

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH  
***THE MESSENGER***

“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

**December 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 member to grow in their faith.

**Father Stavros' Message**

**Plotting the Future Course of our Parish**

*Please try to read this Message before December 7*

*As you all know by now, I enjoy writing. I put a lot of effort into the monthly message each month, to share thoughts that are encouraging and edifying. Again, this is a lengthy article, I hope you will take some time to read my thoughts. This message contains important thoughts about stewardship, Christmas and our community. Thank you for the time you take to read my thoughts each month, and thank you for the encouragement and positive comments you send about the Messenger which motivate me to put in greater and greater efforts to reach and to teach.*

*Jesus said, “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*

*John 14:23*

**O**ne day this past summer, I was at the pool with Nicholas, when I overheard a conversation that was so loud that I didn't really have to try to listen in. A woman was telling a man at the pool about her search for

a church community to belong to. She mentioned one church community, and said that “they were handing out forms and asking for money and stuff before I even found my seat, and I'm like, no way am I going back there.” She described her search for a church and how many different places they visited over the course of many Sundays. Until she said they finally found the place that seemed like the right fit. And then she said, “and then we got involved. Our daughter is in youth group, my husband joined the board of elders, I (she) teach Sunday school. We've really made this church our home.”

So, this got me thinking about how do we view our involvement at our church. Do we look at our church as a home? Do we see our fellow parishioners as our parish family? Do we feel connected with our fellow parishioners? Or disconnected? Is our involvement in the life of the church front and center to our lives or just an afterthought?

As an aside, I can't tell you how many people came up to me at the festival whose weddings I have done over the past

ten years and who I haven't seen in years. A woman and her 8 year old child approached me at the festival. The woman asked me if I remembered her. She asked her child if that child remembered me. And then looked surprised when I said I didn't. She said, "well you baptized him seven years ago. I know you don't see us on Sundays but we never miss one of these festivals." Now, I'm not sure how a person considers St. John their spiritual home if they attend but once a year at the festival. These people, by the way, are not stewards, they have no investment of anything other than some food once a year in our church. If all of these people, or even half of them came to our church, we'd grow sizably. *And if you are one of these people who I met at the festival, especially the gentleman who says he reads this publication faithfully every month, c'mon back to church—we've got a lot of good stuff going on here and invite you to be part of it.*

Many of us have had the experience of trying to find a place to live, whether we buy it or rent it, we have had the experience of hunting around to find something that feels right. And once we find that place, we invest in it - we invest money to purchase or rent, we spend money to decorate, we spend time fixing it up and maintaining it, we invest our talent to make it look like ours. And when we've spent the time, the talent and the resources on our "house," then it starts to feel like our "home."

I realize that there are not a lot of options of Orthodox Churches if you live in Tampa. It's not like you can shop and shop and shop for an Orthodox Church that fits your needs. In fact, the Orthodox Church isn't designed like that anyway—in theory anyway, all churches are supposed to be the same. But if you've made the decision to make St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church of Tampa your spiritual home, I would think that you should have some expectations from your church, and your church should have some expectations of you.

## So, what are some things that you should expect from the church?

1. You should expect it to be open regularly for Divine Worship services.
2. You should expect a nice and moving celebration of the Divine services.
3. You should expect a sermon that is thought-provoking and has been prepared.
4. You should expect a good Sunday School and solid programs for children.
5. You should expect some solid educational programs for adults—Bible Studies, Small groups, philanthropic groups.
6. You should expect spiritual support from the clergy, to be available to confession and counseling.
7. You should expect social, emotional support from parishioners, that they will help to "bear one another's burdens." (Galatians 6:2)

## And there are some things the church should expect from the parishioners:

1. The church expects you to be a regular worshipper at the Divine services.
2. The church expects that you will be a good steward. - The church expects that you will joyfully and sacrificially offer your time, talent and financial resources so that the church can do its work. Because the church is NOT a building, or an organization, the church is the Body of Christ—the CHURCH IS YOU!!!

## The Work of the Church—what is the END goal?

Many times we forget what exactly IS the work of the church? Is the work of the church the ushers, the finance committee, the festival, the Junior Olympics? Yes, these are all part of our church on Tampa. But they are not the end goal of the church—they are means to the end. If we are content with having "means" but without having "ends" then the work becomes pointless, and eventually it stops. So, as we each "work" in our individual ways (singing in the choir, teaching Sunday School, serving on a committee, we can't forget the overall "goal" of the church, the collective "work" that the church, in its entirety is called to do. Below are a few scriptural phrases to help us remember the purpose for which we have this church:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do all that I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20*

*For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost. Luke 19:10*

*Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2*

*Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. Luke 15:6*

*I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Luke 5:32*

Someone recently asked me "What YOUR end goal here at St. John? I mean you have a pastoral assistant, two clerical office workers, what else do you want?" I shared with this person, something I have actually not shared before and after my conversation, this person said, "**you changed my whole outlook on stewardship, you should share this with the entire community!**" So, here it is:

## The Ancient Church

Let's go back one thousand years, to a village in Greece, or Turkey, or Romania, it doesn't matter. Imagine your neighborhood subdivision as a village of centuries past—several hundred homes, surrounded by fields, lakes, forests. In the subdivision, there is a blacksmith, a tailor, a baker, a school, a doctor, etc. Everyone in the village, the equivalent of your subdivision, is an Orthodox Christian. In the center of the village is the church, and everyone attends church each Sunday. In fact, because the church is so close to everyone,

most people go to church every day—early in the morning for prayers and late in the evening as well. There are social events on the weekends, and oftentimes community dinners for everyone in the village. Now, in the village there are many farmers, so when a farmer is sick, other farmers go and plow his field for him, and when others are sick, he will do the same for them. There are 10 widows in the village. These women have a support group—they meet each evening to make sure no one is alone. There are play groups for the small children. In other words, the church is not just the spiritual center of life, but the social center as well, because it provides the social support people need at every stage of life—sitting with someone who is in the hospital, counseling someone who is distraught, giving food to the one who has no food, etc. This is not some Marxist utopia—no, not everyone is the same, people own their own homes and some homes are even nicer than others, some people make more money than others. But what they have in the village is a real sense of community, a real expression of “Bearing one another’s burdens.” (Galatians 6:2) THIS is what Christ intended when He established the church—bear one another’s burdens, find the lost sheep, seek and save the lost, baptize all nations, teaching them to observe the commandments of God, and to call all people (from the most righteous to the greatest sinner) to repentance, a life of faith, and ultimately eternal life.

### **The Modern Church**

OK, so we don’t live in a village where everyone is Orthodox. Modern day Orthodoxy is much different than this. No everyone in our city is Orthodox. We don’t live within a few blocks of the church, and we do not live in an agrarian society. But that does not absolve us from having not only a spiritual support but a social support system. We are supposed to incorporate these social and emotional support practices into our modern church. And this is exactly what many of the successful Protestant Churches have done, which is what makes them so successful—not only in terms of numbers but in terms on unity within a community.

A few years ago, when Nicholas was in pre-school, we sent him to a preschool at a Presbyterian Church near our home. This church community was smaller than ours, maybe 200 families. But they employed 2 full time pastors, several office workers and a youth pastor. The sanctuary was a modest worship space, about the size of our sanctuary. There was no nice gymnasium like the one we have here and we definitely have more square footage as far as buildings are concerned. This church had ministries going on all the time—for church members and non-church members alike. We never joined their church, but that didn’t seem to bother them. They were happy to see us happy in their pre-school ministry. But their ministries didn’t stop with the pre-school, or even the traditional choir, youth group and seniors group. They had a quilting group—who sewed and gave the fruit of their labor to the poor. They sponsored an AA group—and most of the people who went to that were not church people, just people who are trying to stop drinking. I took advantage of a parenting class they were offer-

ing. The point is that they had many things to help me in MY PARTICULAR challenges—they helped me become a better parent, and provided a safe haven for our son. And other than a nominal charge to cover the cost of materials, this was provided for free, a ministry of the church, for members and non-members alike. The members saw a value in supporting ministries for themselves and for the greater good.

So, what’s the end goal of our church—to be like this church I described—to be able to reach out across the community—in our own community and outside of our community—to offer opportunities for not only spiritual growth, but social growth and emotional support as well, in the sense of growing of helping growing into members of a society where there is a consciousness to bear one other’s burdens, whether offering programs on how to be better parents, better spouses, better professionals, dealing with life challenges like alcoholism, being widowed, or many of the other life challenges that we all have to deal with. This is where we want to go—a church that MAKES A DIFFERENCE!!! (As opposed to a church that just gets by). A church that sees itself as a witness to the nations, rather than just a group of people who share a common cultural bond.

### **First Things First**

Before we can be this church though, we’ve got more immediate concerns to deal with. The biggest one is our stewardship. We made great strides in 2014 on our stewardship—we approached the \$400,000 mark as far as stewardship pledges. We have a welcoming committee that topped over 100 connection cards, or 100 families who have expressed interest in joining our church, and many of them did just that. We started to build our infrastructure with a pastoral assistant, and office manager, in addition to our bookkeeper. Our maintenance man Felix has made needed repairs to our physical plant and we’ve spent additional monies to make needed updates.

