

*St. Barbara Orthodox Monastery*  
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*ST. BARBARA MONASTERY  
FRIENDS' GATHERING  
March 30th, 2025*

*4 pm Presentation:*

*Rejoice, O Unwedded Bride:  
Reflections on the Theotokos*

*Speaker: Mother Macrina  
Holy Assumption Monastery  
Calistoga, CA*

*5 pm Vespers*

*6 pm Potluck*



Dear Friends of St Barbara Monastery,

As we approach the middle of Great Lent, it is likely that the Fast is doing its work on us all. We see the precious and life-giving Cross placed firmly before us by the Church to encourage us to keep our eyes on the goal— reminding us that we must first be crucified in order to be raised to new life. We may be feeling a little weary, out of our comfort zones and “exposed” in our souls as we observe our hidden sins rising to the surface one-by-one during these hallowed days of life-giving repentance. Glory to God: the Great Fast is doing its work!

It is easy for some of us at this point in our Lenten journey to lose our way. In theory, we know that these days of purification are appointed by the Church to prepare us to meet Him at His Holy Resurrection. But in practice, our feeble attempts at repentance, fasting, prayer and almsgiving— our efforts to work on our stony hearts, our struggles to relinquish our self will, self-indulgence, etc.—can leave us discouraged, frustrated, and feeling like failures. If we find ourselves stuck in a Lenten rut, we may be missing the “big picture.”

In the middle of the Great Fast, the Church wisely gives the veneration of the Holy Cross. Let us remember that this a Feast of Love *par excellence*! We see Christ’s death on the Cross revealing to us the very nature of real love itself—self-sacrificial, limitless and forgiving. Not only does the Cross set forth before us the image of perfect love, it also sets before us what it means to be truly human. For Jesus Christ—truly God *and* truly Man—shows us on the Cross what we are meant to be *as* humans. “Behold the Man!” utters Pontius Pilate of Christ (lit. “Behold the Human!” (*anthropos*) in Greek)— as he unwittingly reveals a profound truth about what it means for *us* to be truly human as God intended for us. The Cross teaches us that to become fully human, as Christ is and as the saints are, we must voluntarily lay down our lives for the sake of the Other, dying to our own stubborn will and desires, forgiving and loving even those who hate us. The price of perfect love is painful: it involves our own continuous dying! But therein lies our own resurrection. Such is our exalted calling as human beings. Such is our struggle to die daily—with the help of the Holy Spirit—so as to live the Christian life. Such is the work of the Lenten Fast.

Consider the words of the Church’s hymnody from the very first day of Great Lent:

*All mortal life is but one day, so it is said, to those who labor with love.*

*There are forty days in the Fast: let us keep them all with joy!*

—Clean Monday Matins, Ode IX

Ever beholding the love of Christ for us on the Cross, may God grant us to labor *with love* during the remaining days of Lent, not with sad countenances, but keeping each day *with joy*, and preparing ourselves for that great and glorious day of His Holy Resurrection!

—The Sisters of St. Barbara Monastery



## ***A VISIT FROM THE LOCAL SYRIAC CHURCH***

What was originally supposed to be a visit from 20 Sunday School kids from the local Syriac church, blossomed into a delightful visit from 60 of the parishioners— both kids and adults— of The Virgin Mary of the Belt Church (*Um Al-Zunar*) in Ventura.

Led by their Sunday School leader, Reyama Mchammel, 25 bright and eager children learned about the life of the great martyr Barbara and later participated in a question and answer session with Mother Victoria in the church. One could not have wished for a more pleasant afternoon. While everyone lunched outdoors enjoying the temperate weather, the kids romped around with balls and bubbles, exploring the grounds, and interacting with the sisters. There was time before departure for our pilgrims to shop in the bookstore and light candles in church. One of the highlights of the day was when the entire group sang a melodious rendition of The Lord's Prayer in Syriac for the sisters.

For most in this group, this was their first visit with us and, we hope, the beginning of many more.



***Left:*** Let the little children come unto Me...

***Above:*** A little chat about our lives in Christ.

## ***ABOUT THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER***

Mother Macrina is a nun at Holy Assumption Monastery (OCA) in Calistoga, CA. She began her monastic life at St. Barbara Monastery and moved together with the group of sisters led by Mother Melania to revive the monastery in Calistoga in 2009.



## ***ST. TIMOTHY CHURCH LADIES VISIT***

On Saturday, March 15th, St. Barbara Monastery had the privilege of hosting about a dozen ladies from St. Timothy Orthodox Church in Lompoc. It might be more accurate to say that these ladies hosted us! They brought delicious Lenten food for all to share and happily cleaned bay leaves for a good part of their stay here. (These leaves are ordered from us by churches who use them on Great and Holy Saturday.) They also participated in an interactive talk, enjoyed the newly rain-washed property, and, of course, spent time in the bookstore.



At noon, the ladies prayed the short 6th Hour service with us and stayed for an early Vespers and supper before going on their way.

It never ceases to amaze us when pilgrims come to spend the day with us, feeding us, helping us out, and then thanking us for having them! Glory to God that we do have this God-given grace-filled place to share with others and for the grace people bring to us who come to spend time here.

## ***ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN'S ANNUNCIATION TEA***

For the last 25 years, the Antiochian women of St. Michael Orthodox Church (Van Nuys, CA) led by Antiochian Women president, Charmaine Darmour, have blessed our sisterhood with the proceeds of their yearly Annunciation Tea. Just when we thought they could not do a more remarkable job with their annual Teas, they did just that this year for the 25th anniversary. Antiochian Bishop Anthony (Michaels) of Los Angeles and the West shared some beautiful reflections on the Theotokos and the sisters were invited to sell the monastery's wares to roughly 100 women in attendance. St. Michael's parish and its women have always held a special place in our hearts for their ongoing kindness towards us. We thank God for giving us such friends!

***Left: Tea, anyone? Below: Ready for the crowd!***

