

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

*"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*

Christ is Born! December 2016 Glorify Him!

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 And the Word Became Flesh

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory. John 1:14

The Gospel accounts of the Nativity are limited to a mere forty verses. In the Gospel of Matthew, there are 19 verses about the Nativity. The Gospel of Luke has 20. The Gospel of Mark makes no mention of the Nativity. It begins with the Baptism of Christ. The Gospel of John summarizes the Nativity in one verse: And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory. In Nativity scenes and Christmas pageants, we are so enamored with the figures of the Nativity story—the angels, the shepherds, the Magi—that sometimes we forget the main figure in the story—our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we call the feast of Christmas "the birth of Jesus," this too causes confusion. My wife and I have been blessed with one child, who was born in a finite moment in time. Before his birth, we had no son. He did not exist. This is NOT true for Jesus Christ. Saint John captures this best with the opening chapter of his Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the begin-

ning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. John 1:1-3

"Word of God" is another title given to the second person of the Trinity, who is also called Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, Only-Begotten Son of the Father, Messiah, Savior.

It is easier to understand the beginning of John's Gospel if we insert "Christ" for "Word," so please allow me to do this for better understanding: In the Beginning was CHRIST, and CHRIST was with God, and Christ was (and is) God. Christ was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Christ (He was co-Creator with God the Father and the Holy Spirit) and without Christ was not anything made that was made.

Continuing on with John's Gospel, And Christ took on flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His Glory.

The Feast of the Nativity is the day that the Son of God came to live among us. He took on flesh in the way that we do. He came into this world as a new-born baby. He didn't just drop in as an adult. And from the time of His Incarnation, He fol-

Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis, Priest 2418 W. Swann Avenue, Tampa, FL 33609 Office: (813) 876-8830
Email: officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com Website: <http://www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com>



lowed all the steps that we take. He grew up as we do. He learned to walk, He went to school, He had friends, He had struggles. The difference between us and Him is that throughout His life, He walked in tandem with God. He never ventured away from God, as we do when we sin. He came to show us the path to salvation. He came to show us how to live in God, with God, and for God. And He came to balance the equation, to die for our sins, to open a path back to Paradise for us.

So the Feast of the Nativity is not the BIRTH of Christ, but the Incarnation of the Son of God in the flesh. It is the day the Creator came to live with His Creation. It is the day that the uncontained God was “contained” in a human body.

The scriptural account of the Nativity is captured in the Icon of the Nativity. There are three distinct things that this icon depicts:

First, it captures the event of the Nativity. Mary gives birth to her first-born Son in a cave, because there is no room at any inn. Joseph is near-by, taking it all in.

Second, the icon captures that ALL of creation worshipped at the Nativity. All of Creation was present and invited to share in the miracle. The poor—the shepherds. The powerful—the Magi. The angels in heaven. The celestial bodies—the Star. The animals. The earth itself—the cave. All of Creation showed up to worship the Creator in its midst.

And third, the icon serves as an invitation to us to come and worship also. The manger is shown as a tomb, the swaddling bands are burial cloths. This IS the Creator, come to save us through the cross and the tomb. His purpose is clear. The cave is heaven—surrounded by jagged rocks, the cave itself is a setting of peace amidst a place of danger. We are called to follow, the way the Magi followed the star. We are all called—the call to the Shepherds is the call to everyone. Whatever your stage in life, whatever your status in society, all are welcomed. The heavens declare the glory of God. The angels sing God’s praises and invite us to do the same.

When I study the icon of the Nativity, the figure of Joseph is who I relate to most of all. He sits at a distance. His thoughts are confused. He has been the loyal protector. He has put his reputation on the line. He has followed and trusted. And yet he is still trying to make sense of the whole thing. And that’s okay. He’s still there. He is still trying. It is a lesson to us to do the same.

Every person in the icon has followed a tough calling—Mary has lost parents, given many years of her life in the temple, and has given birth to a Son whom she will see killed in a heinous manner.

Joseph has risked reputation to protect his betrothed who is with child that is not his. Joseph won’t live long enough to see Jesus grow into a man.

The shepherds were the first to see the Christ, but still remained scorned outsiders. They weren’t even important enough to be counted in the census, yet God counted them the first to be called to the manger.

The Magi left kingdoms and riches and followed the star. It was a two year journey in, and presumably a two year journey home. What possibly could have been left of their lives after a four year absence?

In their supreme sacrifice, in their trust, in their faith, all of these people received the greatest blessing. They beheld HIS GLORY. They beheld with their own eyes, the Son of God, made flesh, come to dwell among us. They were all profoundly changed for the experience. And all are profoundly honored both by God, and now by us.

Indeed, John captures the message of the feast in the most succinct way. We are called to behold His glory. This is the message of the Nativity. It is also the goal of every human life.

In the month of December, we will hear hours of upon hours of Christmas carols. Some will give glory to the feast of the Nativity. “O Come All Ye Faithful” will invite us to “Come let us adore Him.” “Joy to the World” will ask us to “Let earth receive her King!” And “O Little Town of Bethlehem” will remind us that “God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.” Many of the tunes we hear have nothing to do with the Nativity, they are “holiday songs” at best. “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” “Deck the halls,” and “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” may have catchy tunes, but they lack any depth and meaning.

One Christmas Carol you probably won’t here is called “Here with Us” by Joy Williams. I had never heard this song until someone suggested it to me last year. I want to encourage you to take five minutes of your life, and YouTube this song, and watch the video that accompanies it, showing important scenes



from the life of Christ. It's words are scriptural, and this lady's singing of this song is reverent, joyful and thought-provoking all at the same time. Here are the lyrics:

It's still a mystery to me, that the hands of God could be so small,
How tiny fingers reaching in the night, were the very hands that measured the sky.

*Hallelujah, hallelujah,
Heaven's love reaching down to save the world.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, Son of God, servant King,
Here with us, You're here with us.*

*It's still a mystery to me,
How His infant eyes have seen the dawn of time,
How His ears have heard an angel's symphony,
But still Mary to rock her Savior to sleep.*

*Hallelujah, hallelujah,
Heaven's love reaching down to save the world.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, Son of God, servant King,
Here with us, You're here with us.*

*Jesus, the Christ, born in Bethlehem,
A baby born to save, to save the souls of man.*

*Hallelujah, hallelujah,
Heaven's love reaching down to save the world.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, Son of God, servant King,
Here with us, You're here with us.*

Again, please take five minutes and find the YouTube video of this song. The words and the accompanying images will make you think, cry, and rejoice.

One other reminder about Christmas and that is, please come to church this Christmas. There will be services on December 23, 24 and 25. Keep Christ in Christmas. We never forget to acknowledge the birthdays of our families and friends. We must not forget to acknowledge the Nativity of our Savior.