Though not many parishioners attended our October 26 Parish Assembly Meeting, you should have all received stewardship information prior to receiving this issue of the Messenger and you all should have received the budget which was passed at the Parish Assembly meeting. It is about \$894,000. What? Why so much? Well, we are paying off a sizeable mortgage left to us by the old St. John Greek Orthodox Day School—We can look backwards and say that it was mistake to build the school building in 2003 but, as someone said to me, “there is no cheese at the end of that tunnel.” No point in casting blame there—but we will have this now \$1.3M debt around our necks for a long while. In 2015, we’re going to attempt to start paying down the principal, one of the reasons the budget is so high—that budget pay down is a high number. Another reason for this number is the insurance, utilities and maintenance costs of our physical plant. We have a lot of buildings, lots of square footage to air condition and heat, and lots of old things that keep breaking. Hence there is a lot of money needed just to stay in business. We concluded a long time ago, that one priest-one secretary was not going to grow our parish, so we hired

the additional members of the team to make our office operate

somewhat more efficiently, and to have a second full-time minister to offer assistance in the ministry areas.

The immediate goal of our parish is to continue to shore up our infrastructure and to solidify our stewardship base by increasing our stewardship contributions—not only of treasure but of time and talent as well. There are two ways to do this—a) everyone gives more; and b) we recruit more stewards. The good news is that BOTH are easy to do.

**Everyone gives more** - There are still a fair amount of people who give a once a year stewardship offering. Studies have shown that we are able to contribute more when we offer financial stewardship at a more frequent interval, like once a month. This also makes the cash flow into the church more consistent during the year. Don't get me wrong—we are happy to accept stewardship anyway that it comes. In our family, we could not afford to give what we give in one chunk. So, we pay weekly and are able to give a lot more. In fact, we increase our stewardship for \$5-10 per week each year and find that this is very doable, because it is a small weekly outflow rather than a large one-time payment. Years ago, our first pledge was \$5 per week. And every year we've grown it. A \$5 per week increase each year is going to add up to a lot over time.

**We recruit more stewards** - Over 100 families took time to fill out a connection card this year. And more and more are coming all the time. If our stewardship average in 2014 was \$1,200 per family and we added 75 families this coming year, that would mark a sizeable increase in stewardship. The idea in our stewardship campaign is not just to get more from who we have, but to increase who we have

## The Greek Festival

### One Big Thank You

I'm writing this article a couple of days after our 34<sup>th</sup> annual Greek Festival. While the net profit of the festival won't be known for awhile as it will take some time to pay all the bills, it was another successful event. Not sure if last year's record festival income will be surpassed but our festival this year is in the top couple that we've ever had from the financial standpoint.

I want to thank everyone who worked at the festival this year. Everyone's input large and small, is appreciated. Alkis Crassas, Mike Xenick, Theodore Panopoulos, Perry Katsamakias, Florin Patrasciou, Sandra Pappas, Dan Bavaro and Mike Palios were our FC Tampa for this year and I sincerely thank them. It was so inspiring to see so many people come and give of their time this past weekend. Seeing people unite to work together for a common goal is always inspiring to me. Many times, certain areas were understaffed and I heard people volunteer to go work in other places and do other things than what they had signed up for. When I was in the kid's area for a few minutes, there was a great need for people to do face painting, and someone who had never done it stepped in, took a chance and did a great job.

I commend the FC Tampa for their visionary leadership—the new layout was great. The addition of the Bakaliko was a big success. I want to thank all the people who came together over a couple of months to bake pastries and prepare the other foods, all the people who came to set up and clean up and all those who gave a great portion of their weekend for our festival.

### One Big "Warning"

We were sailing along having a record-breaking Saturday at the festival, when all of sudden the clouds rolled in and it started raining about 8:00 p.m. Did this impact our income? At least a little bit. Also, the raffle didn't do as well as last year. Well, not every raffle is going to be as successful. We weren't in the clear on the raffle until Sunday afternoon. And what if had rained all weekend? What if our festival had been one week earlier when it was cold and windy the whole weekend? In my 11 festivals at St. John, this was the first time it rained. We've not only been blessed with good leadership for the festival but we've been blessed with great weather. That is a year by year gamble. Every year, we put the fortunes of our church in the hands of the weatherman and gamble on the success of a car raffle.

This is one reason why in the budget for 2015 we are slowly going to start backing out the festival and relying on it for our operating expenses. Remember how stressed out we were throughout the entire run up to the festival and through the entire weekend. I know I looked at the weather page on the internet multiple times per hour, somehow hoping to will the rain away. There is nothing wrong with having a festival, but it should be a festival for fun, not a festival for stress. One of these years it's bound to rain the whole weekend, and then what are we going to do? We just can risk the fortunes of our parish in the festival, even as successful a festival as the one we just had.

**The need for leadership** - No organization goes anywhere without some kind of leadership. In order to move a group of people from one place to another, requires a leader. When you are trying to move many people, it requires many leaders. Most people think of parish leadership as being the Parish Council, and that's true, but it's more than that. Other examples of leaders include our choir director, our Sunday school director and teachers, our stewardship committee, the welcoming committee, the ushers and the other ministry heads of our church. So, it's not just 11 people on the parish council who need to step up and lead. It is many more than that. As you fill out your stewardship form, think about any area of parish leadership that you can get involved with. And if leadership is not your thing, there is a great need for followers as well. Think about which ministries you fit into. Think about which ministries best serve you, your family and your friends and try to make a difference in one of them.

On the subject of leadership, as relates to the Parish Council, there is an election on December 14. I do not cast a vote in this election. (Despite the fact that the priest is the leader of the community, he, for some reason, is not afforded the opportunity to choose his leadership team. I can't think of

many other successful organizations that follow this model, but that is our model). But I ask those who will cast a vote to prayerfully consider the people you will vote for. There are certain skills that are needed on the Parish Council in order to lead this parish successfully. Oftentimes, we think of people and personalities when looking at the ballot rather than skills. And oftentimes, we vote for people who we are friends with instead of thinking about what would be best needed for the parish leadership. In many churches, the parish council becomes a popularity contest—one can have all the talent in the world but if he/she doesn't have enough friends or koumbaroi in the community, that talent will never make it to the Parish Council. On the other hand, there are many instances where popular but less qualified people are elected to the Parish Council. I ask that you prayerfully consider who you will vote for. This year, we have a record 12 candidates running for the Parish Council. What a blessing that there is a diverse slate of candidates, something we do not usually have. But it is also a challenge for you, the voters, to consider on what basis you will cast your vote. Please incorporate prayer into your choice.

## Trusting God

**Manna from heaven** in the Old Testament book of Exodus, during the 40 years the Israelites journeyed between Egypt and the Promised Land of Canaan, God made sure His people had food to eat by making Manna fall from heaven onto the ground every day. The people gathered up the Manna and ate it. Every morning, they would find Manna and they would go out and collect it for the day's food. In this way, people worked in concert with God—they *trusted* God to provide. He *always* did. But the people had to go and gather the Manna, it didn't fall on plates ready to eat. On the day before the Sabbath each week, God caused double the amount of Manna to fall, so that the people could gather the Manna and have enough for that day and for the following day, the Sabbath, enabling the people to rest on the Sabbath as it was required by the Law.

The people of Israel didn't get enough Manna to store it up in barns and storehouses months ahead—they received what they needed every day. They had to be *trusting in God each day*. They had to *work in concert with God every day*. It's the same thing in our lives, and in the life of our church. Perhaps this is why churches do not have millions of dollars in endowments, and churches who do usually end up failing. Perhaps the financial state of the churches is God's way of taking us back to the time of the Manna. We, like the Israelites, walk through the dessert of life, on our way to the promised land. Like the Israelites, we have our moments of doubt and frustration, even temptation to abandon the journey altogether. God sustains our journeys, both as individuals and as a church community, in the same way He sustained the Israelites. He provides the means—He gives us talents and the ability to provide for ourselves. He blesses our community as well. And we have to work in concert with Him on a daily basis, on a weekly basis. We don't store up money for years at the church, this would not violate any law per se, but it would violate the spirit of the

Law. If the church has extra funds, they should be invested in ministries, or given to the poor and the needy. That isn't to say though, that our raising of needed funds should be an all-year job. It shouldn't be. When you receive your pledge form, promptly and prayerfully fill it out and bring it to church on Stewardship Sunday, December 14. ***If you aren't someone who usually pledges to Saint John, I encourage you to not only fill out a form, but I invited you back to be part of this community on a full-time basis.*** Come and be part of the church, be part of the ministry, be part of putting hope back into our community and outside of it. Come and learn so you can go and teach. Come be healed so that you can go and heal others.

### Stewardship Sunday is December 7

That's the day that ideally, we would collect ALL the stewardship forms. Ideally we'd do the stewardship campaign in September and then make the budget of whatever received. While we work our way to that point, we will endeavor to collect ALL the forms on December 7 and hopefully by the end of the year.

