

The Censer



Volume 7, Issue 8

August 2003



Inside this issue:

Calendar	2
Editor's Note	2
Transfiguration	3
Beheading of St. John	9
Masbate - An Orthodox Oasis	14
Philanthropy	21

"Let my prayer rise as incense before you"

August 2003

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Dates to Remember

- 6/19 - Transfiguration of the Lord
- 15/28 - Dormition of the Theotokos
- 29 - Beheading of
St. John the Baptist

Editor's Note

Children capture the minds and hearts of many. Maybe it's their playful innocence, or maybe their unending curiosity that keep adults and elders gleefully attentive to them. Maybe it's all the potential that each child has, regardless of nationality or upbringing, to make a difference in the world.

On the Philippine island of Masbate, children like the ones on the cover of this month's issue are increasingly afforded opportunities to learn and grow. Parents of

students at the Theotokos Orthodox Kindergarten watch their children's youthful exuberance, combined with a dynamic set of teachers and an involved curriculum, translate into early academic success. Theotokos Kindergarten children, like all children, have all the potential in the world to improve their lots and the lots of their families.

Such possibilities would not exist without the undying support of a diverse group of benefactors and volunteers. Through their generosity and

love, and the hard work of all those involved on-site, the Theotokos Orthodox Kindergarten has developed into an educational enclave on the small tropical island. It's a place where children are encouraged to learn and be creative. It's a place that strives to increase every child's potential, so that each one can continue to capture the minds and hearts of all who cross their paths.

-C.E.

The Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

By *Metropolitan Nikitas*

Often overlooked and forgotten in the festive summer days is the great Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, celebrated on August 6. And yet, it is numbered among the days dedicated to the Lord and we are called to reflect on the many teachings which come from the feast.

We believe that the Transfiguration of the Lord took place not long before his crucifixion and the glorious Resurrection. Many theologians and teachers of the Church believe that it was actually forty days before the Passion. In allowing his disciples to witness the event of the Transfiguration, Christ poured strength and comfort into their hearts and minds. That

way they would not lose faith at the most critical time. They would be able to endure and bear the difficulties of the Passion and

(Continued on page 4)



The Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord (*cont'd*)

Crucifixion. The beautiful hymnology of the Church gives testimony to this with the words – “Before Thy Crucifixion, O Lord, the mountain became as heaven and a cloud spread itself out to form a tabernacle.” Or as we hear in the final hymns of the Orthros (Matins) service – The Transfiguration was a “prefiguring of the Resurrection”, as another hymn of the feast tells us.

If we follow this train of thought, then the Transfiguration of the Lord did not take place in August, as we now celebrate it. It must have taken place in March, since the Passover was celebrated in the month of Nisan. This leads us to some thoughts and questions. First, we need to remember that the Church does not always celebrate events and holidays when they may have happened, according to the

calendar. She is the master over time and space. A clear example of this is the feast of the Nativity.

“In allowing his disciples to witness the event of the Transfiguration, Christ poured strength and comfort into their hearts and minds. That way they would not lose faith at the most critical time. They would be able to endure and bear the difficulties of the Passion and Crucifixion.”

December 25th was selected for very specific reasons. Or, we know that St. John Chrysostom fell asleep in the Lord on September 14th, but his feast was moved to the month of November, as we are instructed in the synaxarion (list of the Saints who are celebrated each day).

There are some thoughts that the Church selected this day so the feast might be celebrated with joy and in splendor – outside the

(Continued on page 5)

The Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord (*cont'd*)

time of Lent. If one were to follow a strict understanding of when the event took place, then the feast would fall during the lenten period and be celebrated in a humble, modest tone as the sea-

son requires. But in her love and desire to share the blessings of the feast, the Church moved the celebration to the month of August, setting the day to fall forty days before the Elevation of the Life-creating Cross.



