

Eastern Orthodox Church Fosters Tradition

By ELIZABETH BEST
Feature Writer

St. Elias Eastern Orthodox Church on Ponce de Leon Avenue in Decatur is a relatively small church, memberwise, but it's part of the oldest established Christian religion known to mankind.

"We (the Orthodox Church) are the mother religion of Christendom," said the Very Rev. John Chromiak, known as Father John to the parishioners at St. Elias. "Our parish is small. We have 125 families which comes to around 400 souls."

There are three Orthodox churches in the metropolitan Atlanta area, each administratively independent of the others but basically the same in structure. This is true of Orthodox churches

all over the nation.

"All Orthodox churches have particular customs that have nothing to do with the faith. The religion remains intact," said Father Chromiak. "The differences are more cultural than anything. The Orthodox church hasn't changed in 2,000 years."

The Orthodox faith is made up of a group of churches founded by the Apostles. The churches belong to the Five Ancient Patriarchates of Rome. In 1054, Rome and the western churches separated themselves from the rest of Christendom while the Eastern churches remained united.

"Our mother church is the Church of Antioch," said Father Chromiak. "The

mother church for the Greeks is the Church of Constantinople."

He added that a major difference between the Greek and Eastern Orthodox churches is that the English language is used in the Eastern church while the Greeks deliver their liturgies in their native tongue.

Father Chromiak's title of Very Reverend means that he is an arch priest, one rank higher than a priest but lower on the ladder than a bishop or an archbishop. He has been at St. Elias four years, the average stay for clergy being nine to 10 years.

"There are three ways of transferring clergy," he said. "The metropolitan archbishop (the church's

primate) moves the clergy ... or the clergy can request a transfer ... or on rare occasions the congregation will request a transfer." In all instances the primate has final authority.

According to Father Chromiak, who has been married to his wife Jean for 32 years, Orthodox clergy have the option of being celibate or married. If they chose to marry, they must marry before they are ordained. Only celibate or widowed priests can achieve the rank of bishop.

Father Chromiak describes the Orthodox church as "very democratic: the clergy are united with the laity on administrative decisions."

The St. Elias church hosts a number of men's, women's

and youth groups that work on various projects for charity. "We have hunger drives as well as drives to raise money for refugees or flood victims," Father Chromiak said. "I feel the parish should be involved with the community if need be."

The elaborate sanctuary

at St. Elias is filled with icons, pictures which, among other things, depict major scenes in the life of Christ. There are also icons that portray Christ, Mary and various saints. According to Father Chromiak, icons could be described as "visual aids."

"Iconographers are usually monks," said Father Chromiak.

After Labor Day, St. Elias will hold its divine liturgy each Sunday at 10 a.m. The church also holds vespers, matins, feastday services and evening liturgies.



Staff Photo by Paul Eiland

ST. ELIAS CHURCH IS ONE OF THREE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN THE ATLANTA AREA. The Very Rev. John Chromiak Said The Churches Were Each Independent But Similar Structurally

Oct. 26, 1988 DeKalb News
By St. Elias Orthodox Church

Annual Festival Being Planned

The members of St. Elias Orthodox Christian Church are busily preparing for their 16th Mideastern Festival, which will be held on Nov. 5 and 6.

Like the country of Lebanon, it is a small church community, but not without a lot of pride and feeling for their Lebanese foods and cultural background.

Although the membership of St. Elias Orthodox Christian church is small, the members will be open to their doors to the public for an entertaining two-day festival featuring Lebanese cuisine, crafts and culture. Each person is treated and welcomed individually and made to feel at home, just like the Lebanese custom.

Delicious raw and baked kibby; meat and spinach pies; hommos dip with bread; Labani sandwiches, baklava, rice balls, Arabic coffee; falafel sandwiches and coffee breads are a few of the delicacies that will be

lovingly prepared and served at reasonable prices. The ladies of the church, ages 30 to 82, help in the preparation of these foods.

