“Behold I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.” Mark 1:2-3

January 2014

MISSION STATEMENT:
St. John Greek Orthodox Church is dedicated to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

VISION:
The church shall seek to fulfill its mission by:
1. Embracing the Spiritual Life of the Orthodox Church through regular prayer, worship, and frequent participation in the sacraments.
2. Supporting the Church through stewardship of time and talent and sacrificial giving.
3. Providing a welcoming, caring, loving environment.
4. Having its members exemplify Orthodox Christian character and morals.
5. Supporting ministries that facilitate the overall mission of the Church
6. Exemplifying commitment to community service and charitable outreach.
7. Creating an environment which encourages members to grow in their faith.

His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at St. John on Sunday, January 5
Orthros 8:30 a.m.             Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will preside at Great Vespers for Feast of St. John, Monday, January 6 at 6:00 p.m.
His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will officiate at the Liturgy on Tuesday, January 7 —Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.

Father Stavros’ Message
I suppose that is only natural that as we come to the end of one year and the beginning of another, we pause to look back at the year that was, and make our plans for the year ahead. Allow me to do the same as regards our parish. On balance, I would say that 2013 was a very good year for our parish. As I reflect on the year that is passed and think about the year ahead, the first things that come to my mind are good things.

1. Small Group Bible Studies are going very well — Do you realize that we currently have SEVEN Bible studies at our church on a given week. I don’t think there are many churches of any denomination that can say that. Do you realize that almost 80 people are regularly participating on one of these groups? Not only are people getting a better understanding for the Bible in these groups, they are developing friendships with group members. When a group member becomes sick or has another kind of need, other members of their group are jumping in to assist. We’re becoming what the church is supposed to be. The church is not a monastery where everyone leaves the world. The church is not a commune where everyone gives up all their possessions and individual identity in support of the group dynamic. The church is the Body of Christ, the people, and the church is where ordinary people come together to grow in faith. They do it by bringing who they are and what they know and offering it in a community setting. And in the community setting they receive knowledge, support and encouragement, so that when they leave

Fr. Stavros, Pres. Lisa and Nicholas wish everyone a Happy and Healthy New Year 2014!
church on Sundays or they leave their small group and go back home or to work, that they have greater insight in to how to get through life in a more Christ-centered, purposeful way. Small groups will resume in January. Information is provided in this issue of The Messenger. If you haven’t tried small groups, I encourage you to do so. These groups are very welcoming to new people, and because every group is starting new units of study—most will be studying the Epistle of St. James beginning in January—this is a great time to jump in.

I go to the men’s Bible study each Wednesday morning at 7:00 a.m. To be honest, the first couple of weeks were hard. Why? I didn’t want to get up at 5:45 a.m. in order to get here so early. I also was concerned how this was going to go. But having gotten into the habit now of going, it’s something that I look forward to every week. It is a boost to my spirituality to have this kind of fellowship in the middle of the week. And on the couple of weeks we missed (once because I was out of town) and then Thanksgiving week, I really felt like something was missing from my life. I encourage you to join one of our small groups.

2. Stewardship Sunday was more successful than in recent years—On Sunday, December 8, we were blessed to have His Grace Bishop Sevastianos of Zela, Chief Secretary of the Holy Eparchial Synod of the Archdiocese, celebrate Liturgy with us. He gave a wonderful sermon about stewardship, teaching us that stewardship is not only about giving money to the church. Rather, stewardship is a way of life. Our stewardship goal for 2014 is $400,000. On stewardship Sunday, $223,742 was pledged by 113 families. We are well on our way to our goal. If you haven’t turned in your stewardship form, please do go today—help us make our goal.

3. A New Stewardship Committee is going to roll out some new ministries—37 people attended a meeting on December 2 to discuss stewardship and how to increase stewardship in our parish—This isn’t just about money, but how to increase overall participation in worship and in ministries of the church, and how the church can do more in community outreach and also what efforts can be made to grow our church. In early 2014, some new ministries are going to be rolled out, including a new welcoming committee (who will welcome new visitors and follow up to make sure they are integrated into the life of the community), and an ambassadors ministry (people who will go around the hall making contact with all the parishioners as a way to build fellowship and camaraderie, and overall good will with parishioners). We will be using constant contact more to give updates and reminders about activities going on in our parish. We will be updating our mailing list. Everyone who lives in the Tampa area on our mailing list will be encouraged to be a steward of the church. Those who live out of town but who receive our mailings will be asked if they want to be a “friend” of the church. We will try to connect everyone on the mailing list with our church in some way. We will also utilize social media—facebook, our website and other means to promote our church and what our church is doing. Very shortly, we will begin live-streaming our services so that those who are home-bound may still participate in worship. If you are interested in getting involved with anything related to our stewardship committee, there is a survey in this issue of The Messenger inviting people to be part of some of these new ministries. Please fill it out and send it to me. One goal I have is for every member of the church to be involved in at least one of the ministries of the church.

4. High hopes for our youth—2013 was a banner year for our youth at St. John. We have now the highest total of Sunday School students that we’ve ever had. Our youth choir is just awesome! Youth Sundays are one of the highlights of every month, when we hear our children leading the hymns in the church. An average of 25 GOYAns are coming to meetings each month. We had our first successful pre-teen retreat in late September 2013 and are planning for a second event on February 9, 2014. Our JOY/HOPE kids have also done several community service projects this year to help those less fortunate.

5. Community Outreach continues to grow—Our spirit of service to the greater community continues to grow. Every month, we serve breakfast at a church in downtown Tampa to the homeless population of our city. We made 58 boxes of hope for Thanksgiving—that means that 58 families received food for Thanksgiving from our church! In addition to our regular 3rd Saturday of the month community outreach, we had an additional crew of people go work at Metropolitan Ministries (nearly 20 people) on November 25 and 26. And another large crew is scheduled to go over on December 22 (including members of GOYA and our Sunday school students). I am also going to be working at the prayer tent at Metropolitan Ministries along with a few other members of our community on December 19. For the first time ever, in our budget for 2014, we have put MANY charities in the budget of our church. In addition to LifePath Hospice and the Metropolis of Atlanta Diakonia Center which we have supported for years, there is now $1,000 for overseas Orthodox missions, and additional monies for Holy Cross Seminary, St. Basil’s Academy, Clergy Education and the Ecumenical Patriarchate Charities. We’ve made the commitment before the year has even started that we are going to be a church of charity and that is wonderful!

6. The 2014 Festival will be even better!—In 2013, we expanded our “playbook” on the Greek Festival. We ramped up the children’s area, took gyros outside and instituted a car raffle. A new approach to the management of the festival, the Festival Advisory Board, opened up new possibilities, new perspective and new success. And this was all done in 2.5 months. With the whole year to plan, expect 2014 to be the best festival ever!

7. We’ve never had this many people in church—Attendance in church continues to grow. Every week it seems we add a new family to our parish. Every Sunday the church is full. More and more people are singing along with the choir at liturgy. We’re deepening our understanding and love of worship. It’s a beautiful thing to see!

8. We’re going to get a pastoral assistant—In 2010, Charlie Hambos left our parish to go to Holy Cross Seminary to study for the priesthood. We sent him away with our prayers and good wishes with the “hope” or “dream” that maybe he would come back to our church. Time has passed—it is now 2014. Charlie will be graduating from the Seminary in May. Our church has continued to grow and progress. And now our long-time need of a pastoral assistant is going to be filled. Your stewardship of course has the final say on this—so let’s go all the way, let’s SHATTER our stewardship goal, bring Charlie back and do the other things we want to do as a parish.
9. Other highlights of 2013

a. Most well attended Holy Week ever—introduction of a new program, the Maidens, to our Holy Week journey

b. Successful choir conference—in July we hosted the choir conference. A CD was recorded of that liturgy that will be available for sale in the early months of 2014.

c. Year of retreats—in addition to the small group Bible study, and the aforementioned pre-teen retreat, there were two adult retreats, a retreat for choir members from the Tampa area, one GOYA retreat, a retreat for college students, a retreat for Sunday school teachers and the Junior Olympics

Going forward, how are we going to manage everything? Philippians 4:13 says “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” In Matthew 19:26, Jesus tells us “With God all things are possible.” In Matthew 6:33, Jesus tells us “Seek you first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.” These are three of MANY verses in the Bible that lead us to the same conclusion—when we put God first, anything is possible. So, the goal in 2014 in our community is to keep Christ first in all things—whether it be the first thing we do each week, the Divine Liturgy, or whether it be in our marriage, our families or our jobs. We must keep Christ first in our festival, our Sunday school, and in every ministry we do in our church. In 2014, we will focus on keeping Christ first. And we need to focus on stewardship as a way of life—being stewards not only of our church, but of our environment, of our talents, of our mouths, of our families and of even every breath we take. Do we take our breaths in thanksgiving or in anger, as an example?