*Be not afraid.
I bring you good news.
Of a great joy.
Which will come to all the world.
For to you is born this day.
A Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

*Let us go, today.
Rejoicing exceedingly with great joy.
Opening our treasures.*

*For the Word has become flesh.
Let us behold His Glory.*

You righteous, be glad in heart; and the heavens, be exultant. Leap for joy, O mountains, at the birth of the Messiah. Resembling the Cherubim, the Virgin Maiden is seated and holds in her embraces God the Logos incarnate. The shepherds glorify the newborn Babe; Magi bring the Master their precious gifts. Angels are singing hymns of praise and say, "O Lord incomprehensible, glory to You."

The Father was well pleased; the Logos became flesh; and the Virgin gave birth to God who became man. A Star reveals Him; Magi bow in worship; Shepherds marvel, and creation rejoices. (The Praises, Orthros of the Nativity, Trans. Fr. Seraphim Dedes)

A Few More Words

Successful Festival

We still haven't counted all the final money results of the Festival for this year, as of press time. There is still money coming in, and still some bills to be paid. This festival will probably end up as one of our top festivals from a financial standpoint. So that is great news! Even better though, is the spirit of fellowship that permeated the festival. As I walked around the Kourmolis Center the night before the festival, and saw people scurrying around setting up and making last minute preparations, I didn't see stress, I saw joy. I didn't hear yelling, I heard laughing. I didn't feel nervousness, I felt confidence. And this is a credit to the leadership of the festival and the maturity of our community. I would like to thank Alkis Crassas, Mike Xenick, Sandra Pappas, Gary Ward, Florin Patrasciou, Theo Panopoulos, Theo Camene and Dan Bavaro for being our FC (Festival Committee) Tampa. I would like to thank all those who worked with them in making this weekend not only successful but fun. Alkis coined OPA as an acronym for "Orthodox Powered Army" and also calls it "Orthodox Positive Attitude." Indeed we were an Orthodox Powered Army with an Orthodox Positive Attitude. And I am so thankful for EVERYONE's effort in making this event awesome!

Services of Christmas - Later on in The Messenger, you'll read about the services of Christmas that will be offered in our church. There are three services that I want to bring to your attention.

The Candle - Light Service in Preparation for Christmas that will be held on Monday, December 19. This season is not only filled with joy but also with stress. And for some, especially those who have lost loved ones, it can be filled with sadness. This beautiful service, which we celebrated for the past two years, offers a time for quiet reflection. At the end we have a beautiful prayer circle on the solea. If you want a moving experience during this holiday season, I highly recommend this service. The Royal Hours of Christmas, which will be offered on Friday, December 23, is a service for those who love scripture. There are 24 scripture readings in this service, between Psalms, Prophecies, Epistles and Gospels. This service will be held with no lights on in the church, just the natural morning light of the day. It also is very reflective. There is not a lot of "action" in this service, so it reminds me of the shepherds in the Bethlehem countryside, quietly passing the night, and then experiencing the Glory of God. The Christmas Liturgy on Christmas Eve is always a highlight. The Nativity occurred at night, so being in the church, offering the Liturgy with windows darkened by the night sky seems appropriate. The choir will sing the Hallelujah Chorus at the conclusion of the Liturgy as well as other Christmas carols. I'm always surprised how many people DON'T come to church for a Christmas service. If worshipping isn't part of your Christmas celebration, please make it a point to come this year. As that old saying goes, Christ is the reason for the season. And worshipping at the manger needs to be the centerpiece of our Christmas feast.

One more choir note - The choir will sing the Liturgy of Peace on Sunday, December 18. Because it is a little bit of a longer arrangement of the Liturgy, they will begin the Doxology at 9:30 a.m. with the Liturgy following at 9:45 a.m.

Strategic Plan - On our Parish Assembly Sunday, October 30, I stated, in my report on the “state of our parish” that one of our goals is to adopt a strategic plan in 2017 and begin working at achieving the goals it will set forth. A strategic plan is necessary, because as we read in Proverbs 29:18, “Without a vision, the people perish.” The first step in the strategic planning process is an examination of “the WHY.” Why does our church exist? We have sent out a survey to all parishioners regarding our mission/vision statements and are asking for your input by Tuesday, December 6. We will then review and revise our mission/vision statements based on your feedback and the work of the committee. The Strategic Planning Committee is meeting on a monthly basis and will be communicating with the community via my weekly email with information that we are trying to gather as well as information that we are seeking to share. This is an exciting endeavor and will hopefully propel our parish forward for the next ten years and beyond.

Stewardship - Our Annual Stewardship Sunday is December 4. This is the day that we hope to collect all the stewardship forms for this coming year. You should have received your packet and form in the mail. If you did not receive a stewardship packet and form, please call the church office and we will send you one. We’d like to have all the forms for 2017 turned in on December 4. Please consider the following when making your stewardship offering:

1. Stewardship is the main income source for our parish. Ideally it would fund the entire operating budget, so that we wouldn’t have to rely so heavily on the festival. Ideally, we’d take a higher percentage of festival proceeds and offer them to charity, and use additional revenue to pay down our debt.
2. We need to focus on “BE-ing” the church versus just “DO-ing” the church. Stewardship campaigns are part of being the church. Using the revenue from stewardship campaigns to fund ministries and outreach is being the church. When it takes months to get the stewardship campaign accomplished, that takes away from our time and opportunity to be the church.
3. Stewardship is not giving, it’s giving back. We have really nothing to give that we haven’t received from God. So, we are not really giving, so much as we are giving back.
4. Giving in return for something is really not giving at all, it is exchanging. So, when you give stewardship, don’t ask for or expect recognition because that makes the gift an exchange.
5. Stewardship is a work of the heart—This is why we no

longer are putting up a thermometer with our stewardship progress. This is why we are no longer stating a stewardship goal. Stewardship is a matter for each person to decide on their own, how much they want to give back in exchange for what God has given to them.

6. The biblical ideal is the tithe—Yes, the Bible gives us a lot of clues on many aspects of life. What is the percentage of our income that we should be offering as stewardship? The Bible says we are to tithe, or give ten percent, of our money to charity. That means that whatever you give to the church and to other charities should add up to ten percent of your yearly income. Ideally, the church community should give/tithe ten percent to the greater community. Currently, we estimate that the average pledge represents 2.5% of the average household income. And our current contributions to charitable causes represents about 2% of our budget. Imagine the possibilities if everyone gave 10% to the church and if the church was able to give 10% to charity. Stewardship would go up from \$450K to almost \$2M. That would be enough to give \$200K to charity—imagine what kind of church we could be. Imagine the kind of difference we could make.
7. First things first—how about we each try for 3% of our income to stewardship. Slow incremental growth. And over the next 5-10 years work towards that ideal. It’s possible.
8. Stewardship is not only a work of the heart but an act of faith. It takes faith to give and to know that there will still be enough left over.