The event of the Transfiguration is recorded and found in the three Gospels (Matthew 17: 1-8, Mark 9: 2-8 and Luke 9: 28-36) and it carries a serious theological implication. It is the moment when Christ reveals his divinity to the disciples. He presents to the disciples that which he is – that which he was before all time. He did not take on anything that was not his

(Continued on page 6)

The Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord (*cont'd*)

nature. Rather, he reveals what the disciples had not seen, nor understood. But, he does not totally reveal himself. He allows them to see as much as they were able and possible to view, for we know that no one is able to look upon the full glory of God.

The Transfiguration of the Lord is also a teach-

ing example for us. In this wondrous moment, we are shown what is our true calling. The feast of the Transfiguration carries a very personal and important meaning for each of us. Allow me, please, to briefly explain.

1. *The transfiguration of the self*

The feast of the Savior invites us to the experience of self-evaluation and examination. We look at ourselves, our lives, our ways, our thoughts, our actions and evaluate

them against the standards set for us by Christ. We try to change – to be transfigured, so we become a reflection of Christ himself. This is done through confession,

“The feast of the Savior invites us to the experience of self-evaluation and examination. We look at ourselves, our lives, our ways, our thoughts, our actions and evaluate them against the standards set for us by Christ. We try to change – to be transfigured, so we become a reflection of Christ himself.”

the guiding hand of a spiritual father and other tools and means which the Church provides for us. We are called to change from sinners into Christians – from citizens of the world to heavenly persons on earth.

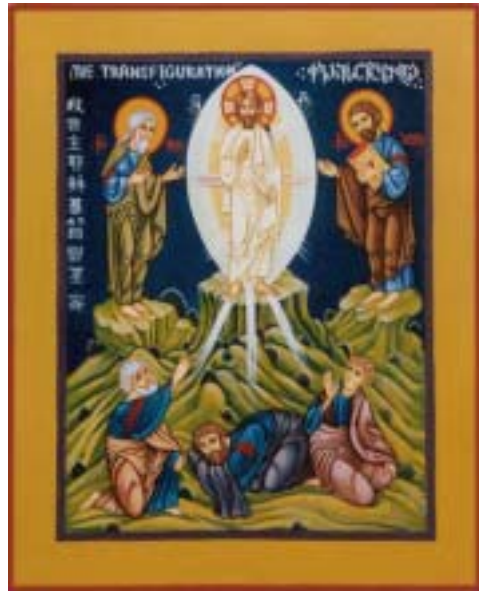
2. *The transfiguration of others*

Once we have changed the inner world and become the real people of God, we share the grace, love and gifts which have been

(Continued on page 7)

The Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord (*cont'd*)

given us. In so doing, we touch the lives of others. They see in us the many blessings and they also wish to possess them. In time and with our help, they also change and become part of the body of Christ. We give to them what we have in our hearts – Christ. But, it cannot be a Christ that we want or have fashioned. It must be the real Christ – the Lord, Savior and God. This is possible only if we live the life of love, the greatest of all gifts.



Icon courtesy of Fr. Daniel Toyne

3. *The transfiguration of the world*

Once we have changed and others have also shared in the wonder of personal transfiguration, the world around us begins to develop and grow in a special way. The world becomes the kingdom of God on earth; humans have become the citizens of an earthly heaven. It is the place of perfection – where all people share their blessings, there is peace, there are no homeless, no poor, no hungry persons, etc. Power, greed, pride,

and all the rest have vanished. Pollution of the soul, the body and the soil no longer take place. We are in communion and union with God. The kingdom of God is on earth.

The above thoughts are a dream and the vision, of course. They are what “is hoped for”. But, they are also those things which can become real, when the true meaning of the feast of the Transfigura-

(Continued on page 8)

The Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord (*cont'd*)

tion of the Lord is lived. It is the feast of light – the uncreated light of God – which enlightens all people and leads them on the path of salvation. It is the light which dispels darkness and illumines the heart and mind.

