We are all familiar with the Nativity story. In fact, we are so familiar with it from the Nativity scenes and from the Christmas pageants that when the story of the Nativity comes up, it is tempting to not pay attention. In our busy-ness, we might say “yes, been there, done that, ho hum, I know the story.” There are so many nuances to this story, however. When I decided two years ago to write on the story of the Nativity for forty days for the Prayer Team, I realized that there were only FORTY VERSES of Scripture that cover the Nativity. I had to really study and reflect in order to get forty reflections out of forty verses.

My favorite verse that I wrote on was actually Luke 2:20 “And the shepherds returned, glorifying God for all that they had heard and seen, as it had been told to them.” Doesn’t seem too inspiring, does it? As I reflected on this verse, however, I realized that the story of the shepherds is really the story of all of us. No we aren’t all shepherds. But for many of us, we labor in relative obscurity, our lives may seem humdrum and mundane. We do the same thing over and over, day after day, year after year.

The shepherds definitely have it worse than us. They were considered outcasts in their society. They were mostly nomads, didn’t have nice homes, weren’t paid well, and didn’t get to take vacations. Their job was inherently dangerous. If one got past the challenges of the weather—hot summer days and freezing winter nights, there was the continuous threat of attacks by wolves and other predators. The shepherds were so “unimportant” that they weren’t even part of the census taking place in Bethlehem, the reason why Mary and Joseph were there in the first place. Suffice it to say, no parent wanted their son to grow up to be a shepherd.

God chose these men to be the first to see the Messiah. After seeing the Christ, they “returned” to their jobs as shepherds. Seeing Christ didn’t change their salaries, or the social standing. However, it changed THEM. The day after Christmas, we’ll return to our jobs and the stressful and frantic pace of life. We will still have bills to pay and challenges to overcome. The Nativity won’t change any of that. But it can certainly change US. It can change our hearts. It can soften them. It can fill them with joy once again.

As I have been reflecting while preparing to write this month’s message, I had another thought about the shepherds that I’ve never had before. We think of them sitting out in the hills over Bethlehem. It is a silent night. It was probably a cold night.
And most definitely it was a long night. Most of us haven’t had the chance to sit in silence all night long. Most of our all night (or most of the night) activities are quite loud (think New Year’s Eve). Have you ever sat for hours in silence? Have you ever spent hours (or any time) looking at the stars, God’s handiwork in the heavens? Imagine the privilege that the shepherds had (yes, a privilege) to look at the stars every night. There is really something powerful about laying down under the blanket of the heavens, seeing so many stars, and know that God put each one of them in its place.

Laying under the stars on a silent night actually put the shepherds in a good position to experience a holy night. In Bethlehem, where there were parties, family reunions and people stressing out trying to find a room at the sold-out inns, there wasn’t silence. And because life was loud and stressful, there wasn’t room for any holiness either. Because God isn’t found in loudness, but rather in stillness. The shepherds were prepared to experience a holy night because they were comfortable experiencing a silent night. They were ready to hear the choir of angels in the heavens because they spent so much time staring at the heavens. And when the angels told them that God’s Son had come to earth, they believed and went to see Him. Perhaps, because they had spent time gazing at the millions of stars in the heavens, they thought to themselves “If God put all these here, then anything is possible with Him, even Him sending His Son to earth.”

If we are loud and busy, and if we have no room or time for silence, we will never find holiness. This doesn’t mean that we should all quit our lives and go live on a hillside. It means that we have to find time to build silence into our lives. If we never meditate on God, we will never become close to Him. Taking time to look at Handiwork in nature is a great way to become closer to Him. And if we never contemplate the majesty of God, then we will not be able to comprehend the miracles of God—the Nativity, the Resurrection, eternal life.

Every summer at camp, I take one night to go out and lay under the stars. It helps me realize my place in the cosmos. I am a small person playing a small role, in a massive universe created by the ALMIGHTY GOD. If I see God as Almighty and myself as insignificant, it leaves me better able to comprehend mercy and grace, as well as the need for my own repentance, working my way to His Salvation.

We don’t think about these things enough. We don’t slow down enough. We live our lives at break-neck speed with constant stress. Our lives represent the busy streets of Bethlehem. We’ve forgotten to leave room at the inn of our hearts for Christ to come in.

One of the things I like about summer camp (and I’ve shared this many times) is that on our schedule, a time has been blocked off for us to be “alone with God.” Fifteen minutes per day has been blocked off for us to sit in silence with our Creator. It’s hard to find that time when I am making my schedule each day, but when someone else makes that schedule for me, it is easy to just follow.

The point of this message is to share with you some special opportunities there are to sit in silence in our church this December. The Church, in her wisdom, has created a few opportunities for us to join the shepherds, away from the busy streets of Bethlehem (away from the streets and malls of Tampa), so that by having a silent night, we can also experience a holy night. Many people stay away from worship on Christmas altogether. And this year, with Christmas being on a Monday, many will come to church on Sunday, December 24, in the morning. Because the Nativity took place at night, it invites us to have a silent night, holy night. With this in mind, here are some special services that will take place this December, as we celebrate the Lord’s Nativity, and invite you to attend as many of them as you can, so that in the “silence” created in the atmosphere of these services, you can experience the “holiness” of the Nativity.

**Monday, December 18 - Candlelight Service in Preparation for the Nativity 6:30-7:30 p.m.**

Three 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 the Nativity. It is very similar in order 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 includes the opportunity to pray for people by name, so bring your names and the names of anyone you know who needs prayer to this service. 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. *If you know someone who can use some prayer this Nativity, or someone who has lost a loved one, or someone who is sad, please invite them to this service. Allow us to pray for them and their loved ones. The service will be done entirely in English. It will last an hour. It will be done only by candlelight. There will be no Holy Communion at the service. So the challenges of a normal Sunday liturgy—length, no intercommunion, use of Greek—that challenge non-Orthodox visitors to our church will not be present. This is the BEST opportunity there is in the year to invite non-Orthodox friends to our church.*

**The reason I started doing this service three years ago was because in 2014, my Dad passed away. I wanted a service that would give me the opportunity to cry for my Dad, but not to cry on Christmas. I wanted to have joy on Christmas. If you need a chance to think or cry, this is the service for you!**

**Friday, December 23 - Royal Hours of Christmas 6:30 p.m.**

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 from 6:30-8:00 p.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. The service will be conducted in English.