We ventured through the last third of 2013 with a phrase we have all come to know well in our parish: Just Say YES! We will again use this as a rallying cry in our church this year. Just Say YES has paid off with greater positivity, greater involvement and greater success. As we meet new challenges and opportunities this year, we will meet them first with Christ as our focus, and secondly, with the collective “Just Say YES” of our congregation.

As we leave one year and enter another, it is a time to reflect on the concepts of thanksgiving and blessing. St. Paul tells us that in all things we are to give thanks, and so the beginning of a New Year provides us an opportunity to thank God for His blessings in the year that has just concluded. It is a time to thank Him for bringing us safely to another year. It is a time to reflect on where we are in life and to do so with gratitude, rather than greed, being grateful for what we do have, rather than regretful for what we don’t have.

The New Year is a time to ask God for His blessings and guidance for the year that is about to begin. It is a time to reflect on where we are in our relationship with Him. It is a time to set goals not only in material things but in spiritual matters as well. So as you are about to enter a new year, and make your proverbial New Year’s resolutions, make some spiritual resolutions regarding prayer, worship, gratitude, attitude and stewardship and work hard to keep them. Make prayer part of your everyday life. Make it a point to worship in church each Sunday. Consider joining a small group.

Read the scriptures each day—signing up for the daily readings from the Archdiocese is a great way to do this. Give sacrificially and with joy and watch God’s blessings back to you multiply. God’s blessings do not always come back on us monetarily or immediately, but they always come back to us in greater degree than we offered them.

As I reflect on 2013, I am thankful to God for many things—I am thankful for my health, for my family and for my ministry. I am thankful that God is blessing our parish by opening hearts and minds to deeper levels of spiritual growth and commitment. I thank God for the journeys and memories of 2013—there were events in this church this year which I will always remember, rejoice in and thank God for. Thank you for sharing in this journey with me and with one another.

As I look forward to 2014, I thank God for the opportunities and even the challenges that we are going to have. I’m thankful to be surrounded by thoughtful, caring and committed people. I know that with God’s help, all things are possible. And when we step forward and help, not only do we gain confidence in one another, but we gain confidence in God Himself, because when people step forward to joyfully and sacrificially help the church, you know that they are working in tandem with and in trust of God Himself, who is the author of life and whose spirit encourages us to give of who we are for the betterment of this church and the Glory of His Holy Name.

I said to a group of people recently that a miracle is when God stops the laws of nature to all something extra-ordinary to occur. Ironically, though, in most of God’s miracles, as told in the Bible right up until today, most miracles include the involvement of ordinary people, who took a leap of faith and thus experience the extraordinary. Ordinary people working in tandem with God to benefit those outside themselves, are allowed by God to experience extraordinary things. As we continue to grow as a parish, when we put our faith in God, when we put our trust in God, we will see that we, even while ordinary people, can indeed do and see extraordinary things.

I’ve made my plans for January 1 at 10:00 a.m. And for January 5, 12, 19 26 and all the Sundays after. I’ll be at the Holy Altar, praying. Will you join me?

Happy New Year! May God bless you, your loved ones, our parish and our nation with health, joy, peace and every good gift that comes from Above!

With love in the Lord,

+Fr. Stavros
25 Ways to Make 2014 Your Year of Faith
By Charlie Hambos

Every New Year, we all make big plans to do something different or even better than what we did the year before. Now that 2013 is over, it’s time to take 2014 to a new level. When I say new level, I mean let’s take our faith to a new level. Don’t think too hard about it. Don’t make a schedule. Just try one thing at a time. Here are 25 ways we can make 2014 our year of faith. There is no particular level of importance. So pick a few, if not all and run with them.

1. Find your Saint – Figure out who your patron saint is. Google him or her and read about them. Chances are really good we will learn something exciting.

2. Get the Daily Readings app or e-mail – Head over to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Website and sign up for the Daily readings e-mail or download the app for your device of choice. Read the scripture each day and learn about the saint of the day.

3. Come to Orthros – Every Sunday before Divine Liturgy, Orthros is celebrated. Listen to the hymns rejoicing in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and also the Saint or feast of the day. Plus, then we will be there early for Divine Liturgy.

4. Go to Weekday Liturgy – At least once a week, St. John’s celebrates an Orthros and a Divine Liturgy for a particular saint of the church or a feast day. There is something about going to church on another day besides Sunday that is really good for the soul.

5. Join a Bible Study group – By now, we have heard about the wonderful happenings of the Small Bible Group Studies that are happening. Involving ourselves with the faith more than on Sundays is always something beneficial.

6. Visit myocn.net – This is a great resource all around. There are many informative podcasts on the church as well as contemporary issues.

7. Invite a friend to church – One of our goals as Christians is to spread the Gospel to all the nations. We can start with our friends. Many people do not go to church because they are never invited. The Orthodox worship experience is meant to be very interactive and never boring. We have a fantastic choir. Not to mention the iconography and stained glass windows which are just beautiful.

8. Celebrate St. John’s Feast day – This year, we will begin with Great Vespers on Monday, January 6 at 6 p.m. This is a service that we don’t celebrate all the time and something that is really great. We should all be there to celebrate our feast day and to interact with the local clergy and visiting Hierarchs. Then on January 7, we will have Orthros and Divine Liturgy followed by a luncheon. Join us.

9. Follow along in services – We have the Red/Maroon/Burgundy Divine Liturgy books. There are also the spiral bound books with phonetics and English. Read the prayers that we don’t usually hear. They are really moving.

10. Like St. John’s on Facebook!

11. Follow uplifting things on Facebook, Twitter and other Social Media – Throughout the day, scrolling through feeds and feeds of what our friends our doing will more than likely leave us feeling pretty empty inside. Break it up by following “Orthodoxy on Purpose,” “Greek Orthodox

Archdiocese of America,” “The Philokalia: Daily Readings,” “Orthodoxy Heterodox,” “Saint Catherine’s Vision.” These are just a few that I subscribe to. Pass it on too!

12. Just say yes!

13. Pray in the morning and at night – We hear it all the time. It doesn’t have to be long and wordy or even from a book. Just say hello, thanks and do the sign of the cross.

14. Learn something new – We all have those times where we see something and want to know what it means. This goes for our entire life but what about the church and our faith. Think about something and learn more about it.

15. Iconography – Stop, look around and enjoy the beautiful Iconography of our church. Each one is a window into heaven. Just as we look into the scene depicted, the scene is looking at us and inviting us to keep our eyes on Christ.

16. Make a prayer list – Start with family and friends. Then add those who are sick. Add the prayer list from the bulletin. It will make your relationship with each of those people better and get us one step closer to God.

17. Talk to someone new – Many people need a friend or just a hug or just an open ear. We need to make ourselves more available.

18. Explore the Gospels – The Life of Christ and his teachings. Plus each Gospel has a different twist. There is a lot more there than what we hear in the church each Sunday.

19. Explore St. Paul – St. Paul is simply incredible. His letters are something to cherish. My personal favorite is Ephesians. Or start by reading 1 and 2 Timothy and pretend that you are Timothy receiving the words of Paul.

20. Read the Psalms – Every Orthodox service uses the Psalms. Why not make it a bigger part of our life.

21. Get on the attitude of gratitude – Just say thank you, especially to God for giving us another day, for friends, family and everything that we have. If we remember what we are thankful for we will be much happier.

22. Say hello! – To a friend or a stranger at church, at school, in the store or wherever we go. There is nothing to lose.

23. Forgive – In Matthew 6:14-15 Christ says, “Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either.” Wow! We have to pay attention to this.

24. Love one another – We all have those times where we see something and want to know what it means. This goes for our entire life

25. Write a friend a note! – Just say Thank you! Or Hello! It’s something we

I hope you enjoyed the list. Can’t wait till June 1st. Only one semester at Holy Cross left. If you would like to contact me, please e-mail me at Charlie.hambos@gmail.com or my address is 50 Goddard Avenue, Box 016, Brookline, MA 02445.
It was time to make the transition between the unique spiritual outpost given to us by the month of December and the exciting challenges we find in nature and society as we move into the coming months. So I was staring at a blank computer screen in the process known as “preparatory mystical insight” or “I don’t have a clue about what to write” when a friend sent a quote from someone I have not thought about for a very long time.