It is for the above rea-

sons that the Church sends out her children to the ends of the earth – to preach, teach and share the meaning of the Transfiguration. We are to bring the glory of Christ to those in darkness, hoping that they may become the children of light. Of such an experience and persons, St. Isaac the Syrian writes:

“The sun which shines in a person is the light of the Holy Trinity. The air that the denizens of this realm breathe is the comforting and All-Holy Spirit. And those who make their abode with him are the holy and incorporeal natures. Christ, the Light of the Father’s light, is their life, joy and happiness. Such a man

is gladdened at all times by the divine vision of his soul, and he is enthralled by his own beauty which is truly a hundredfold more resplendent than the bril-

“We are to bring the glory of Christ to those in darkness, hoping that they may become the children of light.”

liance of the sun itself. This is Jerusalem and the Kingdom of God which is hidden within us, as the Lord says. This realm is a cloud of God’s glory into which only the pure of heart may enter to behold the countenance of their Master and to have their intellects illumined by the ray of His light.”

May His light and glory illumine our hearts and minds, so we may find the kingdom of God within us and share it with others who thirst for truth.

Beheading of St. John the Baptizer

By Fr. Tilemahos Alikakos

Note: Fr. Tilemahos, currently serving the community of the Holy Trinity in Sioux City, Iowa, U.S, spent two years in Asia helping the OMKSEA. His articles have often graced the pages of The Censer.

*“What shall we call you O Prophet; Angel, Apostle, or Martyr? For as the bodiless angels you led your life; as an Apostle you taught the nations; as a Martyr you were beheaded for Christ’s sake. To Him intercede to have mercy on our souls.”
(From the Litany of the Vespers of August 29th)*

In writing on the feast of the beheading of St. John the Baptizer, commemorated on August 29th, the hymnographer wonders how to address this greatest of prophets: Angel, Apostle, or Martyr. St. John is rightly called an angel because from his early youth he withdrew into the desert and the banks of the Jordan River to live a life of extreme asceticism. There he deprived himself of all luxuries, and “*was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey*” (Mt. 3:4). Rightly so, with wings of an angel St. John is depicted in our iconography, for he lived as a bodiless being,



Icon courtesy of Fr. Daniel Toyne

free from the cares of the flesh. As an inspiration and example of the asceticism we are called to keep, St. John came into this world “*neither eating bread nor drinking wine*” (Luke 7:33). Rather, as an angel He came to be the messenger of God, to preach the coming of the Lord and His Kingdom, to ‘*prepare the way of the Lord; to make His paths straight*’ (Mt. 3:3). He came to preach repentance so that even a handful would recognize the Lamb of God who was coming to take away the sin of the world.

This handful of disciples that St.

(Continued on page 10)

Beheading of St. John the Baptizer *(cont'd)*

John had put on the way of repentance would later become the Lord's disciples and apostles to the world. That is why the hymnographer calls St. John an Apostle. Sent by God as the last of the Prophets and the first of the Apostles, St. John made a most important

"He came to preach repentance so that even a handful would recognize the Lamb of God who was coming to take away the sin of the world."

contribution to the saving ministry of Jesus in that he handed over to Him his disciples saying: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30 NKJV).

The hymnographer finally calls St. John a martyr because his beheading was a result of his stand against all injustice and sin, especially the sin of the ruler Herod who had taken his dead brother's widow as his wife. King Herod would not repent, as did King David when the prophet of God came to him. Enslaved to sin and his passions, Herod could not bear to hear St. John's voice. Thus, unwillingly, he served the Divine dispensation, giving the Baptizer the crown of martyrdom which enabled him to bring his message of the Lord's coming to

the land of the dead so that they too would recognize the incarnation of the Son of God.

Among all the stars of the heavenly firmament, none shines brighter than St. John the Baptizer, always depicted next to Christ on the icon-

screens of Orthodox Church. Yet, referring to this Angel, Apostle, and Martyr, Jesus proclaimed in Luke 7:28: "For I say to you, among

those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

What a bizarre statement that comes from the mouth of our Lord! This man, the greatest born from a woman, lived in the wilderness. He dedicated his whole life in contemplation and communion with the angels and the divine. He preached and practiced the message of repentance and guided thousands toward the ministry of Jesus. He was martyred in the hands of unbelievers for the sake of his faith like thousands upon thousands after him. This man of virtue, humility and zeal for God, this great saint and mediator of our

(Continued on page 11)

Beheading of St. John the Baptizer *(cont'd)*



Lord, would not be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven whose coming he preached. On the opposite, the least in the Kingdom of heaven, the Lord said would be greater than St. John the Baptizer.