**Services for the Nativity - December 24**

On Sunday, December 24, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy as usual in the morning, because every Sunday morning is honored with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in commemora-
tion of the Resurrection of Christ. The special Christmas hymns, as well as the scriptures of Christmas will NOT be offered at the morning Divine Liturgy. (There is a second Liturgy that will be offered in the evening, and if you are only going to attend one of the two, I’d encourage you to come to the evening service.)

Because the Nativity falls on a Monday, because we have to offer Divine Liturgy in the morning of December 24, because we have only one priest serving our parish, and because one priest may only offer the Divine Liturgy once per day, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios has instructed us that we may celebrate the Divine Liturgy for the Nativity either on Monday, December 25 in the morning, or late on the evening of Sunday, December 24, so that we finish around midnight. With this in mind, we will have a vigil in our church on the night of December 24. You may come to any or all of these services. You can come to the Vespers service which will begin at 7:00 p.m. and leave at its conclusion if you wish. Or you can come for the Divine Liturgy at 10:00 p.m. Or you can come for the whole thing. On a personal note, I’m looking forward to this vigil, of experiencing the “day becoming night” and then staying deep into the night, mirroring the experience of the shepherds at the Nativity. I’m hoping for a silent night, holy night for myself. I invite as many as can, to experience all or part of this vigil. With this in mind, the services will be as follows:

6:00 p.m.  Silent Prayer Time
The church will be open an hour before Vespers for those who want to come and enjoy some quiet time in the church. The only lights on will be candles in the windows.

7:00 p.m.  Great Vespers of the Nativity
The Vespers of the Nativity is a unique service in that there are TEN scripture readings that are offered in a row. Eight of them are Old Testament Prophecies, beginning with Genesis 1, the creation of the world. Others follow from Numbers, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel. All of these foretell of the coming of Christ. There is an Epistle reading and then the Gospel of the Nativity is read. It is a beautiful and unique progression of Scripture. At the end of Vespers, the hymn of the Nativity is sung for the first time. Vespers will last from approximately 7:00-8:15 p.m. and will take the place of the “early Liturgy” we celebrate usually on December 24 in the evening. If you’d like to attend Vespers and leave afterwards, this is fine. Vespers will also be done in darkness, with only candles burning in the windows.

8:30 p.m.  Orthros of the Nativity
Every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, it is preceded by Orthros (Matins). The purpose of the Orthros is to honor the “liturgical day.” With the exception of some hymns and scripture readings, the Divine Liturgy is virtually the same each time it is done. It is the Orthros service that changes from day to day. The Orthros of the Nativity is the story of the Nativity told in hymns. Some of the phrases in song are really powerful and poetically written. The Orthros will also be offered with only candles burning in the windows.

9:45 p.m.  The Great Doxology
The first hymn our choir sings on Sunday is the Doxology, which is the last hymn of the Orthros. It begins with the words “Glory to God who has shown us the Light, glory in the highest to God and on earth may peace reign among men of good will.” At a morning Divine Liturgy, the Doxology thanks God for the light of a new day. At the Nativity however, the Doxology remembers that time that night turned into day, when thousands of angels filled the sky over Bethlehem and the glory of the Lord shone around all of them. Here is where the lights will be turned on for the first time in the evening. If you have participated in the Orthros or in the entire vigil to this point, you’ll have the experience of the shepherds, sitting in darkness, then seeing the light and hearing the hymn of the angels. In a beautiful juxtaposition, the Feast of the Nativity is the opposite of Good Friday. On Good Friday, we read in the scriptures how day became night as the sun hid its light. At the Nativity, night became like day.

10:00 p.m.  The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great
On most Sundays, we celebrate the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. Ten times a year, we celebrate the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. (His Liturgy is celebrated the five Sundays of Lent, Holy Thursday, Holy Saturday, January 1-the feast of St. Basil, on the eve of Epiphany and on the Eve of the Nativity. When the Nativity falls on a Sunday or Monday, the Nativity Liturgy is the Liturgy of St. Basil, as is the case this year.) Saint Basil’s Liturgy differs from the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom during the part of the service called the “Anaphora”. There is a beautiful, lengthy prayer that recounts the history of the world, from its creation until the Second Coming, and places us on the continuum between the two. It is very rare that this prayer is offered in the evening in our parish, in the stillness of the night. So, we have the extra benefit of not only an evening Liturgy but a spiritual history lesson.

What are you doing on Christmas Eve night? If you would like to experience a silent night and a holy night, I invite you to share in as much of this vigil as you are able.

For many, Christmas has become anything but a holy season—it is a season of busy-ness and stress, decorating, cooking and commerce. I challenge each of us to make it different this year. Let’s enjoy some silent and holy nights, so that as again mark this feastday of the Lord’s Nativity, we experience it with purpose, with majesty, with glory. If we hope to “sleep in heavenly peace” for eternity, our journey there must be filled with silent nights, holy nights. And the best thing about these few days in December is that we don’t have to plan them. They have been planned for us. So let us come, relive and rejoice together. Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

With love in the Incarnate Lord,
+Fr. Stavros
Liturgical Schedule for December 2017

Sunday, December 3  14th Sunday of Luke
Orthros 8:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Mark
Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas
Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Maria Koutroumanis, Lisa Alsina; Ambassador: Helen Cauthorn;
Caller: Peggy Bradshaw; Get Acquainted: Bessie Palios, Michael Palios
Coffee Hour: Bible Studies

Monday, December 4  St. Barbara & St. John of Damascus
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, December 6  St. Nicholas
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, December 9  St. Anna
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke
Ushers: John Christ, Byron Nenos, Chris Kavouklis
Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Kalliope Chagaris, Despina Sibley; Ambassador: Carole Fotopoulos;
Caller: Christene Worley
Coffee Hour: Philoptochos’ Shoe Drive

Tuesday, December 12  St. Spyridon
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, December 15  St. Eleftherios
Orthros 9:00 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 17  11th Sunday of Luke
Orthros 8:15 a.m.  Doxology 9:30 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.
Choir will be singing the responses from the Liturgy of Peace.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. John
Ushers: Tammy Christou, George Mitseas, Florin Patrasciou
Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Ewana Forde, Dwight Forde; Ambassador: Donna Hambos; Caller: Betty Katsamakis
Coffee Hour: GOYA

Monday, December 18  Service of Preparation for Nativity
Orthros 8:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, December 22  Royal Hours
Orthros 8:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 24  Sunday Before Nativity
Orthros 8:45 a.m.  Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke
Ushers: Nick Kavouklis, George Trimikliniotis, Peter Theophanous
Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Skip Higdon, Jenny Paloumpis; Ambassador: Julie Palios;
Caller: Maria Karounos
Coffee Hour: Parish Council
Sunday, December 24  
**Vigil of the Nativity of Christ**
- Church open for silent prayer: 6:00 p.m. -7:00 p.m.
- Great Vespers: 7:00 p.m.- 8:15 p.m.
- Orthros: 8:30 p.m. - 9:45 p.m.
- Great Doxology: 9:45 p.m.
- Divine Liturgy of St. Basil: 10:00 p.m.