Howard Truman (1899-1981) was one of the most important religious leaders of the mid-Twentieth Century. An African-American born in the segregated south, he became the first non-white Dean of Chapel at Boston University. An advocate for Gandhi’s teaching of nonviolence, he was the spiritual advisor of Martin Luther King, Jr., James Farmer, A.J. Muste and many others in the struggle for civil rights. He was also an inspiring guide for people of many religious traditions. OK, here is the quote, which is also the bridge between where you and I have been and where we are going:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.

Well, those are the tasks we take away as we walk out of Christmastide and into the great world of ordinary time. Nothing left to say — here we go!

As we begin our thoughts of stewardship, it is appropriate for us to start at the very beginning. The first words of scripture, in fact, the first words that God speaks to humankind, speak to stewardship. God tells his new creation to “rule” over creation.

We must not think of this term “rule” as an authoritarian ruler. Rather, the meaning here is as one who is entrusted to care. It is key that we understand that God did not give humans ownership, but he gave humans the responsibility to care for creation and ensure all that all creation is fruitful, growing, being blessed.

The first acknowledgement of deciding to be a steward is realizing that everything is God’s. All creation. From the universe to the pennies in a child’s piggy bank. It is all God’s. And we are instructed from the time of creation to be stewards of that trust.

This week, open your eyes in a new way to see everything around you as God’s. Your home. Your job. Your Spouse and Children. Your friends. Your bank account. The strangers you see. This will at times make you feel very good and other times will make you uncomfortable. That is okay. We follow a Savior that didn’t live a comfortable life. And for now, we are just at the beginning.

Michael Conner is a member of our parish, along with his wife Artemis and their children, Billy and Evie. Michael is one of our small group Bible Study leaders.
Every blessing in our lives is a gift—whether that is a job, a child or a marriage. If a steward is a caretaker, and if we are supposed to be stewards of God’s gifts to us, then we are stewards of our marriage. We are supposed to take care of our marriage. Marriage is a journey. It’s like going across the country on a journey, like driving from Florida to California. There are parts that are exciting—a stop by the Grand Canyon will take your breath away. Much of the journey is mundane—i.e. the plains of Texas that never seem to end. Making good preparations for the journey, i.e. packing, having the car serviced, making sure the spare tire is inflated, these things will aid you in having a good journey. Not making the proper preparations will make for a difficult and perhaps unsuccessful journey.

Some journeys across the country have perilous happenings—a tire blow out or a radiator overheating, running out of gas, or having your car stolen. These things imperil the success of any journey. But even the most prepared traveler and most cautious driver will not get across the country unscathed. There WILL be delays for construction, a back up because of an accident, a thunderstorm that will slow you down—these things WILL happen no matter how prepared you are. In fact you have almost no chance of making a journey across our country without contending with SOME problem.

Marriage is like a journey across America. Some parts are breath-taking. Other parts are mundane. Some people are prepared for marriage and some aren’t. Some journeys through marriage are fraught with peril, others with small annoyances. But no marriage, just like no journey, is perfect.

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America has put out some new materials to use in pre-marital counseling. The church would like each priest to guide each couple through a new work-book filled with materials on the journey of marriage and how to make it successful. Before a couple gets married in our church, I generally spend at least 5-6 hours with a couple (and with these new materials, more than that). But once a couple gets married, there is no requirement to ever sit down with a priest again. There is no requirement to renew your marriage commitment like you renew a driver’s license. In fact, many times when I am seeing people for marriage counseling, it is not at the first sign of trouble, but at or near the point of a break-up.

The thesis of this new program work-book is not to say that your marriage won’t have problems—every marriage has problems—but to give you some tools to deal with the problems when they occur. And while this book seems to work well for people who are about to get married, it actually is quite appropriate for people who ARE married, as a starting point for discussion of how your journey of marriage is going and how your marriage can be made even better. Some marriages are enjoying the sites, which is great. Some are stuck in the mundane. Some are underway but have realized they weren’t really prepared for the journey. And some are breaking down and need serious repair. If you are married, if God blessed you with that gift of marriage, then you are a steward, a caretaker of that gift. As we begin a new year, ask yourself, am I taking care of that gift? Are we getting anywhere in our journey? Is the car sailing smoothly, or do we need to stop for repairs? Nowhere in the book of marriage does it say to stop the journey. Nor does it tell us to get a different travel companion. It may be necessary in a journey to change cars or even modify the destination or the way to get to the destination if a certain road is blocked. What must be preserved are the two travelling companions and their commitment to making the journey.

I’m convinced that anyone who works at it can have a successful marriage. If your marriage is going well, this book “The Journey of Marriage” will help strengthen what you have. If your marriage is not going well, this book will provide the guidance and direction to get you back on track. The book is divided into six sections, each designed to take 1.5 hours to complete. There are questions in each section to answer and discuss. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of this book, they cost $15 and you can pick up one from me and I will you instructions on how to get the most use out of the book. If your marriage is not what you want it to be, make a new year’s resolution to work on it. And if I can help in the process, please ask me. I’m very happy to.

Just a reminder—when you got married, a priest carried the book of the Gospels in front of you as you took your first steps as husband and wife. Make sure you keep holding hands with your spouse as you did that day, keep the truth of Christ in front of you at all times (with the patience, understanding, forgiveness, etc. that come from Christ), and if and when it is necessary, feel free to call on your priest for advice and guidance.

One final comment—Marriage is one of the most noble institutions in our world. The concept of faith means that one does not know the final outcome but still dives in anyway. Marriage is an act of faith. It takes faith for someone in their 20s or 30s to pledge to live with someone for their rest of their life—into the 70s, 80s even 90s. No one knows how they will change based on life’s circumstances. The choice to unite with someone and pledge to grow and stay together is one of the most noble things a person can do. Because it requires faith and sacrifice. There is no nobility in living together, where both parties can “pull the plug” on the relationship without consequences. I very much respect the people who choose to participate in the institution of marriage. And as your priest, and the celebrant of many of your marriages, I stand ready to help and assist you in any way so that your journey of marriage is not only successfully completed, but a whole lot of fun along the way.
Epiphany? Theophany? Baptism? What exactly is the Feast we Celebrate on January 6?
by Fr. Stavros

January 6 is one of the 12 major Feastdays of the Orthodox Church year. It is known by many names—The Baptism of Christ, Epiphany, Theophany, and in Greek “Ton Foton.” Why? Is one more correct?

Actually, all the names can be used to describe the feast we celebrate January 6. Each name depicts a certain aspect of the feast and when all are taken together, they paint a complete picture of the event we celebrate January 6, as well as its meaning for Christianity.

The Baptism of Christ- Calling January 6 the Baptism of Christ calls significance to an historical event which is told in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The concept of baptism is something that pre-dates Christ. Obviously, St. John was in the wilderness baptizing people the day Jesus came to be baptized. The baptism that John was doing was a baptism for the forgiveness of sins, basically a ritual washing to be clean from sin. John testifies to those whom he is baptizing, in response to those who wondered whether John was the Christ, “I indeed baptize with water, but One mightier than I is coming whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Luke 3:16) This pre Figures the gift of the Holy Spirit that we receive through Chrismation, as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed on the Apostles at Pentecost—to tongues of fire enabling simple fishermen, and in turn all of us, the ability to participate in and spread the Good News of Christ. Because ritual washing became part of the Judaic Tradition or Law, Jesus, a Jew, submitted to be baptized, even though He had no sin, so that He could fulfill and then supersede the Law.

Epiphany- The word “epiphany” if you look it up in the dictionary, means “revelation.” It means that something previously hidden or unknown is revealed. For example, through some intense life experience, a person might have an epiphany about what they are supposed to do with their life, or what life is all about. Afterwards, the path of life becomes more clear for them to follow. In the case of the Orthodox feast of the Epiphany, Jesus comes down to be baptized, recognizing John’s ministry. Jesus does not need baptism for forgiveness of sins, for He is sinless. Rather He is baptized to be revealed to Israel. (John 1:31) In this baptism, He identifies Himself with His church that is to be, prefiguring our going down to death in baptism (Romans 6:1-6). By thus entering the waters of the Jordan Rivers, He sanctifies forever the waters of baptism (and indeed, all of creation) by mystically restoring it to its original condition through union with Him. (some of the notes in this paragraph were taken from the Orthodox Study Bible footnotes, p. 145)

Theophany- The Word “Theophany” takes the concept of revelation that is part of “epiphany” and makes it more specific. Theophany is the revelation of God. At the Baptism of Christ, the Holy Trinity was revealed to the whole world for the first time. All three members of the Holy Trinity were present, revealing the Triune Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Son was being baptized. The voice of the Father gave His endorsement of the Son. as well as setting the relationship of Father and Son, when the voice of God the Father spoke: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11) The Holy Spirit descended upon Christ coming out of the water in the form of a dove. While this does not mean that the Holy Spirit was incarnated as a dove, it means rather that the dove symbolizes purity, peace and wisdom and appeared in this special sign at the Baptism. We call God the Father also the Creator. Jesus Christ is called the Son. the Word, and the Light. The Holy Spirit is also called the Wisdom of God.