### The story of the lawn-mowers that never got used

There was a man who desired to mow lawns for people who couldn't mow their own lawn, i.e. too old or sick. So that man set out to get \$1,000 in donations so that he could buy lawn equipment and donate his time to mowing lawns of the elderly. He didn't desire to make any money, just to serve. Everywhere he went, everyone he asked, told him "no" they wouldn't donate to his cause. One person even suggested he wash cars to raise the money and then buy his lawn equipment. So, he washed cars, organized 20 car washes to raise the needed funds for his lawn mowing project. He eventually bought the lawn equipment, but he was so tired and burned out from raising funds for this project, that the new equipment sat in his garage and no lawns were ever mowed.

***What happens in many churches, including ours, is that we spend a large portion of the year collecting the funds in order to get through the year, and before you know it, the year is over and we start the process all over again. What we need to do is shorten this process, and this happens when EVERYONE turns in their form on stewardship Sunday. So please bring your form in on December 7.***

### Christmas—God's Greatest Gift to Us

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. . . .and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. . . .and from His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

*John 1:1-3, 14, 16-17*

The feast of Christmas, in the Orthodox Church, is called the Feast of the Incarnation of the Word of God in the Flesh. It is the day that the Word of God, a member of the Holy Trinity who created the world, took human flesh and came and dwelt among His creation. The title of one icon states it perfectly—the Creator becomes part of His Creation. God did not create the world, and then proceed to remove Himself from the world. Rather, He remains at work in the world today. Two Thousand years ago, God incarnated His Son, Jesus Christ, to come into the world to show us how to live. Christ did not come to abolish the Law, but to go beyond what the Law was saying. The Law prescribed ways to live among human beings so that everyone lived in safety. Christ said the new law, the New Covenant, isn't about only safety or even harmony but about LOVE. The human being is not only to respect his fellow human being but to LOVE his fellow human being. And the human being is supposed to serve his fellow human being. John 1:11-12 says that "He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not. But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, HE gave power to become children of God." So, when we receive Christ into our hearts, and when Christ becomes the source and center of our lives, then we identify ourselves as His children, with a loving and stable Father, and this breeds confidence and hope in us.

I am watching the video series "The Truth Project," with our men's Bible study group. And in one of the videos, the lecturer poses a question, do you believe in an "omnipresent God." Meaning that God is present at all times. Now, if we really believe that, asks he instructor, where is God when we are committing sins—swearing, stealing, looking at inappropriate stuff on the computer, failing to honor our spouses or care for our children. If God is omnipresent, then He is present at these moments also. If He is present at these moments, then why are we engaging in these activities?

I bring these questions to mind, hard questions, to bring to our hearts the need to be present with God in worship. Because worship sets the tone for when we are not at worship. Bringing God into our minds and hearts through worship helps keep Him there when we are not worshipping. So making Christ the center of our Christmas Holiday is going to keep the significance of this holiday in the forefront of our minds.

**The Importance of Attending Church on Christmas**  
Every year, as we go through the cycle of services, I find that I am continually not only worshiping but learning more about the Christian Life. Even the Christmas story, which I have read and heard so many times, continues to reveal new layers of beauty to me each time I am reading it or hearing it. So, an important reminder about the Christmas services—please make sure you come to them. The Service of the Royal Hours on December 23 is rich with scriptures—the entire service is scriptures—Psalms, Prophecies, Epistle and Gospel Readings that enlighten us on the meaning of the Nativity of Christ. The Vespers Liturgy on the morning of December 24 also has 8 Prophecy Readings foretelling of

the Nativity. And the Orthros and Liturgy on the evening of December 24 is our celebration of the Nativity—We know that the Nativity occurred in the night-time hours. Thus our service in the night-time hours provides us an opportunity to relive and retell the story and renew our appreciation and awe of this glorious gift that God gave to us, the gift of His Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ founded the Christian Church to show us how to live, and to help us live that way in a world that in so many corners goes against the teachings of God. Again, from the "Truth Project" series I am watching with the men's group, it seems that in our world today, might makes right. And a 51% vote can OK any kind of activity, whether that activity is right in the eyes of God or not. How, then, can we stay faithful to God, if Godliness can seemingly be voted away from us? The answer is found in the Church, in worship, in Communion, in scriptures, and in prayer. The Church is supported ENTIRELY through your stewardship, which is why your stewardship is so essential. And that's not only the stewardship of your treasure, but of your time spent in worship, and of your encouragement of others in their Christian walk, including me!

December is important for our church, and each of you as individual members of it—It is the month we celebrate God's greatest gift to us. It is also the month where we offer our individual gifts to God in the form of our stewardship.

### **So, I am asking you to do two things this December**

Prayerfully meditate on and make a stewardship pledge for 2015 which represents gratitude and sacrifice, bringing your stewardship form to church on Sunday, December 7.

Set aside some time on December 23 and 24 to come to church, to worship with the shepherds, bring adoration like the Magi, sing praises like the angels, and celebrate once again the feast of the Creator becoming part of the Creation. As St. Athanasios so eloquently wrote in his treatise "On the Incarnation," "God became a man, so that man could become like God."

### **The Story of the Sticks—We are Strongest When We Stick Together**

At the recent Trisagion service for Leo Sakellaris, his daughter told a beautiful story from her childhood which I want to close my message with. She said that when they were children, her father sat the family down in the kitchen one evening and handed everyone a stick. He then asked everyone to break their sticks in half, which they easily did. He then took four more sticks, one for each member of the family, tied them together with a string, and passed the stack of sticks around, asking each family member to break the stack. They could not. The lesson of this exercise was this—if the family sticks together, no one can break any individual member of it. We only get broken when we try

to go it alone. It's the same thing in the church. If we try to live our Christianity outside of the church community, without the support of the community, then we are as vulnerable and breakable as that one individual stick. Put hundreds of sticks together, they will be harder to break. Put thousands of sticks together and even the sharpest saw will not get through them. Worship is the way we keep our stick in the bundle. Stewardship is the string that keeps the bundle together.

Thank you for making St. John Greek Orthodox Church your spiritual home. As with any home, there is constant need for maintenance and upkeep. Sometimes there is even need for repair. But the greater joy for the homeowner is the warmth of the home when the home is filled with peo-

ple, when the family gathers around the table for meals, laughs, cries, loves.

Going back to the beginning verse from this article, Christmas is the day Christ came to make His home in us. Our contribution to the church—our worship, our stewardship, is how we make our home in Him.

So please come to the table each week for worship.

And please do your part to help maintain the beauty of the house.

On behalf of Presbytera Lisa and Nicholas, I wish each of you a Blessed Feast of the Nativity and a Happy and Healthy New Year 2015!

With love in the Incarnate Lord,  
+Fr. Stavros

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## Christmas Homily of St. Isaac the Syrian

This Christmas night bestowed peace on the whole world; So let no one threaten;

This is the night of the Most Gentle One - Let no one be cruel;

This is the night of the Humble One - Let no one be proud.

Now is the day of joy - Let us not revenge;

Now is the day of Good Will -Let us not be mean.

In this Day of Peace -Let us not be conquered by anger.

Today the Bountiful impoverished Himself for our sake; So, rich one, invite the poor to your table.

Today we receive a Gift for which we did not ask; So let us give alms to those who implore and beg us.

This present Day cast open the heavenly doors to our prayers; Let us open our door to those who ask our forgiveness.

Today the DIVINE BEING took upon Himself the seal of our humanity,  
In order for humanity to be decorated by the Seal of DIVINITY.

## RUSSELL A. SIBLEY, JR.

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## 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](mailto:rsibleylaw@gmail.com). Thank you for your consideration.

# From the Outside of Orthodoxy, Looking Back

by Charlie Hambos

The excerpt below is found in the World History curriculum of a non-denominational Bible-believing Christian school. Non-denominational means they do not claim to be under any jurisdiction or protestant denomination of Christianity like Baptist, Methodist, Church of God or Assemblies of God. Bible-believing means they take a strict interpretation of the Bible. They only believe what is written in the Bible and have no tradition. This is the same curriculum I grew up learning from when I went to this school from 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Of course I was baptized in the Orthodox Church, but my Christian foundation was laid at this school and I thank God that my parents sent me there and continue to send my brothers there. If I wasn't sent there I would probably not be writing this article as the Pastoral Assistant of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church. So after the book discussed briefly why the Western and Eastern churches split in 1054, it describes the Eastern Church (a.k.a. us as Orthodox Christians) as follows:

*The Eastern Church came to be called the Orthodox Church because it claimed to have remained more orthodox (doctrinally correct) than its Western counterpart. In reality, it adopted much of the same distorted views and pagan influence. For example, the Eastern Orthodox Church developed the mystical Greek liturgy, a public worship service of superstition, symbolism, and pageantry, filled with sights, sounds, colors, and odors.* –History of the World in a Christian Perspective, Fourth Edition

Before we continue, just stop and think for a second. Reread the excerpt again. Do we view ourselves this way? It is very interesting to see how many people view us from the outside looking in. The many people, who visited our community during the Greek Festival, walked into our church and had a sense of amazement. They felt peace in our church and many lit candles and stayed for a while to pray or to ask questions. How often have we felt peace when we walk into our church as members of this community? How often have we spent time in our church and asked questions about our faith? Our church is a place of peace. A place where we are surrounded by the saints and the angels. We are surrounded by the saints because we are all called to be saints. They did everything in their life for Christ and they are on our side in our daily spiritual struggle. A place where we can thank God for all of the blessings we have but also a place of shelter when we have storms in our life.