Friday, December 29  
**Evening Liturgy for St. Anysia**
- Orthros: 5:00 p.m.  
  Divine Liturgy: 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 31  
**Sunday Before Theophany**
- Orthros: 8:45 a.m.  
  Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve  
Ushers: Ron Myer, Jim Armstrong, John Alexander  
Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Maria Xenick, Mike Xenick;  
Ambassador: Sandra Pappas;  
Caller: Vickie Peckham  
Coffee Hour: AHEPA

Monday, January 1  
**Feast of St. Basil/New Year’s Day**
- Orthros: 8:45 a.m.  
  Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, January 3  
**Royal Hours of Epiphany**
- 9:00 a.m.

Friday, January 5  
**Eve of Epiphany**
- Vesperal Divine Liturgy: 9:00 a.m.  
  Blessing of the Waters: 10:15 a.m.

Saturday, January 6  
**Great Vespers for Feast of St. John the Baptist**
- 6:30 p.m.

His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will preside at the Vespers, assisted by Clergy from around the Tampa Bay Area will participate in this service. The Philoptochos Society of our parish will host a reception following Vespers.

Sunday, January 7  
**Feast of St. John the Baptist**
- Orthros: 8:30 a.m.  
  Hierarchical Divine Liturgy: 9:45 a.m.

His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta will officiate at the Divine Liturgy.

Altar Boys: Captains Only  
Ushers: Brett Mourer, Josef Fenton, Amin Hanhan  
Welcome Ministry: TBD  
Coffee Hour: The Parish Council will host a luncheon following the Divine Liturgy.

Archangel Michael Winners from 2017 recognized!

We congratulate again Elaine Halkias and Brett Mourer who were awarded the Archangel Michael Award from our parish in 2017. They will be honored in our church on one of our upcoming Sundays.
Monday, December 4 - Feast of St. Barbara & 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.

Wednesday, 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.

Saturday, 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).

Tuesday, 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.

Friday, December 15 - Feast of St. Eleftherios
St. Eleftherios was a priest-martyr in the 2nd century of the church.

Choir to Sing Responses from the “Liturgy of Peace” on Sunday, December 17
Services will begin earlier on Sunday, December 17, since the “Liturgy of Peace” responses by the choir are significantly longer than the regular responses they sing. The Doxology will begin at 9:30 a.m. and the Liturgy at 9:45 a.m. on Sunday, December 17

Stewardship Sunday is December 17
Please bring your completed Stewardship form for 2018 to church on Sunday, December 17. If you are not able to attend church that Sunday, please mail your form in to the church office prior to December 17. Thank you.

SERVICES OF CHRISTMAS - See Father’s Message

Friday, December 29 - Feast of St. Anysia (Evening Liturgy)
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 Divine Liturgy, since her relics are present in our church. The feast of St. Anysia is December 30, but we will celebrate with an evening Divine Liturgy on Friday evening, December 29, at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros at 5:00 p.m.)
Glorify His Nativity with a Window into Heaven

By Charlie Hambos

Icons are not pictures. They do not capture a particular moment frozen in time. Rather, they are timeless. They are not paintings. We don’t ask iconographers to paint us icons. We ask them to write them for us. Icons tell a story. They inspire us to grow in our faith and are integral to our worship both inside and outside the church.

The icon of the Nativity of Christ is a fantastic example of the description above. There are hundreds of variations of the icon of the Nativity of Christ. Take some time to search for a few icons of the Nativity online and check out some of the differences. Or take some time to look at the one we have in our church. We will highlight some of the main things that are found in most icons.

Let’s start at the very top and center of the icon. There is a blue half-circle with an internal sun symbolizing divinity. On the outer edge, three rays extend out, representing the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The middle ray, representing the Son, Jesus Christ, is extending from heaven to earth to where He was born in a cave. We celebrate the self-emptying of God, becoming man for our salvation, when we celebrate the Birth of Christ. There was no other way to bridge the chasm between us and God after the Fall. Because God loved us so much, He tried several things like the Law, the Prophets, the Kings and the Judges, in order to steer the chosen people to reciprocate the love, He showed them, but it never worked. Like many of the Church Fathers say, “God became man, so that man can become like God.” The second ray also comes down, appearing to be a star, the one in which the wise men followed from the East.

Before we dive into the cave, let’s look around the periphery, starting at the top left. Angels are very much prevalent in the story of the Nativity of Christ. It was an angel who appeared to both Joseph and Mary in the narratives of Matthew and Luke. It was the Archangel Gabriel who announced to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God in Luke’s narrative. It was also an angel who announced to the shepherds in Luke 2:13, “Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” Finally, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favours,” is uttered by the angels at the announcement of His birth in Luke 2:13-14.

Below the angels on the left side of the icon, we see the three wise men. Now, looking at the entire icon, we also see the shepherds on the right hand side of the icon. As mentioned above, an icon is not a picture representing a particular moment frozen in time. If we read the narratives of Christ’s birth in Matthew and Luke separately, without knowledge of either one, we would only know about either the shepherds or the wise men. The wise men are only found in Matthew and the shepherds are only found in Luke. In the icon, both are depicted, once again showing us that it is a window into heaven, a teaching tool and tells us a story rather than snapshot in history.

The wise men are on horseback following the star to Christ. Each wise man is depicted with a different length of facial hair. One has a clean shaven face. One has a medium length beard. One has a full grown beard. This represents all of the generations that came to worship Christ at His birth. Also, each of their horses is a different color which represents all of the nations came to worship Him.

The shepherds are usually found the right side of the icon. We see the Angel of the Lord (probably one of the Archangels) above them announcing to them the birth of Christ. Most times, the shepherds appear to be afraid of the news.

The bottom right of the icon differs depending on the icon. Some depict the three wise men presenting their gifts to Christ sitting on the lap of the Theotokos. The one in our church, depicts the midwives bathing Christmas after His Birth.

The bottom left of the icon usually always depicts a very sad Joseph, who is either facing away from Mary in the cave or not, but always looking very distraught. He is obviously very confused as to how the birth of Christ could happen even though an angel told him about. In some icons, a hunched over old shepherd is behind him telling him something. This character represents the devil, which is placing doubts in the mind of Joseph, basically saying that she was sleeping around and this was not the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit. There is also sometimes a dog behind the shepherd who is the devil. We can’t seem to pinpoint exactly what the dog represents. We would assume it being an instrument in the area of shepherding.