The pastry shoppe will feature several different authentic pastries to carry home for the upcoming holidays. Most of the pastries can be frozen easily for future use.

A country store will be open and will offer many homemade jellies and preserves.

Last, but certainly not least, tours of the beautiful sanctuary will be conducted a priest.

In addition, there will be many other craft booths and entertainment for the young and old.

Everyone is welcomed from all parts of Atlanta and admission is free. The church is located at 2045 Ponce de Leon, at the intersection of Ponce de Leon Avenue and East Lake Drive. Call 378-8191 for more details.

Father John Chromiak (in photo below) samples food served at preview party for St. Elias Orthodox Church's Mideastern Festival. (Staff Photo By Paul Efland)



Oct 26, 1983 DeKalb Northern Newsphoto

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1983



(L-R, in photo above left) Mable Sajem, Viola Ayers and Adlette Mamary show pastries. Traditional Lebanese food will be a highlight of 16th annual festival.

Mid-East Festival To Be Held Earlier This Year

St. Elias Mid-East Festival will be held Saturday, Sept. 28 and Sunday, Sept. 29 this year. In past years this popular look at the traditions of the Middle East has been held in November.

Planners of the festival hope that the better weather of September will draw even more people to the church at the intersection of Ponce de Leon Ave. and East Lake Rd. There is no admission charge for this festival and families are invited.

One of the most popular things in the festival is the chance to taste the rich foods made by the women of the church in their traditions preserved from Lebanon, Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. The wonderfully exotic food is rich in flavor, but is not spicy hot. The traditional favorites are carefully prepared by the women of the church from the family recipes that they follow in their own kitchens. Included are favorites like Kibby (ground beef with onion and wheat); Grape Leaf Rolls (grape leaves stuffed with meat, rice and spices); Fatayer (little pastries stuffed with meat, onion and seasonings) folded into little pies); Koosa (summer squash stuffed with meat, rice and seasonings simmered in tomato sauce); and rice balls (cooked rice and cheese stuffed with meat, onions and seasonings).

The Pita bread sandwich is a real crowd pleaser. It is made of Labany (yogurt, cucumbers and spring onions) and wrapped in the light pita bread.

The desserts are especially popular. The Baklava is tissue thin layers of light pastry, honey, and chopped nuts. Another favorite is Mammol, a cookie style pastry filled with chopped nuts, flavored with rose water, and dusted with powdered sugar. The desserts will be offered with aromatic Arabic coffee.

But feasting is only part of the festival. There will be dancing by a ten member group of church members, The St. Elias Dancers, who dance the traditional line dances for the sheer joy of it. They will be demonstrating each hour, and Saturday from 7 to 11 p.m. they will be inviting the audience to join the dancing with them.

Providing live music will be the Great American Gypsy Band, a professional group that has been playing at the Peachtree Plaza Hotel for a couple of years now. They will play the traditional music of the Middle East, but they are also experts with the hitting music of Russia, Greece, and all of the countries of the eastern Mediterranean. The Great American Gypsy Band will be performing Saturday from noon to 2 p.m.

Other fascinations for the family will include demonstrations of the Old World's intricate art of egg painting. A slide show of Lebanon will be offered for those who would like to see this country.

The Very Reverend John Chroniak, pastor of St. Elias, will conduct tours of the church's

sanctuary. The congregation commissioned icons for the church.

The icons are the equivalent of a stained glass window. They depict the saints and illustrate stories from the Bible in the earliest

tradition of the Christian church. The icons are both beautiful works of art and aids in illustrating the Bible. Their role in the history of the Eastern Orthodox Church will be explained to inter-

ested visitors by Father Chroniak.

There is no admission charge for the festival, and the public is invited to attend. For more information call 378-8191.