Now, let's go back to the portion from the textbook. "The Eastern Church came to be called the Orthodox Church because it claimed to have remained more orthodox (doctrinally correct) than its western counterpart." Yes, this is true. However, before the Great Schism in 1054, we were one church. No one claimed to be better than the other before the split. Let's look at the word "orthodox." It comes from two words, *orthos* + *doxia*. *Orthos* is also found in orthodontist. An orthodontist is responsible for straightening

our teeth if they are misaligned. So, *orthos* means "straight," "true," and "correct." *Doxia* means "praise," "glory," "opinion" and "thought." Yes, we as Orthodox Christians claim to have the correct thought and doctrine of the Christian faith. However, the church is made up of human beings and we are all susceptible to our own thoughts and ways. We are not perfect. We make mistakes. We are trying to become more Christ-like on a daily basis. One major doctrinal difference between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism is the Immaculate Conception. This is the idea that the Virgin Mary was born without sin in order to have the only sinless one Jesus Christ. The Orthodox Church does not believe this because, if it were the case, Christ would not have been fully human and susceptible to sin, sickness and death. Therefore, he wouldn't have been able to balance the equation to allow us to reunite the creation with the Creator. This is just one of a few examples.

"In reality, it adopted much of the same distorted views and pagan influence. For example, the Eastern Orthodox Church developed the mystical Greek liturgy, a public worship service of superstition, symbolism, and pageantry, filled with sights, sounds, colors, and odors." Let's start with Pagan influence. It's true. I hate to admit it but it is true. Many of our sacraments are based in some extent on pagan influences. There were cults at the same time Christianity was starting which believed they were eating flesh and blood as a part of their ritual worship. Baptism wasn't only done by the Jews but other pagan religions used a similar initiation ritual. For example, the Mithras cult. Incense was also used by many of the cults and religions at the time of Christ. So the early Christians adopted what they knew and what was going on around them at the time to create what we have today. It is similar to living in Tampa. When a visitor comes into town, you may bring them to a restaurant to have some local cuisine, like cubans or seafood and perhaps go sample some cigars from Ybor City. Well, if you were to go to Boise, Idaho, they wouldn't have the fresh seafood like we do in Florida nor would they have the Cuban influence nor would they have the cigars like we do in Tampa.

All of the symbols we use in church are supposed to bolster our faith. However, the motions have been maintained but the belief has been lost. The Eastern Orthodox Church did not develop the mystical liturgy. The Divine Liturgy in some form (Liturgy of St. James) has been happening since 70 A.D. Yes, there are a lot of symbols. All the symbols are related to Jesus Christ. For example, the sign of the cross tells the whole story of salvation. Three of the fingers represent the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The other two fingers represent the dual natures of Christ and we make the sign of the Cross representing our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationship with one another. Pageantry, yes. The Bishop's throne was originally meant for the Emperor of Constantinople, but we maintained it. The ornate vestments can be considered pageantry but all of the colors, symbols and parts of the vestments have very deep theologi-

cal meaning. The petrecheli, the vestment which goes around the neck of the priest and almost down to the floor represents the grace of God and the oil of mercy that we ask for when we sing, "Lord have mercy." We should be proud of our choir. The sounds help our brain connect to our faith. The odors represent the sweet smelling fragrance that lifts our prayers to God. The censer has four chains representing the four Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The censer also has 12 bells representing the 12 disciples of Christ and like the bells made noise about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Do we really want to be viewed this way? Spend some time, as we begin to prepare for the Incarnation of Christ, to dwell

on our faith and what it means to us individually. Figure out what makes sense to you and ask questions about what doesn't. I love my faith. I love my Orthodox Christian faith with all of its pagan influence. All of the things we do always trace back to Jesus Christ. He is our savior. He loves us. We must love Him, because he first loved us. We are more mystical because we are Eastern. We don't know how the Holy Spirit comes down to make the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ or how in the sacrament of marriage that two fleshs become one flesh. We aren't supposed to know. Allow these things to bolster your faith in Christ Jesus and not hinder it. □

## The Bagpiper

Time is like a river. You cannot touch the water twice, because the flow that has passed will never pass again. Enjoy every moment of life. As a bagpiper, I play many gigs. Recently I was asked by a funeral director to play at a graveside service for a homeless man. He had no family or friends, so the service was to be at a pauper's cemetery in the Nova Scotia back country.

As I was not familiar with the backwoods, I got lost and, being a typical man, I didn't stop for directions. I finally arrived an hour late and saw the funeral guy had evidently gone and the hearse was nowhere in sight. There were only the diggers and crew left and they were eating lunch. I felt badly and apologized to the men for being late. I went to the side of the grave and looked down and the vault lid was already in place. I didn't know what else to do, so I started to play. The workers put down their lunches and began to gather around. I played out my heart and soul for this man with no family and friends. I played like I've never played before for this homeless man. And as I played "Amazing Grace," the workers began to weep. They wept, I wept, we all wept together. When I finished, I packed up my bagpipes and started for my car. Though my head was hung low, my heart was full. As I opened the door to my car, I heard one of the workers say, "I never seen anything like that before and I've been putting in septic tanks for twenty years."

**Friends of St. John**—Some of you who receive *The Messenger* do not live in the Tampa Bay area or are members of other Greek Orthodox parishes. We would like to ask for your support of our parish as a "Friend of St. John". Your contribution as a "Friend" will help offset the cost of mailing *The Messenger*, among other things. *Being a "friend" does not make one a steward of St. John or afford membership rights and responsibilities, but gives one who is a member elsewhere, an opportunity to make a gesture of financial support to our parish.* If you are interested in being a "Friend of St. John", please fill out and return the form below. Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

### **Friends of St. John**

Barbara Akrotirianakis—Whittier, CA  
Mary Hatzikazakis—from Bristol, TN  
William J Camarinos—Alexandria, VA

### **FRIENDS OF ST. JOHN**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

***I wish to be a "Friend of St. John". I am enclosing a contribution in the amount of:***

\_\_\_\_\_ \$50      \_\_\_\_\_ \$100      \_\_\_\_\_ \$200      \_\_\_\_\_ Other

Please mail this form and check to: St. John Greek Orthodox Church 2418 Swann Avenue, Tampa, FL 33609



# Join us for St. John's Annual Sunday school Christmas Party

Saturday, December 13th

11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Kourmolis Hall

All children welcome for an afternoon filled with  
Christmas crafts, games, lunch and fun!

\*\*Christmas program rehearsal at 2:00 in the church\*\*

Kindly r.s.v.p. so all can be plentiful!

Debbie 813-690-0671 or debbienicklow@hotmail.com

Please bring an unwrapped toy to be donated  
To "Champions for Children"



## The Shepherd's Farewell

Thou must leave thy lowly dwelling,  
The humble crib, the stable bare.  
Babe, all mortal babes excelling,  
Content our earthly lot to share.  
Loving father, loving mother,  
Shelter thee with tender care.

Blessed Jesus, we implore thee  
With humble hearts and holy fear,  
In that land that lies before thee,  
Forget not us who linger here.  
May the shepherd's lowly calling  
Ever to thy heart be dear.

Blessed are ye beyond all measure,  
Thou loving father, mother mild;  
Guard thee well thy heavenly treasure,  
The Prince of peace, the holy child.  
God go with you, God protect you,  
Guide you safely through the wild.

## How Time Flies Top Ten Gifts in 1914

1. Candy
2. Nuts
3. Rocking horse
4. Dolls
5. Oranges
6. Mittens/gloves
7. Books
8. Train set
9. Handkerchief
10. Ice skates

# Liturgical Schedule for December 2014

**Thursday, December 4**      **Feast of St. Barbara**  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Saturday, December 6**      **Feast of St. Nicholas**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m..

**Sunday, December 7**      Orthros 8:45 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. Luke (Christos Nenos, Dean Mitseas, Nicholas Kataras, James Kataras, Nicholas Yotis, Andrew Thacher, Genaro Scarfogliero)  
**Ushers:** Gregory Tisdale, John Tsibris, George Trimikliniotis  
**Coffee Hour:** Philoptochos  
**Welcoming Committee:** Greeters - Donna Trakas, Jamie Brodeick; Ambassador - Edie Kavoukis; Caller - Bessie Palios;

**Tuesday, December 9**      **Feast of St. Anna**  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Friday, December 12**      **Feast of St. Spyridon**  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Sunday, December 14**      Orthros 8:45 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. John (Thomas Shearer, Nicholas Alsina, Anthonio Bavaro, Jonah Blankenbaker, Yianni Trimkliniotis, Nicolas Oliver, Athanasios Oliver)  
**Ushers:** Brett Mourer, Wayne Blankinship, Amin Hanhan  
**Coffee Hour:** Sunday School  
**Welcoming Committee:** Greeters - Irene Kostaris Toula Courialas; Ambassador - Debbie Kavouklis; Caller - Martha Kapetan

**Monday, December 15**      **Feast of St. Eleftherios**  
Orthros 9:00 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Thursday, December 18**      **Candle-Light Prayer Service in Preparation for Christmas**  
7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

**Sunday, December 21**      Orthros 8:45 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. Matthew (Gregory Koutroumanis, Harry Koutroumanis, John Palios, Brigham Sibley, Benny Hiermichel, James Kavouklis, Andrew Patrasciou)  
**Ushers:** David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas  
**Coffee Hour:** Young at Heart  
**Welcoming Committee:** Greeter - Vickie Peckham, Helen Cauthorn; Ambassador - Tammy Christou; Caller - Peggy Bradshaw

**Wednesday, December 24**      **Eve of the Nativity of Christ**  
**Vespers and Liturgy of St. Basil**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
**Nativity Liturgy**  
Orthros 5:30 p.m.      Divine Liturgy 7:00 p.m.