In most icons of the Nativity, there is a tree, which is either twisted or missing a branch or two. This is the Jesse Tree, named after one of the Patriarchs of the Old Testament. It shows the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 11: 1-2, “A shoot will spring from the stock of Jesse, a new shoot will grow from his roots. On him will rest the spirit of Yahweh, the spirit of wisdom and insight, the spirit of counsel and power, the spirit of knowledge and fear of Yahweh.” If we follow Christ’s earthly line from both His mother and Joseph, it traces back to Jesse.

Now, we make our way to the center of the icon, to find Christ wrapped in swaddling clothes. These clothes are also representative of the burial clothes, foreshadowing His death, which is ultimately why He came to earth. The trough also looks similar to a tomb, also symbolizing His impending death. They are in a cave because geographically and in the historical context of the Birth of Christ, there were no barns. The animals would have been housed in caves in the mountains. The mountain itself is also depicted with sharp edges, representing the world in which Christ was born into. The interior of the cave is black representing death and sin. Yet, Christ is the Light that has come into the world. The darkness will try to overcome it but will not be able to do so. In the cave we find an ox and a bull, which is a fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah 1:3, “The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib.” If we look closely, these animals are warming the newborn Christ with their breath.

May this overview of the Icon of the Nativity bring us great joy as we celebrate this joyous feast. Next time, we find ourselves in the presence of such an icon, may we see heaven and grow in our faith. Christ is Born! Glorify Him!
Get Acquainted Sunday, December 3

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 16

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!

Clothing Always Needed for Community Outreach

Our Community Outreach program assists with a ministry called “Matthew 25.” Matthew 25 sponsors the breakfasts that we serve the third Saturday of every month. They also have a closet of used clothes which are given to those who need them. If you are cleaning out closets and have clothes you don’t need, please contact Charlie. We have people who will gladly take these clothes to the Matthew 25 clothing closet.

Metropolitan Ministries’ Holiday Tent Sunday, December 17!

Young Adult Ministry
The YAL fellowship dinner will be on Sunday, December 17, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Please RSVP to Charlie if you are going to attend. Bring $10 for dinner.

College Student Night, December 21 - As we have done in the past, all college students 18-25 are invited to our college student Christmas event. It will be held on Thursday, December 21 from 6:30-9:30 p.m. and in will include dinner and discussion. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros by December 15 (frstav@gmail.com) if you are able to participate. There is no charge for this event.

Thyranoixia of the DRC Chapel - Conference Center

In Metropolis of Atlanta news, we all know about the Diakonia Retreat Center. It is not only the place where our summer camp is held, but it is also a place where ministries of all ages gather for retreats and fellowship. On October 11, there Thyranoixia (door opening) of the lower level of the church took place, officiated by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios assisted by the priests of the Metropolis. The ground floor of the church will serve as a library and conference center for groups having retreats. There is also a small chapel in one wing of the floor. The upstairs church is still being completed and the Thyranoixia of the main church is going to be on Saturday, April 28, 2018.

Any adults interested in volleyball?
Is there anyone interested in a volleyball night, either once a week or once a month at the church. This would be non-competitive, just for adults who want to exercise a little bit. The target night would be Thursday night. Please let Fr. Stavros know if you are interested. If enough people are interested, we will put something together after January 1.

Parish Council Elections
The Parish Council Elections will be held on Sunday, December 10, following the Divine Liturgy.
Meeting, Sunday, December 3
The December GOYA meeting will be Sunday, December 3, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

St. John the Baptist 2017 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 the Baptist 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 26, December 3, and December 10 in the Kourmolis Center. If you have any questions, please contact Maria Koutroumanis at 813-245-3854 or Kara Katzaras at 772-643-5634.

Thank you GOYA—On Saturday, October 28, our GOYAns spend the morning at church getting things ready for the festival. They worked on the landscape, cleaning and went to local business to pass out festival flyers. Nice job GOYAns!

Counting the Wins for our Community!
We’ve got lots of interesting people doing lots of interesting things in our community. If something notable happens in your life, please submit a short blurb to the office. We’d love to start “counting the wins” of our parishioners.

Arianna Krinos was awarded $10,000 from the Astronaut Scholarship Foundation on Thursday, October 19 by NASA Astronaut Kathryn Thornton. Arianna is the first and only student at Virginia Tech to ever have received this scholarship. She is a junior triple majoring in biological sciences, computer science, and computational modeling and data analytics. Arianna is the oldest daughter of Melissa (1st Grade Sunday School Teacher and Prosfora Pro) and Demetri Krinos.

Sophia Crassas, in just her second year of running cross-country, won the district finals representing Robinson High School. She is the first female student from her school ever to be District Champion. Sophia is a Sophomore, and is the daughter of Alkis and Aime Crassas.

Dr. Nicholas Kavouklis was recently appointed to the Florida Board of Dentistry by Governor Rick Scott. The Florida Board of Dentistry plays a leading role in the State’s ever-changing health care environment. This is accomplished through communications with the public, legislature, dental colleges, the dental community and through taking active roles on national dental organizations. Dr. Nick is married to Edie, is a long time member of our community, and is the founder of Argus Dental and Vision, Inc. Congratulations Dr. Nick!

Small Group Bible Study
Our Bible Studies are going in full swing. New people are welcome at any time!

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)
We are studying the Book of Acts
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.
Meeting Dates: December 4 and 11

Women’s Group (for adult women of any age)
Location: Meets at the home of Debbie Kavouklis, 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)
Meeting Dates: December 5, 12 (at the church) and 19

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 & Ellen Karaku
bmp1126@yahoo.com 813-523-0347
ekaraku@verizon.net 813-835-0691
Meeting time: Tuesday evenings from 7:00-8:30 p.m.
Meeting Dates: December 5, 12 and 19
~ Sunday School News ~

Our Greek Festival was a huge success. It was beautiful to see our students involved in helping our church. What a perfect example of Stewardship!!! Giving of their TIME; washing trays, serving food, cleaning tables, etc. And of course of their TALENTS...Greek Dancing! To see our children dressed in costume and dancing with pride, was pure joy and always a highlight of our Festival.

Our Sunday School BULLETIN BOARD is up with our new class pictures. We would sincerely like to thank Olya Clifton for taking these beautiful pictures and also donating all the prints. Please don't forget to stop by and take a look at this bulletin board on Sunday. We also updated our recipients who are in the HALL OF FAITH.