Ton Foton- This is a Greek phrase used in describing the Feast of Epiphany. It means literally “Of the Light,” or might also be translated “The Feast of Lights.” Most correctly, however, it should be translated, “Illumination” or even “Enlightenment.” And perhaps it most accurately captures the significance of this feast. By descending into the waters of the Jordan River, Christ re-consecrated the creation that was created perfect but fell through sin. If the first thing in the created world was light, then the first act in the re-consecration of the world was the Light descending into the waters, and the descent of the Holy Spirit in the endorsement of the Father of the Light, Jesus Christ, as His only-begotten Son. Indeed, this event is very enlightening for all of humanity. And very illuminating for a sinful world. For with the Light of Christ, we can be freed from sin. As we read in the Gospel of Matthew, after the Baptism of Christ, “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. And upon those who sit in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:16-17)

The hymn of Epiphany, which is chanted as we bless the waters in the church, captures not just the event of the Baptism, but it’s meaning in the history of mankind:

“When You o Christ were baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bore witness unto you, calling You, calling You ‘The Beloved Son.’ And the Spirit in the form of a dove, confirmed His word as true and steadfast. O Christ our God, who did appear and enlighten the world, Glory to You.”
**Liturgical Schedule for January 2014**

**Wednesday, January 1, 2014** Circumcision of Christ-Feast of St. Basil-New Year's Day  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Friday, January 3**  
Royal Hours of Epiphany  9:30-11:00 a.m.

**Sunday, January 5** Forefeast of Epiphany  
Orthros 8:30 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.  
Blessing of the Waters  11:15 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke (Christos Nenos, Dean Mitseas, Nicholas Katzaras, James Katzaras, Nicholas Yotis)  
Ushers: Brett Mourer, Christopher Kavouklis, Amin Hanhan  
Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

**Monday, January 6**  
Divine Liturgy at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs 9:30 a.m.  
Great Vespers for the Feast of St. John the Baptist  6:00 p.m.

His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta will preside over the Vespers Service, assisted by Fr. Stavros and priests of the Tampa Bay Area. A reception sponsored by the Philoptochos Society will follow in the Kourmolis Center.

**Tuesday, January 7**  
Feast of St. John the Baptist  
Orthros 8:30 a.m.  Hierarchical Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.

His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta will officiate at the Divine Liturgy, assisted by Fr. Stavros and priests of the Tampa Bay area. A luncheon sponsored by the Parish Council will follow in the Kourmolis Center.

**Sunday, January 12**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. John (Alexios Diniaco, Nicholas Alsina, Thomas Shearer, Antonio Bavaro, William Sotiropoulos)  
Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas  
Coffee Hour: Vasilopita Sunday (Philoptochos)

**Friday, January 17**  
Feast of St. Anthony  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Sunday, January 19**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew (Karter Lenardos, Gregory Koutroumanis, Harry Koutroumanis, Brigham Sibley, Benny Hidermichel, James Kavouklis)  
Ushers: Mike Trimis, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis  
Coffee Hour: Young Adults

**Sunday, January 26**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Mark (John Karamitsanis, Lukas Karamitsanis, Andrew Mellon-Lynn, Dominic Garcia, Demetri Karounos, Grayson Borgeas)  
Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, Kevin Fentress, John Alexander  
Coffee Hour: AHEPA/Daughters of Penelope

**Thursday, January 30**  
Feast of the Three Hierarchs—St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Sunday, February 2**  
Presentation of Christ in the Temple  
Orthros 8:30 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke (Christos Nenos, Dean Mitseas, Nicholas Katzaras, James Katzaras, Nicholas Yotis)  
Ushers: Nick Kavouklis, Perry Katsamakis, Peter Theophanous  
Coffee Hour: Philoptochos Missions Sunday
Services in January

January 1-Feast of the Circumcision of Christ—St. Basil—New Year's Day—Three things are commemorated on the first day of each year. First, the circumcision of Christ, which occurred historically 8 days after His Nativity. He was circumcised according to the rites of the Jewish law and given the name Jesus. Secondly, we commemorate the feast of St. Basil the Great, one of the Great Hierarchs of our church. St. Basil authored one of the Divine Liturgies used in our church, which is celebrated on his feastday. He also helped found monasticism. St. Basil was a friend to the poor, often baking bread with money in it and throwing it through the windows of widows and the poor. Hence the tradition of the Vasilopita, the bread with the coin baked inside, that we cut on New Year's Day. Finally, we are supposed to pray every day and commemorate all of life's milestones with prayer. So, we open a new year, 2014, with prayer and the Divine Liturgy on January 1.

January 3-Royal Hours of Epiphany—Like Christmas and Easter, there is a service of the Royal Hours which is celebrated in anticipation of Epiphany. This service consists of prayers, Psalms, hymns and Gospel readings which both foretell and recount this Great Feast of the church year. The Royal Hours will last from 9:30-11:00 a.m. on Friday, January 3.

January 5-Eve of Epiphany—Also, like Christmas and Easter, the feast of Epiphany is commemorated with two celebrations of the Divine Liturgy, one of them on the forefeast (day before the feastday). Hymns of anticipation are sung at this service. Also, there is a service of Aghiasmos (blessing of the water) which is done at the conclusion of the Liturgy on January 5. On January 6, there is also a service of the “Blessings of the waters” at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy.

On Monday, January 6, we will NOT hold the Divine Liturgy at St. John. Rather, we will all gather at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs for Liturgy beginning at 9:30, followed by the yearly diving for the cross following around 12:30.

Vespers of St. John the Baptist, to be celebrated on January 6 at 6:00 p.m.—The Vespers Service is the service that begins the liturgical day. In our church, the day begins at sundown. Thus the feast of St. John the Baptist, celebrated on January 7, begins with the sunset of January 6. Properly celebrated, all feastdays should begin with the celebration of Great Vespers, including every Sunday which should begin with Great Vespers on Saturday evenings. Because this is not practical in most parishes, Great Vespers is celebrated in most parishes on a limited basis. We will, of course, celebrate the complete cycle of services related to our feastday of St. John, which will begin with Great Vespers at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, January 6. His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will preside at this service, assisted by Fr. Stavros and all the priests of the Tampa Bay area.

January 7-Feast of St. John the Baptist—The day after a major feastday often commemorates the secondary figure of the Feast. On January 6, we celebrate the Baptism/Epiphany of Christ, who is obviously the major figure. The secondary figure of that feast is St. John the Baptist, whose feastday we commemorate the next day, January 7. St. John is the LAST of the Prophets before Christ and the first of the Saints, those who believed in Christ. Righteous figures who came before Christ are called either “Righteous” or “Prophet.” Holy People who came after Christ are called Saints. St. John the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist, as both titles. His life and his important work as the forerunner of the Lord is commemorated January 7. As this is the feastday of our church, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will be here with us to mark the occasion, together with all the clergy of the Tampa Bay area who will celebrate the liturgy together with His Eminence.

January 17-Feast of St. Anthony—St. Anthony is recognized as one of the fathers of monasticism. He lived in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries. He founded a monastery in Egypt which still exists to this day. He authored many of the monastic rules that are still in practice today. He also was a major contributor to the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in 325, where the Nicene Creed was first authored. He was one of the leaders against the heresies of Arianism.

January 30-Feast of the Three Hierarchs—The Three Hierarchs are St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. Each had his own feastday and all are honored together on January 30. Each of them lived in the 4th Century, each was an accomplished writer and speaker, each was a Bishop, each authored a Liturgy and each is remembered prominently in the history of our church to this day. The Three Hierarchs are Patron Saints of Teachers and Education.
**Registry Statistics**

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**Parish Registry**

*Baptism*—Elizabeth Eleanor Serbanos, daughter of Michael and Patricia Serbanos, was baptized on Saturday, November 30. John and Sara Nastopoulos were the Godparents. *Na Sas Zisi!*

**Poor in Spirit**

*By Fr. John Wallace*

I don’t know about your cell phone battery, but mine seems to recharge quickly at lower levels. It readily accepts an infusion of electric energy when its supply is low. But as it approaches or is near full charge, it seems to be much slower to accept charging.

