

Defending the Faith



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January 2019

New Beginnings

Here we are at the beginning of another new year. Perhaps, you too, hope that 2019 will take a turn for the better, since 2018 was filled with many challenges. Naturally, it is always a time to review the past and look forward to the future, and of course, we try to make a better future for ourselves by proclaiming new resolutions. Often, they are not new commitments, but rather, old resurrected promises to ourselves that never came to fruition. Then, when we have done this year after year for decades, we may abandon the whole idea of creating new resolutions. However, new beginnings inspire us. They give us hope and motivate us to greater heights, greater goals. Perhaps, we should evaluate our commitment, our methods for achieving those goals, and our progress toward accomplishing our resolutions.

Generally, we are committed to making our resolutions a reality at first but lose our momentum along the way. We may not always take into consideration the work involved in undertaking such an aspiration. Most of all, we do not always involve God in our plans. Christ metaphorically described Himself as the vine, and we as the branches. He said that if we remain in Him, we will bear much fruit. He went so far as to say that *“apart from me you can do nothing”* and *“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you”* (John 15:5-7).

Therefore, first we need to consult God in choosing which resolutions would be worthy of our efforts. We should seek God’s will for us. Keep in mind that God’s will is that we love Him and love our neighbors, and to conform to His will, He intends for us to be more like Christ. He desires that we be humble, self-disciplined, merciful and pure in heart. God’s will is that we live with integrity, keeping our word and avoiding hypocrisy. He desires that we maintain balance in our lives in caring for our bodies and in how we spend our time. All this requires that we set appropriate priorities in our lives, always keeping God first.

Next, we need to set goals for ourselves that are attainable and realistic. This means that we should only choose one or two resolutions at a time, and we should plan a timeline with short-term mini-goals to achieve our resolution. I know that many of my past resolutions neglected to into account that often, resolutions require a permanent change in us. This is a reality we must consider. In addition, we must remember to expect challenges and setbacks. We should not expect perfection.

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New Beginnings (cont'd)



If we are truly committed to following through on our resolution, we must write it down and keep a log of our progress. Writing down goals is a physical action of making a mental decision. Once we get it on paper and look at it, our resolution takes on a sense of urgency because we have made the decision. Keeping a log of our progress aids in motivating us. Little steps go a long way to helping us persevere. As we make progress, we may need to adjust our mini-goals or timeline for a more realistic plan, so we do not find ourselves discouraged.

Throughout the process of achieving our resolution, we must talk to God. We can ask Him to strengthen our resolve or assist us in remaining patient. We can ask God to guide us in our planning and progress. Most of all, remember *“whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God”* (1 Corinthians 10:31) and *“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples”* (John 15:8).

Making changes in us is the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. He is able to transform us. Therefore, we must pray continually and thank God for the progress we make along the way. God reassures us, *“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine...Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing;*

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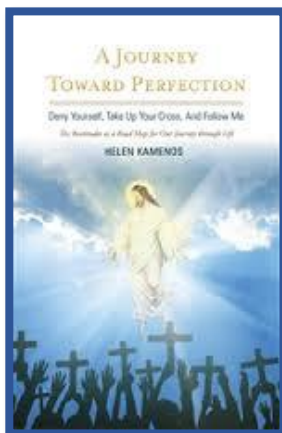
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:1, 18-19) Christ did a new thing in us when He died for our sins and rose again to everlasting life. He gave us the Holy Spirit to guide us and strengthen us.

I ask myself, "Do you not perceive it? Are you not bought with a price, the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ? Are you not His?" I remind myself, as Paul did, "*but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:13-14). I will forget the past and look forward to the blessings which lie ahead. I pray that I will hear God and know His will for me. I pray that He will give me the strength and perseverance to stay the course. I tell myself, "*you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator*" (Colossians 3:9-10). I pray that these passages will inspire and encourage you, as well.



Have a beautiful New Year filled with God's love and many of His blessings!

Helen Kamenos
Readers' Favorite Author



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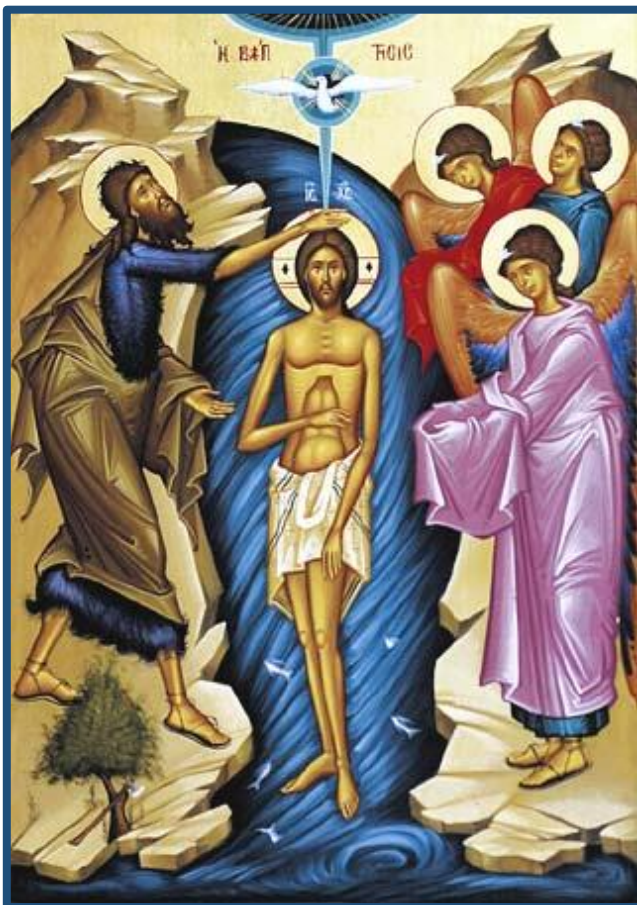
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Baptism and The Feast Day of Epiphany