Congratulations to the following Students who have MEMORIZED THE LORD’S PRAYER!

Constantine Akrotirianakis  Adriana Catrone  Philip Kane  Vasilios Panos  Sam Thomas
Gianni Bavaro  Anthony Catrone  Julie Kontras  Aiden Ricks  Maggie Trakas
Gryphon Borgeas-Beach  Kris Christopher  Yanni Lambrou  Lucas Ricks  P.J. Zelatis
Maggie Brewer  Aidan Clifton  Elisa Mitisas  Uriah Ricks
Sofia Camene  Ariana Clifton  Nathan Moran  Penn Serbanos
Nicholas Carter  Bill Conner  Emily Nicklow  Katerina Sotiropoulos
Zachary Carter  Teddy Kafantaris  Maria Nicklow  Ariana Thatcher

Congratulations to the following Students who have MEMORIZED THE LORD’S PRAYER AND THE CREED!

Nicholas Akrotirianakis  Benny Hadremichael  Maria Paliou  Toula Trakas  Kaitlin Zelatis
Alexander Demetriou  Calliope Kafantaris  Demetri Passalari  Artemis Xenikis
Alex Findlay  Eleni Katzaras  Gennaro Scarfogliero  Elizabeth Xenikis
Dominic Garcia  Abby Moran  Brigham Sibley  George Xenikis

Our topic for November was CHARITY-THANKFULNESS. Charlie Hambos visited the High School on November 5 and our 6th Graders also made Proshora on that same day.

November 5 was also our YOUTH SUNDAY SERVICE. Our children sang beautifully throughout this service. We would like to thank them and Dean Mitseas for doing such a great job reading the Epistle. The parishioners of St. John the Baptist are truly blessed to have such wonderful children.

Our SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PAGEANT will take place on December 10. The SUNDAY SCHOOL/HOPE AND JOY Christmas Party and Pageant rehearsal is Saturday, December 9.

SUNDAY SCHOOL CALENDAR

Sunday, December 3  Youth Sunday  (6th-8th Grade Music at 11:50 a.m.  Proshora (6th Grade)
Saturday, December 9  Sunday School Christmas Retreat & Program Rehearsal  Boxes of Hope (HOPE/JOY)
Sunday, December 10  Sunday School Christmas Program
Sunday, December 17  Topic: Nativity  Charlie Hambos: 5th Grade (Vessels)
Sunday, December 24  No Sunday School Classes (Christmas)
Sunday, December 31  No Sunday School Classes (New Year)
Sunday, January 7  Sunday School Resumes  Topic: Epiphany/St. John

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

Saturday, December 9 from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.
(St. Anna – Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m.)

Christmas Party will follow at 11:00 a.m. in the Kourmolis Hall
**Christmas program rehearsal at 2:00-3:00 p.m. 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.

Our food drive continues...bring in a non perishable item for the Box of Hope Drive!
Hope/Joy Fall Harvest Celebration 2017

The Hope/Joy Fall Harvest Celebration was held on Sunday, October 22 with a great turn out of about 100 kids and parents in attendance. A special thank you to all who helped make this event a success! First, to Father Stavros for all his support with our youth, to Charlie for always being there to help, to all the parents who helped with crafts, food and clean up, to all the GOYA kids and to Lizzy for running the slime craft, to Olya Clifton for taking pictures and finally to all of our amazing kids who participated! Thank you! In Christ, Debbie Nicklow

Hope/Joy Fall Food Drive
"HOPE starts with a MEAL. HOPE starts with YOU!"

"During the Holiday Season, a box of food turns into a Box of Hope. Your family can be part of that hope by providing a family of four with food for the holidays. One family reaching out to another."

Please join St. John the Baptist Hope/Joy ministry in providing a meal to families in need through Metropolitan Ministries. Make this your family project for the month of November and help us put together 60 Boxes of Hope filled with the items needed for a Holiday dinner. There are many ways you can help provide a Box of Hope.

**Shop for the items below and bring to church on any Sunday through December 3.**

The kids will assemble the Boxes of Hope on Saturday, December 9.

Donate $25 (cash or gift card) for a Box of Hope.

**BOX OF HOPE contains:**

- $15 gift certificate for turkey / ham
- 2 cans of black beans
- 1 box of cereal (hot or cold)
- 2 cans of cranberry sauce
- 2 cans of fruit
- 1 bag of dried beans
- 1 jar of peanut butter
- 1 box or bag of rice
- 2 cans of vegetables
- 1 can or packet of gravy
- 2 cans of yams
- 1 box dessert mix
- 1 bag or box of stuffing
- 1 package cookies or pastries
- 1 box of potatoes
- 1 family box of Jell-O/Pudding

Items will be collected during the month of November through Sunday, December 3rd.

There will be a collection bin in the hall for the food.

"He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward him for what he has done." Proverbs 19:17
Thank You For a Successful 2017 Tampa Greek 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 two festivals from a financial standpoint. So that is great news! Even better though, is the spirit of fellowship that permeated the festival. And this is a credit to the leadership of the festival and the maturity of our community. Special thanks to our Festival Committee of Alkis Crassas, Mike Xenick, Sandra Pappas, Gary Ward, Florin Patrasciou, Theo Panopoulous, Theo Camene and Dan Bavaro. We 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 we are so thankful for EVERYONE’s effort in making this event awesome!
What Stewardship means to me...

As we sat to reflect on what stewardship means to our family, we had an epiphany while trying to encapsulate the concept of stewardship into a few paragraphs or sound bites. We struggled to compartmentalize the idea of stewardship because, to put it quite broadly, stewardship is everything we do everyday to serve and glorify God. Stewardship is not a fundraiser or a capital campaign: stewardship is about the heart that is yielded to God in every way possible, including how we spend our money, what we do with our time, and how we use our talents.

It is hard to discuss stewardship with any integrity without talking about money, but perhaps it is more appropriate to use the word resources—the things we have been given and can choose to use for the glory of God. In terms of resources, most are in some way related to money, which permeates almost every aspect of our lives directly or indirectly. Also, when we stopped to think about some of our favorite Parables and passages from Jesus’s life and ministry, they almost all related in some way to money and the use or misuse of resources on earth. In other words, it appears to be very important to God—this idea that we use our resources to glorify Him, rather than to just please ourselves.