Our hearts can be like a cell phone batter. When we are “poor in spirit” we readily accept energy. In fact, we seek it, sometimes inappropriately in something that provides a quick lift but has no lasting power, like a sugary snack. Seeking temporary satisfaction rather than fulfillment, we often take the quick and easy way out to our own long-term detriment. We do this with food and we do this with life inspiration.

Christ warns us to avoid such thinking when he says “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you…” (John 6:27) He then goes on to identify Himself as that food “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger and he who believe in Me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35) Christ is not talking only about food and drink, but about the meaning and purpose of our lives now and later in the Kingdom of God.

When we need recharging, we should turn to our creator, God. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, we have access to the power and energy of the Holy Spirit which can fill our hearts and minds with enough strength, purpose and direction for the day. His Son, the true bread of life, has the power to not only grant us fulfillment in this world but also in the world to come.

However, if our hearts are already at full charge in pride or if we are not poor but rich in ego, then we will slowly accept His power if not resisting or rejecting it altogether. Preferring to draw energy (such as it is) from the created instead of the Creator, we may seek energy from unreliable worldly sources to our ultimate demise.

The choice is ours. Will we seek the energy form on high or from below? One leads to life, the other to death. One is characterized as make-believe while the other is promoted as real. One works, but often slowly since the process of growing more life and closer to God take time. The other seems to work at first, but then breaks down leading us to search in desperation for another purpose or source of inspiration.

Will you put your faith in the things of this world or in the kingdom of God? As we enter a new year, give thanks to God in Jesus Christ that you have the choice.

The paths of this world lead to but one destination, death. The path of the kingdom of God, found in the Church, leads to heaven and an eternal life of blessedness and peace.

Think about it. Pray about it. An resolve to walk a little further each day down the sacramental path laid out before us by Jesus Christ in the Church; the path of humility and patience, the path of the “poor in spirit,” for theirs is the kingdom of God.

*Father John Wallace is the assistant priest at St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church in Charlotte, NC.*
Small Group Bible Study Update

Our Small Group Bible Studies will resume in January. If you haven’t been part of one of these groups, please come and join one. They are on different days, at different times and in different parts of town, with the hope that we can accommodate everyone who wants to participate. Days and locations and contact information is below. For questions about small groups, please contact Fr. Stavros or any of the group leaders. New members are welcome at any time. Your non-Orthodox friends and neighbors are also welcome to participate—we have several who come to small groups. If we are going to grow our church, it is going to be from outside our church. Please feel free to invite not only your fellow parishioners but your non-Orthodox neighbors and friends to join us.

Women’s Group (for adult women of any age)

Location: Meets at the home of Debbie Kavouklis, 3315 Jean Circle, Tampa, FL 33629—Debbie lives in South Tampa, a mile or so from the church.

Group Leader: Debbie Kavouklis—you can email Debbie at dkavouklis1@verizon.net, or call her at 690-0155.

Meeting time: Tuesday mornings from 10:00-11:00 a.m. (coffee and refreshments at 9:30 a.m.)

January meeting dates: January 14, 21 and 28

Men’s Group (for adult men of any age)

Location: Kourmoli’s Center

Group Leader: Group Members rotate who leads each week. For more information, however, please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com or contact him at 813-394-1038.

Meeting time: Wednesday mornings from 7:00-8:00 a.m.

January Meeting dates: January 8, 15, 22 and 29

South Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient for those who live in South Tampa

Location: Home of Ellen Karaku, 4610 S. Ferdinand Avenue (South Tampa near Dale Mabry and Bay to Bay), Tampa, FL 33611. Ellen’s home number is 813-835-0691 and her cell number is 813-240-3687. Her email is ekaraku@verizon.net.

Group Leader: Bessie Palios—Her email is bmp1126@yahoo.com, and her cell number is 813-523-0347. If you are going to attend this group, please RSVP to Ellen, Bessie and Fr. Stavros

Meeting time: Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

January meeting dates: January 14, 21 and 28

North Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient for those who live in North Tampa, Lutz, Land O’ Lakes, Wesley Chapel and Carrollwood

Location: Home of Michael and Artemis Conner. They live in Lutz near George Steinbrenner High School off of Lutz Lake Fern. Their address is 5524 Reflections Blvd, Lutz, FL 33558. Their number is 813-920-4404 and Michael’s cell is 813-784-0182. Michael’s email is conner.mike.01@gmail.com, and Artemis’ email is artemisia004@yahoo.com. Please contact them before you attend the first meeting to get the gate code to their community.

Group Leader: Michael Conner

Meeting time: Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

January meeting dates: January 14, 21 and 28

East Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient for those who live on the East side of town—Riverview, Brandon, Valrico, Seffner, Lakeland

Location: Location: Home of George and Donna Hambos—They live in Valrico at 2604 Herndon Street, Valrico, FL 33596. Their number is 813-651-9226 and Donna’s cell number is 813-843-8412, and Donna’s email is dhambos@msn.com

Group Leader: Donna Hambos

Meeting Time: Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

January meeting dates: January 14, 21 and 28

Young Adult Group (for adults ages 18-40)

Location: Homes of group members, this one rotates, contact group leader for location each week

Group Leader: Mary Ann Konstas, who can be reached at 813-215-9862 or at mapkonstas@gmail.com. Please contact Mary Ann if you are interested in joining this group so she can tell you where the next meeting will take place.

Meeting time: Wednesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

January meeting dates: January 8, 15, 22 and 29
Get Acquainted Sunday, January 5—In an effort to get to know one another better, we are going to continue our “get acquainted Sundays” one Sunday of each month. We will have nametags and markers in the entry way of the Kourmolis Center and will ask that each person put one on during coffee hour and introduce yourself to at least one person that you do not know. This will serve to help us increase our fellowship and sense of community. Our “Get Acquainted Sunday” for January will be Sunday, January 5.

Get Daily Bible Readings Sent to your Email or Phone—One of the best ways to start each day is by reading from the Bible. There are prescribed readings for every day of the year in the Orthodox Church. You can go on the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America website at www.goarch.org, go into the search box and type in “Receive Daily Readings,” follow the prompts and have this valuable resource sent right to your phone or email. Reading the Bible is so important and for those of us who don’t make the time or are lazy to reach for the Bible, have the readings sent in a way that is easy to remember. Spend some time this new ecclesiastical year in God’s Word, the sacred Scriptures!

Office Closed for New Year and Martin Luther King Holidays—The office will be closed on Wednesday, January 1 for New Year’s Day and on Monday, January 20 for Martin Luther King Day.

Deadlines for the Messenger and Bulletin—The Deadline for submitting something for the Messenger is the 10th of each month for the following month. The deadline for submitting something for the weekly bulletin is Tuesday afternoon at 5:00 p.m. for the following Sunday. All information for the Messenger or Bulletin must be sent electronically—don’t just hand in a flyer. It must be “camera ready” and in complete sentences. Some people submit content for either The Messenger or bulletin that is in sentence fragments. We are not going to edit it for you. Full page flyers will not be placed in the Messenger unless space permits—this will be at the discretion of the staff. It is your responsibility to send in information that you would like printed in the parish periodicals. We are not going to “hunt you down” and remind you.

Constant Contact Emails—Our parish utilizes Constant Contact as a way of staying in touch with parishioners, particularly on subjects that are time sensitive, i.e. funerals, special events, and last minute announcements. To keep you apprised of news in our parish, we will probably be sending out 1 (and no more than 2) message per week. This is an effort not to clog your inbox but to keep you informed of the goings on in our parish.

Vasilopita Sunday will be on Sunday, January 12, following the Divine Liturgy in the church. A Vasilopita will be blessed and cut for the ministries of our parish. Our parish will be sending a check for $500 to St. Basil’s Academy in New York, a school for orphaned or disadvantaged children run by our Archdiocese. Our Philoptochos will also sponsor the coffee hour with all proceeds going to St. Basil’s as well.

Gasparilla Parking Fundraiser—On Saturday, January 18 and Saturday, January 25, we will be renting out the church parking lot for Gasparilla parking, for the children’s parade on January 18, and for the main event on January 25. If you are interested in volunteering a few hours to help the church make some easy $$$, and also have a good time socializing for a few hours while directing traffic, please contact John Kokkas at 727-992-4165 or johnkokkas@verizon.net. The primary hours needed are approximately 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. each Saturday. This is a very easy and fun way to generate income for our parish.

Charitable Giving by our Youth—Boxes of Hope—Our community collected 58 boxes of food to donate to Metropolitan Ministries. That’s over 400 pounds of food and $620 of donations. Thank you to the children and their parents who helped to sort the many items donated. Thank you to everyone who donated items, gift cards and their time.