Gratitude, love and faith—these are the ingredients of stewardship. These are the ingredients of a strong parish. So, what kind of church community do you want to have—one that focuses on DO-ing the church, or BE-ing the church? And which kind of community do you think our Lord wants for us in Tampa?

And with that, I will conclude my monthly message. Thank you for the time you take in reading the things I write. Thank you for the many messages of support and encouragement I receive. Thank you for filling the church each Sunday. Thank you for your prayers. Thank you for your stewardship of God’s Church in Tampa. This will be Christmas number 13 for us in Tampa. Hard to believe. Our son will turn 10 in December—double digits. Time flies doesn’t it?! We are so thankful to call St. John our spiritual home, and to call Tampa our home. May God bless each one of you and your families as we mark another holiday season together. Merry Christmas and best wishes for a Happy and Healthy New Year 2017!

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

With love in the Incarnate Lord,
+Fr. Stavros



The Prayer Team continues and now at 22 months it is still continually growing. The Prayer Team is a daily reflection that Fr. Stavros sends out to any one who wishes to receive it. It comes out each morning at 12:30 a.m. via Constant Contact. From Monday - Friday each week, Father writes on various topics. On Saturday-Sunday, he writes reflections on the Divine Liturgy. If you are interested in joining the prayer team, send a one-line email to either Fr. Stavros or Charlie and they will add you to the daily email list.

Liturgical Schedule for December

Saturday, December 3

Divine Liturgy for our Advent Retreat

Orthros 8:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 4

St. Barbara

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. John

Ushers: John Alexander, John Christ, George Trimikliniotis

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Donna Hambos Maria Karounos; Ambassador: Elaine Halkias;

Caller: Martha Kapetan; Get Acquainted: Jeannie Nenos, Skip Higdon

Coffee Hour: Philoptochos Shoe Luncheon

Tuesday, December 6

St. Nicholas

Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, December 9

St. Anna

Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 11

11th Sunday of Luke - St John the Baptist Christmas Program

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and those Not in Christmas Program

Ushers: Brett Mourer, John Tsibris, Amin Hanhan

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Edie Kavouklis, Jenny Paloumpis; Ambassador: Debbie Kavouklis

Caller: Sandra Pappas

Coffee Hour: The AHEPA Family

Monday, December 12

St. Spyridon

Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, December 15

St. Eleftherios

Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 18

Sunday Before Nativity (Choir will sing "The Liturgy of Peace")

Orthros 8:15 a.m. Doxology 9:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas

Welcome Committee: Greeters: Marenca Patrascoiu, Maria Xenick; Ambassador: Donna Trakas;

Caller: Megan Rindone

Coffee Hour: GOYA

Monday, December 19

Service of Preparation for the Nativity 6:00 p.m.

Friday, December 23

Royal Hours of the Nativity 9:30 a.m.

Saturday, December 24

Christmas Eve

Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Eve of the Nativity

Great Vespers 5:30 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:30 p.m.

The Choir will sing Christmas Carols at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy

Ushers: Mike Trimis, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis

Sunday, December 25

Christmas Day

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve at all of these services.



Friday, December 30

St. Anysia

Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, January 1 **St. Basil - Happy New Year!**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve
Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, Mike Kavouklis, Tammy Christou
Welcome Committee: TBD
Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

Wednesday, January 4 **Royal Hours of Epiphany** 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, January 5 **Eve of Epiphany**
Vespers Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 9:00 a.m.
Blessing of the Waters 10:15 a.m.

Friday, January 6 **Divine Liturgy at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs** 9:30 a.m.
Great Vespers for St. John the Baptist at St. John the Baptist 6:30 p.m.
Clergy from the Tampa Bay area will participate in this service.
The Philoptochos Society of our parish will host a reception following Vespers.

Saturday, January 7 **Feast of St. John the Baptist**
Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.
Clergy from the Tampa Bay area will participate in this service.
The Parish Council will host a luncheon following the Divine Liturgy.

Liturgical Notes for December

Saturday, December 3 - Divine Liturgy for our Advent Retreat

We are going to spend a day in retreat on Saturday, December 3. What better way could there be to start a retreat than celebrating the Divine Liturgy.

Sunday, December 4 - Feast of St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus

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.



Stewardship Sunday is December 4

Please bring your completed Stewardship form for 2017 to church on Sunday, December 4. If you are not able to attend church that Sunday, please mail your form in to the church office prior to December 4. Thank you.

Tuesday, December 6 - Feast of St. Nicholas

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.

Friday, December 9 - Feast of St. Anna

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).

Monday, December 12 - Feast of St. Spyridon

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.

Thursday, December 15 - Feast of St. Eleftherios

St. Eleftherios was a priest-martyr in the 2nd century of the church.

SERVICES OF CHRISTMAS

Monday, December 19 - Candle-Light Prayer Service in Preparation for Christmas

Two years ago we added something new to our celebration of Christmas at St. John the Baptist with the candle-light prayer service in preparation for Christmas. 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. At the end of the service, a Trisagion service will be chanted for all those who have passed away this year.

Friday, December 23 - Royal Hours of Christmas

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 Holy 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 Friday, 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.

Services for Christmas - December 24-25

On December 24, in the morning, we will celebrate the Orthros and Liturgy of the forefeast of Christmas. For those who do not drive at night or those with small children, it is hoped that you will take advantage of this morning Divine Liturgy, which will be celebrated with Orthros at 9:00 a.m. and Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. In the evening of the 24th, we will celebrate Great Vespers, followed by Divine Liturgy. The Vespers of Christmas includes Old Testament Prophecy Readings. Vespers will begin at 5:30 p.m. followed by the Divine Liturgy at 6:30 p.m. Divine Liturgy will also be celebrated on Christmas Day, since it falls on Sunday. Orthros will begin at 8:45 a.m. with the Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. With three opportunities to receive Holy Communion, it is hoped that all parishioners will attend at least one of these three services.

Wednesday, December 30 - Feast of St. Anysia

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.

Panagia Chapel at Diakonia Retreat Center

Hopefully we are all familiar with the Diakonia Retreat Center (DRC) that the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Atlanta has owned and operated since 2004. Many of our children have gone there for summer camp. Some of our adults have served as counselors. Some of our choir members and Philoptochos members and others have been there for retreats. The DRC is located near Salem, SC, and is a year round retreat center used by many ministries of our Metropolis. That's right, it's not just for summer camp. The center of any Orthodox institution is always a church. For the center of Orthodox Christians is receiving our Lord Jesus Christ through the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion. After many years, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios has embarked on the building of a church at the DRC. Dedicated to the Panagia (Virgin Mary), it will be used for worship at the DRC for generations to come. Because the DRC is something which belongs to the Metropolis, and we are part of the Metropolis, by extension, it belongs to all of us. So, His Eminence is presenting us with an opportunity for all of us to participate in furnishing the Panagia Chapel. He is asking all of us to contribute something for this church. There are many furnishings, related to the Holy Altar, that are needed. The Holy Altar Table itself is needed. The Bishop's Throne, the Synthronon, the Icon screen, the side altars of preparation, icon stands, Chanter's stand - all of these are needed. Wooden chairs called “Stasidia” will also be used around the interior perimeter of the church - the design calls for 75 of them. The stasidia will cost about \$850 each and other items, up to \$80K for the altar table and different costs in between. If you would like to donate any of these items, please see Father Stavros. If your ministry would like to consider donating something, please see Fr. Stavros.