We have struggled in the past to prioritize our gift to the church and we still struggle. We will probably struggle with this for the rest of our lives—keeping open hands with blessings from God is not easy. But, we have realized that because it matters so much to God, it is ok and right to orient our life around this priority. It is an act of faith. In other words, it is ok to say no to bigger and better things in this world so that we can be generous to God. We used to look at our gift to the church by seeing how it fits into our existing budget, but now, we are trying to re-orient the conversation so that our life fits around our gift.

For us, it starts with honest conversations about how we spend our resources and what that says about who we are. If God is the first priority in life, the use of our money and time should reflect that. If we spend more money each month on coffee, golf, or cable than we do on our stewardship contribution, then our actions are not in line with our beliefs. We believe that our talents, time and treasure are all gifts from God and are His, to be used for the glory of His kingdom. He gave us the ability and opportunity to have jobs that make money in the first place. And He gave us those talents so that we could glorify Him and further the kingdom of God. Because it is all a gift to us, it seems natural and necessary to give back to God the first fruits of those gifts, and not the leftovers. Stewardship is every way that we honor God with the life He has blessed us with and choose to trust Him with our resources.
"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 2018

We wish everyone a blessed Nativity Fast as we enter this joyous season and prepare for a New Year. The sacrificial giving of our loyal parishioners helps sustain our church Vision & Mission and we thank each and every one of you for your gifts this past year. Fr. Stavros writes in detail about our 2018 Stewardship Campaign ‘My Gift Back to God’ in this Messenger.

It’s really quite simple…..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.

This month we also highlight a heartfelt message of giving and sacrifice from the Konstas Family. Jimmy and MaryAnn sat down together to talk about Stewardship, as husband and wife, and realized how much more there is to say. May we all make time for this valuable exercise in this new year.

We continue to grow as a community and see many new families. Our Annual Greek Festival brought many new faces and the atmosphere was filled with joy. The addition of our Welcome Committee staged outside our beautiful church tours was impactful.

May we continue 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 2017 pledge by year-end as we prepare for our new Stewardship Year! Tax Letters will be compiled in January 2018 to reflect donations received in the 2017 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 directly through your bank. 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 officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com or speak directly with Fr. Stavros, Sandra Pappas or Pete Trakas -Stewardship Co-Chairs.

We are here for YOU!

~ Year to Year Comparison ~

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*YTD as of 11/14/17 & 11/14/16
By the time The Messenger arrives, you will have received stewardship materials for 2018. We are making a few changes to our approach to stewardship this year. We ask that you please spend some time reading over the materials, and also some time praying about your stewardship before you fill out your stewardship forms this year. Here are some things to consider:

**We have nothing to GIVE, only to GIVE BACK.** This year’s stewardship campaign is based on the phrase “For every good and perfect gift is from Above, coming down from You the Father of Lights” which is from a prayer at the Divine Liturgy adapted from James 1:17. If everything we have that is good is from God, then we really have nothing to give to God, only to give back.

**Our stewardship pledge is not just a pledge to St. John, it is a pledge to God Himself.** Many people think that their pledge is to St. John, and that is partly true. Your stewardship helps fund and run our church of St. John in Tampa. However, more than just supporting the church in Tampa, your stewardship helps to support God’s CHURCH. Why? Because your stewardship supports not only our parish but many ministries and causes that are outside of Tampa, including charities that are not Orthodox. We need to start looking at stewardship in a more “global” way. When we are good stewards, we not only help our parish in Tampa, but worldwide Orthodoxy and worldwide Christianity, because our stewardship helps further God’s message across the whole world.

**Stewardship of Time and Talent are actually two different things.** Our understanding of stewardship is evolving. Based on a compelling article about the stewardship of time. When we offer stewardship of talent in our parish, it presupposes that it will take some time to offer that talent. There is a time commitment to teach Sunday School, serve on the Parish Council or sing in the choir. But those things really constitute offering our talent.

**The Stewardship of Time is the time we spend with God.** God has blessed each of us with time—every day that we wake up is a gift from God, He has blessed us with another day to live. How much, then, of the day He has given us, are we willing to GIVE BACK to Him in prayer, study of scripture and worship? The study of time includes things like personal prayer and reading of Scripture, going to church on Sundays, attending a Bible study, reading a spiritual book and going to confession. In this year’s stewardship information packet, you’ll notice a “Stewardship of Time” form. This is for you to fill out and keep at home. It is your personal commitment to your personal spiritual growth.

**The Church needs lots of talents in order to further the message of the Gospel.** God has blessed each of us with some talent that can be used for the spreading of the Gospel through the work of the Church. Some can teach, others can sing, others can lead, others can write, etc. Decide what talent you’d like to GIVE BACK to support the work of God’s Church. In pledging talent, you offer more than just helping our church to have a choir or a Sunday school or a Parish Council, you help the church further the message of the Gospel.

**Your Stewardship of Treasure Will Define the Success of our Parish.** It costs money to run a parish. Before anyone of our personnel get paid and before any service is offered, it costs nearly $200,000 for insurance, utilities and maintenance on our property. It costs $200,000 just to have the church. Nearly $100,000 goes to support the Archdiocese and Metropolis. We currently employ one priest, a pastoral assistant, an administrator, a book-keeper and a maintenance worker, as well as an organist. In November 2017, we decided to bring an additional priest to serve on Sundays, in order to make distributing Holy Communion more efficient. It is our goal for 2018 to have a priest come to serve on a part-time basis, serving on Sundays with Fr. Stavros as well as working two days a week in the office, doing visitations, hearing confessions and being a resource in a church that is active and growing.

**The Goal of the Church is not to just maintain.** The mission of the church is to spread the Gospel. This is done through ministry, mission and service. We spend part of our budget on ministries, like the choir, GOYA, Sunday School, etc. In order for these ministries to be successful, they need funding. In the ideal church, each parishioner would set aside ten percent of their income for charitable giving. This is called a tithe. In the ideal church, ten percent of the budget would be set aside for charitable giving. If every parishioner gave ten percent to the church and if every church gave ten percent to charity, there would be no poverty. Of course, nearly every church falls short of this ideal. We don’t want to lose the ideal though. This year, we are giving 3.1 percent of our budget to charitable causes. We’d love to see our parish work up to giving ten percent to charitable causes. This is possible when we give ten percent of our income.

So, we would like to challenge our parishioners, let’s each give 3 percent of our personal budget in charitable giving to the church, and our church will give 3 percent of its budget to charity, and each year, we will try to go up one percent until we reach the ideal.