The Feast of Holy Theophany (Epiphany) is celebrated on January 6. For the Greek Orthodox, it commemorates the divine revelation of the Holy Trinity at the Baptism of Jesus Christ, where all the persons of the Trinity were manifest, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:13-17):

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John (the Baptist) at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."



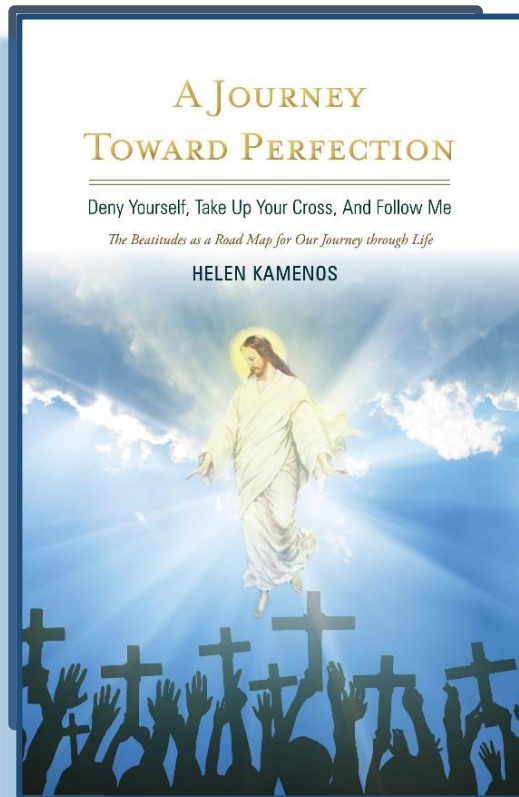
As Christians, we too, are baptized for the remission of sins and to be initiated into Christ's church. Our baptism is symbolic of Christ's death and resurrection. When we are immersed in the water we die to our old sinful selves, and when we are raised out of the water, we are raised into our new selves or born again into Christ. During baptism we renounce the works of the devil and dedicate ourselves to a life with Christ. For the Orthodox, baptism is a supernatural transformation, which mystically unites us to Christ through the Holy Spirit who takes residence within us.

The Baptism of Christ initiated His three-year ministry. Immediately after Jesus was baptized, He was "led by the Spirit to go into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted 40 days and 40 nights" (Matthew 4:1-2). After this time of trial and suffering, the devil left Him and the angels came and ministered to Him.

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Reviews

By Lisa Dobson posted on Facebook – “A must read.”

“This book is a must read! I have been reading and discussing it with my WSC, Patrice Wheeler. Every chapter is like a gourmet meal, meant to be taken slowly, the words savored. Each chapter keeps coming back in Full Circle with scripture. It's amazing, the deeper understanding of the Word, discussing how it applies with today's circumstances! My spiritual growth can't be measured. I greatly appreciate this book and look forward to additional growth in my walk with my Lord. Thank you for writing this. Really, there are not words to describe how amazing it is.”

By Mamta Madhavan for Readers' Favorite

“A Journey Toward Perfection: Deny Yourself, Take Up Your Cross, And Follow Me: The Beatitudes as a Road Map for Our Journey through Life by Helen Kamenos is an uplifting book for all those who seek the love of Christ. The book leads readers into a deeper relationship with God and reiterates the power of God's love. The author exalts the virtues of Jesus Christ and makes Him the role model

of divine love. Every Christian's journey should be toward Christ and also toward an intimate relationship with Him and His divine love. Readers are encouraged and motivated through this book to follow in Christ's footsteps to see their lives transformed and becoming more perfect in Christ.”

By Jaime Contreras on Amazon – “One of the Best Christian Teaching Books”

“This world is full of evil and the believer must be able to stand up against evil and be a minister of love, hope, peace, and charity. This book serves as a handbook for believers because it encompasses the essential lessons for living a Christian life and battling evil. The reader of this enlightened book has a valuable tool. Like any stellar teaching, one must take the concepts taught in this book and wield them in righteousness. A firm foundation in the lessons taught on the mount and throughout Jesus' ministry will gird one for life and bring one into an intimate relationship with Jesus, the Savior. Finally, this book was written with love and faith. I praise the work of the Holy Spirit leading Ms. Helen Kamenos in this work. I rate this one of the best Christian teaching books I have ever read.”

To read past issues of **Defending the Faith** visit: <http://www.helenkamenos.com/bio/>

Forward this to your family and friends, so they can sign up, too!