At first glance, this statement of Jesus seems to be a diminishment of the ministry of St. John that contradicts the honor that is bestowed to him in the Orthodox way of life. One need

only to look at his prominent position in the iconography of the Church, in the Church calendar, in the myriad of saints that bear his name, and in the multitude of churches dedicated in his honor. The purpose, however, of Jesus' statement was not to diminish St. John. After all, He did exclaim that among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptizer. Jesus proclaimed him the messenger who came to prepare the way for the Messiah, the prophet Elijah reborn. Ultimately, Jesus accepted to be baptized by him. Therefore, Jesus' statement may not be

used to diminish the Baptizer, but rather to show the greatness of the Kingdom he inaugurated. St. John belongs to the period of the Old Covenant; the Kingdom of God is inaugurated in Christ. The new Covenant so far surpasses the old that the least in this Kingdom is greater than St. John. Luke 7:28 then becomes more a statement of

(Continued on page 12)

Beheading of St. John the Baptizer *(cont'd)*

the grandeur of God's gift to those who believe rather than a statement about St. John.

Nevertheless, when we speak of St. John the Baptizer, the images of an ascetic, austere, prophetic figure, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, a proclamation

of judgment, the ax falling on the root of the tree that does not bear fruit, all these come into mind. A message of 'gloom and doom' is associated with the ministry of St. John along with the ministry of all the prophets of the Old Testament. However, if we look more carefully at the prophets' teachings, we will rather see a proclamation of joyous news, the announcement that God the creator was fulfilling His promise of redemption, the declaration and arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. What do we read in the prophecy of Isaiah in the vespers of August 29th? "*Comfort, ye, comfort My people!*" *Says your God. Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the Lord's hand Double for all her sins. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for*

our God. Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places

"...He did exclaim that among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptizer."

shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Isa. 40:1-5). The message is that of the glorious Kingdom of God coming to earth, a pardon of sins, and an end to warfare with evil. It is a joyous message, a revelation of the glory of God which we all desire to see so that injustice will no longer prevail in the world, and when the 'Herods' and 'Salomes' of this world will be silenced in favor of the praises of God. It is a declaration that the humble and the low will be exalted and no longer be crying out: "*How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?*" (Rev. 6:10)

In the ears of the repentant, the faithful, of those who live by the mercy

(Continued on page 13)

Beheading of St. John the Baptizer *(cont'd)*

of God, St. John serves as the Angel who proclaims the best of news, the

has been joined by a myriad of Holy Fathers and Mothers of the Church, martyrs, ascetics, healers and right-

eous. By the grace of God, the voice of the Baptizer will continue to be joined by voices of faithful around the world. These voices filled with courage and conviction will continue to proclaim the joy and the grandeur of the Kingdom of God which we all hope to taste by glorifying and praising the name of

“The message is that of the glorious Kingdom of God coming to earth, a pardon of sins, and an end to warfare with evil.”

eous. By the grace of God, the voice of the Baptizer will continue to be joined by voices of

Apostle who teaches and guides us to our Lord, the Martyr who shed his blood in order to seal his proclamation, his preaching and his faith in His Lord Whom he served with his whole being. In the ears of those who are

faithful around the world. These voices filled with courage and conviction will continue to proclaim the joy and the grandeur of the Kingdom of God which we all hope to taste by glorifying and praising the name of

struggling to live in imitation of Christ, it is a message of encouragement, a call to change and bring the Kingdom of earth now; it is an announcement of adoption as children on God with the duty to act accordingly.