Address Changes—If you change your address, please inform the office so we can make the appropriate changes. Recently, we found that several members that had moved months ago and were not getting our mailings. Kindly let us know if you have moved and are not getting our church mailings. If you change your email address, kindly let us know as well, as we use Constant Contact via email for timely announcements which you will miss if we don’t have your email address.

Scan to like St. John on Facebook facebook.com/StJohnGOCtampa

St. John has a Facebook page. Please “like” our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are put on their frequently and we will also be posting photos in the near future.
PURCHASE LIGHTNING TICKETS AND SUPPORT OUR CHURCH

One of our parishioners is donating a number of their Tampa Bay Lightning Hockey Tickets to our CHURCH. They are great seats in the lower corner valued at $122 each (Section 104, Row P, Seats 15-18). They are:

Thurs. Jan. 16th 7:30 - Lightning VS. NY Islanders - (Up to 4 tickets) $50 each
Thurs. Jan. 23rd 7:30 - Lightning VS. Ottawa - (Up to 4 tickets) $50 each
Sat. Jan. 25th 7:00 - Lightning VS. Colorado - (Up to 4 tickets) $75 each
Thurs. Feb. 6th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Toronto - (Up to 4 tickets) $50 each

+++ Checks can be made Payable to St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church. If you are interested in any of these tickets please call the office (876-8830) or stop by. First come, first serve, and if the tickets are not purchased within two days of the game they will be returned to our donor.

Katherine Sakkis, CRS
Fine Homes Specialist
Sakkis & Sanders Real Estate Consultants
Premier Sotheby’s International Realty
202 S. Moody Ave Tampa, FL 33609
Tel: 813-309-1073
E-mail: KSakkis@gmail.com
www.BestTampaRealEstate.com

Mortgage rates are at record lows.
Please call me and mention this ad, 10% of the commission will be given to the church.
JOY PRE-TEEN RETREAT
FEBRUARY 9

On September 29, 2013, we had a pre-teen retreat for pre-teens from around Tampa bay. It was very well received. We are going to do a second installment of this retreat on Sunday, February 9, 2014 following Divine Liturgy. Please save the date, more information will follow.

PHILOPTOCHOS MISSIONS
SUNDAY-FEBRUARY 2

As they do every year, Philoptochos is going to sponsor a Missions Sunday to support overseas Orthodox missions. Kenny Kidd from the Orthodox Christian Mission Center in St. Augustine will be with us on Sunday, February 2. He will offer the homily and then Philoptochos will sponsor a luncheon to benefit Missions work, with all proceeds going toward the Mission Center.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Thank you to everyone who continues to support our Community Outreach ministry to serve the homeless and those in need. For those who don't know, we serve breakfast at First Presbyterian Church on the third Saturday of each month from 8:00-10:30 a.m. Upcoming dates are Saturday, January 18 and Saturday, February 15. For more information or to sign up to serve one Saturday, please contact, please contact Betty Katherine Palios at bettypalios@gmail.com or 813-468-1596.

BIBLE STUDY
WITH DR. BILL MANIKAS

Bible Study will resume on Monday, January 13 from 6:30-8:00 p.m. in the multi-purpose room. Newcomers are welcome to join us. Dr. Bill Manikas leads the Bible study, which meets every Monday night.

YOUNG AT HEART

Young At Heart Meeting-The Young At Heart meeting for January will be Tuesday, January 14 at 11:00 a.m. More details to follow. For more information on our group, contact Nick Antonakakis (813-477-6639) or Mary Nenos (813-935-2096).

Apokreatiko Glendi—Mark Your Calendars for Saturday, February 22, 2014—The Young at Heart will have their Annual Apokreatiko Glendi! We look forward to a wonderful time, great food, live band and prizes awarded for the best costumes!

GOYA MEETING-
The GOYA Meeting for January will be Sunday, January 12, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be served.

GOYA Clearwater Event-January 24-26—The Clearwater GOYA Winter Event will be held from January 24-26 at Holy Trinity in Clearwater. If you are interested in attending, please let Elaine Halkias know by January 12 whether you will be attending. You can reach her at 813-629-1843 or nybagel2@msn.com
SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School Christmas Program—The Sunday School Christmas program will be held at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, December 15.

Sunday School Christmas Party/Program Rehearsal—December 14—The Sunday School will have a Christmas Party and practice for the Christmas Program on Saturday, December 14, from 11:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m. Lunch will be included. We will meet in the Kourmolis Center for crafts, games, decorating and lots of fun together. Please bring an unwrapped gift to donate to the Child Abuse Council. We will rehearse the Christmas program one last time in the church at the end of the party.

Fall Harvest Festival a Success—Over 40 of our JOY/HOPE Sunday School Students participated in our Fall Harvest Festival on October 27. Thanks everyone who helped out—what a wonderful event!!!

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS:

We would like to wish everyone in our parish a blessed New Year and hope that you had a wonderful Christmas with your family. The first half of our Sunday School year has been extremely busy and successful thanks to all the teachers, Fr. Stavros, the parents, and especially the students of St. John’s. One of the new additions to our program is the Weekly Topics that Fr. Stavros guides us with. The last three topics were The Church Hierarchy, Charity/Thanksgiving, and Stewardship.

WOW, wasn’t this year’s Christmas Pageant the best ever? The parishioners of St. John's Church are truly blessed with such wonderful and talented children. We would like to thank these children and their parents for helping to make this pageant a success. But the BIGGEST thank you goes to MARIA XENICK, our Director of Music/Programs, for planning the Christmas Party and producing this pageant. We would also like to thank the many parents and teachers who helped with the pageant on the 15th and our Sunday School Christmas Party and Rehearsal on the 14th. We also shared our gifts by collecting toys for needy boys and girls.

This is our 2nd year of YOUTH SUNDAYS which is held once a month. Our students are doing a great job singing the hymns that they have learned in our music program. On December 8th our children were able to sing for Bishop Sevastianos and the prosphora was made by our 7th through High School Students.

This school year the Sunday School is trying to raise $4500 for our own Stain Glass Window. We are almost at the $3000 mark. On Dec. 8th we had a spaghetti luncheon that was hosted by the Hambos Family. They donated all the food and also prepared a delicious lunch for us. We are truly thankful for their kindness and generosity. We would also like to sincerely thank Maria Xenick, South Tampa Sugar Mama, for donating her delicious Christmas cookies that we sold on December 22nd, for this worthy cause.

CONGRATULATIONS to the Students who had PERFECT ATTENDANCE for the month of November.

Pre-School: Teddy Kafantaris
Kindergarten: Gianni Bavaro, Maria Nicklow, and Katerina Sotiropoulos
1st Grade: Nicholas Akkrotirianakis, Ariana Coundas- Thatcher, Emily Nicklow, Calliope Kafantaris, Maria Palios, George Xenick, and Panagiotis Zelatis
2nd Grade: Niko Bavaro, Isabella Browne, Makis Crassas, Kaitlin Zelatis, and Yiannis Laliotis
3rd Grade: Maria Bavaro, Andrew Choundas- Thatcher, Alexander Findlay, Gennaro Scarfogliero, Vasili Sotiropoulos, Alexander Sotiropoulos, and Yanni Trimikliniotis
4th and 5th Grade: Antonio Bavaro, William Sotiropoulos, and Elizabeth Xenick
6th Grade: Sophia Crassas, Artemis Xenick, and Nicholas Yiotis
7th and 8th Grade: Christina Apockotos, Sophia Krinos, Savvas Ferekides, and Brigham Sibley
High School: Nedi Ferekides, Arianna Krinos, Chace Sibley, and Larissa Krinos
Leave the Church in Your Will

Part of our life’s legacy is the inheritance we leave our children. By leaving an inheritance, a part of us lives on through them. When preparing your will, you should consider leaving money to our church—this is the church of your children and part of their future can be positively impacted by leaving some of your inheritance to the church. The ability of the church to spread the Word of God is facilitated by everyone’s stewardship. By leaving a portion of your inheritance to the church in your will, you remain a steward in perpetuity, but more importantly, you help cement a solid financial future for the church for your children and your grandchildren. If you are interested in leaving the church in your will, please contact Russell Sibley (church member) at rsibleylaw@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration.