The Nativity Through the Eyes of a Saint

By Charlie Hambos

St. Cyril of Alexandria lived from 376-444 A.D. and was a helped the church fight heresies concerning the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ. He wrote many things and expounded on many scriptures to prove the humanity and the divinity of Christ. Here we will explore St. Cyril's exegesis of the Nativity of Christ according to the Gospel of Luke 2:8-18. (For the actual sermon, it can be found online.) An exegesis is a study of the Scripture or other texts from a greater framework. Exegesis comes from the Greek word, ἐξήγησις from ἐξηγεῖσθαι, which means, "to lead out." So through this process scholars, saints and Christians develop a better understanding of scripture. We will see how St. Cyril promotes the significance of God becoming human flesh to save us. He uses both the prophets, mainly Isaiah, Psalms and some Pauline references in the sermon to prove his point.

Immediately, St. Cyril begins with a Psalm, "Come let us praise the Lord, and sing unto God our Savior." This clearly indicates where he will take his sermon and that is recognizing Christ as God in human flesh to save the world. Shortly after that he quotes Psalms again, "All ye people clap your hands;" and again adds thereto, "Sing with understanding, God hath set a king over all the heathen." Here we see more praises for the incarnate Christ. This is also an example, although not so clear, of a "What does it remind you of?" type of question. The next issue St. Cyril sheds a light on is prophets who had previously proclaimed the birth of Christ in the flesh and the angels singing praises. He mentions that the shepherds were the first to know of Christ's birth from the angels. Then he goes on to answer the question of, what is the significance of the shepherds being notified of Christ's birth by the angels? He answers by saying, "for Christ reveals Himself to the spiritual shepherds, that they may preach Him to the rest, just as the shepherds also then were taught His mystery by the holy angels, and ran to bear the glad tidings to their fellows. Angels therefore are the first to preach Him, and declare His glory as God born in the flesh in a wonderful manner of a woman."

He continues to dive into the passage from Luke when he looks into the significance of the swaddling clothes by asking a question that could possibly come from those who do not believe in the incarnation of Christ. "That He who was now born was still a child, and wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and laid in a manger: how then did the powers above praise Him as God?" First he acknowledges the mystery of the incarnation and says, "God was in visible form like unto us: the Lord of all in the likeness of a slave, albeit the glory of lordship is inseparable from Him." Then he follows that by using two different areas of scripture to answer the question. First, to further prove the magnificence of the event and to prove the incarnation. He continually likens Christ becoming flesh like that of a slave. He answers by using an Old Testament reference from Genesis. After the fall of man, the punishment for the woman was pain in childbirth. Thus he said, "But because a woman has brought forth in the flesh the Immanuel, Who is Life, the power of the curse is loosed and along with death have ceased also the pains that earthly mothers had to endure in bringing forth." Secondly, he uses a text from Paul which says, "For as to the powerlessness of the law, wherein it was weak through the flesh, God

having sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and because of sin, has condemned the sin in His flesh, that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." However, with this second scriptural text, he begins to ask questions of that text. "What then is the meaning of his saying that the Son was sent 'in the likeness of sinful flesh?'" Here he answers by saying that sin is hiding in our flesh but because the Word of God became flesh it was in the likeness of our flesh but free from sin which was natural in our bodies. Then through these two answers, one being the reconciliation of pain in childbirth and the other being that the grace of God through the incarnation of Christ was so that we may fulfill the law and reunite creation with the Creator, St. Cyril answers the overall question. He says that seeing the baby Jesus wrapped up in swaddling clothes, does not mean we must only recognize his earthly form but instead focus on his Godlike glory by "elevating thy mind aloft: ascend to heaven: so wilt thou behold Him in the highest exaltation, possessed of transcendent glory; thou wilt see Him 'set upon a throne high and lifted up;' thou wilt hear the Seraphim extolling Him in hymns, and saying that heaven and earth are full of His glory."

Following this, he continues to speak of the prophets who were born before the Christ but did not get the praises of the heaven because they were not God incarnate. He makes a typological reference here when he quotes Moses who says, "Rejoice, ye heavens, with Him, and let all the sons of God worship Him." He also goes on further to ask another question which actually comes from the Psalms, "Who in the clouds shall be compared unto the Lord, and who shall be likened unto the Lord among the sons of God?" He answers this by saying that no one can be compared or likened unto the Lord. "For the appellation of sonship is bestowed by Him as of grace upon us who lie under the yoke, and are by nature slaves: but Christ is the true Son, that is, He is the Son of God the Father by nature, even when He had become flesh."

Another interesting technique that St. Cyril uses is when he took a quote from Isaiah and then asks an exegetical question of that text in relation to the original text. The quote from Isaiah is as follows, "Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel; butter and honey shall He eat: before He knoweth or chooseth the evil, He shall prefer the good: for before the Child distinguisheth good or evil, He is not obedient to evil in that He chooseth the good." Then he goes on to ask, how the baby could distinguish between good or evil? Then he answers it by saying because he was God in the flesh he only knew the good and was without sin, for that which is good by nature, firmly and unchangeably, belongs specially to It, and It only; 'for there is none good, but one God,' as the Saviour has Himself said." Again, he uses the birth narrative to move the agenda of Christ's natures forward.

Let us close and remember what St. Cyril's sermon says, "For it pleased God the Father to form into one new whole all things in Him, and to bind together things below and things above, and to make those in heaven and those on earth into one flock."

Community News

Parish Registry

Baptism - Ella (Elizabeth) Celin, daughter of Edjir and Nadin Celin, was baptized on Sunday, October 23. Godparents was Niveen Gomez. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism - Alyssa Maria (Alexandra) Sapountsis was baptized on Saturday, October 29. Stavros and Penelope Cruz and Sara Leonard were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Wedding - Dustin Merrell and Cory Dowell were married on Saturday, October 22. George Abramis was the sponsor. Congratulations!

Wedding - Panagiotis (Pete) Kargakos and Joan Williams were married on Saturday, October 29. Elias Dimopoulos was the sponsor. Congratulations!

Funeral - Penelope Karoutsos (mother of Koula Plakas) passed away on October 19. The funeral service was held on October 24. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to the family of Fr. Michael Soter, who passed away on Thursday, November 10. Fr. Michael on many occasions filled in for Fr. Stavros over the past twelve years and was a friend of our community. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Eleni Camene on the passing of her father, Panayiotis, on Saturday, November 12. May his memory be eternal!