**Sunday, December 28**      Orthros 8:45 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  
**Altar Boys:** Anyone attending may Serve  
**Ushers:** Mike Trimis, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis  
**Coffee Hour:** AHEPA/Daughters of Penelope  
**Welcoming Committee:** Greeter - Bessie Palios, Michael Palios; Ambassador - Sandra Pappas; Caller - Vickie Peckham

**Tuesday, December 30**      **Feast Day of St. Anyisia**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Thursday, January 1**      **Feast Day of St. Basil**  
Orthros 8:45 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Sunday, January 4**      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, Peter Chandler)  
**Ushers:** Florin Patrasciou, Kevin Fentress, Tammy Chirstou  
**Coffee Hour:** Young at Heart  
**Welcoming Committee:** Greeters - Genie Carter, Katherine Sakkis; Ambassador - Lisa Alsina; Caller - Martha Kapetan; Get Acquainted - Mike Xenick, Marina Xenick

# FEAST DAYS IN DECEMBER

**Feast of St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus - On December 4** we celebrate the feastday of St. Barbara, a martyr for Christ who was martyred by her own father. On the same day, we celebrate the feastday of St. John of Damascus, a hymnographer of the church who also was a strong defender of iconography.

**Feast of St. Nicholas - On December 6** we celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of travelers. The tradition of Santa Claus is derived from St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, who was giving gifts to those less fortunate.

**Feast of St. Anna - December 9** This feastday commemorates the mother of the Theotokos, and also the conception of the Theotokos, as it falls 9 months before the feast of her Nativity (September 8).

**Feast of St. Spyridon - December 12** St. Spyridon was Bishop of Trimythous. Tradition is that each year, the remains of St. Spyridon are opened to reveal that his shoes have been worn out. They are changed each year. St. Spyridon continues to intercede for the souls of the faithful, wandering over the earth to do so.

**Feast of St. Eleftherios - December 15-** St. Eleftherios was a priest-martyr in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century of the church.

**Feast of St. Anysia – December 30** - St. Anysia was martyred in Thessaloniki in the year 304. Her relics are interred in the altar table of our church. We have not celebrated her feastday in the past, but as our community is growing in its spirituality, it would seem appropriate that on the day we remember the life of St. Anysia, we should commemorate the day with a liturgy, since her relics are present in our church.

## SERVICES OF CHRISTMAS

### **Candle-Light Prayer Service in Preparation for Christmas - Thursday, December 18**

This year we will add something new to our celebration of Christmas at St. John. There is a “canon” (a set of hymns) in preparation for Christmas. It is very similar in design to the Paraklesis Service that we celebrate in August, except that the hymns are dedicated to the Feast of the Nativity and not to the Virgin Mary, though she is still mentioned prominently in many of them. The service also includes the opportunity to pray for people by name. Also, included in this service will be an opportunity to pray for those who have passed away this year. I know that this affects many families in our community. At the end of the service, a Trisagion service will be chanted for all those who have passed away this year. I want to try this service this year, and if it is well-received, we will make it an annual thing. This service will be held on Thursday, December 18, from 7:00-8:00 p.m.

### **Royal Hours of Christmas - Tuesday, December 23**

The service of the Royal Hours consists of Prayers, Hymns, Psalms and Old Testament prophecies that foretell the coming of Christ on Christmas. Also read are the Gospel passages of the feast of Christmas. There is no Communion at this service. Rather, it is a service of quiet meditation in anticipation of the Nativity. We will hold this service at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, December 23. We will celebrate the entire service by candlelight. This will be a wonderful and peaceful way to usher in the Feast of the Nativity.

### **Christmas - Wednesday, December 24**

There are traditionally two Divine Liturgies celebrated in connection with the feasts of Christmas, Epiphany and Pascha. On December 24, in the morning, we will celebrate the Great Vespers of Christmas followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. The Vespers of Christmas includes Old Testament Prophecy Readings. It is hoped that those with young children and those who do not drive at night will take advantage of this morning Liturgy, which will be celebrated on December 24 with Vespers at 8:45 a.m. and Divine Liturgy from 9:30-11:00 a.m. On the evening of the 24<sup>th</sup>, the Church will be open for a time of silent prayer beginning at 5:00 p.m. Orthros will be celebrated at 5:30 p.m., followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom at 7:00 p.m. From 5:00-6:45 p.m., the church will be illumined only by candlelight. Many of you have made a tradition of coming to church for this vigil of prayer and the Orthros and Liturgy and many people who have done so have commented to me how powerful the celebration of Christmas was for them. Liturgy on Christmas Eve will be followed by a reception sponsored by the Parish Council in the Kourmolis Center, so that we can all break bread as a community on the feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

## **Services of the Feast of St. John the Baptist**

Our Parish celebrates the Feast Day of our Patron Saint, St. John the Baptist, each year on January 7.

### **Tuesday, January 6 Great Vespers 6:30 p.m.**

His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will preside, assisted by the priest of the Tampa Bay Area. A reception will follow the Vespers, hosted by Philoptochos Society of our Parish.

### **Wednesday, January 7 Orthros 8: 30 a.m. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.**

His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will officiate, assisted by priest of the Tampa Bay Area. A luncheon will follow the Liturgy, hosted by the Parish Council.

# Community News

## Parish Registry

**Baptism**-Theodore Spiros Edquid was baptized on Monday, November 10. Godparent was John Billiris. Na Sas Zisi!

**Funeral**-Leo Sakellaris passed away on Friday, November 7. Funeral services were held on Tuesday, November 11. May his memory be eternal!

**Condolences** to the family of John Farkas, who passed away on Friday, November 7. May his memory be eternal!

## Get Acquainted Sunday - Sunday, December 7

In an effort to get to know one another better, we are going to continue our "Get Acquainted Sundays" the first 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.

## Parish Council Elections will be Sunday, December 14 after the Divine Liturgy.

## Monday Night Bible Study



We are studying the book of Romans lead by Charlie Hambos. We meet from 6:30 p.m.- 8:00 p.m. December Meeting are scheduled for Monday, December 1, 8, and 15 in the administration building. Bring your Bible and come join Charlie for Bible Study. **Everyone is welcome!**

## Community Outreach

Thank you to everyone who continues to support our Community Outreach ministry to serve the homeless and those in need. In addition to supporting First Presbyterian Church's breakfast for the homeless on the 3rd Saturday of each month from 8:00am-10:30am on December 20th and January 17th, in December we will have opportunities to work in the Metropolitan Ministries' Holiday Tent.

Give back and get in the Christmas Spirit! In addition to supporting First Presbyterian Church's breakfast for the homeless on December 20th from 8:00am-10:30am, we also have an opportunity to serve in the Metropolitan Ministries' Holiday Tent!

On **Sunday, December 21st** (right after church) from 2:00pm- 4:30pm, we will need **50 volunteers** to help distribute food and toys to families in need for Christmas in the Metropolitan Ministries Holiday Tent just north of downtown Tampa. Volunteers in the Holiday Tent do a wide variety of tasks, including sorting canned goods, assisting families with registration on the computer, or walking families through the food shopping area (just to name a few). This is a great opportunity for families with children over the age of 8. Last year, approximately 30,000 families were served in the Holiday Tent with food and toys for Christmas. The Joy/Hope "Boxes of Hope" food drive supports the families who come to the Holiday Tent!

**TAMPA BAY**



## 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 \$125 each (Section 104, Row P, Seats 15-18).

Thurs. Dec. 4th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Buffalo - (Up to 2 tickets) \$50 each  
Sat. Dec. 6th 7:00 - Lightning VS. Columbus - (Up to 4 tickets) \$75 each  
Tues. Dec. 9th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Capitals - (Up to 4 tickets) \$50 each  
Thurs. Dec. 11th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Carolina- (Up to 4 tickets) \$50 each  
Fri. Jan. 9th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Buffalo - (Up to 2 tickets) \$75 each  
Thurs. Jan. 15th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Edmonton- (Up to 4 tickets) \$50 each  
Sat. Jan. 17th 7:00 - Lightning VS. Colorado - (Up to 4 tickets) \$75 each  
Tues. Jan. 20th 7:30 - Lightning VS. Vancouver - (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 813-876-8830.**



The Tampa AHEPA's and Daughter's of Penelope are planning their Christmas Scholarship Social Dinner to be held at the Floridan Palace Hotel on December 19, 2014. The event will begin at 6:30 PM and is open to family, friends and community members who would like to come and celebrate with us. The price of the dinner is \$50 per person and includes gratuity. Please make checks payable to 'The Daughters of Penelope'. Contact Marina Paras 813.254.6980 or Edie Kavouklis 813.758.0305 for more information.



Also, tickets may be purchased after Liturgy in the Kourmolis Center.

**Please make you reservation by December 10th as seating is limited.**

## GOYA

The Next GOYA meeting will be Sunday, December 7 at 5:00 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner will be provided.

## Hope/Joy

Thank you to Debbie Nicklow and Amy Kafantaris who chaired the Fall Festival. There were over 40 kids that participated. The Christmas Program Rehearsal will be on Saturday, December 13 at 2:00 p.m. during the Christmas Party.

# Masquerade Dance

Sponsored by Young at Heart

**Valentines Day Saturday, February 14  
7:00 pm - 11:00 pm**

**At St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church  
Adults \$35 Children 12 & Under Free  
Cash Prizes for Best Costumes  
Raffle, Food, Fun, Dancing & Live Music**

**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](http://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!

**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.

**Live Streaming of Divine Liturgy**-We are now live-streaming the Divine Services of the Church. If you go to our website, [www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com](http://www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com) and find on the menu bar the live streaming option, you can easily tune into the Liturgy if you are unable to attend. Please bear in mind that watching a service on your computer is not a substitute for coming to church. You should attend church in person. However, for shut-ins, people who have a hard time getting to night services, parents with babies, if you are at home on a week-day and want to hear a week-day service, if you are sick, or can't make the service for some reason, or if you are out of town, please feel free to tune in. The services are live-streamed only and will not be archived.

**Connection Cards**—We now have what are called "Connection Cards" in the pews of our church. Obviously we want everyone to be connected to our church. If someone is new to our church, we should encourage them to fill out a connection card and join our church. **If your contact information has changed, please fill out a connection card and send it to the office so we can update your address, email, etc.**

## SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS:

It was also wonderful to see our children participate in our BOXES OF HOPE project on November 23rd. Helping others is such an important part of our Faith. Our children will have other opportunities to do more this Holiday Season at Metropolitan Ministries.

### CONGRATULATIONS to the Students who had PERFECT ATTENDANCE for the month of OCTOBER:

**Pre-K:** Santino Bavaro

**Kindergarten:** Teddy Kafantaris, Vasilios Panos

**1st Grade:** Gianni Bavaro, Maria Nicklow

**2nd Grade:** Ariana Choundas-Thatcher, Nicholas Akrotirianakis, Calliope Kafantaris, Emily Nicklow, Maria Palios, George Xenick

**3rd Grade:** Niko Bavaro, Eleni Kataras, Demetri Passalaris

**4th Grade:** Andrew Choundas-Thatcher, Lola Bavaro, Gennaro Scarfogliero, Yanni Trimikliniotis

**5th & 6th Grades:** Antonio Bavaro, Elizabeth Xenick

**Middle School:** Joseph Hambos, James Kataras, Artemis Xenick

**High School:** George Hambos, Arianna Krinos, Eleni Pessemier

We will acknowledge students with perfect attendance on a monthly basis this year. Every student should be able to achieve this goal at least once. We will also keep track of Perfect Attendance for the year and award those students at our Graduation Ceremony.

We are very excited about our Weekly Topics that each classroom will include into their curriculum/program this year. The topics for the past month were READING THE BIBLE, THE SAINTS, and CHARITY-THANKFULNESS. We would like to thank Fr. Stavros for providing the teachers with weekly information about each topic.

We would also like to thank Charlie Hambos for his involvement in our Sunday School. On Dec. 7th he will have completed the Lesson about our Church Vessels for each of our Sunday School classrooms. (That is 9 presentations.) The students have thorough enjoyed and learned so much about these vessels from Charlie.

Our children sang beautifully on Oct. 19th and Nov. 16th for our YOUTH SUNDAY SERVICE. We would like to thank our high schoolers for reading the Epistle and our 2nd Graders (Oct.) and 3rd Graders (Nov.) for making the PROSPHORA for these services. The parishioners of St. John's are truly blessed to have such wonderful children.

### **DATES TO REMEMBER:**

**Dec. 7th:** Youth Sunday- Charlie Hambos - Pre-K - Church Vessel Presentation

**Dec. 13th:** SATURDAY - Christmas Program Rehearsal/Christmas Party

**Dec. 14th:** Sunday School Pageant- Sunday School is sponsoring the COFFEE HOUR.

**Dec. 21st and Dec. 28th:** No Sunday School

**Jan. 4th, 2015:** Sunday School Resumes - TOPIC: Epiphany/St. John the Baptist

Please feel free to contact us with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John's Sunday School Program. Parents, If you do not receive our weekly e-mails about our Sunday School Program, please contact Vickie Peckham at 406-5626 or e-mail her at vickie-peckham@gmail.com.

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# GOYA Christmas Card

It's time for GOYA's Annual Christmas Card fundraiser. Sing-ups for the Christmas Card will be after church Sunday, November 30th, December 7, and December 14 in the Kourmolis Center. Cost is \$25 made payable to St. John's GOYA.

**Deadline is Sunday, December 14. If you have any questions, please contact Elaine Halkias 813-629-1843.**

### **GOYA Community Christmas Card:**

**Name:** (as you would like it to appear on the Christmas Card)

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**Phone # :**

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When filling out this form, please attach your check for \$25 made payable to St. John GOYA and return it to the church office by Sunday, December 14. Don't miss out! This is a wonderful way to support our Youth and to wish our Community a Merry Christmas as we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

# JUST SAY YES!

We will continue with part five of a monthly article to the Messenger to encourage and inspire you to continue to Just Say Yes! The following is an excerpt from the book Having a Mary Spirit: Allowing God to Change us from the Inside Out, by Joanna Weaver. The monthly excerpts will come from a chapter of the book titled *A Willing Spirit*. It is a beautiful study on both the Virgin Mary and the concept of saying Yes to God.

## FOOLISH THINGS TO CONFOUND THE WISE

I wonder what it must have been like.

Did it happen as she walked to the well for water or as she straightened her room her room? Was she overlooking the rolling hills around Nazareth or helping around the house? Did she awaken that morning with an intuitive sense of expectancy that told her this day would be like no other?

We don't know when and where she received the message that her life was about to change. The Bible doesn't give many details. It only says that God sent the angel Gabriel to a young virgin named Mary living in a village called Nazareth (Luke 1:26-27)

"Greetings, you who are highly favored!" the angel said (verse 28) "The Lord is with you."

And in that instant Mary's life changed forever.

God has always seemed to use the most unlikely people in the most unusual ways to perform His most perfect will. A risky practice, I think. After all, we humans have so many ways of messing things up. Procrastination, pride. Not to mention our tendency to add a few things or skip a few steps in order to "enhance" God's plans.

Even the archangel must have wondered what God was up to, entrusting His grand plan to this unassuming young person. Frederick Buechner writes in his book *Peculiar Treasures*:

*She struck the angel Gabriel as hardly old enough have a child at all, let alone this child, but he'd been entrusted with a message to give her, and he gave it. He told her what the child was to who he was to be names and something about the mystery that was to come upon her. You mustn't be afraid, Mary, he said. As he said it, he only hoped she wouldn't notice that beneath the great golden wings, he himself was trembling with fear to think that the whole future of Creation hung on the answer of a girl.*

So why out of all the Jewish young women who'd ever lived, did God choose Mary?

Certainly, it might have been that she was in the right place at the right time. After all, she was a resident of Nazareth and pledged to be married to a descendant of David, a man who would soon be called by a Roman census to return to Bethlehem, the City of David - all of which set the stage for the full merit of several prophecies. But to choose the woman who would bear His own Son? Surely there must have been something more on God's wish list than a pedigree, an address, and her availability for a road trip.

I believe there was. For Mary was no ordinary teenage girl, as we will discover. She was a woman willing to say yes to God - to lay down her own hopes and dreams so that His plans and purposes could come to pass. Mary was the kind of woman God still looks for today.

Because, for some mysterious yet marvelous reason, God willingly links His hopes and dreams to fickle, failing humans like you and me. And in that divine insanity, I see three amazing implications:

God must really love us.

He must be up to something bigger and more wonderful than we know.

He must want us to join Him in the adventure.

Oh, how the angels must tremble to realize these truths. How they must lean over the portals of heaven, waiting to see, listening to hear. Dumbfounded to think that the whole future of Christianity hangs, again and again, on your answer and mine—on our willingness to say yes to what God asks. To rearrange our lives in order to accomplish His plans.



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.



Scan to like St. John on Facebook  
[facebook.com/StJohnGOCTampa](https://www.facebook.com/StJohnGOCTampa)

# The Nativity of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ

The incomprehensible and inexplicable Nativity of Christ came to pass when Herod the Great was reigning in Judea; the latter was an Ascalonite on his fathers' side and an Idumean on his mother's. He was in every way foreign to the royal line of David; rather, he had received his authority from the Roman emperors, and had ruled tyrannically over the Jewish people for some thirty-three years. The tribe of Judah, which had reigned of old, was deprived of its rights and stripped of all rule and authority. Such was the condition of the Jews when the awaited Messiah was born, and truly thus was fulfilled the prophecy which the Patriarch Jacob had spoken 1,807 years before: "A ruler shall not fail from Judah, nor a prince from his loins, until there come the things stored up for him; and he is the expectation of the nations" (Gen.49:10).

Thus, our Savior was born in Bethlehem, a city of Judea, whither Joseph had come from Nazareth of Galilee, taking Mary his betrothed, who was great with child, that, according to the decree issued in those days by the Emperor Augustus, they might be registered in the census of those subject to Rome. Therefore, when the time came for the Virgin to give birth, and since because of the great multitude there was no place in the inn, the Virgin's circumstance constrained them to enter a cave which was near Bethlehem. Having as shelter a stable of irrational beasts, she gave birth there, and swaddled the Infant and laid Him in the manger (Luke 2:1-7). From this, the tradition has come down to us that when Christ was born He lay between two animals, an ox and an ass, that the words of the Prophets might be fulfilled: "Between two living creatures shalt Thou be known" (Habakkuk 3:2), and "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib" (Isaiah 1: 3).

But while the earth gave the new-born Savior such a humble reception, Heaven on high celebrated majestically His world-saving coming. A wondrous star, shining with uncommon brightness and following a strange course, led Magi from the East to Bethlehem to worship the new-born King. Certain shepherds who were in the area of Bethlehem, who kept watch while tending their sheep, were suddenly surrounded by an extraordinary light, and they saw before them an Angel who proclaimed to them the good tidings of the Lord's joyous Nativity. And straightway, together with this Angel, they beheld and heard a whole host of the Heavenly Powers praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men" (Luke 2:8-14).

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## Christmas Reception

The Parish Council will sponsor a reception on Wednesday, December 24 following the Christmas Divine Liturgy in the Kourmolis Center. Let us all come together to break bread and have fellowship on the feast of the Nativity of our Lord!



# Woman and the Fork

*A Beautiful Story to Remember as we Pick up our forks this Christmas*

There was a young woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. So as she was getting her things 'in order,' she contacted her Pastor and had him come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes. She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in. Everything was in order and the Pastor was preparing to leave when the young woman suddenly remembered something very important to her.

'There's one more thing,' she said excitedly..

"What's that?" came the Pastor's reply?

'This is very important,' the young woman continued. 'I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.'

The Pastor stood looking at the young woman, not knowing quite what to say.

That surprises you, doesn't it?' the young woman asked.

'Well, to be honest, I'm puzzled by the request,' said the Pastor.

The young woman explained. 'My grandmother once told me this story, and from that time on I have always tried to pass along its message to those I love and those who are in need of encouragement. In all my years of attending socials and dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, 'Keep your fork.' It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming...like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. Something wonderful, and with substance!'

So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder 'What's with the fork?' Then I want you to tell them: 'Keep your fork ..the best is yet to come.'

The Pastor's eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged the young woman good-bye. He knew this would be one of the last times he would see her before her death. But he also knew that the young woman had a better grasp of heaven than he did. She had a better grasp of what heaven would be like than many people twice her age, with twice as much experience and knowledge. She KNEW that something better was coming.

At the funeral people were walking by the young woman's casket and they saw the cloak she was wearing and the fork placed in her right hand. Over and over, the Pastor heard the question, 'What's with the fork?' And over and over he smiled.

During his message, the Pastor told the people of the conversation he had with the young woman shortly before she died. He also told them about the fork and about what it symbolized to her. He told the people how he could not stop thinking about the fork and told them that they probably would not be able to stop thinking about it either. He was right.

So the next time you reach down for your fork let it remind you, ever so gently, that the best is yet to come.

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## Stewardship

**Will You Help Put us over our goal of \$400,000**

**November 15, 2014**

<b>Number of Steward Families</b>	314
<b>Amount Pledged</b>	\$386,751.30
<b>Amount Collected</b>	\$302,357.60

For those who have pledged this year, thank you for your generous support of St. John Greek Orthodox Church. For those who have not pledged, please send in your pledge form today. Extra forms are available in the church office. **As you can see, we haven't quite achieved our goal for 2014. So, if you haven't pledged for 2014, please do so today. If you are new in the community, it is important to pledge for the remainder of 2014.** Remember, the church relies on your generosity to not only keep it's door open, but to offer it's many ministries. We all benefit from the church. We all must do our part in support of our church!

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF ST. JOHN GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH IN TAMPA**

# Parish Council News

by Alkis Crassas, Parish Council President

As we enter the last month of the year, I wanted to thank our community for what has been a productive 2014. Over the course of the year, we have grown as a parish, both in numbers, in programs, and in a positive spirit. I appreciate all of the support that our community has given to Fr. Stavros, to the Parish Council, to the various ministries, to stewardship and to the overall growth and progress of our parish and our faith. Many of you have stepped into leadership roles and taken on increased responsibilities at our parish which has not gone unnoticed.

On this note, I wanted to take a moment to not only thank the members of our Parish Council for their good work and dedication but to also make you, the people we were elected to serve, aware of the responsibilities each Parish Council member carries out. The following account is by no means exhaustive or all inclusive as that would make my message very long.



**Carole Fotopoulos** serves as the Parish Council Vice President. She is also the President of Young at Heart and the Chairperson of numerous social activities, including organizing the St. John Feast-day Luncheon, the Greek Independence Day Luncheon, the Saturday of Lazarus Breakfast, the Pascha Reception, the Parish Picnic and the Christmas Reception. Carole was instrumental in creating the office for Charlie and for the refurbishing of Father Stavros' office.



**Sandra Pappas** serves as our Parish Council Secretary. She has maintained minutes and reports, reviewed and sent correspondence, and is presently leading the effort to roll out the Parish Data System software system. Sandra is also serving as the co-chairperson of the Stewardship Committee and was involved with the Festival Committee, responsible for volunteers and man-power.



**Dante Skourellos** serves as our Parish Council Treasurer. He is also a member of the Finance Committee. He works to oversee the parish finances, watches over our bank balances, and shifts funds from various accounts as needed. He, along with Ed Gerecke, is an attorney and is able to offer expert advice on legal issues that arise from time to time. Dante also ran the money room during the festival.



**Nick Antonakakis** has helped in the technology area and was instrumental in our switch over from Bright House to Verizon so we can have the broadband speeds required for many of the technologies on our campus. He was also involved in the upgrading of our phones and enabling live streaming capabilities.



**Ed Gerecke** works with Mike Xenick as liaisons to the charter school that is renting our facilities. He stays on top of the lease to make sure they are abiding by its provisions and timely rent payments. Ed also chairs the Kourmolis Endowment Investment Committee. As an attorney, he provides expert opinions to the legal issues that come up during the course of the year.



**Skip Higdon** has been instrumental in the office transition this year. She has volunteered innumerable hours when the church was without a full-time secretary, has helped the transition to the present office set up, and makes herself available anytime something is needed on short notice. She also manages some of our banking relationships.



**Michael Kafantaris** is in charge of our Human Resources. We've worked to come up with job descriptions and streamline our hiring practices this year. We continue to build infrastructure in an area where we hadn't given much emphasis to in the past. Michael also seats in the Finance Committee and has volunteered many times to build or repair items in our church.



**Catherine Mitseas** leads our Public Relations and is a member of our marketing department which also promotes the festival. She is also the Parish Council spokesperson for official statements and for legal matters. She is working at present to bring all of our church volunteers into compliance with the Youth Protection Manual of the Archdiocese, and organizing the various background checks for parish leadership to create the safest possible environment in our community.



**David Voykin** is in charge of buildings and grounds. This has been a busy year for David as we've had to replace air conditioning units and make repairs on electrical, plumbing and the roofs of the various buildings. David supervises our maintenance staff to make sure that routine maintenance is being done on our large physical plant. Under his leadership we are slowly starting to plan vs. react to building and grounds issues.



**Mike Xenick** has chaired the Finance Committee this year. He has been the catalyst in bringing the church financial records current and up to date, and prepares the annual budget. He also interfaces with Debbie, our bookkeeper to ensure proper day to day accounting, and along with Dante, oversees our cash flow. Mike was part of the Festival Committee, and along with Ed, serves as a liaison with the charter school on lease issues.

In closing, I wanted to express that I'm very optimistic about the direction of our parish, the growth of our church, and the promise of our ministries. You may have heard me use one of my favorite quotes by Gandhi: *"you must be the change that you want to see in the world"*. It is inspiring to see so many members of our community volunteering, leading and contributing to our parish this way. Thank you all for everything that you do! May God bless us and our parish!

# Small Group Bible Studies

We have FIVE Small Groups that are meeting each week. If you haven't joined a group yet, you may do so at any time.

**East Tampa Mixed Group** (for any adults) Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient to those who live on the East side of town—Riverview, Brandon, Valrico, Seffner, Lakeland

**Location:** Home of George and Donna Hambos—They live in Valrico at 2604 Herndon Street, Valrico, FL 33596. Their home 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.

**November Meeting Dates:** December 2, 9, 16

**Men's Group** (for adult men of any age)

**Location:** St. John Greek Orthodox Church in the Administration Building in the meeting room

**Group Leader:** Father Stavros for the first one but we are going to rotate this among group members. Please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com or contact him at 813-394-1038. **We are watching and discussing the video series: The Truth Project.**

**One week we watch on chapter and the next week discuss it.**

**Meeting time:** Wednesday mornings from 7:30-8:30 a.m.

For this early morning group, bring your own coffee or breakfast food if you wish—we will not be providing these things.

**November Meeting Dates:** December 3, 10

**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 Helen and Ken Cauthorn, 3922 W. Palmira Avenue, Tampa, FL 33629. Helen's Number is 813-505-1059 and her email is hcauthorn@chubb.com

**Group Leader:** Bessie Palios—Her email is bmp1126@yahoo.com, and her cell number is 813-523-0347.

**Meeting time:** Tuesday evenings from 7:00-8:00 p.m.

**November Meeting Dates:** December 2, 9, 16

**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. (9:30 a.m. for coffee and refreshments)

**November Meeting Dates:** December 2, 9 (will attend the Divine Liturgy as a group), and 16

**Young Adult Group** (for adults ages 18-40)

**Location:** At the home of Betty Katherine and Perry Katsamakias 4301 Tacon St, Tampa, FL 33629

**Group Leader:** Mary Ann Konstas. Please contact Mary Ann at 813-215-9862 or at mapkonstas@gmail.com.

**Meeting Time:** Thursday Evenings at 7:30 p.m.

**November Meeting Dates:** December 4, and 11



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# 2014 Tampa GREEK FESTIVAL



# A Christmas Reflection

By His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios of Boston

This Christmas, we will celebrate that blessed day that changed the course of human history. It was the day “the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). It was the day “when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared” (Titus 3:4). Christmas is that day when “God so loved the world that He gave His only son that whoever believed in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

On Christmas, humanity encounters the Almighty as a newborn baby lying in a humble manger. The Incarnate Logos is born in a manger to impress upon us that to understand who God is, we must look at the humility of the birth of Jesus. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords comes not as a powerful ruler, but as an innocent child - in simplicity and humility. He is born not in a palatial environment, but in the humble surroundings of a stable. The Savior of the world is born in humility. He will live His life on earth in humility. He will humble Himself even unto death for the salvation of the world. “Though he was in the form of God (he)... emptied himself taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:6-7). God lowers Himself to the point of being born in the poverty of a stable. He becomes the poorest of the poor and the neediest of the needy to teach us that our journey in life must follow the road of humility and simplicity. It was He who “though he was rich, yet for your (our) sake became poor, so that by his poverty you (we) might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Christmas has always disturbed the conscience of the material world in which we live. A world characterized by narcissism and arrogance. A world in which man is so preoc-

cupied with himself and his urgent need to satisfy his every insatiable desire, that he has no time for God or for his fellow man. Just as there was no space in the inn to welcome the newborn Savior, in the same way there is no space in our lives for the Incarnate Logos or His church. Man has removed God and placed himself on the altar of worship. We feel we are self-sufficient masters of our own destiny, in no need of a savior. Living in an age of unbridled consumerism—enslaved to our passions—we have become spiritually bankrupt. We are bereft of hope, misled by prophets of instant pleasure and happiness, trapped in a tunnel of loneliness and despair. We are enslaved in the dungeons of our overinflated egos. It is to this world that the innocent child of Bethlehem comes to be born this December.

As we celebrate Christmas this year, let us reflect how—and if at all—the birth of the newborn Savior has affected our lives. Have we learned to emulate His example and live in simplicity and humility? As we listen to the beautiful hymns and carols of the season, do we hear the lamentations of our suffering brothers and sisters—both here in America, in Greece and throughout the world—who suffer in homelessness, hunger and despair? As we celebrate this joyous feast of Christianity, are we mindful of our brethren who are experiencing the holocaust of Christianity in Egypt, in Syria, and throughout the Middle East? Do we have room in the inn of our lives for anyone but ourselves?

May the Incarnate Logos of God choose our hearts as His manger this Christmas. May each day of the new year be blessed with opportunities for us to recognize our Savior in the persons of those whom He identified as “the least of my (His) brethren” (Mt. 25:40). In simplicity and humility, let us experience the joy of Christmas and feel the presence of the newborn Savior in our hearts. □



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~ December 2014 ~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<b>**Fast Day</b> Philoptochos Spanakopita Sale 12/7, 12/14 GOYA Christmas Card 12/7, 12/14	1** Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	2 **WBS 9:30 a.m. BSE 6:30 p.m. BSS 6:30 p.m.	3 **Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m.	4** St. Barbara Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young at Heart 11:30 am Young Adult Bible Study 7:30 p.m.	5 **	6** St. Nicholas Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
7 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday Stewardship Sunday Get Acquainted Sunday GOYA 5:00 p.m.	8 **Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	9** St. Anna Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. WBS attending liturgy BSE 6:30 p.m. BSS 6:30 p.m. Parish Council 7:00pm	10 **Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m.	11** Young Adult Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	12**St. Spyridon Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	13 ** Sunday School Christmas Party/ Program Rehearsal 11 a.m.-3 p.m.
14 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday School Christmas Program PC Elections Philoptochos Meeting	15** St. Eleftherios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	16** WBS 9:30 a.m. BSE 6:30 p.m. BSS 6:30 p.m.	17**	18** Service of Preparation for Christmas—by Candlelight 7:00-8:00 p.m.	19 ** AHEPA/DOP Scholarship dinner	20 ** Community Outreach
21 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. No Sunday School AHEPA/DOP Mtg. Metropolitan Ministries Church-wide event 2:00 p.m.	22**	23** Royal Hours 9:30 a.m.	24** Vespers 8:45 am Liturgy/St. Basil 9:30a Orthros 5:30 p.m. Nativity Liturgy 7:00p Christmas Reception	25 Christmas Day—No Services	26 No Fasting until 1/5/15	27 Wedding
28 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. No Sunday School Wedding	29 St. Anyasia Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	30 St. Anyasia Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	31	WBS-Women's Bible Study BSE-Bible Study East Tampa BSS-Bible Study South Tampa JOY/HOPE Toy Collection all month		

# St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

2418 W. Swann Avenue

Tampa, FL 33609-4712

Office: (813) 876-8830 Fax: (813) 443-4899

officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com

www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com

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## 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) 813-394-1038 (Cell)  
frstav@gmail.com

**Pastoral Assistant:** Charlie Hambos

813-876-8830 (Office) 813-843-8471 (Cell)  
charlie.hambos@gmail.com

**Parish Council:**

Alkis Crassas, President	813-690-3867
Carole Fotopoulos, Vice President	813-982-0947
Sandra Pappas, Secretary	813-785-3747
Dante Skourellos, Treasurer	813-765-9534
Nick Antonakakis	813-264-7513
Catherine Mistseas	813-571-0658
Ed Gerecke	813-229-4306
Skip Higdon	813-831-9021
Mike Kafantaris	727-821-0193
David Voykin	727-415-5603
Mike Xenick	813-340-8737

**Office Staff:**

Monica Gjerde, Office Manager	813-876-8830
officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com	
Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper	
debstjohntpa@gmail.com	fax 813-443-4899

**Adult Greek School:**

Magda Myer	813-909-2327
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**AHEPA:**

Gus Paras	813-254-6980
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**Altar Angels:**

Engie Halkias	813-932-5859
Sia Blankenship	

**Bible Study:**

Charlie Hambos	813-843-8471
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**Bookstore:**

Bill Manilkas	813-716-8185
---------------	--------------

**Chantor:** Nick Andreadakis

813-516-6081	
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**Choir:** Artie Palios, Director

813-831-1294	
--------------	--

Jim Leone, Organist

813-254-7844	
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**Community Outreach:**

Betty Katherine Katsamakis	813-468-1596
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**Dance Groups:**

H XAPA ΜΑΞ Alexandra De Maio	813-340-9668
------------------------------	--------------

Marina Coundas	813-877-6136
----------------	--------------

Glendi Jenna Mingleddorff	813-610-7365
---------------------------	--------------

Panigyri Vanessa Anviles	813-221-2194
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**Daughter of Penelope:**

Edie Kavouklis	813-758-0305
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**Finance Committee:**

George Chagaris	727-420-1920
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**Food Pantry:**

Mick Scharbach	813-458-1620
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**Gasparilla Parking:**

John Kokkas	727-992-4165
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**GOYA:**

Elaine Halkias	813-629-1843
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**Hope/Joy:**

Amy Kafantaris	727-743-1297
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Debbie Nicklow	813-690-0671
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**Jr. Olympics:**

Byron Nenos	813-789-0729
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**Oratorical Festival:**

Peggy Bradshaw	727-244-1374
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**Philoptochos:**

JoAnn Hartung	727-432-0228
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**REAL:**

Charlie Hambos	813-843-8471
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**Small Groups:**

East Donna Hambos	813-843-8412
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Men, Fr. Stavros	813-394-1038
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South, Bessie Palios	813-523-0347
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Womens, Debbie Kavouklis	813-258-5571
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Young Adult, Mary Ann Konstas	813-215-9862
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**Stewardship:**

Pete Trakas	813-505-2193
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**Sunday School:**

Vicky Peckham	813-406-5626
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Tammy Christou	813-957-0835
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**Ushers:**

Tom Georgas	813-985-0236
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**Welcoming Committee:**

Maria Xenick	813-765-3587
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**Young at Heart:**

Carole Fotopoulos	813-982-0947
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Mary Nenos	813-935-2096
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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.