

Defending the Faith

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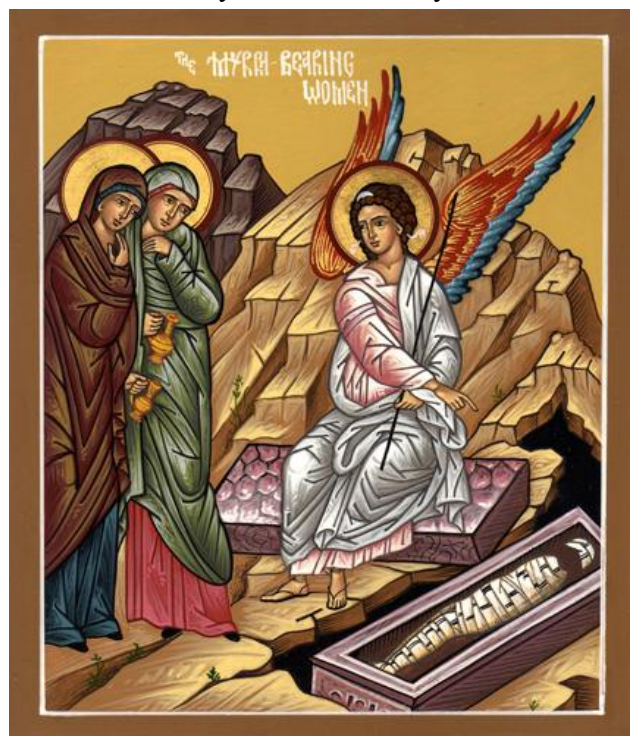
May 2019

The Resurrection

Xristos Anesti! Christ is Risen! This is how Greek Orthodox greet each other beginning on Easter until the day of Ascension, Thursday, June 6. All Christians believe that Christ rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, three days after he was crucified. According to Matthew 28:2, *“And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it”* and the guards shook from fear and became like dead men. The discovery of the empty tomb was first made by Mary Magdalene and two other women as they arrived to find the stone rolled away and saw an angel with an appearance like lightning and clothing white as snow. He announced that Jesus had risen from the dead and instructed the women to go and tell the disciples.

However, none of the disciples believed the women. I always wondered why. Didn't Jesus tell the twelve that he would rise from the dead in three days? So why did they not believe? Firstly, women were not considered reliable witness in those days. As a matter of fact, women were not permitted to testify as witnesses in court proceedings. Their testimonies were not considered admissible. If someone had created this story as some suggest, they would not have had women discover the empty tomb. It just was not customary to accept the word of a woman. On the other hand, these women were well acquainted with the disciples and were more like family. Why was it so difficult for the disciples to believe Jesus rose from the dead? After all, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

I suppose, it is the same reason why *we* may find it difficult to believe! It had never ever happened before! No one had ever raised themselves from the dead. Even if Jesus raised Lazarus, how could He raise Himself, once He was



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dead? Jesus talked about the resurrection of the dead, when those in Hades would receive eternal life in paradise, but no one ever saw the dead spirits. The disciples probably never expected a bodily resurrection. They never expected to see Jesus walking on this Earth. They probably expected to see Him when they died and went to heaven themselves.

Even Thomas disbelieved the other disciples, when they told Him that they had seen Christ. He declared that *“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe”* (John 20:25). Christ obliged. Thomas touched the wounds in His hands and in His side. Then

Thomas believed. He not only believed, but he declared, *“My Lord and my God!”* (John 20:28), acknowledging that Jesus was God. They even gave Jesus *“a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence”* (Luke 24:42-43). A spirit would not be able to eat!

The fact remains, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, all that we believe would be in vain. It is the resurrection, which gives us hope for eternal life. This is what Christ promised. If He did not rise from the dead, He would be little more than a good teacher. However, because Christ kept His promise, we can be assured that His word is truth. No one else ever claimed to have risen from the dead. It is a bold claim.

There were Roman guards placed at the tomb to ensure that the disciples could not steal the body of Jesus. When earthquake revealed the empty tomb, some of the guards reported what had happened to the chief priests. The priests *“devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, ‘You must say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.’ So, they took the money and did as they were directed”* (Matthew 28: 12-15). According to Matthew, the Jews were well acquainted with the story that the disciples had stolen Christ’s body.

However, there are a few problems to this story. First, why would the disciples knowingly die for a lie? If they had truly stolen the body, they would not have been willing to die such horrific deaths, like crucifixion, beheading, being flayed to death from whipping, or being dragged by horses through the streets. Second, if Christ had not risen from the dead bodily, all the chief priests and Roman authorities had to do was produce the dead body. All rumors would have been immediately quashed.