378-8191

St. Elias

Mid-East Festival

St. Elias Orthodox Church Sets Mideastern Festival

Robert M. Jones

11/18/89

The annual Mideastern Festival, sponsored by St. Elias Orthodox Christian Church, 2045 Ponce de Leon Avenue, N.E., will feature authentic Mideastern foods and pastries, live entertainment and church tours. The festival will be held at the St. Elias Church Hall on Saturday, November 11, from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Sunday, November 12, from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m.

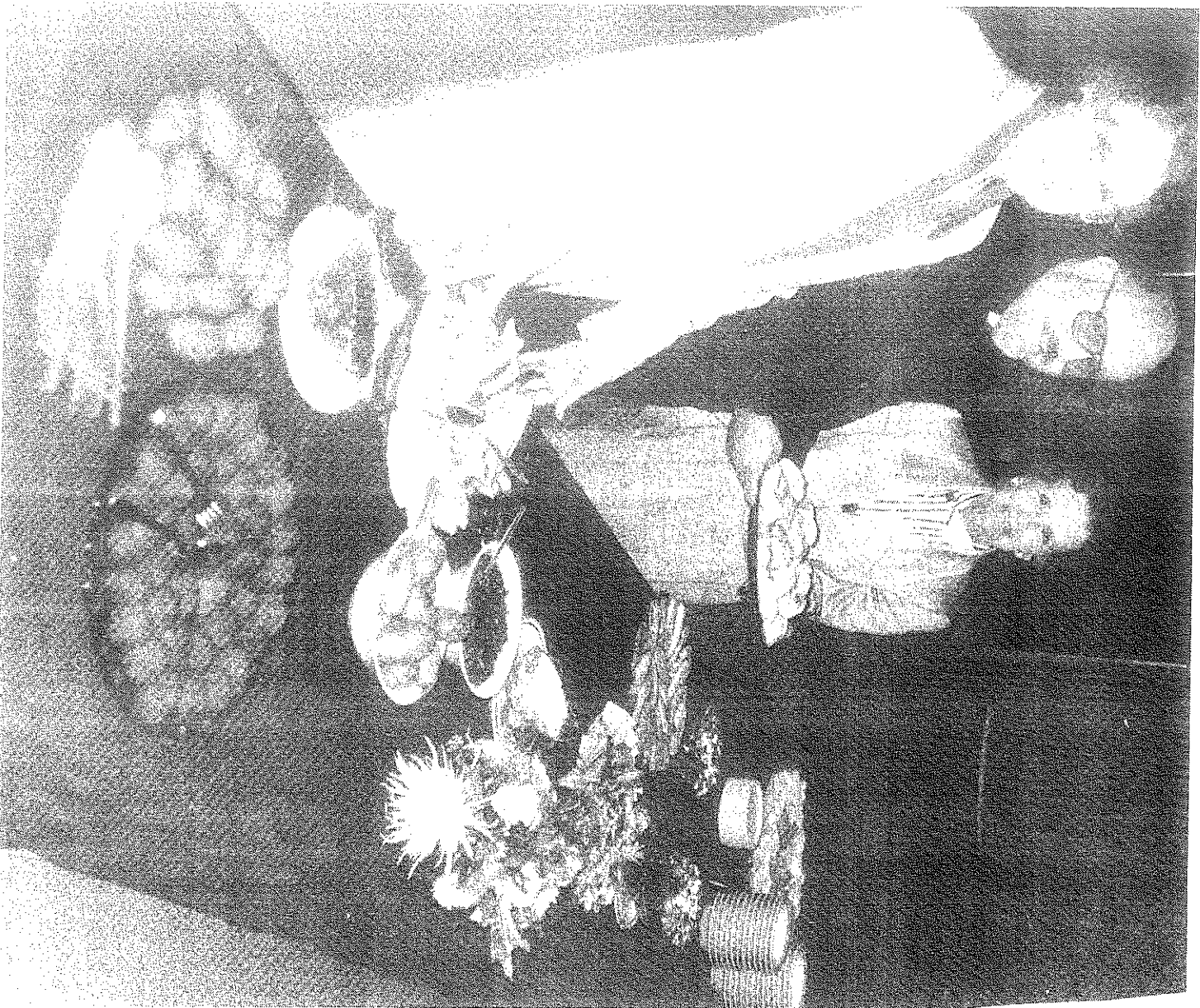
Mideastern recipes which have been handed down through many generations will be served. Included are: grape leaf rolls (grape leaves stuffed with meat, rice and spices), baked kibby (ground beef with onions and wheat), fakayer (meat pies stuffed with meat, onions, and seasonings), koosa (summer squash stuffed with meat, rice and seasonings, simmered in tomato sauce), rice balls (cooked rice and cheese stuffed with meat, onions and seasonings).