We ultimately need to make our operating budget on stewardship. We can’t continue to rely on the festival and other fundraisers. While we did enjoy a nice festival, the amount of work, stress and distraction from the actual mission of our church was evident during the run up to the festival. The Festival should be for fun, not for stress. The week before the Festival it rained. Storm clouds gathered over the church on the Sunday of our festival, and thankfully cleared up. We can’t continue to rely on the weatherman, and on the citizens of Tampa to keep our church doors open. It is our church, it is our responsibility.

Consider paying your stewardship monthly (or weekly) instead of an annual offering. Why? Because it will be easier for you to offer more. By paying stewardship weekly, we allocate a certain amount of money each week to our pledges. Then each year, it is easy to add $10 a week to our pledge. When we do it that way, we can steadily increase and almost not even notice.

**Stewardship Sunday is December 17—We’d like to have everyone in their form on December 17.** We don’t want the money by December 17 or December 31, just the form. Knowing what is being pledged for 2018 will give us confidence that we can meet our budget. It is also not efficient when our stewardship committee has to spend most of the year trying to get people to turn in their forms. So, please bring your form on December 17, or if you can’t be in church that day, please mail it to the church office.

We’ve got a great church community. We’re winning more than we’re losing, we have more good days than bad ones, we are trending in the right direction—pick your cliché. It’s a great time to be a steward of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa. We thank you for your stewardship that is helping to make our church the great community it is, and the even greater community it can be.
6 Reasons Why Tithing is Good for an Orthodox Parish

By Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick

Tithing is good for the Orthodox Christian and therefore good for the Orthodox parish. So why don’t more Orthodox Christians tithe?

We know the usual reasons: We’re not used to it. Back in the old country the government paid for the church. The parish was founded on the “dues” model. Tithing is “Protestant.” Orthodox people are stingy. We just don’t have it in our culture.

Those things are all true in one way or another, but I don’t think those are the real reasons that we do not tithe very much as Orthodox Christians. There are some who do, of course, but it’s not very many of us. So what is the reason why we’re so terrible at tithing?

I believe that it is because we don’t know why we tithe. And because we don’t know why, we don’t do it. And when we don’t do it, then we come up with the various reasons given above as the cause of our non-tithing. But those aren’t the real reasons. It’s because we don’t know why we should tithe.

Now, the reasons I am going to list below are not all equally important. Indeed, if I had to answer the question, “Why should I tithe?” I would answer only with #1. That’s the real reason. #2-6 are essentially useful effects of tithing that should help us to focus on #1.

So here are six of my reasons. #1 is the most important and really the point of all of it.

1. Tithing Enables Us To Be Saved.

As Christians, we want to be saved. We want to be healed. We want to “go to heaven” rather than to hell when we die (setting aside for the moment all the details). We want to become like Christ. Tithing doesn’t purchase all that for us, but tithing is a powerful way that we give of ourselves, that we turn over what we have to God so that we are opened to receiving His healing and blessing.

It’s a basic principle of Christian spiritual life that we cannot receive God’s blessing if we are holding back on Him. Why? We can’t be filled with God if we remain full of ourselves. Tithing helps us to empty ourselves.

Don’t get me wrong—giving money is not the only way that we work out our salvation and become open to receiving blessings. But whatever we have, we have to give to God. And if we have money, then we have to give money. If we don’t have money, then of course we don’t have to give it. But we have to give what we have, whatever it is, and with the way our culture is so grasping and possessive about money, it really is one of the best things for us to give if we can.

Money is one of the places where we spiritually hurt the most! So we need to pay attention to that wound.

2. Tithing Shows That We’re Serious.

When I speak of tithing here, I am referring most obviously to giving 10% of income, but for this article, you can define tithing as serious giving. 10% is serious for most of us. For some of us who are more affluent, 10% is not that serious, and we should do more because we can. And for some of us, 10% is unaffordable, so we need to be serious with another percentage. But the point is to be serious. So if you’re not serious, get serious.

How do you know if you’re serious? Well, to start with, if you’re spending more on cable TV or other forms of entertainment every month than you’re giving to the Church, it’s a safe guess that you’re not being serious about giving.

I love the phrase “put your money where your mouth is.” It’s definitely true. Jesus says almost exactly the same thing when He says, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21, Luke 12:34). Where we put our money proves where are hearts are. Where is your heart?

3. Tithing Is Absolutely Orthodox.

Some people say that tithing is not Orthodox. This is nonsense. Giving is Orthodox. Asceticism is Orthodox. Generosity is Orthodox. Ministry is Orthodox. Discipline is Orthodox.

The purpose in tithing is not because it is an “absolute requirement” in order to be saved. It’s not. But how can we be saved if we do not nurture a truly generous heart? And how can we nurture that generous heart without becoming disciplined about giving all that we have? The Orthodox Church understands how to become disciplined. We understand asceticism. This is one of the best ways to do it.

Tithing was a minimum set up in the Old Covenant (and there were multiple tithes, equaling about 23%). 100% is the standard in the New Covenant (Acts 4), and when the Fathers talk about tithing, they say that because the New is superior to the Old, we give more than the Old Covenant people did.

So perhaps it’s true that “tithing is not Orthodox.” But that’s not because we give less than 10%, but because we give more than 10%.

God is merciful, of course, and if we’re not ready to meet that standard, we can work toward it. But are we working toward it? If not, let’s get on it.

4. Tithing Becomes Ministry.

There are things that a parish would love to do but just can’t because they don’t have the money for it. Perhaps they could improve or repair the building or build a new one. They could start that iconography project. They could get an assistant priest. They could hire a youth director. They could give to charities. They could fund continuing education for the priest, the choir director, or other parish workers. They could bring in special speakers. They could sponsor kids to summer camp. They could sponsor people to go on pilgrimages. They could do a lot more outreach. They could feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

The possibilities really are almost endless. The point is that
God takes what we give, blesses it, and then returns it to us for our sanctification. When we give our money, God turns it into ministry.

And sometimes ministry is just the most basic things, like keeping the priest from having an outside secular job, keeping health insurance in place for him and his family, paying the parish’s utility bills, buying supplies, etc.

When we tithe, that’s what God does with our money. It doesn’t go to lining anyone’s pockets. Most clergy—not just Orthodox, but all clergy—are actually rather underpaid for their level of education, experience and the labor they put in. And almost none of them ever get a raise for preaching about tithing. And a lot of them are tithing themselves. In many parishes, the priest is one of the top givers, and he usually does it on a salary far below the parish average.

5. Tithing Ends Money Problems For The Parish, Once And For All.
If a mission parish has 25 tithing families who each make roughly the national average ($50k/yr.), the collective income for the parish would be $125k, which is usually plenty for a mission to function on.