Instead, rather than silencing the Christian movement, it gained momentum. Christians still stubbornly believe that Christ rose from the dead. Why do billions of Christians still persist in their beliefs for two thousand years? It seems illogical and foolish.

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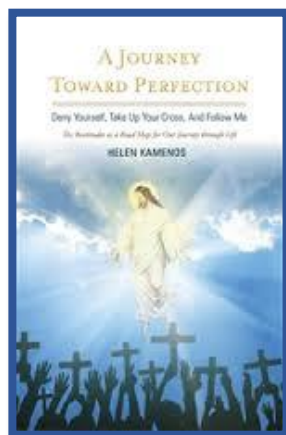
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“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...Where is the one who is wise...Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified” (1 Corinthians 1:18-23).

The proof of Christ, the Son of God who rose from the dead, is in the changed hearts and lives of those who love Him. The frightened and cowardly disciples who ran away and hid after Jesus was crucified became bold proclaimers of His resurrection and died horrific deaths for their beliefs. For two thousand years, even to this day, Christians have been martyred for their beliefs. We Christians claim to know Christ and to have experienced Him in our lives. We do not live by blind faith, but rather, live by what we know to be true, our personal encounters with the living God. Our faith is not based on just a feeling. Our hearts and lives are changed as we come to develop a relationship with our Lord. Every Christian has a story, an experience, which has changed them. Some have experienced a radical change over a short period of time, while others have undergone a gradual change over the years. What is your story?

Read *My Story* on the next page, and then send me an email with your story! I'd love to hear about your experiences!

Helen Kamenos
Readers' Favorite Author



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My Story



As far back as I can remember, God has always been a part of my life. I remember my mom, sitting my brothers, sister, and me down to tell us about all the miracles that she had heard as a child herself. This was when I first learned to love God. I remember going to Sunday School and being enthralled by all that I had learned. I remember Good Friday services in Cleveland, when all the Eastern Orthodox churches in the neighborhood processed in the streets and converged on one corner to celebrate in unity. Christ's funeral procession was real to me. I remember walking in the processions, praying that my candle would not be blown out in the wind and watching its glow strengthen. I knew it was God who made it burn more brightly, even in the wind. I remember learning about Christ's second coming in Sunday School, when I was around eleven or twelve years old. I read the Book of Revelation. It had a profound effect on me.

By the time I was in middle school, I knew that God had called me to teach. As I grew to adulthood, this desire never wavered, even though my mom did not believe in girls going to college. She believed that girls became secretaries, married, had children, and became housewives. I entered CSUN, knowing my path in life. As graduation approached and I began taking my credential classes, I realized how young I appeared to look compared to the high school students I was about to teach. As required, I visited classrooms to conduct my observations. I was often asked for my hall pass, being mistaken for a student. I felt a bit intimidated, wondering how I would be able to teach students, if I looked as young as they were. I didn't believe I was ready.

After having worked at Fotomat Corporation part time during my college years, I was offered a promotion to Area Training Manager, just as I was about to go on and begin my student teaching. Being fearful of the prospect of teaching high school students in the public schools of Los Angeles, I accepted the promotion. This began my new path in life, my life in management. I loved it! I learned so much about managing employees, hiring them, motivating them, teaching them, and when necessary, even firing them. I achieved great success, exceeding the goals set for me. After working at Fotomat for ten years and as the company began experiencing financial hardships, I decided it was time to seek new opportunities. I accepted a position at Brook's Fashions as a Store Manager in Inglewood. After five years of working weekends and holidays, as well as witnessing the demise of another retail company, I was convinced to return to my initial dream of teaching. Brook's offered me a five-month severance package, since my store was being closed down. I decided to return to school and earn my credential. I knew that God had always called me to become a teacher, and now, a bit older, I knew it was the right time.

During my years in management, my faith in God never wavered, but my time in church was inconsistent. I often worked Sundays, and to be honest, I didn't always make it a priority. It was at this time that my beliefs were challenged, and I realized that I didn't know enough about my own religion. I had a friend, who was a born-again Christian, but had lost her faith when her pastor made sexual advances toward her. Her roommate was an atheist who enjoyed challenging my beliefs. I read

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My Story

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the Bible regularly. I attended Father Kezios' catechism classes and Father Costa's Bible study classes at St. Nicholas Church. Thanks to them and God's guidance, I learned so much. I again began attending church regularly.