“His voice that proclaims the great news of the Kingdom is still a voice crying out in the wilderness, but since the time of his martyrdom, this voice has been joined by a myriad of Holy Fathers and Mothers of the Church, martyrs, ascetics, healers and righteous.”

His voice that proclaims the great news of the Kingdom is still a voice crying out in the wilderness, but since the time of his martyrdom, this voice

the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

Masbate - An Orthodox Oasis

By Spiro J. Deligiannis

Note: Mr. Deligiannis, a Metropolitan Council member, made the journey to Masbate to witness the consecration of the Theotokos Orthodox Church in July 2003. His observations were graciously provided to The Censer for publication.

While the Philippines may be an archipelago of over 10,000 islands, Masbate is most unique in that it is the only island that has an Orthodox monastery located on it. Nestled in a small village off a side street from the main road that traverses the island, the Theotokos monastery grounds itself are an oasis, an island within an island. For it is here in a most serene setting that Orthodoxy has taken root in Asia's only Christian nation, away from the teeming masses living in this continent's large cities and the demands of society that are quite secular and commercial in nature.

Similar to how one feels upon reaching a desert oasis after a long grueling journey, one is overwhelmed both spiritually and physically when arriving at the monastery. The trip requires one



Above: Sunset at the newly consecrated Theotokos Orthodox Church in Cataingan, Masbate, Philippines.

to fly from Manila for just over an hour on a small prop plane that has seen better days. As unnerving as that may be, the flight jitters are eased by the tranquility of looking down upon a majestic blue ocean and vibrant green islands. A sense of calm spreads as one realizes that even in this part of the world - where islands are covered with forests of palm

(Continued on page 15)

Masbate - An Orthodox Oasis *(cont'd)*

trees, where typhoons routinely pass through, and where remnants of volcanoes that erupted long ago are seen everywhere with lakes filling in the caldera - a place far different from what most of us are familiar with, there is an Orthodox presence.

Arriving at the short landing strip on the island of Masbate is a brief respite, for ahead, there is still a two hour drive to the monastery on a road that is bumpy and winding, serves as a rest area for chickens and livestock, and meanders through villages where homes are made of either thatch or corrugated metal. The stark living conditions are offset by fertile plains, hillsides amply covered with trees bearing tropical fruits, and an

“Similar to how one feels upon reaching a desert oasis after a long grueling journey, one is overwhelmed both spiritually and physically when arriving at the monastery.”

ocean teeming with sea life. This is a place that the modern con-

veniences of the 21st century have not reached; there is no cell

(Continued on page 16)

Right: Mother Theodoti reads the Psalms of the Matins on the eve of the consecration of Theotokos Orthodox Church.



Masbate - An Orthodox Oasis *(cont'd)*



Above: Mother Theodoti (center), and Srs. Fidelis (left), Agnes (rear, right), and Ester (front) prepare to exit for one of the many processions during the Matins and Consecration Services.

phone coverage nor air-conditioning on this tropical island.

Yet, despite the lack of amenities, the warmth and genuineness of the children who attend the Theotokos

kindergarten are priceless. Their enthusiasm in greeting visitors, exuberance in singing, and innocent curiosity of all things is most welcoming. The playfulness and energy they exhibit are such that all pilgrims to these sanctified grounds feel truly blessed. The local inhabitants may be quite small in stature, but large smiles are evident everywhere.

Likewise, the monastery is only an enclave, but yet it provides a sense of hope for all. On 15 July 2003, Metropolitan Nikitas went to Masbate to consecrate Theotokos Orthodox Church. Assisting were Fr. Konstantinos Tsilis, and Fr. Melchezidek (both from Greece), as well as Fr. Vincentius Escarcha, the spiritual head of the Orthodox faithful of Masbate, and Fr. Philemon Castro, whose parish of the Annunciation in Manila was consecrated in March of 2000. Brother Cleopas – a tortured monk to be ordained later this year - assisted with all the preparations, while Mother Theodoti – the abbess of the

(Continued on page 17)

Masbate - An Orthodox Oasis *(cont'd)*

monastery, along with Sisters Fidelis, Ester & Agnes, chanted and led the congregation in song.