Psalm 25

To thee, O LORD, I lift up my soul. 2 O my God, in thee I trust, let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. 3 Yea, let none that wait for thee be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. 4 Make me to know thy ways, 0 LORD; teach me thy paths. 5 Lead me in thy truth, and teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation; for thee I wait all the day long. 6 Be mindful of thy mercy, 0 LORD, and of thy steadfast love, for they have been from of old. 7 Remember not the sins of my youth, or my transgressions; according to thy steadfast love remember me, for thy goodness’ sake, 0 LORD! 8 Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. 9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. 10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. 11 For thy name’s sake, 0 LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great. 12 Who is the man that fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. 13 He himself shall abide in prosperity, and his children shall possess the land. 14 The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. 15 My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. 16 Turn thou to me, and be gracious to me; for I am lonely and afflicted. 17 Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distresses. 18 Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. 19 Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. 20 Oh guard my life, and deliver me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in thee. 21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for thee.
The Greek Orthodox Church is a church of rules. But without some guidelines to go by, there would be chaos. The following guidelines are rooted in Orthodox Tradition and Canon Law. These guidelines are printed in The Messenger near the beginning of each calendar year, and it is a good idea from time to time for people to review them. These guidelines have been copied from the 2013 Yearbook of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Please review them, and keep them in mind when planning for your important life events. If you have any questions, please contact Fr. Stavros. (Special requirements specific to sacraments at St. John appear in italics.)

Weddings
For the union of a man and woman to be recognized as sacramentally valid by the Orthodox Church, the following conditions must be met: The Sacrament of Matrimony must be celebrated by an Orthodox Priest of a canonical Orthodox jurisdiction, according to the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, in a canonical Orthodox Church, and with the authorization of the Metropolitan.

Before requesting permission from the Metropolitan to perform the marriage, a Priest must verify that: a) Neither of the parties in question are already married to other persons, either in this country or elsewhere (if a person comes to the United States after age 18, they need to provide a letter from their country of origin that they are indeed free to marry); b) the parties in question are not related to each other to a degree that would constitute an impediment; c) if either or both parties are widowed, they have presented the death certificate(s) of the deceased spouse(s); d) if either or both of the parties have been previously married in the Orthodox Church, they have obtained an ecclesiastical as well as civil divorce. (The Ecclesiastical Divorce process is done after the civil divorce becomes final, and involves counseling with the parish priest, forms that are filled out, a review by the Metropolitan, a divorce hearing which in the Tampa Bay area is held in Clearwater, and this process usually takes several months to complete. Fr. Stavros will not set a wedding date for anyone until an ecclesiastical divorce has been secured, so please plan accordingly, the ecclesiastical divorce process often takes several months.) e) the party or parties who are members of a parish other than the one in which the marriage is to be performed have provided a certificate declaring them to be members in good standing with that parish for the current year; and f) a civil marriage license has been obtained from civil authorities.

No person may marry more than three times in the church, with permission for a third marriage granted only with extreme oikonomia.

In cases involving the marriage of Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians, the latter must have been baptized in water, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church cannot bless the marriage of an Orthodox Christian to a non-Christian. The couple should be willing to baptize their children in the Orthodox Church and raise and nurture them in accordance with the Orthodox Faith. There is a list with religious groups that Orthodox are prohibited from marrying, i.e. Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and others. Fr. Stavros can provide you with this list. This is important to consider when you begin to date someone. Make sure your children are aware of this! Because circumstances exist where a couple is dating where one of the two is not eligible to be married in the Orthodox Church, and this causes heartache in the relationship and often leads to someone leaving the church.

A baptized Orthodox Christian whose wedding has not been blessed by the Orthodox Church is no longer in good standing with the Church, and may not receive the Sacraments of the Church, including Holy Communion, or become a sponsor of an Orthodox Marriage, Baptism, or Chrismation. A non-Orthodox Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian does not thereby become a member of the Orthodox Church, and may not receive the Sacraments, including Holy Communion, serve on the Parish Council or vote in parish assemblies or elections. To participate in the Church’s life, one must be received into the Church by the Sacrament of Baptism, or in the case of persons baptized with water in the Holy Trinity, following a period of instruction, by Chrismation.

Canonical and theological reasons preclude the Orthodox Church from performing the Sacrament of Marriage for couples where one partner is Orthodox and the other partner is a non-Christian. As such, Orthodox Christians choosing to enter such marriages fall out of good standing with their Church and are unable to actively participate in the sacramental life of the church. While this stance may seem confusing and rigid, it is guided by the Orthodox Church’s love and concern for its member’s religious and spiritual well-being.

The Sponsor (koumbaros or koumbara) must provide a current certificate of membership proving him or her to be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the church. A person who does not belong to a parish, or who belongs to a parish under the jurisdiction of a bishop who is not in communion with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, or who, if married, has not had his or her marriage blessed by the Orthodox Church, or, if divorced, has not received an ecclesiastical divorce, cannot be a sponsor. Non-Orthodox persons may be members of the wedding party, but may not exchange the rings or crowns.

Days when marriage is not permitted.
Marriages are not performed on fast days or during fasting seasons or on the feasts of the church as indicated: September 14 (Holy Cross Day), December 13-25 (Christmas), January 5 and 6 (Epiphany), Great Lent and Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, August 1-15 (Dormition Fast) and August 29. Any exceptions can only be made with the permission of the Metropolitan.

Prohibited Marriages
The following types of relationships constitute impediments to marriage:
Parents with their own children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren or Godchildren of the same Godparents; Brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law; Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews; First cousins with each other; Foster parents with foster children or foster children with the children of foster parents.

Godparents with Godchildren or Godparents with the parents of their Godchildren. (In the Chrismation of an adult, one has to be careful that the choice of sponsor does not create a potential marriage impediment. For any questions regarding, please see Fr. Stavros)

A date cannot be set for marriage unless one of the parties getting married, NOT THE PARENTS, contact Fr. Stavros, who sets all the dates for weddings. Pre-Marital Counseling is also required for weddings at St. John. For people who wish to be married at St. John who are not members anywhere, a substantial fee is imposed for use of the church, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing.

**Baptisms**

A person who wishes to sponsor a candidate for Baptism or Chrismation must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing and a supporting member of an Orthodox parish. A person may not serve as a Godparent if the Church has not blessed his or her marriage or, if civilly divorced, he or she has not been granted an ecclesiastical divorce, or for any other reason he or she is not in communion with the Orthodox Church. Baptisms may not be performed from Christmas Day through the Feast of Theophany (December 25-January 6), during Holy Week, or on any of the Great Feastdays of the Lord.

**Funerals**

Funeral services are permitted on any day of the year, except for Sunday and Holy Friday, unless permission is granted by the Metropolitan. The Orthodox Church does not allow for cremation. This is based on Ezekiel’s vision of a valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37) and St. Paul’s writing that the Body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19) and thus must be treated with dignity even in death and allowed to return to its elements naturally. The Orthodox Church will not allow a funeral service for someone who has been cremated. Many people have mentioned in their will their desire to be cremated. Please discuss this with Fr. Stavros if there are any questions regarding this, and make the appropriate changes, because Fr. Stavros cannot grant oikonomia (dispensation) and do a funeral service if someone has been cremated.

Additionally, eulogies offered in the church at a funeral service may only be offered by an ordained Orthodox clergyman. If members of the family wish to offer testimonials, these may be done at the funeral home the night before the funeral or at the makaria luncheon.

**Memorials**

Memorial services may not be chanted from the Saturday or Lazarus through the Sunday of Thomas, or on any Feastday of the Lord or any Feastday of the Theotokos. We customarily do not offer memorial services on the 1st Sunday of Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy) or the 3rd Sunday of Lent (Sunday of the Holy Cross), or the Sunday after September 14. In 2014, the Sundays when NO memorial services will be offered include: January 5 (Forefeast of Epiphany), February 2 (Presentation of Christ in the Temple), March 9 (Sunday of Orthodoxy), March 23 (Sunday of the Holy Cross), April 13 (Palm Sunday), April 20 (Pascha), April 27 (Sunday of St. Thomas), June 8 (Pentecost), September 14 (Feast of the Holy Cross).

Memorial Services may be scheduled through the church office. Please contact the church at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service. Please let the office know when you call whether you will be providing your own kolyva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a $75 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to “St. John Philoptochos”. Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service.

**Organ Donation**

The Orthodox Church allows the faithful to donate organs after death if they wish.

**Forty-Day Blessings for babies** may be done on any day. The prayers of this service connect the 40 day churching of the baby with the mother of the child (if she is Orthodox) receiving Communion. Thus, if this service is offered on a Sunday, Father Stavros schedules them at 9:30 a.m., prior to the Divine Liturgy, so that the new mother can receive Holy Communion in the context of the Divine Liturgy.
Some Guidelines Unique to our Parish

In line with the guidelines from the Archdiocese provided above, we also have some guidelines for things in our parish that it is helpful to review as we start the new year. The Parish Council has adopted what is below with the approval of Fr. Stavros. Most of these guidelines are old, though a few of them are new. For the “Good of the Order” at our church, we ask that everyone cooperate in following these guidelines. Please read these over carefully and if you have any questions, please address them to the Parish Council or Father Stavros.

