

St. Barbara Monastery – 15799 Santa Paula - Ojai Road – Santa Paula, CA 93060  
(805) 921-1563 – [www.stbarbaramonastery.org](http://www.stbarbaramonastery.org)

# ***CHRIST IS BORN!***

*We wish each and every one  
a glorious celebration of  
the Holy Nativity  
of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ.*

# ***GLORIFY HIM!***

## **DIRECTIONS TO THE MONASTERY**

### **From Highway 101 – Exit Hwy 126 East at Ventura.**

Travel 11 miles east along Hwy 126 and exit 10th St/Hwy 150 at Santa Paula.  
Turn left from the exit ramp and follow 10th St/Hwy 150 through Santa Paula.  
Bear right at the fork in the road. This is Santa Paula-Ojai Rd/Hwy 150.  
Travel about five miles (1/4 mile past Thomas Aquinas College) to 15799 Ojai Road.  
The monastery driveway is on the right just past our mailbox at Highway Marker 2830.  
Follow the signs to the parking area.

### **From Highway 5 – Exit Hwy 126 West at Santa Clarita.**

Travel 27 miles to Santa Paula, and exit at 10th St/Hwy 150.  
Turn right from the exit ramp and follow 10th St/Hwy 150 through Santa Paula.  
Bear right at the fork in the road. This is Santa Paula-Ojai Rd/Hwy 150.  
Continue as directed above.



***CHRIST IS BORN!***

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**Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,**

**We are celebrating Christmas at the monastery this year with new awareness of God’s love for us human beings. His efforts to get our attention and bring us all to our senses, to repentance and into the joy and glory of His Kingdom are endless.**

**On Christmas Day, it will be three weeks since the Thomas Fire broke out about a mile away from the monastery and roared through our canyon on its way to burning up what amounts to almost 300,000 acres—and counting—as of this writing. The monastery was preserved. But what a huge disaster the fire is! It has claimed lives, turned homes to ash, destroyed wildlife—and is still burning.**

**Repeatedly, the word used to describe the fire is “uncontrolled.” And the stated goal of the firefighters is “to bring the fire under control.” Then, in the next breath the commentators mention the fierce Santa Ana winds blowing out of the desert, carrying hot embers far and fanning the flames—as much as to say the firefighters are at the mercy of the winds and cannot hope to gain control of the fire themselves! (We are reminded of the Lord’s words in the Gospel, although they were delivered in quite another context: “The wind blows where it wishes. . . .” John 3:8.)**

**Surely the salutary conclusion to be drawn is that human control is at best limited and largely a delusion. Meanwhile, at least as far as public discourse is concerned, the only recognition we hear of the One Who is in control, comes from the insurance adjusters, who are willing to call the damage to property “acts of God.” Otherwise, the silence of political correctness prevails on the commentators’ lips, risking nothing more than occasional mention of “Mother Nature.”**

**As always, we Orthodox Christians do well to turn to the Church for guidance, for Her perspective on what is happening. Here we encounter a very different, encouraging and hopeful interpretation of such disastrous events. At the same time the Church prays for deliverance from fire and disasters and evils of all kinds, She recognizes within them God’s call to us to return to Him, evidence of His refusal to abandon us even as our society turns away from Him and abandons Him. Isn’t this the deep message of Christmas? “God is with us!”**

**Abbess Victoria  
and the community of  
St. Barbara Monastery**

# ***FEAST OF ST. BARBARA AND 25<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION***

## ***DECEMBER 4, 2017***

***A Feastday like no other! A Feastday to remember!***

This Feast Day of St. Barbara in 2017 marked twenty-five years since St. Barbara Monastery began in a small rented cottage in downtown Santa Barbara. To mark the anniversary, we had hoped to have ready a small booklet of the monastery's history—along with photos showing the evolving life of our community. Providentially, it would seem, that project had to be postponed. What we have here instead is a short account of this momentous 25<sup>th</sup> feastday itself—along with photos of quite another sort!

December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017, was the first time the Feast of St. Barbara was celebrated in our newly consecrated chapel of the Holy Martyrs Barbara and Eugene. We heartily thank Archbishop BENJAMIN for coming once again and duly presiding at the Divine Liturgy. And we likewise



heartily thank the seven priests who came to concelebrate: V. Rev. Patrick O'Grady of St. Peter Church in Pomona, V. Rev. Nazari Polataiko of Holy Virgin Mary Cathedral in Los Angeles, V. Rev. Lawrence Russell of Holy Annunciation Church in Santa Maria, V. Rev. Nicholas Speier of St. Athanasius Church in Goleta, Rev. Yousuf Rassam of St. Innocent Church in Tarzana, Rev. Michael Rozdilsky of St. George Church in Victorville, and Rev. Nicholas Hanna of Holy Cross Church in Palmdale. The preceding evening, Rev. Yousuf Rassam

served the Vigil assisted by V. Rev. Patrick O'Grady and Rev. David Kruse of St. Raphael Church in Palm Springs. We are especially grateful to Peter Howe of Holy Annunciation Church in Santa Maria, who enthusiastically directed the choir at the Divine Liturgy and at the Moleben and Cross Procession, as well as Subdeacons Stephen Butler and Serge Liberovsky and the many others who labored to make this event beautiful to the glory of God.

The weather was perfect—sunny and warm. To our great joy, just before the beginning of the Divine Liturgy Sister Photini (Engelbach) was clothed with the apostolnik. And following the glorious services in honor of the Martyrs festive meals prepared with love by Chef Kimmy Tang and Bogdan Popescu were served to all who attended. Then, in the afternoon on the Feast Day itself, Father Nicholas Speier related the story of St. Barbara to the children, who were presented with treats and toys to enjoy and take home.



## *And then a most unexpected evening. . .*

By about four o'clock in the afternoon, all our guests had gone on their way except for the



West family from Bakersfield, who chose to remain for Vespers. It was about 6:30 PM, while everyone was at the supper table, that our neighbor phoned to ask us to take a look at the sky glowing red with the threat of fire. Wisely, the Wests immediately drove off for home. In minutes, towering flames, marching down the hillside beyond Thomas Aquinas College, became plainly visible from our big windows. They were far enough away that we had time to remove and pack the relics and the icons from the

iconostas as well as some other important items from the chapel and the house, collect our overnight bags (which as experienced Californians we keep at the ready), put the cats in their carriers, and evacuate. Our lay sisters Asia Ballew and Jill Wallerstedt along with Joseph Ballew (who at the time was staying at the monastery) headed for Santa Barbara. The rest of us drove to Oxnard, where we were graciously given shelter and hospitality for the next five days by Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Hibbard (Mitch Denny's sister and her family).

Every day, we attempted to return and check the status of the monastery property, but were repeatedly turned back at the road block on Hwy 150/Ojai Rd. in Santa Paula (about five miles away), mostly because of downed power lines. At last, to our enormous relief, we received word through a CHP officer that all the buildings on the monastery property were standing. Somewhat later, however, we learned that our main lavender field had burned, as well as vegetation along the creek banks to the south and the hillside to the north of our property. Upon viewing the devastation later, we found that the fire had come right up to the icon of the Protection of the Mother of God, which stands at the head of our infant cemetery, and stopped there. Not one of the small crosses marking the graves was touched!



Many of our immediate neighbors did not fare so well. They lost vehicles and out-buildings, although their houses remained untouched. A couple of miles or so up Hwy 150, however, quite a number of houses burned to the ground.

We returned on December 9<sup>th</sup> to resume the daily round of our monastic life with renewed dedication, giving thanks to God for preserving our monastery and mindful as never before of the fragility of life.