My friend's roommate challenged me to a debate on the existence of God. Through this philosophical debate, God helped me to understand that it requires just as much faith to be an atheist as it does to believe in God. After all, there is no scientific proof either way. The roommate became an agnostic that night. I prayed and prayed for an understanding of the Trinity and proof in the Bible. While in church one day, God gave me a vision of the Trinity, which I have never spoken about, but it gave me an understanding and strengthened my faith. Soon afterward, God led me to the needed passages in the Bible to confirm that the Trinity was God.

I survived my student teaching, although it was quite a challenge. It was time to seek employment. Naturally, I applied to LAUSD but found that the only positions available were in the inner-city schools. I did not feel ready for that challenge. I took a temporary job as a secretary, while I waited for God to match me to the right teaching position. I waited for about six months. Out of the blue, I received a call from Cathy Pallad about a 4th grade position available at St. Nicholas School, due to a teacher who was taking maternity leave. Cathy was the principal of St. Nicholas School at the time. I didn't realize that anyone at the church was even aware that I had earned my credential. I was trained as a secondary English teacher, not an elementary school teacher, but I felt God had blessed me with this opportunity.

Father Kezios interviewed me. I was so nervous; I think my hands were shaking! During the interview, Father Kezios made an unusual statement that struck me. He said that one day, Cathy Pallad would retire, and that perhaps I could become principal. I thought that was a strange comment, considering the fact that I was a brand-new teacher with no experience at that point. At the time, I believed that Father Kezios probably made that comment to encourage me to accept the position by pointing out that this was a potentially long-term opportunity for me with advancement potential, but I never forgot it. For me, years later when I became principal, that comment took on the significance of a prophecy from God. But at that moment, I had no thoughts of being principal. I was just anxious to teach. I felt blessed that I was being offered this position, especially at my own church. I knew that this was the path God had chosen for me. I enthusiastically accepted the position and was to begin on February 1, 1990.

After 15 years of teaching, I was shocked when Father Costa, the head priest of St. Nicholas at that time, called me into his office to offer me the position of principal. After the initial shock, I eagerly accepted the position. The school was experiencing many challenges at the time. With God's grace, it seemed that I knew exactly what to do. It was a strange feeling, but it was during those first few months that I knew I was exactly where God wanted me. He prepared me all my life, just for this calling. My years at St. Nicholas, my teaching experience, and my management skills had all combined to prepare me for this task as principal of St. Nicholas School. This was my church, my home. This was my purpose in life for the next eight years.

There are many more experiences that have contributed to increasing my faith over the years, including God healing me from cancer, miracles of healing within my family, and other events that I included in *My Brief Autobiography* available on my Bio Page at www.helenkamenos.com. In short, they are too numerous to include in this newsletter! Glory to God!

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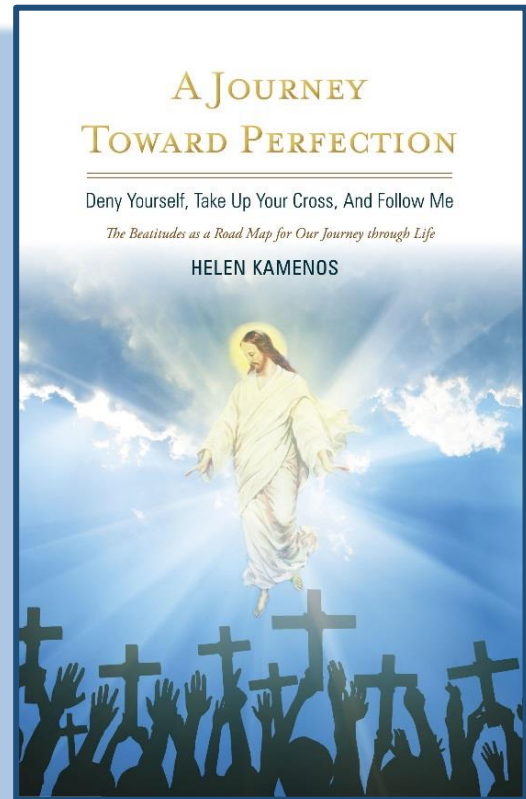
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A Journey Toward Perfection

A *Journey Toward Perfection* reveals a path toward developing an intimate experiential relationship with God. It is an in-depth study of the attributes of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. These are the attributes God bestowed upon us when He created us in His image. God created us to love. These are the traits necessary to love others as God loves us. These characteristics are central to our Christian spiritual growth. Discover how these attributes can sustain you through the many trials and tribulations of your life. Comprehend how love truly conquers all. Experience God's true presence in your life.

The Beatitudes from Matthew 5:

- ³ *Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- ⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.*
- ⁵ *Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.*
- ⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.*
- ⁷ *Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.*
- ⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.*
- ⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.*
- ¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- ¹¹ *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*
- ¹² *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*



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