A special pita bread sandwich of labany (yogurt, cucumbers and sprigs, wrapped in pita bread) will be served, as well as appetizer, homos bi tahini (mashed garbanzo beans and sesame oil).

Many distinctive mideastern delights, including the mouthwatering baklawa, will be offered to enjoy with a steaming demitasse of aromatic, Arabic coffee.

Other attractions will include: The St. Elias Dance Group performing traditional mideastern folk dances, a Hafti (Middle Eastern dancing with audience participation), and church tours will be conducted on a regular basis throughout the festival by Father Andrew Zbeeb.

Special attractions for the kids include, face painting, personalized balloons, pony rides, air walk, games, and train rides.



NEWSphoto by Spencer Rogstad

St. Elias Plans Mid-Eastern Festival

St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church will present its annual Mid-Eastern Festival Nov. 11 and 12, at the church located at 2045 Ponce de Leon Ave. at the intersection of East Lake Drive. A highlight of the festival will be a wide array of mid-east foods prepared by the ladies of the church from recipes handed down through their families for generations. Katherine Colelli, left, shows a tray of Fatayer (meat pies spiced with onions and seasonings) while The Right Reverend Andrew Zbeeb, center, is offered a selection of pastries by Adelette Mamary. The pastries include the traditional baklava, Marmoul (chopped nuts and rose water surrounded by a pastry dusted with powdered sugar)

and date kiak pastry. Other foods will include grape leaf rolls, Koosa (summer squash stuffed with meat, rice and seasonings simmered in a tomatoe sauce), and pita bread sandwiches. There will be pony rides, train rides and face painting for the children. During the two-day festival there will be traditional Middle Eastern dances performed by the St. Elias Dance Group, entertainment by the Great American Gypsy Band, and tours of the church's sanctuary conducted by Father Andrew Zbeeb. Sammy Jaraysi and His Arabic Band will play for dancing Saturday from 7 p.m. to midnight. The festival will be open from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and from 1 to 7 p.m. Sunday.

Bishop Niphon Watches Dramatic Changes For Christians In The Soviet Union From His Diplomatic Post In Moscow

By SPENCER RAGSDALE

The changes that are sweeping the Soviet Union are being watched with great interest by a man with a unique perspective, Bishop Niphon Saikali, whose post in Moscow is that of a diplomatic representative — the official representative of the Patriarch of Antioch to the Patriarch of Moscow.

It is a post he has held in Moscow for the past 12 years. But this week he has been taking a brief respite from the whirlwind of change in Moscow to visit St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church on Ponce de Leon, and on a personal level to renew acquaintances with boyhood friends from Lebanon.

Tony Ayoub, who is now an engineer with Georgia Power Company and a resident of the Toco Hills area, and his brother Nick, the owner of Nicola's Restaurant on La Vista Road, welcomed to DeKalb the man who is now a Bishop. The three attended school together in Lebanon. It was in high school Tony recalls, that his friend made the decision to enter the priesthood of the Orthodox church.

That choice set his feet on the path that lead him to Moscow where many changes are taking place. Bishop Niphon said that there were 60,000 Orthodox Churches in Russia at the outbreak of the revolution in 1917. With the official declaration of the Soviet Union as an atheist state, that was reduced to only 7,600 churches and 19 monasteries. Some were converted into museums, some became factories, some churches were demolished.