Parish Council Elections are on Sunday, December 11 following the Divine Liturgy.



Annual Advent Retreat to be held on Saturday, December 3

Do you feel like your spiritual life suffers during the hectic holiday season? Do you feel like you aren't getting enough out of prayer and worship? Come join us in reviving your spirit as a community just in time for Christmas. Our annual Advent Retreat will be held on Saturday, December 3, from 9:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m. at St. John the Baptist. The Theme is **"Therefore encourage one another and Build Each Other Up."** Fr. Stavros will lead the retreat. Cost is \$15.

Get Acquainted Sunday, December 4



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.



Community Outreach - Saturday, December 17

St. John the Baptist's Community Outreach will be serving breakfast to the Homeless at the First Presbyterian Church in Downtown Tampa from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. 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!



Save the Date

St. John the Baptist will be volunteering at the Metropolitan Ministries Holiday Tent on Sunday, December 18 at 1:30 p.m. Keep a look out for the Community Outreach Constant Contact Email for the Sign up Genius!

As we have done in past years, all college students and anyone 18-25 is invited to our college student Christmas event. It will be held on Monday, December 19. IT will begin with the Service of Preparation for Christmas at 6:00 p.m., followed by dinner and discussion from 7:00 - 9:30 p.m. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros by December 15 if you are able to participate.



Young Adult Ministry

Our young adult ministry group has a monthly dinner/discussion night at the church. For December, it will be Sunday, December 4, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. Please bring \$10 to cover the cost of dinner. Other events will be scheduled. Please check the weekly bulletin or church website for more details.



Join us for
St. John the Baptist
Annual
Sunday School
Christmas Party

Saturday, December 10th

11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Kourmolis Hall

Christmas program rehearsal at 2:00-3:00 in the church

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

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

“Hope Children’s Home”

(Christmas wish list at Walmart—First name: Hope / Last name: Children)





Meeting on Sunday, December 11

The November GOYA meeting will be Sunday, December 11, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmoulis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

GOYA Lock-In is on Saturday, December 17 at 5:00 p.m.

Thank You GOYA!

On Saturday, November 5, our GOYAns spent the day at church painting and getting things ready for the festival. They painted all the concrete parking bumpers and handicap spaces and other work in preparation for the festival. **Nice job GOYAns**



St. John the Baptist 2016 Community Christmas Card

It's that time again for our annual Saint John The Baptist Community Christmas Card, sponsored by our GOYA. The suggested contribution of \$25.00 will go to assist our GOYA Ministry. This is a lovely way to join in the spirit of love and good will during the Christmas season. GOYA will have a table set up in the community center for you to come sign up and make your donations. Please make checks out to St. John's GOYA. Our GOYA family is truly thankful to you all for the support you continue to show us through the years. Thank you and God Bless!

Sign-ups for the Christmas Card will be after church Sunday, November 27, December 4, and December 11 in the Kourmoulis Center. If you have any questions, please contact Maria Koutroumanis at 813- 245-3854 or Kara Katzaras at 772-643-5634.



Tampa Greek Festival





~ Stewardship Update ~

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.
Hebrews 13:16

Please give back your Time, Talents and Treasure in 2017!

As the year comes to a close we thank our 2016 loyal Stewards for your pledges, essential to keep 'Our House of God' operational ~ Your Treasure, Time and Talents keep our community vibrant & thriving!

This year we called upon our Community to 'Do What Pleases God' and we continue that call in 2017 as we strive to be a church that gives with joy to receive God's blessings.

We live in a physical world that places great value on material possessions. Material possessions and wealth may bring power and status. But wealth and possessions can be fleeting. Circumstances change. It is the voice of Jesus Christ and the truth of His Gospel that remain constant. In our spiritual relationship with our Creator, we realize that we are called to be good stewards of His Creations. And as stewards of His Gospel, we are called to use our material, worldly possessions to meet the needs of others.

We continue to grow as a community with over 43 new families. Our Annual Greek Festival brought many new faces through the doors, including many Orthodox that seldom come to church. We welcome you back to share in our beautiful liturgy, faith and community. And we ask our Stewards to reach out to friends you haven't seen in some time. That little bit of encouragement, as we learned from Fr. Stavros' Encouragement Project makes a difference!

May we continue as a community to connect, love one another, be kind to one another and keep our eyes turned to God and the reasons we give of our Time, Talents and Treasure!

~ Stewardship Housekeeping ~

Please complete your 2016 pledge by year-end as we prepare for a new Stewardship Year! Tax Letters will be compiled in January 2017 to reflect donations received in the 2016 calendar year. We can address any questions you may have regarding your remaining commitment.

We now accept online credit card payments through PayPal. This option is provided for convenience. Consistent donations are a tremendous help for our church operations and easy to set up with Internet Banking or Electronic Funds Transfer. Please visit our website for more detail.

YES - Stewardship Pledge Forms really are required and can now be completed on-line. They not only provide family information on areas of interest and talents but also help us determine how much income the Church can expect to support our operations. Pledge forms and current contributions are required to meet the Uniform Parish Regulations (UPR) of our Archdiocese as well as our local by-laws, which enable participation at Parish General Assembly Meetings, Nominations and Voting for Parish Council in December.

Please feel free to share your thoughts to the office email - officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com or speak directly with Fr. Stavros, Sandra Pappas or Pete Trakas -Stewardship Co-Chairs. We are here for YOU!

Stewardship	2016
Pledged	\$430,232
Collected To Date	\$375,103
Average Pledge	\$1,243
Median Pledge**	\$600
# of Parishioners (Families) Pledged with a completed form	349
# of Parishioners (Families) that have given a Stewardship Check without a form+	42

*Dollars received - Based on YTD as of 11/14/16

** Pledge amount in the Middle – ½ of Stewards pledge higher & ½ lower

+Per our Bylaws, to be considered a Voting Member of St. John you must have a completed Pledge Form which can easily be completed on-line.

Make Sure Your Will Keeps Pace with Your Life

Join the St. John Legacy Society

Your will reflects the time when it was created. Many people have good intentions to update their wills but often fail to do so. You can change your will at a later date by adding a codicil (an amendment) to reflect any life changes.

Here are some circumstances that make it critical to update your will:

- You want to name a different personal representative, trustee or guardian.
- Your estate has increased or decreased significantly.
- You've moved to another state.
- Your situation or a beneficiary's situation has changed because of marriage, divorce, birth, adoption or death.
- Tax laws have changed.
- You want to include a charitable gift in your will. If you wish to remember St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, consider leaving the church a percentage of your estate so your gift will remain proportional to your estate size, no matter how it fluctuates over the years.

If you have additional questions on updating your will or are considering adding a gift to St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, please contact Fr. Stavros at 813-876-8830 ext. 103, (email frstav@gmail.com) or call Debbie Gavalas at 813-505-8901 for more information.