PROCEDURES FOR THE OFFICE:

1. The deadline for submitting information for the weekly bulletin is Tuesdays at 5:00 p.m. All submissions must be sent electronically to officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com.

2. The deadline for the Messenger shall be the 10th of the month. As a cost cutting measure we reduced the size of the Messenger, so no full page flyers will be put in. All submissions must be electronically; via email. Simply send in your event information and the office will format it for the publication. officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com

3. Events may be advertised a maximum of two months prior to the event date for the Messenger and four weeks prior for the bulletin.

4. If you wish to see Fr. Stavros or the office staff, you must make an appointment. Also, when meeting with the office staff, or when meeting with Father Stavros on a non-pastoral matter, please be efficient with your time. There is lots of work that goes on in the office and constant interruptions make for little progress. Planned appointments are fine, they are not interruptions.

5. Other than the emergency fund of the church, we will have a no second tray policy going forward beginning January 1, 2014.

FUNDRAISERS/HALL USAGE:

1. All fundraisers and events by ministries or church affiliated groups should be scheduled at the August calendar meeting. For those, not scheduled at this meeting; please submit your event request to the Parish Council; via the office email. officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com

2. Please make every effort to clean up the kitchen after your event. No food, trays, utensils, etc., should be left on the counters. Please throw away all trash and at least rinse all dirty dishes, trays, etc. We don’t want to attract critters!

3. All sales of tickets and other fundraising items, shall take place at designated tables immediately outside of the foyer and center of the hall. These tables will be preset for your use. Our foyer has become increasingly crowded and we need to maintain clearance per fire code.

4. All contracts for caterers, bands, etc., made in the church name that obligate the church for payment shall be submitted and signed by the Parish Council.
Sunday School Cereal Drive

Sunday School is sponsoring a 2014 New Year single item food drive!!
This month we are collecting Cereal!!

Please donate a box (or two!) of any type of dry, ready to eat cereal of your choice.

A donation box will be in the foyer of the Kourmolis Community center.

We will collect them every Sunday in January.

Our goal is 100 boxes of cereal!!

Donations will be given to our own food pantry and Feeding America Tampa Bay.
Sunday School is sponsoring a 2014 New Year single item food drive!! This month we are collecting Cereal!! Please donate a box (or two!) of any type of dry, ready to eat cereal of your choice. A donation box will be in the foyer of the Kourmolis Community centre. We will collect them every Sunday in January. Our goal is 100 boxes of cereal!! Donations will be given to our own food pantry and Feeding America Tampa Bay.

Stewards for 2014 (as of 12/11/13)
Fr. Stavros and Lisa Akrotirianakis
John and Anetta Alexander
George and Zackie Ameres
Nicholas and Doris Andreadakis
Nick and Judy Antonakakis
Angel and Lisa Alsina
Alexa Alsina
Ed Ambrozy
Scott and Christine Axelrod
Mathew and Suzy Balasis
Denise Bedran
Rita Bedran
Tom and Angie Bougas
Chrysanthi Brown
Dorothy Bush
Michael Cantonis II
John and Genie Carter
George and Kalliope Chagaris
Ethel Chakonas
Robert and Viviana Chandler
John Christ
Michael and Artemis Conner
Telly and Toula Courialis
Alkis and Aime Crassas
Alex DeMaio/Sylvia Michos
Anna Demas
John Demas
Melpo Diamantides
Stan and Mary Ellen Evdemon
Christos and Debbie Ferekides
Andrew and Karina Findlay
Tony and Carole Fotopoulos
Chris Frazier
Richard and Stannie Garcia
Debbie Gavalas & Robert Richie
Tom and Janet Georgas
Ed and Teri Gerecke
Mike and Margaret Halikoytakis
George and Elaine Halkias
Evangelina Halkias
Amin and Gloria Hanhan
Christie Hartsfield
Mark and JoAnn Hartung
Skip Higdon
Scott and Rena Horack
Evelyn Hoppenstand
Stephanie Hord
Jon Irwin
Pam Irwin
Raissa Jewtenzhenko
Amy and Michael Kafentaris
Ellen Karaku
Martha Kapetan
Anthony and Sophie Karas
Jim and Paula Karagounis
Maria Karounos
Pres. Loretta Karpelenia
Daniel Karpelenia
Nick and Helen Katzaras
Theodore and Amy Kladis
Alexandros Korakis
Demetrios & Mary Ann Konstas
Irene Kostaris
Demetri and Melissa Krinos
Nick and Melissa Laliotis
Dominic & Melanie Letobarone
Mary Maas
Kathryn Maclaury
Chris and Nicole Mantzanas
Bill and Nancy Manikas
Clara Manikis
Greg and Victoria Melton
Jaime Melton
George and Catherine Mitseas
Brett and Ana Mourer
Spero Moutsatsos
Mary Nenos
Byron and Jeanie Nenos
Bill Neyland
Artemis Palios
Betty Katherine Palios/Perry
Katsamakis
George and Julie Palios
Michael and Bessie Palios
Tom and Jenny Paloumpis
Theodore & Marisa Panopoulos
Alec and Lauren Papadakis
John and Irene Papadopoulos
Gus and Marina Paras
Florin and Marenca Patrasciou
Georgia Payne
Ryan and Megan Rindone
Archie and Eletheria Roussos
John Saavedra/Peggy Saavedra
John and Katherine Sakkis
Dante and Lindsey Skourellos
Michael and Shirley Skourellos
Peter Skourellos
Christine Scourtes
Michael and Patricia Serbanos
Alex Skijus
Paul and Terri Sotiropoulos
Peter Spanos
Wayne and Pauline Spencer
Jane Stavropoulos
Mario and Ourania Stephanides
Melvin and Violet Tamashiro
Mary Tingiris
Greg Tisdale
Pete and Donna Trakas
Mike Iraklinos
Mike and Diane Trmis
John Tsibris
David Voykin
Gary Ward/Sandra Pappas
Mike and Maria Xenick
Evangelene Xeroteres
Victor and Lisa Yotis
William Yotis
Maria Zabetakis
Peter Zeban

Stewardship Update

On Stewardship Sunday, we received 117 pledge forms for a total of $223,742 for 2014.

Our Financial goal for stewardship for 2014 is $400,000.

Thank you to all those who have made a pledge for 2014! If you did not send in your form yet, please do as today. If you need a pledge form, please contact the office and we’ll be happy to send you one.

If you still have a balance for 2013, please try to fulfill it before December 31, 2013.
Stewardship Survey

In early December, we expanded the stewardship committee. As was mentioned in Father Stavros’ Message, some new ministries will be created under the umbrella of this ministry. If you would like to participate in any of these ministries listed below, please fill out this form and send it to Fr. Stavros at the church office by January 10. Thank you.

Name_________________________________________________

Phone Number________________________________________

Email Address__________________________________________

Your Stewardship Interests (please check all that apply)

I am interested in the following:

_______Fundraising—asking people to increase their pledge

_______Fundraising—asking people about directed gifts/endowment

_______Long-range planning

_______Ambassadors—working the hall at coffee hour to build good will, answer questions of the stewards

_______Administrators—who can manage the stewardship list-inputting and connecting people with time and talent needs

_______Media—Facebook, live-streaming, website-post pictures, other social media

_______Looking into on-line giving possibilities

_______Letter writers—people who can write all kinds of correspondence—thank you letters, welcome letters on behalf of stewardship committee

_______Welcoming committee on Sundays

_______Making follow up calls to visitors

_______Contacting people who haven’t been to church in a while

_______Developing/writing materials for our parish for future stewardship campaigns

_______Interested in working with building/grounds and maintenance

_______Other (any other gifts you bring to the table that would help with our stewardship campaign—please write below)
# January 2014

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<td>5 Epiphany Services in Tarpon Springs</td>
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<td>12 Community Outreach</td>
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<td>Three Hierarchs</td>
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<td>26 Dr. Bill's Bible Study</td>
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ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

2418 W. Swann Avenue
Tampa, FL 33609-4712
Office Phone: (813)876-8830
Fax (813) 443-4899
stjohngoctampa@gmail.com
www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

Timetable of Services

Sundays: Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.
Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

Parish Priest: Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis
813-876-8830 (office) 394-1038 (cell)
frstav@gmail.com

Parish Council:
Katherine Sakkis, President  813-309-1073
Bill Manikas V. President  813-716-8185
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“May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” From the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom