

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

February 2016

Mission Statement:

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

Vision:

The church shall seek to fulfill its mission by:

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

Father Stavros' Message

Fighting and Winning the Good Fight

Imagine if a group of us was sitting in a room having perfect conversation and breathing perfect air. And all of a sudden, someone entered the room and sprayed a voluminous amount of aerosol into the air. What would have changed? There would still be a group of nice people sitting in a room having perfect conversation. An outside person introduced a polluting agent into the room. No one in the room did anything wrong. But each person in that room will suffer a consequence. One will get watery eyes, another a scratchy throat, another a headache, another will cough, another will get a sore throat. Everyone shares in the imperfect nature in an equal way. They are all breathing the same polluted air equally. But the consequence for each is different.

This is the human condition. And we all have it. We are equal sharers of an imperfect nature. It doesn't matter if you are smart, or rich, or poor, or educated, or tall, or young or whatever differences we have. We all are breathing the same imperfect air. We are all drinking the same impure water. We are all equally sharing in the polluted environment. We are all subject to natural disasters. We all have the same chance to be a victim of human error--to get on a malfunctioning airplane or be the victim of a terroristic act. We share in these equally. We are all the product of imperfect gene pools, which pre-dispose some of us to learning disabilities, high cholesterol, depression,

anxiety, cancer and an innumerable amount of other things.

There is no perfect marriage. There is no perfect child. There is no perfect person. There is no perfect anything. Only God alone is perfect. Only with God in heaven can we be perfect. Only in the Lord can we experience "fleeting moments" of perfection on earth, prayer being the first among them.

We are all created equal when it comes to our ability to love others. We all have the ability to do that. We all have an ability to help others. We all have the ability to be compassionate. The question is, do we seek to grow these things in our lives? Do we encourage others to foster these things in their lives?

There is no person who has not made a mistake. There is no person who has not committed a sin. God knows this. God did not intend this for us. God doesn't want us to make mistakes or commit sins. God doesn't want us to be angry, or harbor hostility towards one another. God wants us to be loving, as He is loving. God wants us to be perfect, as He is perfect. God recognizes that we are not perfect, that is why He gives us tools to help us manage our state of imperfection, to survive our human condition. He gives us doctors to heal the infirmities of our bodies. He gives us psychologists, to heal the infirmities of our minds. He gives us teachers, to give us knowledge. He calls people to serve in the military, to protect

us from those who are overly aggressive and wish us harm. He calls people to be farmers, to grow the food to satisfy our hunger. He calls people to be married, so that they can support one another, so that they can beget children who will continue the human race. He gave us the church, to help us to heal our souls and to find hope and purpose and direction in this life, to prepare us to experience perfection in eternal life.

There is no career that I can think of where one can work for years and years without some kind of continuing education. Without continuing education, one would fail in just about every career. Why? Because no mind is perfect—the mind needs reminding and recharging and relearning. And because society is not stagnant. We grow, evolve, occasionally devolve, and this reality of change brings about the need to retrain our minds, to acquire new knowledge, to meet new challenges that constantly arise.

This is true not only in careers. It is true in families, in marriages, in spirituality. It is the smart person who takes advantage of the opportunities for continuing education in his chosen field. And indeed it is a foolish person who doesn't. The same applies in marriages, parenting, spirituality and even in basic relationships with others. We need continuing education in all areas of our lives.

The church is supposed to help us sort through our spiritual condition, which in turn affects the other aspects of our human conditions. For example, the church teaches forgiveness, patience, faith and optimism. It encourages repentance and charity. If you consistently bring these things into a marriage, a friendship, a working relationship, parenting, imagine how these things would improve. On the flip side, remove these things from any relationship, and the relationship suffers. The church also encourages personal responsibility. We need look no further than the liturgy itself—every week we are reminded to check our decisions on “do they promote peace in the world (our small corner of it) and are they good for our souls”—the petition reads “for all that is good and beneficial to our souls and for peace in the world, let us ask of the lord.” It doesn't say what is good for our wallets, or our popularity, but what is good for our souls.

We don't know how to forgive

On of the greatest societal illnesses is that we do not know how to forgive. Forgiveness is usually exchanged in this manner “I'm sorry, but I had a reason.” And the response is “I forgive, but I will not forget.” We don't “own it” when we do something wrong. We mitigate the circumstance. Is that because we are worried that we will not be forgiven? That we'll be fired? Or sued? We've made a society where it's actually hard to own up to a wrong doing because we do not know how to forgive and forget. We are very good at keeping score of wrongdoings, yet we read in the Psalms “If You, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You.” (Psalm 130:3-4) And Jesus tells us to forgive one another “seventy times seven” times (Matthew 18:22). Forgiveness is an area we can all stand to work on.

We are all dysfunctional in some way

Dysfunctional means not fully functional. Because we all have some deficits, we are all dysfunctional in some way. Some of

us are anxious, hyper focused, unfocused, stubborn, lazy, slow, quick to judge, depressed, have a learning disability, insecure, have a medical condition and many other things. Sometimes these things are apparent immediately in a relationship. And other times they flare up well into a marriage, a friendship, etc. And when they do, they cause disappointment, anger. Many times we don't know how we'll react to something until that thing happens. And our spouse, or our friend, or our co-worker is disappointed or distraught at what we've done. This is the human condition—we all have it. We all do it.

If we want to fight a good fight and win a good fight, the answer does not lie in escalating a fight between people, but in de-escalating tension, finding real forgiveness, working toward unity, working towards oneness, in marriage, in friendships, with the Lord.

This is the primary work of the church—to lead us to oneness with God, and to unity with one another. This is why we have the Liturgy—to help us remember what we are doing, what the Lord did for us, and how we can be one with the Lord and one another, even in a dysfunctional world where we all suffer from the human condition. Everything that the church does should lead us in these directions—to oneness with God and to oneness with each other. The first words of the Liturgy call upon us to pray in peace. We are called to “love one another”, to “give our thanks to the Lord,” to realize that “every good and perfect gift is from Above,” from God, not from our own selves. The church is here to teach us, because we don't come out of the womb knowing all things, and because even when we know something, we need continuing education. We need continuing education in how to love, how to forgive, how to repent. We need encouragement when life gets hard. We need empathy and compassion when we are sad. We need hope when life seems to overwhelm us.

In the month of February, our church is offering several things to you, the parishioners, to help you cope with the human condition.

A Marriage Retreat

Every marriage has at least some level of dysfunction. Why? Because you put two imperfect people together and you will have imperfection. There are no two perfect people and there is no perfect love, no perfect marriage, no perfect anything. Only God has perfect love. Every marriage goes through its ups and downs. Even the strongest marriages can use some “continuing education.” The retreat will be on Saturday, February 20, from 8:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m. This retreat is not going to be group therapy (see below)—you will not be sharing problems in front of other people. Last time I offered this retreat, that was the concern. Rather, you will have the opportunity to ask anonymous questions to be addressed in the retreat, we will have a couple of presentations on the purpose of marriage and obstacles that are present in most marriages, and most important, there will be some time for you to spend with just your spouse talking about ways to improve your marriage, something that most married couples don't spend enough (or any) time doing.

Orthodoxy 101

If you are not getting much out of being a member of the Orthodox Church, then the Orthodoxy 101 class is for you. It is

three Monday nights—February 8, 15 and 22—from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and it will help to give you not only basic information about what we believe and how we practice but will give you the opportunity to ask all the questions you want to know about the Orthodox Faith.

Inter-faith Service at Christ the King Catholic Church

We are going to start a twice-yearly interfaith service with Christ the King Catholic Church. As you may know, our Patriarch and the Pope exchange visits each year on the feasts of each church. A Patriarchal delegation goes to Rome on June 29 (St. Peter) and a Papal delegation goes to the Patriarchate on November 30 (St. Andrew). It is a human condition that keeps churches apart from one another. No, this will not be a Eucharistic service, but it will be an opportunity to pray with our sister Christians, praying for peace, unity and healing of the human condition that we all (Orthodox and Catholics) share.

OCMC Souper Bowl Sunday February 7

Bring canned food and help those who suffer from hunger.

In March, the Movie War Room will be shown.

Some of you saw the movie “War Room” when it was in the theaters last fall. We will be screening the movie at church on Friday, March 4, beginning at 6:30 p.m. This is a great movie about healing and reconciliation.

New Prayer Team Unit

Over 400 people are on the Prayer Team, the daily message I send out every morning. On weekdays, I will continue to write on various topics and on weekends, I will write on the Divine Liturgy. But come February 21, the beginning of the Triodion, I will be writing on the scriptures of Triodion, Lent and Holy Week. The new unit will be called “And We Beheld His Glory.” (John 1:14) If you want to join the prayer team for daily encouragement in the human condition, please email Fr. Stavros (frstav@gmail.com) and Charlie (charlie.hambos@gmail.com) and we’ll be happy to add you.

Confession, Counseling, and Prayer

Available Any Time

One of the greatest benefits of belonging to the church is that the church is eager to help you manage the human condition. At any time, the church offers confession, counseling and prayer. Someone shared that a visiting priest in one of the parishes in the Metropolis offered to stay in church after liturgy to pray with people. And people thought this was a novelty. I wanted to say clearly and succinctly, if you ever need a prayer, stop me at any time and I’m happy to pray with you. I may not be able to speak with you at length on a moment’s notice, but I will always have time to stop and offer a prayer for you.

The Sheep and the Shepherd

In the Bible, Jesus calls Himself “The Good Shepherd.” (John 10:14) The flock of His followers are like the sheep. He speaks in imagery that the people of the time (primarily farmers and herders) would understand. Everyone knew the dynamic between shepherds and sheep. The ratio of shepherd to sheep was 1 to 100. That’s why the Bible says that there is more joy in heaven of one lost sheep that is found than over 99 who never went astray. (Luke 15) Sheep were by nature irrational crea-

tures. And so they had to be herded by the shepherd, who used his staff to poke and prod them to get into the sheep-pen. The sheep-pen was often against a hillside, where the pen was surrounded by hills and fences. There was a narrow gate that all the sheep had to fit through to get into the sheep pen. Once all the sheep were in the pen, the shepherd would stand guard at the gate to make sure no wolves came into the pen to devour the sheep.

Now, we are sheep, but we are not irrational and stupid. We are rational. But we still need guidance, we still need a shepherd to guide us. And the gate is still narrow, the wolves are still real, we still need the protection of the sheep pen, and the shepherd is still filled with joy when the lost sheep has been found. If the human condition has made you feel like a lost sheep, it’s time to rejoin the flock and head towards the narrow gate. The shepherd can certainly help. If you need confession, counseling, or even just prayer, let me know and I’m happy to provide these things for you.

No matter how you cut it, life is tough. Life is made easier when we all recognize that we have the Human Condition, and take steps to manage it in our own lives, and encourage one another in theirs.

Here is the great thing about our Lord—He rewards effort, not success. We will not be successful in everything we endeavor to do. Just like we won’t be perfect. It is effort that God wants and expects from us. And that is something we can all offer. That is how we fight and win the good fight—with effort and with optimism.

One final comment on the sheep, the shepherds and the flock—The flock is our church, the sheep are the individual members, the shepherd is the priest. The goal of each church is to make the flock as large as possible. The goal of each sheep is to get into the line that leads to the narrow gate, which is salvation in the kingdom of heaven. The goal of the shepherd is to make sure the sheep are in line and heading towards the narrow gate. If one is not part of the flock, he does not hear the message. This is why I continually encourage our parish to grow, to make the flock larger, to get the message to more people. If the sheep are not in line, they will not make it through the narrow gate. For those sheep who are reading this message who do not participate in the life of the church, you are not going to make it through the narrow gate. This is why I encourage people to go to confession, worship, pray and other things. If the shepherd doesn’t do a good job tending to his sheep, he will have to answer to the Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is my motivation. So, let us enlarge the flock, let us get into line, let us get through the narrow gate!

Thanks for being part of the flock in Tampa. Thank you for allowing me to serve as your shepherd, even as I struggle with my own human condition. May we strive together to be the best we can be, loving one another, and most especially loving Him!

With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros

Liturgical Schedule for February 2016

Tuesday, February 2 **Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple**
Orthros: 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, February 7 16th Sunday of Luke
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke
Ushers: Gregory Tisdale, John Christ, George Trimikliniotis
Welcome Committee: Greeters: Vanessa Aviles, Pablo Aviles; Ambassador: Marenca Patrascoiu;
Caller: Megan Rindone; Get Acquainted: Katherine Sakkis, Lisa Alsina
Coffee Hour: Philoptochos' OCMC Luncheon

Wednesday, February 10 St. Haralambos
Orthros: 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, February 14 Sunday of the Canaanite
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. John
Ushers: Brett Mourer, John Tisibris, Amin Hanahan
Welcome Committee: Greeters: Maria Karounos, Skip Higdon; Ambassador: Donna Trakas; Caller: Bessie Palios
Coffee Hour: Sunday School

Sunday, February 21 Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew
Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Peter Trakas
Welcome Committee: Greeters: Katherine Sakkis, Skip Higdon; Ambassador: Vanessa Aviles; Caller: Peggy Bradshaw
Coffee Hour: Choir

Sunday, February 28 Sunday of the Prodigal Son
Orthros 8:15 a.m. Doxology 9:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

Memorial Service: Anastasia Garcia (40 Days)

Note: The Liturgy will start earlier because the choir will be singing the "Liturgy of Peace"

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Mark
Ushers: Mike Trimis, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis
Welcome Committee: Greeters: Skip Higdon, Jeanie Nenos; Ambassador: Kalliope Chagaris; Caller: Christene Worley
Coffee Hour: The AHEPA Family

Saturday, March 5 **First Saturday of Souls**—Divine Liturgy in the Mausoleum Chapel at Garden of Memories
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, March 6 Judgement Sunday – Meat Fare
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke
Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, Mike Kavouklis, Tammy Chirstou
Welcome Committee: Greeters: Elaine Halkias, Donna Hambos; Ambassador: Genie Carter; Caller: Martha Kapetan;
Get Acquainted: Christy Pessemier, Tom Pessemier
Coffee Hour: Maids of Athena

Liturgical Notes for February

Tuesday, February 2 - The Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple

The Presentation of Christ is a major feastday of the church and commemorates the day, 40 days after the Nativity, when Christ was brought to the temple when He was 40 days old. According to the Law of Moses, every male child was brought to the temple on its 40th day, together with a sacrifice of pigeons or turtle doves by the parents, and the child was “consecrated Holy to the Lord.” Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple on His 40th day, because it was the law to do so. In the temple was a priest named Simeon, who was an older man, who had been promised by God that he would not die until he saw the Christ. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he knew in his heart that this was the Lord’s Messiah. He took the child in his arms and prayed “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light to enlighten the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel.” (Luke 2: 29-32) This prayer is recited over every child in the Orthodox Church when they are brought to church for the first time when they are 40 days old. That’s where this beautiful tradition comes from. February 2 is indeed a special day for all parents and all young children.

Wednesday, February 10 - St. Haralambos

St. Haralambos was a Saint of the first century and lived in Greece. He was a priest who was martyred. Our parish has a special connection to St. Haralambos since his relics were interred in our altar table when the church was consecrated in 1986.

Looking Ahead to March

Saturday of Souls Liturgy at Garden of Memories Mausoleum on the second Saturday of the Souls, March 5, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the Mausoleum Chapel at Garden of Memories, and bless the graves of all the parishioners interred at Garden of Memories and Myrtle Hill Cemeteries.

Epiphany in Tarpon Springs

On Wednesday, January 6, Savvas Ferekides represented our parish for the diving for the cross in Tarpon Springs for the annual Epiphany celebration. Congratulations Savvas!

St. John the Baptist Feastday

On January 6-7, we celebrated our annual Feastday of St. John the Baptist, the Patron Saint of our Parish. On January 6, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios presided over the Vespers, assisted by Fr. James Rousakis (Vicar) Fr. Stavros, Fr. James Paris (Clearwater), Fr. Soteri Rousakis (St. Petersburg), Fr. John Bociu (Sarasota), Fr. Sampson Kasapakis (Tarpon Springs) and Deacon John Pantelis (St. Petersburg). Mary Nenos offered an Artoklasia, and also decorated our icons of St. John. The Philoptochos sponsored a reception following Vespers. During the Vespers Service, His Eminence tonsured ten of our Altar Boys—Gregory Koutroumanis, Harry Koutroumanis, Brigham Sibley, Christos Nenos, Dean Mitseas, Nicholas Alsina, Nicholas Katzaras, James Katzaras, Lukas Karamitsanis, and John Karamitsanis. Axioi to these young men! On January 7, His Eminence officiated at the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, assisted by Fr. James Rouakis, Fr. Stavros, Fr. James Paris, Fr. Soteri Rousakis, and Deacon John Pantelis. The Parish Council sponsored a luncheon following the Liturgy. Special thanks to the Hambos family for cooking an excellent lunch!

Thank you to all those who helped make our Feastday a success!



Jesus is calling. Are we going to answer?

By Charlie Hambos

Charlie, when did you hear the call to become a priest? At what age? When did you realize that you wanted to become a priest? This question comes up a lot. My answer is always that it is a long story. It could be the time when I could barely walk myself, that I helped my great grandmother down the stairs. It could be the time in 10th grade when I really felt this push towards the priesthood. It could also be the time, back in the day, when Tampa was too far to drive for Liturgy, so I set up an altar table at the fireplace and conducted my own Divine Liturgy. The bottom line is that people have holes in their heart. I have holes in my heart, big ones. We fill them up with everything except the one thing that will actually fill it, Jesus Christ. I believe I have the call to help all of us, including myself, to fill our holes with Jesus. I don't know that I have "the call" to the priesthood, but I am getting a call from Jesus and sometimes, I just don't pick up.

It's not just those who are called to the priesthood who receive the call from Jesus. We all receive the call from Jesus, believers and non-believers alike. The question is, are we going to answer that call? We hear the call to forgive. We hear the call to show mercy. We hear the call to be Christ-like. We hear it, we look at it, and we mute it. We let him leave a message. "Hey this is Jesus. I died for you so you wouldn't have to suffer, to be in pain, to even die. When you have chance, give me a call." One missed call. Two missed calls. Three missed calls. Three new voicemails. Your voicemail box is 90% full. He'll keep calling. Are we going to answer?

Receiving a call from the Lord is nothing new. The prophets of the Old Testament received the call from the Lord to prophesy to the people to change their ways before destruction befell them. Some of them answered the call and did what they were supposed to do. Others, like Jonah, answered the call but went the other way. Jeremiah, heard the call, and like Moses made an excuse as to why he couldn't answer the call properly. Jeremiah claimed he was too much like a child. Moses had a speech defect and couldn't speak properly. Isaiah had an angel bring a flaming hot coal to touch his mouth. We all have our excuses. We all don't want to answer the call.

Charlie, when did you hear the call? I'll tell you when I heard the call. I heard the call in Genesis, when God created us in His image. None of us were born then. When did we receive the call from Jesus? We received the call from Jesus before we were born. Before all of humanity was born, we were called. We were set aside as special. We were set aside to answer the call of relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Are we going to answer the call?

Let's see when Isaiah and Jeremiah heard the call. These two were the greatest of the Major Prophets in the Old Testament. The Book of Isaiah is like the Fifth Gospel because of all of the prophecies regarding the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jeremiah, himself is like Christ, knowing that the law was to be written in the heart and not on the stone. Both of them and all of the prophets received the prophetic calling. In the beginning of Jeremiah,

the prophet writes, "The word of the Lord, came to me, saying: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I appointed you as prophet to the nations.'" (Jeremiah 1:5) Before Jeremiah was born, the Lord knew him. Before Jeremiah was conceived, the Lord knew Him. Before Jeremiah was a thought in his parent's mind, the Lord knew him. Knowing him is one thing, but before Jeremiah came to birth he was consecrated. Consecrated means that he was set a part to be holy. He was anointed before he was born. He was set aside for a special purpose. The purpose was to be a prophet to the nations.

The Lord also called Isaiah before he was born. Isaiah used the manner in which he was called to prove to the people that his message was true and that they should pay attention. "Coasts and islands, listen to me, pay attention, distant peoples. The Lord called me when I was in the womb, before my birth he had pronounced my name." (Isaiah 49:1) The Lord called Isaiah when he was in the womb. Before Isaiah was born, the Lord said his name. Know this, you the reader, the Lord knew our name before we were born. Before we were conceived he knew us. Before our existence, he called us. Are we going to answer?

It doesn't matter when we answer the call, as long as we answer. It doesn't matter what poor choice we made in our life or what evil we committed before we answered the call. We must answer the call. In the New Testament, we learn of other people who were called. They were also called in the womb, before they were born. St. John the Baptist was a prophet, called to lead the way for Christ and to prepare the path for Christ to walk on. "He will be your joy and delight and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord; he must drink no wine, no strong drink; even from his mother's womb he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the Israelites to the Lord their God." (Luke 1:14-16) Even from his mother's womb, St. John the Baptist and Forerunner of Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit. He did not need other things to fill him, he was already full of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit filled him and called him to prepare the way for the Lord. It was the prophet Isaiah who prophesied the calling of St. John the Baptist. "This was the man spoke of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'A voice of one that cries in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight.'" (Luke 3:3/Isaiah 40:3) St. John the Baptist answered the call. Are we going to answer the call?

Saul, the great persecutor of Christians received the call. He was literally persecuting Jesus Christ. Christ called him and asked him, "Why do you persecute me?" He spoke of this call openly. He knew he wasn't one of the original disciples of Christ but he considered himself one because of the manner in which he was called. He answered the call and saw Him. Even though he did so much evil, Paul was still called, still set aside before he was born. "But when God, who had set me apart from the time when I was in my mother's womb, called me through his grace and chose to reveal his Son in me, so that I should preach Him to the Gentiles." (Galatians 1:15) Paul was-

n't a immediate disciple of Christ, but Christ revealed himself to Paul. Christ reveals himself to us. We have witnessed the prophet's call. We have witnessed the call of St. John the Baptist. The calls were received before they were born. They answered the call. Are we going to answer the call?

Now that Christ has come. Now that Christ was crucified, buried and rose on the day for our salvation. Our call is direct. There is no need for an operator to connect us. We have a direct line to answer the call and to call back. All God wants is for us to answer the call to love Him. Paul writes, "We are well aware that God works with those who love him, those who have been called in accordance with his purpose, and turns everything to their good." (Romans 8:28) If we love God, we will have engaged in a relationship. The relationship is not easy as all relationships are not easy. It is our purpose to answer his call. Everything will be good if we answer the call. It may not be good at the moment but we will come to realize whatever bad thing happens when we answer the call that it will be turned into good. Paul continues using the same time reference for us, as to when we were called. "He decided beforehand who were the ones destined to be molded to the pattern of his Son, so that he should be the eldest of many brothers; it was those so destined that he called; those that he called, he justified, and those that he has justified he has brought into glory." (Romans 8:28-29) He called us before we were born. He called us before the prophets. He called us before John the

Baptist. This passage is often interpreted as only God chooses who will go to heaven and who will not, regardless of what we do here on earth. This false-doctrine is called predestination. Yes, we are predestined. We are predestined to answer the call of Christ. It is not that many are call, but few are chosen. It is that many are called and few choose. Jesus Christ calls all of us. Are we going to be the few that answer that call?

Why should we answer the call? What's the point? The point and the answer to why we should answer Christ's call can be found all the way back in Jeremiah. When we call Jesus back, this is what we will get. "Yes, I know what plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord, plans for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11) He is going to call. He has been calling and we must answer His call. We must call to Him. "When you call to me and pray to me, I shall listen to you. When you search for me, you will find me; when you search wholeheartedly for me, I shall let you find me." (Jeremiah 29:12-14a). Even if we feel far away, from the call, we will be brought closer if we answer. "The Lord declares. I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and wherever I have driven you. The Lord declares. I shall bring you back from the place I have exiled you." Sometimes we are exiled. Sometimes we are exiled far away to help us realize that we need to answer the call. And when we answer the call He will bring us closer to Him, regardless of how far away we are. He is calling. Are we going to answer?



His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios celebrated the Divine Liturgy on the Feast Day of St. John the Baptist with clergy from around the Tampa Bay Area.

(From left to right) **Fr. Soterios Rousakis**, St. Petersburg, **Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis**, Tampa, **Fr. Jim Paris**, Clearwater, **Fr. James Rousakis**, Tarpon Springs, **His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios**, Metropolis of Atlanta, **Dn. John Pantelis**, St. Petersburg

Community News

Parish Registry

Baptism - Nikolas Roy DeJesus, son of Roy and Anna De Jesus, was baptized on Sunday, January 3. Dionisios "Danny" Tataris, Dionisios "Dennis" Tataris and Maritza DeJesus were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Funeral - Anastasia Garcia passed away on Sunday, January 17. Funeral services were held on Friday, January 22. May her memory be eternal! A 40 day memorial service will be offered for Anastasia on Sunday, February 28.

Get Acquainted Sunday, February 7



In an effort to get to know one another better, we are going to continue our "Get Acquainted Sundays" one Sunday of each month. We will have nametags and markers in the entry way of the Kourmolis Center and will ask that each person put one on during coffee hour and introduce yourself to at least one person that you do not know. This will serve to help us increase our fellowship and sense of community.



Orthodoxy 101 Class will be held in February

Fr. Stavros offers this class two times per year, in spring and in fall. This will be the SAME CLASS so no need to take it again if you already have. This will be a three-week course of study on Monday nights to make people aware of the basics of being an Orthodox Christian. Who should attend the Orthodoxy 101 class?

- ◆ Interfaith couples. This will help the non-Orthodox person understand more what is going on in our church when they attend.
- ◆ Anyone who is considering joining our church. Going forward, this class will be a requirement for those who wish to join our Orthodox faith.
- ◆ New converts to Orthodoxy. For those who recently joined our church and who want to know a little bit more about it.
- ◆ Anyone who wants to know more about the basics of our faith, or who wants a refresher course in the basics of Orthodoxy is encouraged to attend.

The classes will be part lecture, part discussion, with lots of time for questions and answers. The three sessions will be done as follows:

Monday, February 8 A Tour of the Orthodox Church: What we see in the Church and what it means

Monday, February 15 Orthodox Spirituality: The Seven Sacraments and the Divine Liturgy

Monday, February 22 Orthodox Traditions: Fasting, Icons, Prayer, sand Separating Theology from "yiayialogy"

Classes will be held on these three Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary. Please sign up with Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com, so he has enough materials for everyone. There is no charge for this class.



Choir Will Sing the Liturgy of Peace on Sunday, February 28

Because the Liturgy of Peace is a little bit of a longer arrangement of the Divine Liturgy, we will begin Orthros at 8:15 a.m., the Doxology at 9:30 a.m. and the Divine Liturgy following at 9:45 a.m.

Community Outreach

Saturday, February 20 from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. St. John the Baptist's Community Outreach will be serving breakfast to the Homeless at the First Presbyterian Church in Downtown Tampa. The church is located at 412 Zack Street. The entrance is on Polk Street. Grab a cup of coffee and come help us! We love to see new and old faces!



There will be a lock-in for our GOYAns on Saturday, February 20, beginning at 6:00 p.m. Please let Elaine Halkias at nybagel2@msn.com if you plan to attend.

FOR GENERATIONS TO COME!

Sts. Raphael, Nicholas and Irene in Palm Harbor is hosting the 2nd Annual Greek Orthodox Youth Talent Show of Tampa Bay will be on Saturday, February 13 at 6:00 p.m. at the Palm Harbor University Theater.

Some of our GOYAn's will be participating! If you are interested in purchasing a ticket, please email Charlie at Charlie.hambos@gmail.com for more information.



HOPE & JOY NEWS

February 7, 2016 is Super Bowl Sunday of course, but it is also “Souper Bowl of Caring” Sunday as well. This is a nationwide, youth-led initiative to tackle hunger across our country. Over 3000 Churches, youth groups, and other organizations will be collecting non-perishable items and monetary donations for local food banks. Several of our Sunday School students will be near the side door to collect these donations. You may bring any nonperishable food item or a cash donation.

Mission Statement:

Using the energy of the Super Bowl to mobilize youth in a united national effort to care for people in their local communities who are hungry and those in need.

Vision Statement:

Transform the time around the Super Bowl into the nation's largest celebration of giving and serving.

We believe:

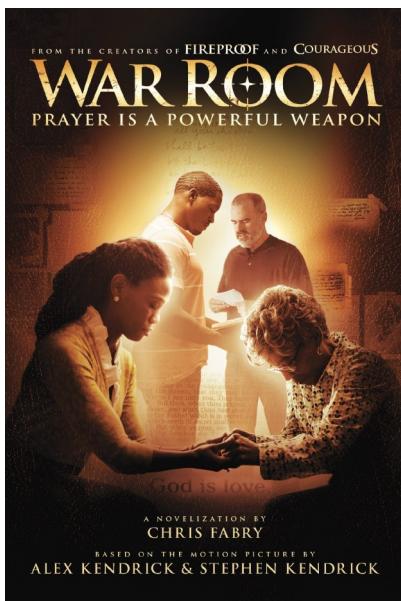
- The idea for Souper Bowl of Caring is a gift from God.
- Young people have the ability to serve and should be given opportunities to lead their communities in helping others.
- Every dollar collected through Souper Bowl of Caring should be donated directly to a charity selected by each participating group.
- People of all backgrounds and beliefs can work together
- Hunger and poverty have a negative impact on individuals and the communities in which they live, yet there is joy in serving and giving to those in need.
- The excitement and energy surrounding the Super Bowl can be used to engage young people in service while producing lasting hope for all people.

Join us in support of this nationwide youth initiative to stop hunger in this country. We encourage the entire community to please bring a non-perishable food item or monetary donation to church on Super Bowl Sunday, February 7.

Philoptochos Missions Sunday - February 7



As they do every year, Philoptochos is going to sponsor its 5th Annual Missions Sunday to support overseas Orthodox Missions. Kenny Kidd from the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) in St. Augustine will be with us on Sunday, February 7. We will offer the homily and then Philoptochos will sponsor a luncheon to benefit missions work, with all proceeds going toward the Mission Center.



SAVE THE DATE

Screening of the Movie “War Room” on Friday, March 4 at 6:30 p.m.

We will have dinner, movie and discussion from 6:30-9:30 p.m.
Please see weekly bulletin and website for more details.

Storyline:

Filled with heart, humor, and wit, WAR ROOM follows Tony and Elizabeth Jordan, a couple who seemingly have it all—great jobs, a beautiful daughter, their dream home. But appearances can be deceiving. In reality, their marriage has become a war zone and their daughter is collateral damage. With guidance from Miss Clara, an older, wiser woman, Elizabeth discovers she can start fighting for her family instead of against them. As the power of prayer and Elizabeth's newly energized faith transform her life, will Tony join the fight and become the man he knows he needs to be? Together, their real enemy doesn't have a prayer.

Christ the King Catholic Church and St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
will pray together in a

Ecumenical Prayer Service for the Persecuted Christians in the Middle East

**Tuesday, February 23, 2016 at 6:30 p.m.
at Christ the King Church**

A reception will follow in the McLaughlin Center.

Let us join our Catholic brothers and sisters for an evening prayer service as we come together to pray for our Christian brothers and sisters who are suffering so much persecution because of the rise of radical Islamic terrorism.

In the Fall, St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church will be hosting a prayer service with at our church.

Christ the King is located at 821 S. Dale Mabry Highway, Tampa, FL 33609



*Young at Heart
will be hosting a*

Mardi Gras Ball

Saturday, February 27

In the Kourmolis Center

Hors d'Oeuvres 7:00 p.m. Dinner 7:30 p.m.

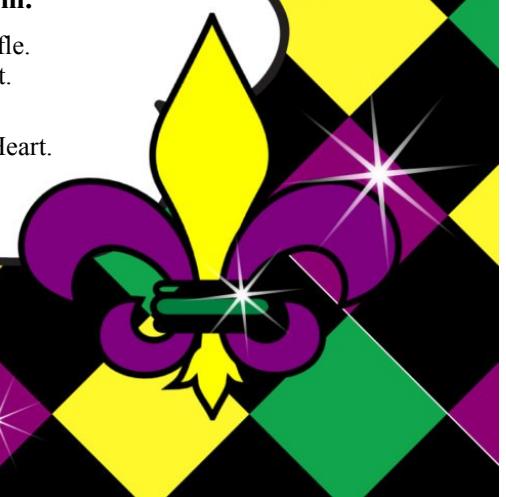
There will be cash prizes for best costumes and a raffle.

Live music by John Demas and The Omega Project.

Catering will be by Big Star Catering.

Tickets are on sale in now see a member of Young at Heart.

Adult \$40.00 Ages 12+ \$20.00
Kids Under 12 are Free!





With Glory and Honor - Strengthen Your Marriage

A Retreat for Married Couples - On Saturday, February 20, we will hold a retreat on improving marriage. Marriage, like all relationships, requires work. It isn't always roses. As we continue to work on our relationship with God, it is a perfect time to work on our relationship with our spouse, the person God chose for us to share our life with. Our church encourages "pre-marital counseling," but does not address "counseling" post-marriage. Most people think about "counseling" in general as something you do when you have a problem. People who come for Pre-Marital Counseling are not in trouble in their relationships. In fact, we use the term Pre-Marital Counseling only because we can't think of another term. Pre-Marital Counseling is really an examination of a couple's relationship, pre-marriage. It's an opportunity to talk about goals, dreams, the things that hold you together, the things you enjoy doing together. It's a time to make plans and troubleshoot areas where there might be trouble, i.e. what obstacles do you face as a couple? Part of my Pre-Marital Counseling involves a lengthy survey or inventory that asks many questions about a couple's relationship as they approach marriage. In looking over some of the questions, most of them apply to after marriage as well. I.e. what are your mutual interests, where do you want to be in five years, how do you resolve conflict, etc.

Some things to know about this retreat

- ◆ It is for any couples who are married or who intend to be married, regardless of how long you have been married. But you must come as a couple.
- ◆ We will not discuss personal information on your marriage in a group setting. We will have some general discussions about marriage. Topics to include:
 - ♥ **Why do people get married?** Followed by some discussion time with your spouse to discuss why did you get married in the first place?
 - ♥ **What happened on the day of your wedding?** The significance of the wedding service and how it serves as an outline for a life-long successful relationship
 - ♥ **Why do marriages get in trouble?** A general discussion
 - ♥ **How to keep marriages strong?** A general discussion, followed by time together with your spouse to discuss how your marriage is going, goal, setting, etc.
- ◆ During the "discussion time," questions will be provided for you to answer and discuss with your spouse

The Schedule will be as follows:

8:30 Registration

9:00 Prayer in church

9:30 Introduction of participants (can be done in small groups if the group is too large)

10:00 Why do people get married in the first place?

11:00 Discussion time with your spouse

11:30 The Wedding Service in the Orthodox Church—what is God's intention for your marriage

12:00 Lunch

12:30 Why do marriages get in trouble? How to keep them strong

1:30 Discussion time with your spouse

2:00 Concluding thoughts

2:30 Closing Prayer

3:00 Departure

There are several resources that can help strengthen your marriage, including the book "The Five Love Languages" by Gary Chapman, the movie "War Room," the movie "Fireproof" and others. I highly recommend these resources and highly recommend that couples sit down at least once a year, privately or with a 3rd party, to discuss the state of their marriage—what's going well and what can be improved. This retreat is an attempt to provide that opportunity for couples in our parish (or if you have friends who are not part of this church who would like to attend, they would be welcome as well). Please contact the church office by February 15 in order to sign up.

Sunday School News

January was a very busy month for the Sunday School. Our topics for January were the Epiphany/ St. John the Baptist, the Vasilopita/St. Basil, the Ten Commandments, and Making Moral Choices. Charlie Hambos was also very busy by working with our 2nd graders, our 5th graders, and our high school students this month.

CONGRATULATIONS to Angelina Krinos for finding the lucky coin in the Sunday School Vasilopita on January 10. We would truly like to thank Melissa Krinos for making the Vasilopita for our Sunday School Children. The sweet bread was delicious and appreciated by all of our children. We would also like to acknowledge that Hannah Passalaris, representing all of our Sunday School Students, found the coin during the Church's Vasilopita celebration. May God bless all the children of St. John's in 2016.

On Saturday January 9, the Sunday School Teachers participated in a retreat with Fr. Stavros. The Sunday School teachers are truly blessed to have Fr. Stavros and Charlie as spiritual leaders of our Sunday School. Our Sunday School program would not be what it is today without them. Some of the topics that we addressed on Saturday were: God's Grace; Why we were created?; Keeping students engaged in Sunday School; church etiquette; and the Sacrament of Confession. As a result, we were spiritually renewed and are eager to share more with our students. **THANK YOU** Fr. Stavros and Charlie for dedicating so much of your busy schedule to our Sunday School.

We also had our YOUTH SUNDAY on Jan. 24th. The children sang beautifully, our Epistle Reader did a fine job and the Prosphora, made by our students, was delicious as usual. Our children are truly great stewards of St. John's.

The next few months will be busy as usual for the Sunday School. Our older students are preparing for the Oratorical Festival and everyone is getting reading for Pascha. Each Sunday School class will have the opportunity to participate in the important Sacrament of Confession. We will also have a Pre-Lenten Retreat and a Retreat on Good Friday.

Heidi Borgreas - Middle School "Get To Know Our Teachers"

"It has been a extraordinary privilege to teach Sunday School at St. John the Baptist for the past 6 years, starting with the Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd and now middle school grades. I don't think I appreciated what actually transpired in my own childhood Sunday School classes until I became a parent. Perhaps what wasn't clear for me until I had departed my own G.O.Y.A., Greek dancing troop, countless festival & other church volunteer hours, etc etc was the need for a real personal relationship with God. That is the underpinning of all I have been so fortunate to be able to do with the children of St. Johns. Whether it has been making our "phone calls" to God in a hula skirt with the kindergarteners, communicating with my parents via email to let them know our day's adventure, our weekly treasure chest of your childrens monetary contributions in Ziploc bags given to the treasury people after class, art "projects with a purpose", joining forces with the fantastic Maria X. (music), Melissa K. (prosfora) and the amazing other classroom partners I have been so lucky to co-teach with over the years to bring home the message – we need this real relationship in our lives and it needs to start when our small people are small. Many of you know that I am very involved in my sons Cub Scout pack (Gryphon) and more recently starting to engage with Grayson's Boy Scout troop. The mottos of the Scouts changes from "Do Your Best" (cubs) to "Be Prepared" (boy) – we need both of these concepts to help all our children, boy or girl, become strong Orthodox Christians every day of their lives. Thank you parents for bringing your child/children to spend time at Sunday School and trusting me to do my personal best to help them be prepared for a strong Christian life that will carry them long after they leave our classrooms."

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

Sermons on Youtube Channel Each Sunday



Father's sermons each Sunday are available on our YouTube channel. Just go to YouTube and type in "St John GOC Tampa" and you'll find them. If you miss a sermon or wish to hear a sermon again, you'll find it there!



Do you Like our Facebook page? Like our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are posted frequently so you are up to date with everything going on at St. John the Baptist. You can find our page at StJohnGOCTampa.

Live Streaming - All of our services are being video recorded and are available on our Livestream page.

To access this page

1. Go to our Church's website: greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com,
2. Scroll the mouse over the "Multimedia" tab on the menu bar,
3. Click "View Liturgy,"
4. Then click on the link where it says, "Check out our live stream of the Divine Liturgy here <http://new.livestream.com/accounts/2454446>.

All of the services are available to watch at anytime.





AHEPA FAMILY NEWS – February 2016



ANNUAL AHEPA FAMILY OF TAMPA AHEPA SAINT JOHN'S DAY DINNER



The AHEPA FAMILY of Tampa had our Annual AHEPA Saint John Day Dinner again this year on Thursday, January 7, 2016 in the evening, at the Floridan Hotel. Guests include Metropolitan Alexios of the Diocese of Atlanta, the Supreme President of AHEPA, John Galanis; the Grand President of the Daughters of Penelope, Connie Pilallis. The Supreme President of the Sons of Pericles, Andreas Christou; and Greek Consul General in Tampa, Florida, Adamantia Klotsa. In Attendance also were District Lodge members from the AHEPA and Daughters of Penelope Citrus District 2 Lodges; past district governors of Citrus District 2 and other Districts and past supreme lodge members and other dignitaries.

The event served as the kick-off of the 90th anniversary of the chartering of Lycurgus Chapter 12 by AHPEA National in 1926 in Tampa. The theme of the event was “Orthodoxy and AHEPA working together for a bright future during our current troubled time”.

AHEPA FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP DINNER AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

On December 19, 2015 the AHEPA FAMILY hosted the annual SCHOLARSHIP AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL DINNER at the Floridan Hotel, once again awarding scholarships to the young members of our community including high school seniors, college and graduate school students. Scholarship recipients included **Nedi Ferekides**, **Vasilios Nenos**, **Christopher Scarfogliero** and **Eleni Pessemier**.

The AHEPA Family Scholarship Program began in 2010 and this is the sixth year that we have awarded scholarships to worthy students of our community. To date the AHEPA Family has awarded over 26 scholarships worth over \$25,000.

AHEPA FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE DAY

AHEPA Legislative Day is scheduled again this year on February 26, 2016. A block of rooms has been secured at a Tallahassee hotel and reservations have been made for the dinner on Friday night. AHEPA Legislative Day will provide an opportunity for AHEPA family members including AHEPAns, Daughters, Sons and Maids to go to Tallahassee for education about how our legislature works and for face to face meetings with legislators. The event is being organized by Lycurgus Chapter 12 for the District Lodge and will involve all AHEPAns in the State. Put the date on your schedule and join us again this year for this educational and fun filled trip.



SONS AND MAIDS HAVE A FUN TIME AT A LOCAL BOWLING EVENT OVER THE HOLIDAY BREAK.

The Sons of Pericles Menelaos Chapter 154 and the Maids of Athena Chapter 39 enjoyed Christmas Break by participating in a joint Bowling Night at the Pin Chasers Veterans Bowling Alley Sports & Recreation Center on December 29. They all enjoyed the event and are looking forward to future events.



Stewardship 2016

The 2016 Stewardship Year is off to a really good start and we would like to provide everyone with a brief update. As you will see we have a little ways to go to achieve 100% participation from our Parishioners. Fr. Stavros has blessed us with many positive messages and sermons about our commitment to God's House and our community and it is clear many have heard this calling.

227 Total # of Parishioners that have completed a 2016 Stewardship Pledge Form ~THANK-YOU~

47% of these Parishioners have increased their Pledge

20 New Families/Individual Parishioners are included in this number! What a blessing and testament to the growth in our community!

We are hopeful and waiting on 128 Parishioners that pledged in 2015 to complete their 2016 Stewardship Pledge. Pledge Forms are available in the Church Narthex, Office or you can print online from our Church Website.

As you can imagine, it is much easier to start the year off with a clear understanding of the financial commitment from our community.

When filling out a Stewardship Pledge Form please keep in mind the importance of Time and Talents. We can keep track of these details in our church software - Parish Data Systems. Many helping hands and talents are needed throughout the year for various church needs, and we will be calling from time to time to ask for support!

**~On behalf of the Stewardship Committee we wish everyone a Blessed Year and Thank You for support of
OUR Community and God's House in Tampa~**

What Stewardship means to me...

Please Note: Longtime Loyal Stewards of St. John the Baptist, Brett and Ana Moure, have provided a comprehensive Parishioner perspective of 'What Stewardship Means to Me'. We have included Part 2 of this ongoing series below and sincerely thank Brett and Ana for their dedication to our church and their time to prepare this thoughtful message. The full article is also posted under Stewardship on the Church Website.

St. John Chrysostom stated, "Wealth is not evil—it is used properly when distributed to the poor. Rather, greed is evil and it provides for unending torments." And is not our local Church among those that are poor? We do not have enough money for basic needs such as repairing the roof/air conditioning of our church in order to maintain our beautiful icon of the Pantokrator (Almighty or All-Powerful). But the question is--do we really believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is All-Powerful and able to supply all our needs, and that we do not need to worry about our needs, and also that if we give to Him and His Church FIRST out of love with faith in Him that He will supply for our physical needs?

The following quote is from Beyond Wealth—Orthodoxy Capitalism and the Gospel of Wealth, on page 28. "Christian ministry (diaconia) is motivated not by selfishness, but by selfless love. It is the self-emptying (kenosis) that Christ underwent when He became man: 'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life is a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).' Regardless of one's station in life, he considers himself first and foremost a servant. This constitutes true freedom, since the choice is determined by the person who, when healed from necessity, becomes open to infinite possibilities. In other words, the Christian knows that God will provide for his needs. Therefore, for such an individual, needs do not occupy the first place in his deliberations. It is a manner of living, since the person exists to contribute rather than to survive. He who serves does not do so for profit..."

Romans 6:33 states, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Stewardship is meant to be a blessing. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, said, "It is more blessed to give than to re-

ceive" (Acts 20:35).

We give for many reasons. First, we love the Lord and what He has given to us so we give back to Him out of love for Him (we are reminded of the elderly widow who gave only 2 mites, but it was everything she had). So, it's not so much how much we give but what percentage of our income that we give. For where your heart is there your treasure shall be also. When the widow gave her two mites which was all of her net worth, this occurred at the same time as when Jesus was calling the leadership of Israel hypocrites. But even though they were hypocrites, he did not instruct the widow not to give, but rather he praised her for her willingness to give even though the leadership was hypocritical.

Today, we also may at times feel that our leadership is not always sincere and somewhat hypocritical. Let's face it--aren't all of us insincere and hypocritical to a certain degree? Regardless, this does not excuse us from giving. God has not called us to be judges, but to give and to exhibit love. He occupies the position of Judge. Let us give without worrying about our leaders because we will not be judged based on what they did, but based on what we did while on this earth. It is our responsibility to give back to God and then it is up to those to whom we give to faithfully use the money for the glory of God. All of us will be held accountable for what we do in every aspect of our lives. This also means that deacons, priests and bishops will also be held accountable for how they shepherd the flock and for what purpose donated money is used. It is not our responsibility to judge them for that; that is the Lord's role. However, to the extent that we have opportunity to positively influence how the Lord's money is used in a church or in the Lord's work, then we ought to do that.



PHILOPTOCHOS' VASILOPITA SUNDAY CELEBRATING ST. BASIL THE GREAT AND ST. BASIL ACADEMY JANUARY 10, 2106

On Sunday January 10, 2016, Annunciation Chapter of St. John the Baptist Philoptochos held it's annual Vasilopita Sunday. After the Divine Liturgy, Father Stavros cut two large Vasilopites baked by long time Philoptochos and Parish member Mary Nenos. After blessing Pites, he gave a piece to each Ministry head and to the other Parish Organization heads.

Afterwards, during Coffee Hour, Philoptochos members cut and served the various Vasilopites our Parishioners lovingly brought to celebrate the Feast Day of St. Basil the Great! We also sold whole Vasilopites for those who wished to take one home to share with their family.

All of this effort is to help support Saint Basil Academy in Garrison NY. The Academy was founded in 1944 through the vision of Archbishop Athenagoras, of blessed memory. He went to the National Philoptochos Society to purchase the property and build a Christian home and school for orphans and other Orthodox children who needed a safe place to live and be raised. In addition to a Children's Home, serves as a parochial school, and a National Retreat Center. It currently houses the Archdiocese Center for Family Care.

We are very happy and grateful to everyone who helped us raise \$1,550.00!

Photos By Olya Clifton Photography



10th Annual Women's Retreat

Hosted by Atlanta Metropolis Philoptochos

Open to Orthodox Christian Women of all ages

Friday, March 18th - Sunday, March 20th
Diakonia Retreat Center, Salem SC

If you have never experienced our Metropolis Retreat Center, you will be amazed

www.diakoniaretreatcenter.org



Cost: \$150

Airfare to Atlanta: apprx \$260

Sharing rental cars to Salem, SC

Please contact JoAnn Hartung for more details

727-432-0228

jshartung@verizon.net

We Are So Proud of You!

Alexander Findlay Awarded National Medal of Merit for Saving a Life

The Boy Scouts of America's local Gulf Ridge Council awarded the National Medal of Merit to Alexander "Alex" Findlay at a special awards ceremony held recently by Cub Scout Pack 21 at the Mother Teresa of Calcutta School for saving a toddler from drowning in a neighborhood pool. The Boy Scout National Court of Honor acted on a recommendation by the local council following the nomination by his Cubmaster, Andrew Schultz, after stories surfaced of his Memorial Day rescue.

Andrew and Karina Findlay had invited neighbors to a pool party and BBQ on Memorial Day. After an afternoon of swimming, fishing and eating ice cream, 4 year old Keaton Bau wandered back to the pool's splash pad while everyone was still eating, lost his footing and fell in over his head. Alex was the first to notice Keaton struggling under water, jumped in, swam the length of the pool and pulled him out before yelling to the adults for help. Still breathing but unresponsive, Keaton was taken to the hospital where he fully recovered. "I saw him under the water by the pool steps, and it seemed like the pump jets were pushing him towards the wall so I rushed over to him and got him out of the water so he could breath," said Alex who is a 5th Grader at Corbett Prep and in his final year of Cub Scouts. His parents noted that Alex's awareness, swimming and first aid were all skills reinforced through the Cub Scout program.

Friends of St. John the Baptist - 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 the Baptist". 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 the Baptist," please fill out and return the form below. Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Barbara Akrotirianakis - Whittier, CA
William J Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI

Perry & Fay Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
Wesley & Melissa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
Demitrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH
Mary Spanos - St. Augustine, FL
Bessie Bliziotes—Palm Cost, FL

Friend of St. John the Baptist

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 the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church 2418 Swann Avenue, Tampa, FL 33609

The Presentation of Christ - February 2



INTRODUCTION

This feast, celebrated on February 2, is known in the Orthodox Church as The Presentation of Christ in the Temple. Another name for the feast is The Meeting of our Lord. Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians call the feast, The Purification of the Holy Virgin. About 450 AD in Jerusalem, people began the custom of holding lighted candles during the Divine Liturgy of this feast day. Therefore, some churches in the West refer to this holy day as Candlemas. The Feast of the Presentation concludes the observances related to the Nativity of Christ, a period that opened on November 15 with the beginning of the Nativity fast.

BIBLICAL STORY



Joseph and Mary were not wealthy, so they took two turtle doves with them to offer as a sacrifice at the Temple.

The story of the Presentation is told in Luke 2:22-29. Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews and observed their religious customs. An important custom was for the couple to take their first-born son to the Temple. The baby was taken to the Temple forty days after his birth and was dedicated to God. In addition, if the parents were wealthy, they were to bring a lamb and a young pigeon or a turtle dove to be offered as a sacrifice at the Temple. The custom provided that if the parents were poor, they were to offer two pigeons or two turtle doves for the sacrifice.

When Jesus was forty days old, Mary and Joseph took Him to the Temple in Jerusalem. They were not wealthy, so they took two turtle doves with them to offer as a sacrifice at the Temple. As they arrived at the Temple, Mary and Joseph were met by a very old man named Simeon. He was a holy man and was noted as a very intelligent scholar. Simeon spent much time studying about the prophets of Israel. It was during his studies that he learned of the coming of the Messiah. The Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah to come and deliver Israel from their conquerors. From that time on, Simeon spent his time praying for the Messiah to come. He spent many years in prayer. Finally, while Simeon was praying he heard the voice of God. God promised Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah.

When Simeon saw Jesus, he took the baby in his arms and blessed the Lord and said:

"Lord, now let Your servant go in peace according to Your

promise, because my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory to your people Israel."

Also, in the Temple was Anna the Prophetess. She had been a widow for many years. Anna was about eighty-four years old and spent her time in the Temple worshiping, fasting, and praying. When she saw the Christ Child she praised God and spoke of him to all who were awaiting the Messiah.

After Jesus was presented in the Temple, the family returned to Galilee to the town of Nazareth. The Bible tells us that Jesus grew and became strong, and was filled with wisdom.

ICON OF THE FEAST



The Theotokos is holding out her hands in a gesture of offering and humility.

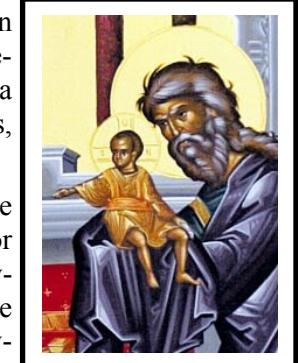
The Holy Icon shows that the meeting takes place inside the Temple and in front of the altar. The altar has a book or a scroll on it and is covered by a canopy. The Theotokos stands to the left and is holding out her hands in a gesture of offering. The one hand of the Theotokos is covered by her cloak or as it is known, the maphorion. She has just handed her Son to Simeon.

Christ is shown as a child, but He is not in swaddling clothes. He is clothed in a small dress and his legs are bare. Jesus appears to be giving a blessing. Simeon holds Jesus with both hands which are covered. This shows the reverence Simeon had for the Messiah. Simeon is bare headed and there is nothing to show that he is a priest. Some biblical scholars say that Simeon was probably a priest of the Temple or a Doctor of the Law.

Joseph is behind the Theotokos. He is carrying the two turtle doves for the sacrifice. Anna the Prophetess is also standing behind the Theotokos and is pointing to the Christ child.

The words Simeon spoke when he saw the Christ Child are known as "St. Simeon's Prayer." This prayer is sung daily at the evening Vespers services of the Orthodox Church.

In the Orthodox Church, both baby boys and baby girls are taken to the Church on the fortieth day after their birth. This is done in remembrance of the Theotokos and Joseph taking the infant Jesus to the Temple.



Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God.



Joseph offers the sacrifice of a poor family while Anna the Prophetess praises God and "speaks about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." Luke 2: 38

Church and Spirituality as a College Student

By Arianna Krinos

A monumental transition and a hallmark of modern culture, the change from life as a full-time dependent to a university student and budding young adult is portrayed as a time to “have fun” and to “find yourself,” and an invitation for peers to offer their most heartfelt advice. Yet even when talking to my Christian friends or to many friends and elders in the Orthodox Church, I find that attention is relieved from one’s spiritual life. After all, if college is a time to find oneself, perhaps it is assumed that determining one’s own variety of religion comes later.

Now that I am attending college at Virginia Tech, I have been asked regularly, “Have you found a church?” amidst college-related conversations. When I reply that the nearest Greek Orthodox church is in Roanoke, Virginia, about forty-five minutes away from my dorm, my counterpart often appears crestfallen. Quickly, I add, “We have a carpool,” meaning to communicate that I do, in fact, manage to find a way to church, and even to teach Sunday School, save the weekend of Fall Break when the Virginians drove home, and the week before winter break, when my Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) colleagues were bogged down with exams.

It disappoints me that I was seldom asked how I planned to attend church when I was selecting a college. Yielding the benefit of the doubt, I supposed that with the perceived omnipresence of the Church they expected that, wherever I went, I would figure it out. Most colleges I was considering were located at least fifteen to twenty minutes from an Orthodox church, and some were even more remote. As a college student, I find the hallways quiet when I slip out of my room on Sunday mornings. My suitemates are asleep; if anyone is in the lounge, they are donned in pajamas, perhaps playing *Call of Duty*. For some, it is their preference not to attend church: they adhere to a different/no religion, or they excitedly decline after years of being “dragged” there by their parents. For others, they find the churches off-putting, but would otherwise attend. A fellow freshman in OCF did not fancy our interim priest.

The Sunday before my first week at Virginia Tech, I did not have a carpool. With no way to Roanoke, as buses do not run that far on Sundays, I walked to an Anglican Church in Downtown Blacksburg. The priest there—some called him a pastor—excitedly greeted me and confirmed that I was a student (the only one in attendance). The church, merely a fifteen minute walk from my hall, was in the process of changing its patron saint in an effort to revitalize itself to make it more attractive to college students. The service was quaint and a somewhat reminiscent of what I was used to, although decidedly not my Orthodox spiritual home. The priest, who had newly arrived from another parish and had young children, was very kind to me, and gave me his contact information should I ever need anything. Despite the fact that I would soon attend church

in Roanoke, I lamented that churches like these did not captivate the curiosity of my classmates. Members of the Anglican Church would later host a poorly-attended table at Gobblerfest, the school club and activities fair. There are dozens of churches in the Blacksburg area, and over 30,000 students at Virginia Tech, yet many parishes are poorly-attended and thus feel aged and are often in disrepair. As an alternative, many students turn to casual “religious gatherings” in the student center: non-denominational expressions of faith which are effective as revivals, but sometimes not a substitute for the real thing. There are about twenty students who attend OCF meetings, but only about five of us typically attend church—it is not uncommon for me to ride with just one other person, the driver.

I have found that, when I look deeply, college is an ideal time for my figurative renewal of spiritual vows. It confuses me when I am told that college is a time to “have fun,” because I believe that this comment sends youth the wrong message: college should be no more “fun” than other stages of life, because it is unrealistic to say that after leaving college (and, presumably, the support of one’s parents), one loses the desire to do things other than work—whether related to family, faith, or occupation. Instead, college should be a gradual transition to everyday tasks in the next stage of one’s life, and thus far, I feel I have been making progress towards that balance. Unlike in high school, my life is no longer just about school, extracurricular activities, faith, and free time. All of those categories remain, but on my own, firstly they must be fortified: I must meet new challenges, schedule things personally, and find transportation in creative ways. Yet, further, each day I have to add new rivers—turbulent, concurrent paths which I am required to follow to meet my diverse and difficult goals, whether as obvious as buying groceries or as complex as contemplating graduate/professional school. At the end of the tangled sequences lies a massive delta which manifests itself in the feelings of self-doubt, identity confusion, and loneliness which all students (and all young adults) must face in order to form a meaningful concept of personhood.

In a documentary I watched recently, a psychologist commented that people often wish to raise their children with the same religious rituals which they adhered to as a child, even if as adults they have drifted from those principles. This process begins when students attend university. The demands of life are great, and it has only been as a college student that I have fully appreciated that: school is just as much work, yet life is not willing to compromise. Religion should be emphasized as a mechanism through which college students, such as myself, can bridge our childhoods and adulthoods, as God lives in everything. Irrespective of what obstacles I might face as a university student, I can be certain that the psalms will be chanting on Sunday morning: a constant expression of the faith of so many with whom I am fortunate to surround myself, and a reminder of God’s unwavering companionship and love.

Arianna Krinos, daughter of Dimitri and Melissa Krinos, is a freshman at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA.

Small Group Bible Study

We have **Five Small Groups** that meet once a week. If you haven't joined a group yet, you may do so at any time!

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)

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

Group Leader: Charlie Hambos

Charlie.hambos@gmail.com, 813-843-8471

Meeting time: Monday evenings from 6:30– 8:00 p.m.

February Meeting Dates: February 1, 8, 15, 29

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

2604 Herndon Street, Valrico, FL 33596

Group Leader: Donna Hambos

dhambos@msn.com, 813-843-8412

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

February Meeting Dates: February 1, 8, 15, 29

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

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

Group Leader: Father Stavros

frstav@gmail.com, 813-394-1038

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.

February Meeting Dates: February 3, 10, 17, 24

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: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in the Library

Group Leader: Bessie Palios

bmp1126@yahoo.com, 813-523-0347.

Meeting time: Tuesday evenings from 7:00-8:30 p.m.

February Meeting Dates: February 2, 9, 16

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

Location: Meets at the home of Debbie Kavouklis,

Debbie lives in South Tampa, a mile or so from the church.

3315 Jean Circle, Tampa, FL 33629

Group Leader: Debbie Kavouklis

dkavouklis1@verizon.net, (813) 690-0155.

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

February Meeting Dates: February 2 (Will Attend Liturgy), 9, 16,

Donation Needed

Every set of altar cloths we have has several pieces—for the altar, sacraments tables, etc. Our Paschal set has only the altar cloth. We are interested in getting the matching pieces so that all the Paschal cloth appointments are matching. If you are interested in donating, the cost is \$1,200 for the whole set, or you can donate individual pieces for varying costs. If you are interested in donating, please see Fr. Stavros.

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 Fr. Stavros at Frstav@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration.

The Sunday Victory

A Super Bowl Message

by Fr. Christopher Makiej

When we think about a Sunday victory during this time of year, it is usually a thought about who is going to win the Super Bowl. But I want to declare that as we watch the Super Bowl and view the battle and then the exhilaration of victory of the winning team, let us become even more aware of the greater Sunday victory which takes place *every Sunday* in the Orthodox Christian Church!

As a priest, when Sunday Liturgy is over and our parishioners are enjoying fellowship during the family hour, when I walk back into the quiet church, reflecting upon what just took place in the Liturgy, with the fragrance of incense still hovering above, like the dust settling after a great battle, I always feel a tremendous sense of victory. I call it the Sunday victory.

I believe Sunday is a victory because on that day nothing else matters; we have put everything aside and we've made the decision to come to Church and be with Christ. On that day we defeat the worldly influences of society, and the devil who operates through them, which continuously seek to draw us away from our Church and our Faith, isolating us away from Christ and other believers. And make no mistake, we will surely see these influences in vivid high definition during many of the commercials of the Super Bowl: worldliness, secularism, mega-materialism – all the same things of which the great King Solomon spoke of, who had all the wealth the world had to offer, but summed up his life by saying: "Vanity, vanity, it's all vanity, emptiness, it's a bubble that bursts." (Book of Ecclesiastes).

Saint Paul talked about the feeling of triumph and victory when he wrote his second letter to the Corinthians (2:14-17), "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in victory in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place....." The commentary in the Orthodox Study Bible says the following about this passage: "The victory is Christ, the captives are the powers of darkness; His fragrance is the apostolic ministry. Christians are the winning forces who triumph through the hearing of the word of God and joining the great procession of thanksgiving leading to life."

I believe each Sunday to be a victory for us as individuals and families as we gather as the body of Christ, worship Jesus, hear the Gospel of truth, grow in faith, and receive the Body and Blood of Christ, our children are taught the faith, and we all grow closer to one another in faith and in

love, becoming the people God has called us to be in this world. And that, my brothers and sisters, is a great victory!

Sunday is a victory because on that day we have stood firm against the wiles of the enemy, and made the effort to attend Liturgy and put ourselves into an environment of faith which blesses, sanctifies and strengthens our lives! However, too many people today, including young parents are spiritually sleeping. Permissive and absentee parenting today has become epidemic. While many modern parents are chasing their own self-fulfillment, their children are being emotionally neglected and morally ravaged through the wireless tentacles of television, computer video games, and corrupt music and entertainment. The result, a desensitized, joyless, selfish, stoic young generation.

But Sunday can turn this defeat into a victory! So many people today are searching for something real because the vanity and emptiness of worldly secularism has left them spiritually bankrupt. What is truly *real* in our world is Jesus, His Church and the Liturgy of life in which bread and wine become the very real body and blood of Christ. However, the Sunday decision is ours. I truly believe there is a spiritual battle in every Orthodox Christian home every Sunday morning about whether to come to church or not. But it's our call. God will not force us. To use a football analogy, the coach is calling the play, as the Quarterback we hear it in our headphones: "Go to Church, go to Jesus, bring your children, receive Communion, commit your life to Christ." Friends, that's the winning call! But it's our decision.

Dear brothers and sisters, today, let us make it our commitment to be triumphant in Christ by participating in the Sunday victory *every Sunday*! We need Jesus. We *need* to be in Church and in His holy environment of Faith with other believers every Sunday. The mall, the lawn, the home decorating, the Sunday newspaper - everything else in our life should close down on Sunday morning and our total focus should be on Christ. Truly every *day* is a constant battle to do good and follow Christ, but every *Sunday at Church* is a great victory from which we can then tap into for strength during the week. Jesus rose from the dead on this day, and there is a power and holiness on this day unlike any other.

Enjoy the Superbowl, and let it remind us of the great victory that awaits us and our families every Sunday. Amen.

*Fr. Christopher Makiej is parish priest of
Saints Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Church
in Andover, MA.*

~ February 2016 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 Bible Study 6:30 p.m. EBS 6:30 p.m.	2 Presentation of Christ 3** MBS 7:30 a.m. Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. WBS will attend. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.		4 Greek School 6:00 p.m.	5**	6
7 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday Get Acquainted Sunday OCMC Fundraiser SOUPER Bowl DOP - Gift Baskets	8 Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. EBS 6:30 p.m.	9 WBS 9:30 a.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	10** MBS 7:30 a.m. St. Haralambos Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	11 Greek School 6:00 p.m.	12**	13 Palm Harbor Talent Show
14 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. OCMC Fundraiser SOUPER Bowl DOP - Gift Baskets	15 Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. EBS 6:30 p.m.	16 WBS 9:30 a.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	17** MBS 7:30 a.m.	18 Greek School 6:00 p.m.	19**	20 Community Outreach Marriage Retreat GOYA Lock-In
21 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA mtg.	22 (No Fasting this week) Philoptochos Board Meeting 7:00 p.m. Orthodox 101 6:30 p.m.	23 WBS 9:30 a.m. Ecumenical Service at Christ the King 6:30 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	24 MBS 7:30 a.m.	25 Greek School 6:00 p.m.	26	27 Young at Heart Mardi Gras Ball
28 Orthros 8:15 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m. Choir-Liturgy of Peace Anastasia Garcia Memorial	29 Bible Study 6:30 p.m. EBS 6:30 p.m.					**Fast Day WBS: Women's Bible Study EBS: East Bible Study MBS: Men's Bible Study SBS: South Bible Study

How Would You Like to Receive ***THE MESSENGER?***

We hear lots of positive feedback on *THE MESSENGER*. We also know that many people prefer to read *THE MESSENGER* on line at our website www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com, or may prefer to have it emailed to them, rather than receive it in the mail. Of course, many of you like receiving it in the mail and that's fine too!

Kindly tell us how you'd like to receive *THE MESSENGER* by filling out the form below and mailing it back to the church office. Also, please let us know what your email address is. And if you've unsubscribed to Constant Contact, you need to re-subscribe by contacting Charlie at Charlie.Hambos@gmail.com. We'd like to save a few bucks and a few trees. But most of all, we want to serve you.

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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.

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Debbie Nicklow 813-690-0671

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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.