How to Update Your Will

Step 1: Obtain a copy of your current will.

Step 2: Mark the necessary changes.

Step 3: Meet with your estate planning attorney.

Step 4: Discuss changes with us if they will affect St. John Greek Orthodox Church.

If you include St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in your plans, please use our legal name as stated above and Federal Tax ID # 59-1170684. Additionally, please contact Fr. Stavros at 813-876-8830 ext. 103 or frstav@gmail.com or call Debbie Gavalas at 813-505-8901 so that we may properly thank you and include you as a founding member of the St. John Legacy Society.

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
Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
William & Kane Chapman - Palmetto, FL
Lillian Thomas - Highland, IN
Kathleen Mendez - Ponte Vedra, FL
Theodora Poletis - Baltimore, MD

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 by being 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.

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ **Email:** _____

I wish to become a Friend of St. John the Baptist. 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 W. Swann Ave Tampa, FL 33609

JOY/HOPE Harvest Festival

Our JOY/HOPE Fall Harvest Festival was held on Sunday, October 23. There were about 100 kids and parents in attendance. Special thanks to Amy Kafantaris and Debbie Nicklow for organizing the event, to all the parents that helped with the crafts and clean up, to the GOYA kids who helped out the younger kids, to Charlie for being the DJ, Maria Fentress who did the face painting and to Olya Clifton for taking awesome pictures.



Small Group Bible Study

Small group Bible Studies are now underway. These groups gather once a week to study the Bible, discuss how to apply scripture to daily life, pray together and become small spiritual support groups. These sessions are discussion based, not lecture based. This is an opportunity to work side by side with each other to learn more about the faith. As group members get to know one another on a deeper level and as groups become more committed, you'll see that the groups will not only become a resource to help learn and live the faith, but through these groups, we'll eventually help *"carry one another's burdens and so build up the body of Christ,"* as we are told to do in Galatians 6:2. And this is what the church is all about—helping one another through this life, on the journey to everlasting life.

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)

We will be studying Hebrews

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.

December Meeting Dates: December 5 and 12

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)

December Meeting Dates: December 6 (Liturgy at the church) and December 13

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 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.

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.

December Meeting Dates: December 7 and 14

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: At the 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.

December Meeting Dates: December 6 and 13

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

December Meeting Dates: December 6 and 13



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.

You Tube





Philoptochos Christmas *Brunch & Meeting*

Sunday, December 11 at 12:30 p.m.
Palma Ceia Golf & Country Club
1601 S MacDill Ave, Tampa, FL 33629

The cost of the buffet brunch is \$27. Please RSVP to Lisa Alsina By Tuesday, December 6 with a check payable to Philoptochos. You can mail the check to 812 S. Poinsettia Dr. Tampa, FL or to the church address- attention Philoptochos. We must have your cash or check to reserve your place. We hope you can join us for this festive event. **New Members Welcome!**

Philoptochos Spanakopita Sale

Philoptochos will be selling Spanakopita and Tyropita after church on
Sundays December 4, 11 & 18

48 piece appetizer tray Spanakopita/ Tyropita \$30
2lb spanakopita pan \$20

We will also be selling our 60th Anniversary Ornament.
\$8 each or two for \$14



Philoptochos Shoe Drive Luncheon

The Philoptochos Annual Shoe Drive Luncheon for Chester Elementary School will be held on December 4, 2016 in the Church Hall following the Divine Liturgy. Many of the children at this school are needy and cannot afford gym shoes which eliminate them from participating in the class. All proceeds go to buy shoes for the children. We will accept brand new, never worn, gym shoes if you happen to have some you would like to donate for the children but prefer monetary donation so that we can keep the shoes similar for all the children.

We look forward to seeing you on Sunday, December 4 and thank you in advance for your donation.



The Russian Boy and the Babe in the Manger

(Author Anonymous)

In 1994, two Americans answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics (based on Biblical principles) in the public schools. They were invited to teach at prisons, businesses, the fire and police departments, and a large orphanage. It was nearing the holiday season for the orphans to hear for the first time the traditional Christmas story. They told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem and finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where Jesus was born and placed in the manger.

Throughout the story, the children, according to one of the Americans, “sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word.” As a follow-up activity to the story, each child was given three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was also given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins which the children tore into strips the paper and carefully laid them in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel from a thrown away nightgown were used for the baby’s blanket. From pieces of tan felt a doll-like baby was made. As they made their way around the room to observe the children this is what one of the Americans noted, “All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat. He looked to be about 6 years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy’s manger, I was startled to see, not one but two babies in the manger. Quickly, I called for the translator to ask the lad why there were two babies in the manger.” The observer goes on to note that Misha very accurately recalled the story that had been told until he came to the part where Mary put Jesus in the manger. “Then Misha,” it is noted, “started to ad-lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said, ‘And when Maria laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no momma and I have no papa, so I don’t have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I couldn’t because I didn’t have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift. So I asked Jesus, ‘If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?’ And Jesus told me, ‘If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me. So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and he told me I could stay with him – for always.’”

As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon or abuse him, someone who would stay with him – FOR ALWAYS!”

Archangel Michael Winners from 2016 recognized!

We congratulate again Carole Fotopoulos and Sandra Pappas who were awarded the Archangel Michael Award from our parish in 2016. They were both recognized at a special ceremony at the Annunciation Cathedral in Atlanta on November 12-13. We thank you for your stellar stewardship to our community!



The Gifts of the Magi: The Spirit of Stewardship

Fr. Luke A. Veronis

The Gifts of the Magi icon presents the Wise Men offering gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christ Child. These wealthy scholars and priests of the East endured numerous dangers, and traveled great distances to offer their treasures to Christ, the newborn king. What a beautiful and meaningful example of stewardship they set for all future generations, helping us to understand the blessing of properly using and sharing God's gifts.

To begin with, the Magi represent a sincere desire to seek after God, searching through science, nature, and their cultural traditions to communicate with their Creator and discover His will for them, even when it was something so unexpected. Imagine their long, arduous journey, possibly a 1500 mile expedition from Persia to Bethlehem, over mountains and deserts, a journey that took many months. Surely on such a trip they faced numerous dangers from nature, from bandits, and from the fear of the unknown.

What faith, determination and sacrifice they must have had. They surely faced questions and skepticism at the start. During their journey, unexpected challenges and discouraging setbacks would have been commonplace. Yet they persevered. They overcame the difficult trials and tests of their journey, and persisted in their search for God's truth.

