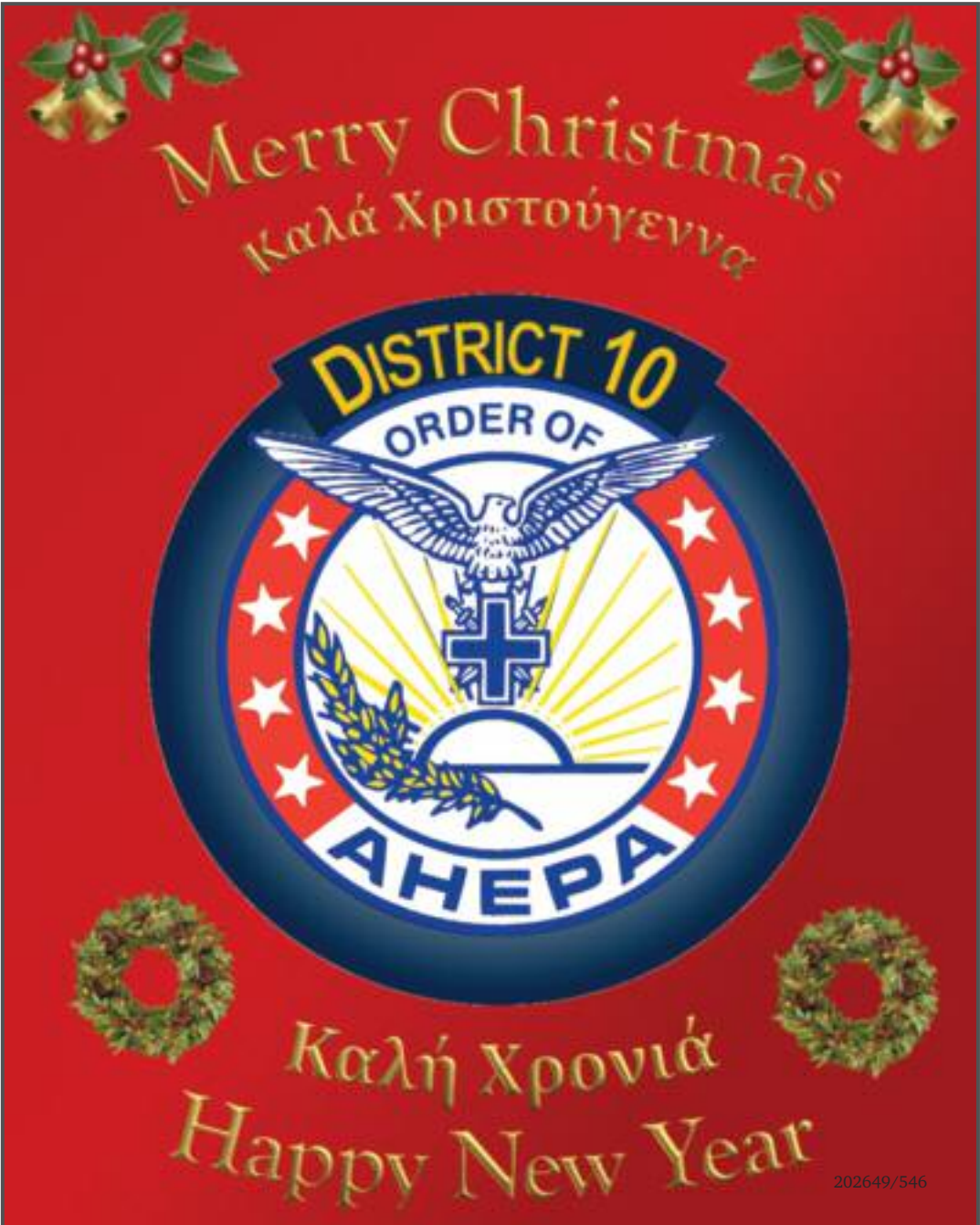
Christmas Lights Bring Joy around the World



AP PHOTOS



Christmas light displays bring joy across the globe and especially this year during the holiday season when many cannot visit family and friends in person, due to the pandemic. The first Christmas lights were introduced for the holidays in 1882 by Edward Johnson, a friend and partner of light-bulb inventor Thomas Edison, according to Time magazine. The outdoor displays remind us all that the spirit of the season is still strong, wherever people are celebrating, as shown here in (1) Connecticut and (2) Florida in the United States, as well as in (3) Germany, (4) the Philippines, (5) Hong Kong, (6) Brazil- where Santa Claus even delivers underwater at an aquarium, (7) India, and (8) Britain where characters from Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland are bringing Christmas joy to the Mad Hatter's tea party.







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Happy holidays

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