But today, Bishop Niphon says, "people are no longer afraid to be a member of a church," and he added, even more indicative of the

official relations between the church and the Soviet state, "now you may see a Sunday sermon on (state-run) television," significantly he says, "they call it a sermon, not a speech," or a cultural event. The sermon is just that. It deals with moral teachings. "For the first time on daily television you may see priests and bishops..."

Asked if the church has not been severely persecuted under previous regimes in the Soviet Union, Bishop Niphon replies, "It was not a direct problem to attend a church service, but they went against you on the rules, or the law...they would say that you had attended a meeting with a dissident priest...now that is over..."

Americans believed that religion was officially banned by the Soviets, the Bishop said, but that was not entirely true. "It is written in the Soviet Constitution that there shall be freedom of conscience, but the government did not practice what was written in the constitution."

Many bureaucrats exceeded what was written, he said. That has been one of the points of contention in the upheavals in eastern Europe. While Communism had promised equality, the people had suffered from shortages while party officials had lived in luxury with the goods, food and services that were not available to the ordinary people.

THE CLOSE ties between the Patriarch of Antioch and the Russian Orthodox Church go far back in history. By tradition St. Andrew was the first to bring Christianity to the Russians. The establishment of the Russian Orthodox Church

began in 988 A.D. with the conversion of the pagan Russians to Christianity. They had visited churches and mosques and chose to be baptised into the Orthodox Church. The first Bishop of Russia was a Syrian, he points out. In 1589 the first Patriarchate of Moscow was established. The first Patriarch was Job. "This year was the 400th anniversary of the Patri-

arch, and it was celebrated at the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Kremlin." Bishop Niphon says it is important that, "it was the first religious service held in the Kremlin since the revolution in 1917."

Close ties have existed between the two Patriarchs since 1848 when the church at Antioch was being suppressed while it was

under the Ottoman Empire. Then the Russian Patriarch helped the church at Antioch.

GORBACHEV is the one man credited with the sweeping changes in the Soviet Union. Bishop Niphon was asked for his perspective on this man from his point of view in Moscow. "I do not interfere in politics," the Bishop said firmly, but he added, "I respect this man and I pray for him. He is the first to respect the dignity of man."

News coming from the southern Soviet Union reports fighting between Christians and Moslems, and persecution of Christian Armenians. What perspective can he give of this situation? "The Armenians are of the Eastern church," he said, but they split from the Orthodox Church in 325 A.D. over theological differences at the Council of Nicea. At issue was whether Christ was a man and God, or if he were God only.

Bishop Niphon said, "I don't travel in Armenia...I hear what you hear," and he could not comment from his direct observation. "I have no contact with people who are not Orthodox."

But he said that the Armenian Church is now an integral part of the Middle Eastern Council of Churches and there are efforts at reconciliation with all eastern branches which include not only the Armenians but the Copts and the Syro-Jacobites.

Speaking of Russia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine, he said the majority of Christians are Orthodox, although there are smaller Christian churches which are Lutheran and Baptist.

For the Orthodox church things are changing quickly, he said. "Fifteen new Bishops were named this year...There were only three theological academies before, but now there are eight open, and several spiritual schools. Now there are 6,000 people studying in these theological schools."

"You will not find the spirituality elsewhere that you will find in Russia," he said. "No it is part of the Russian character. They are people of great spirituality, and of nationalism."

Expressing an idea that Americans find difficult to understand, he said, "Russians can only be Russians. I could be a Lebanese, or

an American, but a Russian can only be a Russian."

Does that mean the various republics in the Soviet Union may seek independence along ethnic lines in the future?

"The church is doing all it can to reconcile people. The Orthodox church does not look at nations or nationalities, "the whole world is our church."

From his vantage point in Moscow, can he predict what will happen in the near future — in the Baltic area, along the southern frontier with Iran?