The almost four-hour service in a crowded church with the full force of July's heat

and humidity was a truly uplifting experience. There was the melodic chanting of the nuns and the rhythmic ringing of the bells; the stinging, pungent yet familiar aroma of the consecration sealant and the sweet smell of myrrh-incense and rose water; the flowing robes of the clergy and the colorful head scarves of the women; and lastly, the faithful's

Right: The altar table is sealed with relics from the monastery of St. Sava in Jerusalem. Shown are (from left to right) Fr. Konstantinos, Fr. Melchizedek, Fr. Vincentius and Metropolitan Nikitas.

piety and sincerity. One's senses were overwhelmed, yet at the same time subdued, as the barren slab in the center of the altar was

"The almost four-hour service in a crowded church with the full force of July's heat and humidity was a truly uplifting experience."

slowly transformed to an ornate altar table that will serve as the centerpiece of all liturgies and services held from now on in the newly consecrated church.

(Continued on page 18)



Masbate - An Orthodox Oasis (*cont'd*)

Afterwards, lunch was held for all on the lower floor of the church that functions as the community center.

Countless meat dishes – chicken, beef, lamb, and goat, along with platters of potatoes and eggplants,

Below: Brother Cleopas and Ismael prepare the sealant for the Consecration of Theotokos Orthodox Church.



“While the church serves as the physical presence of the Orthodox faith, the monastics’ never-ending examples of fasting, prayer, and service provide the living testament of what the faith is all about to the faithful. ”

and heaping mounds of rice were served. Additionally, a quite tasty and creamy local dessert known as “Filipino pudding” was provided, along with the ubiquitous warm bottle of Coke and straw. If that was not enough, a roasted pig was brought in for all to partake of in this celebratory feast. A congratulatory speech was given by the vice-Mayor, a personal account by Fr. Vincentius on how he converted to Orthodoxy, and a presentation by His Eminence Nikitas that served as an excellent Sunday school lesson. From the political to the personal to the pastoral, the afternoon’s program was emceed by Ms. Sheila Todio, who articulated quite well the sincerity and

(Continued on page 19)

Masbate - An Orthodox Oasis *(cont'd)*

thankfulness of the community at large, as to the day's most blessed events.

While the church serves as the physical presence of the Orthodox faith, the monastics' never-ending examples of fasting, prayer, and service provide the living testament of



Above: Metropolitan Nikitas washes the altar table after the relics have been sealed. Fr. Vincentius looks on.



what the faith is all about to the faithful. The consecration on Wednesday, July 16, 2003 of the Theotokos church at the monastery of Masbate was a most memorable experience. For while there are hotels throughout Asia that are far more luxurious and other sights that have much to offer in terms of history and culture, the sense of being at

(Continued on page 20)

Left: Metropolitan Nikitas anoints the walls of Theotokos Orthodox Church as part of the consecration service.

Masbate - An Orthodox Oasis (*cont'd*)

home in the newly consecrated church and the sense of peace in knowing that the monastery is part of a tradition that transcends time and distance, provide a most fundamental un-

derstanding of how we are all connected to each other. Masbate may be one of the countless islands that make up the Philippines, yet the

“For while there are hotels throughout Asia that are far more luxurious and other sights that have much to offer in terms of history and culture, the sense of being at home in the newly consecrated church and the sense of peace in knowing that the monastery is part of a tradition that transcends time and distance, provide a most fundamental understanding of how we are all connected to each other.”

Theotokos monastery connects it to a world that is far beyond its shores.



Left: Brother Cleopas and Mr. Spiro Deligiannis at the post-consecration luncheon at Theotokos Orthodox Church.

Philanthropy

Project Profiles

The Office of Philanthropy (OP) is in the process of creating a two-page *Project Profile* for some of the humanitarian programs established in the region. The purpose of these brief summaries is to keep supporters, interested parties and the general public informed about specific regional projects on a semi-annual or quarterly basis. Additionally, creating a digital and hard-copy portfolio of updated *Project Profiles* will enable the OP to provide, almost immediately, fairly updated data to prospective

benefactors or members of the media.

