

Saint George Greek Orthodox Church

I chose to visit the Saint George Greek Orthodox Church located on High Street in Albuquerque. I attended the service on Sunday at 9:00 am. This was their Divine Liturgy service. I had shown up for their 8 am Orthos service, but did not feel comfortable going in, because there were very few cars in the parking lot for that service. Upon returning at 9 am I found quite a few more cars in the parking lot so felt more comfortable going in.

I had driven by this church many times, but did not know anything about it. The outside of the church is very simple, and had piqued my curiosity. It is white and clean, and stands in contrast to the darker buildings surrounding it. The parking lot is behind the church, and the grounds were simple like the buildings, yet well maintained. There is a low wall surrounding the property.

The inside was anything but simple. The inside was ornate and flashy. It was surprising to walk into this colorful, ornate, gold and wood filled room after noticing the simplicity of the outside of the buildings. The narthex, or entrance area, seemed to be a place to greet one another and was filled with various pamphlets. The nave was filled with iconography, that were beautifully done pictures of saints and scenes from the Bible. To me the most prominent icon was straight above the nave, or area for worship lined with pews. It was a huge painting of Jesus in a dome surrounded by a circular mosaic with Greek words. He seemed to be looking down on the congregation. The pews were made of beautifully polished wood. There were massive gold chandeliers overhead. It was a lot to take in and made it challenging to focus on the service.

Once I had been greeted and let the greeter know I was a visitor, I took a seat in the middle of a pew in the middle of the nave. One of the things I noticed was that nicely dressed people would enter the service throughout the entire service, not just as it was starting, but at all points of the service. Some of the service was in Greek. The priest sang prayers with responses from the congregation. The only instrument was a small organ. There was a procession with incense and bells. There was a time of communion when the priest gave the wine mixed with the bread to each member of the congregation by spoon, and some also pick up a piece of bread. I was offered a piece of bread by a member of the congregation, although I did not go up for communion. There was a short message and a reminder of things happening in the week at the church. Much of the service seemed ceremonial in nature. The children came forward, sang a song and were taught a short lesson.

To me it was interesting how much of the service happened in an area that was mostly hidden from the congregation. This sanctuary or altar area was where the priest prepared the bread and wine. He also did much of the praying from there. This area was only viewable from an opening the size of a door, the rest was hidden behind a wall of beautifully polished wood and colorful iconography.

At the end of service there was much chatting and hugging. When service was over, and I was walking through the narthex, I was approached by a gentleman asking if I had any questions. He tried very hard to get my contact information. He was kind but persistent. I am glad I chose to visit this church. If I had not walked through the doors, I would never have known what was inside.