

SOPHIA!

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DID YOU KNOW . . . that the Orthodox Church has always celebrated the beginning of the New Year on September 1. This day is referred to as the "Induction" (a term given to identify an era on the calendar, which was widely used throughout the Mediterranean). The Patriarch of Constantinople adopted September 1 as the Ecumenical New Year. The Church prays on this day for fair weather, rains, and the fruits of the earth. The Church calendar does not recognize January 1 as "New Year's Day," but rather as the Feast of our Lord's Circumcision.

TOPIC OF THE MONTH . . . ESTABLISHING A PRAYER LIFE

In honor of the New Year, it's a common tradition to make "resolutions." For the upcoming Liturgical Year, let us – as women of the Antiochian Archdiocese – make a resolution to establish a stronger life of prayer.

Discussion Topics:

1. ***What is Prayer?*** St. John Chrysostom wrote that prayer is "a dialogue and union with God." He also wrote that "prayer is a source of grace and food for the soul." Prayer is both personal and private. In his letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul wrote that we should "pray unceasingly."
2. ***How Should I Pray?*** The Orthodox Church has a veritable treasure trove of magnificent prayers. However, we must initially open ourselves up to the power of the Holy Spirit in order to pray in the way that we should. We shouldn't be praying that we come into a great sum of money, or that we are granted unrelenting happiness. Instead, we should pray that we accept God's will and for strength to accept Him. Put your entire being into each prayer – it's okay to use prayers that are already given to us as part of the Church. If your mind wanders, force it back. Prayer can take place in a variety of venues – in your home, at school, at work, on a plane or a bus. Never think that you don't "know how" to pray or that you are not in the proper place. God is everywhere!
3. ***A Rule of Prayer.*** With our busy lives, it is easy to forget to pray, or to become distracted when we are praying. It is recommended that you begin with prayers with which you are already familiar. Our Church Fathers maintained a Rule of Prayer and received many temptations, so do not become frustrated. We should not fear that we are praying "incorrectly." Start off with a few basic prayers. It is recommended that you start with the Morning Prayers immediately upon getting out of bed (before you get dressed, start breakfast, or send the children off to school). Say them slowly, even if you initially just read a few sentences. Make them become a part of your being – like breathing the air around you. When said often enough, you will be able to memorize them. Repeat the same procedure for your Evening Prayers.

Tools for a Life of Prayer.

"The Jesus Prayer," also known as "The Prayer of the Heart," is one of the most famous and beautiful in Orthodoxy. With twelve simple words, our prayers rise to the heavens as incense: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner." In one of Christ's parables, it is the Pharisee who says, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." In the Gospel of Matthew, it is Peter who cries out, "Lord, save