"It is very difficult to predict what the outcome will be," he said, but speaking as a priest in paraboles he said, "It is like clothing. If anything is artificial it will not serve you well, but if the fabric is good, and true, it will last."

"When you say something that you don't believe, then that will not last."

AT THE TIME of the revolution in 1917, the church was criticized as a supporter of the oligarchs and the Tsar. Is there the same resentment toward the church as upholding the state?

Putting historical perspective on the issue, he said, "At the time the people felt that the church and the government should work together. The people would not have put up with rebellion by the church if it had gone against the government. It was their government and their church."

Does that create a new dilemma for the Orthodox church? Must they now pray for the head of the Soviet Union as they once did for the Tsar?

Bishop Niphon said, "I pray for any leader. In our church here we pray not for the president of the United States, but for the leader of the United States. It is my spiritual task to pray for all people, and for all leaders."

Tumultuous times appear to be ahead for eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. What outcome does he see?

"I see salvation when there is a real life in religion. The center of real religion is love. If there is love then there will not be enmity between men. "We believe that what is happening is the will of God, so that His creatures can have more dignity. We believe that not one hair can fall from the head of a man if that hair's falling is not the will of God."



NEWSphoto by Spencer Ragdale

Bishop Niphon Visits St. Elias Church

Enjoying the early spring sunshine on the steps of St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church on Ponce de Leon are left to right Father Andrew Zbeeb, pastor of St. Elias, Bishop Niphon Saikali, the diplomatic representative of the Patriarch of Antioch to the Patriarch of Moscow, and the Bishop's childhood friend Tony Ayoub who is now a DeKalb businessman. The Bishop also has a cousin who lives here, Hind Leithead.

*Red - News Service
10/24/90*

St. Elias Church Plans Mid-East Festival

A smorgasbord of cultural history awaits you at the annual Mid-eastern Festival, sponsored by St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church. St. Elias Orthodox Church is located at 2045 Ponce de Leon Avenue, at the intersection of East Lake Drive. The festival will be held on Saturday, November 10 from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. and Sunday, November 11, from 1 to 7 p.m.

One highlight of the festival is the authentic Mid-eastern cuisine. These recipes have been handed down through many generations and will be offered from morning to night. Included will be Grape Leaf Rolls (grape leaves stuffed with beef, rice and spices), Baked Kibby (beef with onions, bulghur wheat, pine nuts and seasonings), Fatayer (pies stuffed with beef or spinach, onions and seasonings), Koosa (summer squash stuffed with beef, rice, seasonings, and simmered in tomato sauce), and Rice Balls (cooked rice and cheese stuffed with beef and onions in a tomato sauce then baked).

Not only will the spinach fatayer satisfy a vegetarian appetite but other vegetarian specialties such as a special sandwich of Labany (yogurt cheese, cucumbers,

spring onions and a special dressing wrapped in thin mountain bread) and Homos Bi Tahini (garbanzo bean dip) will be available.

After a delicious meal, a mouth-watering pastry finished with the delicious aroma and rich taste of hot turkish coffee is a must. There will be the traditional Baklava, Marmool (chopped nuts and rose water surrounded by a pastry dusted with powdered sugar), delicious date pastries and many more delicacies to choose from.

Entertainment abounds throughout the festival with the Great American Gypsy Band, energetic Mid-eastern folk dances, and traditional dabke music. There will be many cultural displays, an old fashioned general store stocked with traditional clothing, grocery items, icons, jewelry, books, hand crafts plus many children's activities.

The St. Elias sanctuary is both beautiful and unique. Tours of the sanctuary will be conducted by Father Andrew Zbeeb along with explanations of the beliefs and worship of the Orthodox Christians today.

There is no admission charge.