The Theotokos Orthodox Kindergarten in Cataingan, Masbate, Philippines is the subject of the first *Project Profile* to be created. Masbate Province (which includes the relatively large island of Masbate and a few smaller surrounding islands), although aesthetically beautiful at first sight, has the dubious distinction of routinely being one of the poorest areas in all of the Philippines. In addition to regular economic plight, Masbateños often

face regular natural disasters including typhoons, floods, and earthquakes.

The Kindergarten, highlighted in last

Masbate Province Statistics	
Total Land Area:	4,047.7 km ²
Total Population (2000):	707,668
Major Economic Activities:	1) Cattle raising 2) Agriculture (copra, rice, corn, tobacco) 3) Fishing
Average Annual Family Income (1997):	55,882 Php (USD 1,054)
Major languages:	Masbateño, Samar-Visayan, Bohol, Cebuano, Tagalog, English

Above: Charts like this one are an integral part of *Project Profiles*, along with maps and crucial project details.

Philanthropy (cont'd)

month's issue of *The Censer*, is comprised of two sparsely-equipped classrooms on the grounds of the Theotokos Orthodox Monastery on a hill above Cataingan. Roughly fifty students, aged 4-6, come from all over Cataingan each school day, either by foot, tricycle or on the school's aging compact bus. (The term "bus" should be used loosely here. It's really a covered compact pick-up truck with two hard wooden benches placed in the back. It should seat 6-8, but routinely carries 12-16 children at one time. Needless to say, the Kindergarten is in desperate need of a new vehicle). Students attend classes taught by three hardworking local teachers. Mother Theodoti and Srs. Fidelis, Ester & Agnes keep watch over the kindergarten program, which has gained the deserved reputation among locals of being one of the best kindergartens on the island.

The Masbate Project Profile displays some noteworthy geographi-



Above: Theotokos Kindergarten students pretend to play trumpets outside of their kindergarten during a recent performance for visitors .

cal, demographical, and economic statistics for the province. It also includes vital statistics for the 2003-04 kindergarten school year, including running costs. The academic year in the Philippines starts in mid-June and runs until mid-March to avoid the

(Continued on page 23)

Philanthropy (cont'd)

Spring's infernal heat and allow time for the Easter holidays. Without the help of external resources, including institutional and private donors, each year, the kindergarten would not continue to thrive.

Future *Project Profiles* will highlight the Girls Orphanage at Bakeswar, India, the Daily Enriched Milk & Biscuits Program and the

weekly food distribution program in Kolkata, India, and the St. Sophia Orthodox School in Medan, Indonesia. These profiles will be made available online (www.omhksea.org) in September. Until then, if you would

like a copy of the *Masbate Project Profile* or information on our other ongoing programs, please contact Mr. Christopher Ebe, Director of Philanthropic Projects, at the OMHKSEA (contact details on the back cover of this issue).

-C.E.



Above: OMHKSEA Director of Philanthropic Projects Christopher Ebe stands with the teachers and students of the Theotokos Orthodox Kindergarten in Cataingan, Masbate, Philippines.



"Let my prayer rise as incense before you"

Correspondences should be directed towards:

The Censer

Attn: Christopher Ebe, Editor
Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia

#704 Universal Trade Center
3 Arbuthnot Road
Central, Hong Kong

Phone: + (852) 2573-8328
Fax: + (852) 2573-8379
Email: omhksea@netvigator.com
Web Site: www.omhksea.org

***Disclaimer:** The views expressed by individual authors do not necessarily reflect the opinions or position of the OMHKSEA.*

PRINTED MATTER

Below: One of the many stops on the church procession during the consecration of Theotokos Orthodox Church on Masbate. Shown (from left to right) are Fr. Vincentius, Fr. Konstantinos, Metropolitan Nikitas, Fr. Melchizedek, and Fr. Philemon.