When they finally met the Christ Child, they bowed down in worship. They offered Jesus the most precious of their gifts. Although they were the "wise men" of their day, they didn't allow their ego to interfere with their unexpected discovery. Even when the journey surprisingly took them beyond the king's palace in Jerusalem to the insignificant village of Bethlehem, they went forward in faith. Everything seemed so astonishing, and yet in humility they approached the Christ Child to worship Him and offer the best of their gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The Story of the Magi is not simply a cute part of Christmas, but it represents central characters who model a path of faith and stewardship worthy of imitation. They offer an example of a sincere search for God using the intellectual gifts they possessed; a willingness to overcome any obstacles or challenging inconveniences in their journey towards God; and the witness of offering the best they had once they encounter the Christ Child.

In connection with this inspiring story of the Magi, we can also reflect on St. John Chrysostom's words, "*The rich man is not the one who has much, but the one who gives much. For what one gives away, he keeps for all eternity.*" Both the Magi and Chrysostom offer a challenging perspective of Christian Stewardship. We are called to understand that all we have in life - from life itself, to our intellectual abilities and specific talents, as well as to our faith experiences and material possessions – all we have in life is a gift from God, and each of us is called to act as a proper and good steward of these gifts.

Think about how the Magi were conscientious stewards with

their knowledge, experience and wisdom, as well as stewards of their time and effort, which culminated in their good stewardship of their treasure. St. John Chrysostom highlights that true wealth comes through sharing what we have first received from God Himself. Ultimately, whatever we have isn't ours! All is God's, and we are simply caretakers of His riches. As we learn to generously give of ourselves, of our time, talents and treasure, we only increase our wealth and make eternal investments.

Christian Stewardship is all about becoming good caretakers of all that God has given us. Think about all that God has given us – our health, our family, our opportunities in life, our intelligence, our talents. God has given each of us special and unique gifts. And through Holy Scripture He teaches us all that we have is a loan. He lends everything to us, and reminds us that one day He will ask us to give a detailed accounting of what we have done with the gifts He has given us. How have we used our time, our talents, and our treasure? Have we used them in a self-centered way or God-glorifying ways? Archbishop Anastasios of Albania has noted that "we find ourselves by offering ourselves." Have we learned the blessedness of generously giving to others of all we have?

Everything we have is temporal. We don't know for how long we have it. The fundamental question, though, is how will we use all that we have for the glory of God?

One day, a person complained to his priest that the Church and Christianity is one continual "give, give, give." To which the priest replied, "Thank you very much for the finest definition of Christianity I have ever heard. Your right, Christianity is all about a constant "give, give, give." God giving His only Son to the world to show His unconditional love. His Son Jesus giving His life on the cross to forgive our sins and destroy death. Then our Lord's disciples giving all they had to make sure God's Good News of love was preached to all people everywhere. They not only gave away their homes and businesses, but even gave up their lives as martyrs in gratitude to God! And after all that giving of God to the world, yes, God does ask His followers of today to imitate His own generosity by giving – by offering back from all that He ultimately has given each person! So, yes, the Church and Christianity is one continual "give, give, and give," but from a good and holy perspective!

The Gifts of the Magi and the words of St. John Chrysostom help clarify our understanding of Christian Stewardship and what it means to act as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

Fr. Luke Veronis is the Proistamenos of Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Webster, MA.

Song of the Stars

The world was about to change forever. And it almost went by unnoticed. . .

But the leaves, that night, rustled with a rumor. News rang out across the open fields. A song drifted over the hills.

The wind whispered it softly in the sycamore trees that waved their moonlit branches to the sky. A barn owl too flight. Woodland creatures stirred. . . “It’s time! It’s time!”

In the pinewoods, two deer raised their heads. A big brown bear sniffed the air. A red fox darted.

The faces of little flowers lifted to the skies. . . “It’s time! It’s time!”

The skies shouted it to the seas that thundered it to the waves that roared it to the great white whales that sang it to the starfish in the deep. And tiny sandpipers danced it on shining sands... “It’s time! It’s time!”

The running rivers bounded over boulders and the otters clapped and played and sang to the ducklings that splashed and quacked to the salmon that leaped and leaped.

And tiny field mice and insects and little creeping things and sparrows and robins and every single blade of grass squeaked and hummed and chirped and sang... “It’s time! It’s time!”

Wild stallions drummed it to the ground. . . “Get ready! Get ready! Be glad! Be glad!”

On a lonely peak a lion raised his strong head and roared it out to the empty wilderness. . . “The Mighty King! The Prince of Peace!”

All the stars joined together in a chorus that rang out through the heavens. . . “The Bright and Morning Star!”

And on a hillside overlooking a little town sheep nuzzled their new lambs... “The Good Shepherd!”

Suddenly angels lit up the whole sky and a great choir sang it out loud. . . “It’s time! He’s come! At last! He’s here!”

And in the little town in a little shed in a little window a candle flickered in the dark.

And a tiny cry rang out in the cold night air. And high above a single star set in the highest heavens shone out brighter than all the others and poured down silver onto the little shed. . . “A Light to light up the whole world!”

The animals stood around his bed. And the whole earth and all the stars and sky held its breath. . . “The One who made us has come to live with us!”

And a young mother with no place to rest nowhere to stay kept it as a song inside her heart. . . “Our Rescuer!”

And they gazed in wonder at God’s great gift. Lying on a bed of straw wrapped in rags—a tiny little baby. Heaven’s Son sleeping under the stars that He made.

Christmas Reception

The Parish Council will sponsor a reception on Saturday, 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!



9 Christmas Carol Lyrics with Profound Lessons

By Martin Saunders

Christmas carols are a wonderful thing. Evocative, nostalgic and as festive as an eggnog latte, they unite us as a church and a society each December, giving us an outlet for our collective sense of Christmas cheer. Like footballers who use a goal as an opportunity for a much needed hug, Christmas carols give us a great excuse to do what our hearts desire at this time of year - to sing, to smile and to celebrate, all while wearing an expensive novelty jumper.

Some of the lyrics of these songs have become as culturally familiar as the most memorable lines of Shakespeare. 'O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!' 'Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.' Even those of us who have no idea what the words mean can probably recite half a dozen of those classic opening lines. But what we don't always appreciate is that hidden away are some extraordinary moments of uplifting, thought provoking and profound lyricism. Here are nine of my favourites.

1. Sing choirs of angels - sing in exultation!

(from 'O Come all ye Faithful')

This is stirring stuff to begin with. Who can fail to be moved by the full choral rendition of this line, which underlines the divine significance of Christmas with volume and harmony. I like to imagine angelic hosts joining in every time an earthy choir nails this lyric - which would make sense of course...

2. Son of God, love's pure light (from 'Silent Night')

A glorious image which focuses us in on the central 'meaning' of Christmas - that because he loved the world so much, God came here as a baby to save it. As the recent Sainsbury's / World War One advert proved, this carol is among the most moving and evocative pieces of music ever conceived - and I think the lyrics are one of the key reasons. Deep down we all know there was something different, special, holy about that night 2,000 years ago on which we divide human history. This song gives language to that knowledge - and this line is the key to it all.