Dickels News/era

10/31/90



Mid-East Feast And Fun Coming To St. Elias

St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church will present its Mid-East Festival Saturday, Nov. 10 from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. and Sunday, Nov. 11 from, 1 to 7 p.m. One of the biggest treats in the festival will be foods from the middle east. Showing some of the delicacies to be offered are, left to right, Katherine Colatti, Adlette Manroy and Yvonne Salem, president of the Ladies Society of St. Elias. They are holding platters of baked and raw kibby, which is beef with onions, bulghur wheat, pine nuts and seasonings. Other foods will include Patayer, pies stuffed with beef, spinach, onions and seasonings, and grape leaf rolls. There are many vegetarian dishes including Koosa, yellow summer squash stuffed with beef, rice and seasonings and simmered in tomato sauce. And of course there will be

the deserts of Bakalawa, Mammoul and Pate Kooka. During the festival there will be entertainment by the Great American Gypsy Band, lively folk dances from the Mid-East, with everyone invited to join the fun, traditional dabke music and many children's activities. There will be many cultural displays, plus a general store offering clothing, grocery items, icons, jewelry, books and handicrafts. The festival will be held at St. Elias Church located at the intersection of Ponce de Leon and East Lake Drive. Father Andrew Zbeeb will conduct tours of the church sanctuary and explain the many beautiful icons. There is no admission charge to the festival and everyone is invited.

Mideastern Festival Planned At St. Elias

The 24th annual Mideastern Festival will be held Oct. 3 and 4 at St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church, 2045 Ponce de Leon Ave., N.E.

Hours are 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 3, and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 4. Church members and their children stage the festival to share and celebrate their culture and cuisine with the Atlanta community.

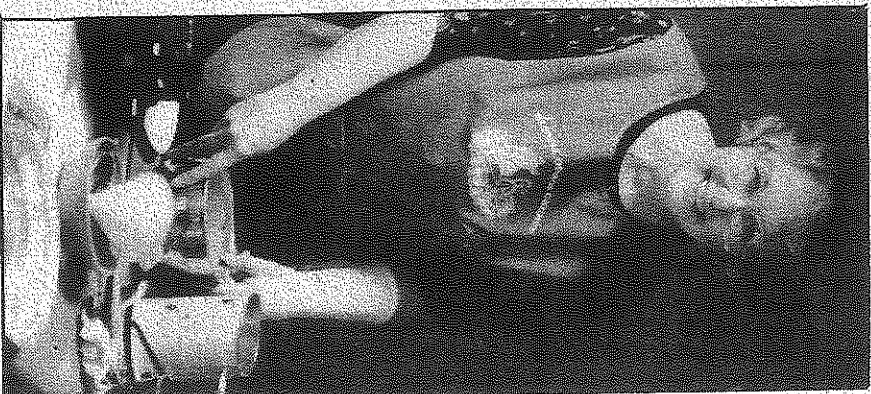
Mideastern dishes are prepared by members of the parish. Most recipes have been handed down through the generations and are as prized as any family heirloom.

All dishes are authentically prepared using traditional ingredients and spices unique to Mideastern cuisine. Festival favorites include Kibby Nuyee, Rice Balls, Palafel, Lebani Sandwiches, Beef Kabobs, Hummos, Homemade Cucumbers, Mint Yogurt, Baba Ghanoush, Turkish Coffee and authentic pastries. Prices are \$1 to \$9.

Activities have been planned for all ages. Children may enjoy the Space Walk, Bingo, face painting, personalized balloons, movies and a game room.

Music and dance performances provide day-long entertainment. Traditional folk dances are performed by the children of the parish, demonstrating their interpretation of this age-old form of art and celebration. Mideastern music will be played throughout the festival by talented performers.

Guests may tour the church sanctuary and shop the many



CATHY BESHARA
MAKING ZALEBEE

booths displaying international wares, foods and crafts. Jewelry, flowers, art, coffees and other cultural treasures will be available. A grand prize of \$1,000 will be awarded to a lucky ticket holder.

9/23/92 The Weekender
File's Churcker - St. Elias