3. The dark night wakes, the glory breaks, and Christmas comes once more (from 'O Little Town of Bethlehem')

This line comes from the usually-omitted fourth verse of 'O Little Town', cropped from the hymnbook because the sentences that come before it are a little bit weird. A shame though, as it's an incredible piece of poetry showing how the glory of Christ's coming smashes through the darkness of a world lost without him. The youth organisation I work for loved this line so much when we discovered it, we made it into a charity Christmas card.

4. Fall on your knees! Oh hear the angel voices! (from 'O Holy Night')

This one sends the hairs on the back of my neck straight up every time. The idea that a moment is so divinely profound that it literally sends us spiralling to the ground might be culturally unfamiliar, but boy - don't we all long for experiences like that? My absolute favourite moment in my absolute favourite carol - a phrase that describes a pulse-racing moment, and creates the same reaction in us.

5. Sages leave your contemplations, brighter visions beam afar (from 'Angels from the Realms of Glory')

A highlight of a deeply theological carol, these words both refer to the wise men (or Magi), and inspire us to remember that there's something bigger than all of us, however clever or well-read we might be.

6. To free all those who trust in him from Satan's power and might (from 'God rest ye Merry Gentlemen')

Unlike Santa, Satan doesn't get much of a mention at Christmas, and while that might seem like a sensible thing, it does leave one wondering exactly what all the blood, sweat and tears of the incarnation were all actually for. After all, why do you need a saviour if there's nothing to be saved from? It's understandable that we airbrush most of the darker bits of the Christmas story away in the pursuit of celebration, but we should also remember the reason why Jesus appeared at all: to *save*.

7. Be near me Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay (from 'Away in a Manger')

If you're anything like me, a few bars of Away in a Manger have you immediately claiming there's something in your eye. The theology might not be note-perfect (Jesus has left the earth, it's the Holy Spirit who stays with us), but the sentiment is - reaching out beyond the nativity story as a reminder that Christmas is only the start.

8. And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love (from 'Once in Royal David's city')

What a promise this is - that not only will we sing about Jesus by candlelight, but that one day we'll see him face to face. And the way that happens? Through his 'redeeming love', because Christmas is really only a precursor to the main event of Easter, when this baby grows up, dies, rises again, and heals the rift between heaven and earth. And all for love. I'm welling up here.

9. The whole world sing back the song which now the angels sing (from 'It came upon the Midnight clear')

The one about the angels finishes with an amazing bit of future-gazing - flinging us forward to the moment when this world is restored like new and Jesus comes to earth once more. 'It came upon...' focuses on the song of the angels, and promises a time when that song will be ours too. That's a perfect vision of eternity for me - one where we get to sing Christmas carols all year round...!

~ December 2016 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1** YAH 11:30 Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m.– 8:30 p.m.	2**	3** Orthros 8:00 a.m. Liturgy 9:00 a.m. Adult Advent Retreat Media Center
4** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday? Get Acquainted Sunday AHEPA DOP mtg. YAL 5:00 p.m.	5** Bible Study 6:30 p	6** WBS at church St. Nicholas Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. EBS 6:30 p.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	7** MBS 7:30 a.m.	8** Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m.– 8:30 p.m.	9** St. Anna Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	10** Practice for Sunday School Christmas Program
11** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Christmas Program Parish Council Elections GOYA	12** St. Spyridon Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p	13** WBS 10:00 a.m. EBS 6:30 p.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	14** MBS 7:30 a.m. Parish Council Meeting	15* St. Eleferios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m.– 8:30 p.m.	16** Goya Lock-in	17** GOYA/Choir Christmas Caroling Community Outreach AHEPA Scholarship Dinner GOYA Lock-in
18** Orthros 8:15 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m.	19** Service of Preparation for the Nativity 6:00 p.m. College Student-Young Adult Program 7:00-10:00p	20** Basketball 8:00 p.m.	21**	22**	23** Royal Hours 9:30 a.m. Office Closed	24** Christmas Eve Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Vespers 5:30 p.m. Liturgy 6:30 p.m.
25 Christmas Day Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	26 (No fasting) Office Closed	27 Basketball 8:00 p.m.	28	29	30 St. Anyisia Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	31

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

2418 W. Swann Avenue

Tampa, FL 33609-4712

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

officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com

www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com

NONPROFIT ORG.

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

TAMPA, FL

PERMIT NO. 461

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 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)

firstav@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

Mike Xenick, Vice President 813-340-8737

Sandra Pappas, Secretary 813-785-3747

Ed Gerecke, Treasurer 813-229-4306

George Chagaris 727-420-1920

Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947

Skip Higdon 813-831-9021

Catherine Mitseas 813-571-0658

Byron Nenos 813-789-0729

Despina Sibley 813-758-0520

Dante Skourellos 813-765-9534

Office Staff

Monica Gjerde, Office Manager 813-876-8830

officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com

Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper

debstjohnnpa@gmail.com fax: 813-443-4899

Adult Greek School

Magda Myer 813-909-2327

AHEPA

Ron Myer, President 813-523-5583

Altar Angels

Engie Halkias 813-932-5859

Sia Blankenship 813-968-8855

Basketball

Perry Katsamakias 516-403-3118

Jimmy Konstas 813-220-7352

Bible Study

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Bookstore

Bill Manikas 813-960-3679

Chanter

Nick Andreadakis 813-516-6081

Choir

Artie Palios, Director 813-831-1294

Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

Community Outreach

Betty Katherine Katsamakias 813-468-1596

Dance Group

H XAPA MAE, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668

Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347

Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963

Parea, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136

Anna Maria Bavaro 732-239-9085

Panigyri, Vanessa Aviles 813-221-2194

Daughters of Penelope

Chris Frazier, President 813-661-2290

Finance Committee

Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Food Pantry

Anetta Alexander 813-758-2689

Gasparilla Parking

John Kokkas 727-992-4615

GOYA

Maria Koutroumanis 813-245-3854

Kara Katzaras 727-643-5634

Hope/Joy

Amy Kafantaris 727-743-1297

Debbie Nicklow 813-690-0671

Junior Olympics

Bryon Nenos 813-789-0729

MOMS

Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

Lindsey Skourellos 813-503-7845

OCF

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Oratorical Festival

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Philoptochos

Lisa Alsina 813-728-1094

Small Group Bible Study

East, Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

Men, Fr. Stavros 813-394-1038

South, Bessie Palios 813-523-0347

Women, Debbie Kavouklis 813-258-5571

Stewardship

Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747

Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

Sunday School

Vickie Peckham 813-406-5626

Usher

Tom Georgas 813-985-0236

Visitation Committee

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Welcome Committee

Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Young at Heart

Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947

Mary Nenos 813-935-2096

The Messenger of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is published on a monthly basis. Publication is the first of each month. Deadline for notices and announcements for The Messenger is the 10th of each month. You may send announcements to the church office through email.

“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.