If a parish has 50 tithing families who make that average, pledge income would be $250k. We are now well above the income of most medium to small parishes.

If there are 100 families who tithe like that, the income would be $500k. And they’re probably about to burn any mortgage, buy new land, build something new or start a new mission. Or maybe they’re hiring a couple more clergy, a secretary, etc. How many 100-family parishes have half a million dollars to use every year?

Even if half the families in a parish start tithing or even if that same half started giving just 5%, the parish would probably never have any more money problems ever.

6. Tithing Changes A Parish Culture.
Related to #5, I sometimes hear that, if only the membership knew all the money problems in their parish, they would be inspired to give a little bit more. But usually the people who say that, knowing full well the financial situation of their parish, have not themselves increased their pledge. Giving information and insight to the unmotivated usually doesn’t accomplish much.

But what if we started thinking about parish life in a whole new way?

What if we stopped talking and worrying about paying for things and started thinking about why each of us needs to become generous, serious givers? We have to put the horse before the cart. We don’t develop a culture of generosity by complaining about money problems. We develop a culture of generosity, and our money problems go away.

A tithing parish sees itself as a group of people ministering to one another, not as a group of people who are paying for something or expect to get something. And that’s the kind of parish that’s truly Christian, because they have love for each other (John 13:35).

So those are some of my ideas. What are yours? There’s a lot more we could say here, of course. Giving all that we are and have is at the heart of what it means to be Christian. So we certainly can’t leave money out.

The Very Rev. Archpriest Andrew Stephen Damick is pastor of St. Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church of Emmaus, Pennsylvania.
On December 10 the Philoptochos will host a luncheon to benefit The Spring Of Tampa Bay whose mission is to prevent domestic violence, protect victims and promote change in lives, families and communities. We will also be collecting the items below for our Seasons of Necessity donation drive.

- Bath towels
- Washcloths
- Twin Blankets, flat & fitted sheets
- Pillows & Pillow cases (standard)
- Laundry Detergent
- Sanitary Pads & tampons
- Hair care products
- Deodorant
- Bar Soap & body wash
- Toothbrushes & Toothpaste
- Baby Powder
- Baby Shampoo
- Baby Wipes
- Baby Bottles
- Sippy Cups
- Diaper rash ointment
- Baby Food
- Formula
- Pedialyte
- Gift Cards (Walmart, Target, Dollar General etc.)
- Diapers (sizes 4, 5 & 6) & Pull Ups

Philoptochos Christmas Brunch & Meeting

Sunday, December 17 at 12:30 p.m.

Palma Ceia Golf & Country Club
1601 S. MacDill Ave, Tampa, FL

The cost of the brunch is $27. Please RSVP to Lisa Alsina by Tuesday, December 12 with a check payable to Philoptochos. You can mail your check to 812 S. Poinsettia Dr. Tampa, FL 33609 or send to the Church 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 & Tyropita after church on Sundays December 3, 10 & 17. 48 piece appetizer tray of Spanakopita Or Tyropita $30 2lb Spanakopita pan $20.

We will also be selling our 60th Anniversary Ornament $8 each or two for $14.
THE AHEPA FAMILY OF TAMPA WISHES EVERYONE A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR WITH HEALTH, HAPPINESS, PEACE AND PROSPERITY FOR ALL.

AHEPA FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP DINNER AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

On December 15, 2017 the AHEPA FAMILY will host the annual SCHOLARSHIP AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL DINNER at the Floridan Hotel, once again awarding scholarships to the young members of our community. The 2016 Scholarship recipients included George M. Hambos Jr., Gregory James Koutroumanis, Larissa Alexandra Krinos and Katherine Chace Sibley. The 2017 winners will be announced at the SCHOLARSHIP AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL DINNER.

The AHEPA Family Scholarship Program began in 2010 and we have awarded scholarships to worthy students of our community every year since then. To date the AHEPA Family has awarded over 35 scholarships worth nearly $40,000. Plan to attend this event to celebrate the Christmas season and to congratulate our 2017 AHEPA Family Scholarship winners. Tickets will be on sale after church during coffee hour.

ANNUAL AHEPA FAMILY OF TAMPA SAINT JOHN DAY DINNER

The AHEPA FAMILY of Tampa is having our Annual Saint John Day Dinner again this year on Sunday, January 7, 2017 in the evening, at the Floridan Hotel, beginning at 6:30 p.m. with dinner at 7:00 P.M. Invited guests include members of the Grand Lodges of both AHEPA, Daughters of Penelope, Sons of Pericles and the Maids of Athena in addition to the Consul General of Greece in Tampa. In Attendance will also be District Lodge members from the AHEPA and Daughters of Penelope Citrus District 2 Lodges; past district and supreme governors of Citrus District 2 and other Districts and past supreme lodge members and other dignitaries.

We invite everyone, to attend this elegant, inspirational and motivating evening with the leaders of our Hellenic- American community throughout the United States. Please make your reservations by calling (813)254-6980.

EPHINPHY EVENTS IN THE TAMPA BAY AREA

Epiphany is a holiday which is celebrated throughout the Tampa Bay Area with many visitors joining us for the festivities. The following are some of the events that are scheduled.

January 5 - AHEPA Annual Epiphany Banquet - Cocktails 6pm, Dinner Follows, Dancing Innisbrook Resort, Tarpon Springs, FL Call Tim Keffalas (727)510-3934 for reservations.

January 6 - Church Services & Epiphany Procession - Orthos 8am, Blessing of Waters 12pm
St. Nicholas Cathedral - 36 N. Pinellas Avenue, Tarpon Springs, FL Everyone is invited to attend and participate in the Church Services & Epiphany Celebration.

January 6 - Epiphany Glendi - 12:30pm to 6pm St. Nicholas Community Center - 348 N. Pinellas Avenue, Tarpon Springs, FL Food, Drink, Live Music & Dancing - Everyone is invited to Celebrate Epiphany at this fun event after Epiphany services.

WALK TO END ALZHEIMER’S

Ahepa and Daughters of Penelope participated in the “WALK TO END ALZHEIMER’S” again this year on November 18. The event was led by Maria Zabetakis and the Daughters of Penelope. A great time was had by everyone and they raised money for the cause to end Alzheimer’s as part of the Hillsborough WALK which last year raised over $400,000.

BRAVO TO ALL!

AHEPA SERVICE DOGS FOR WARRIORS

AHEPA Lycurgus Chapter 12 is raising funds to contribute to the SERVICE DOGS FOR WARRIORS PROJECT. The program was presented at the National Convention and was received with great emotion and pride. The program raises much needed funds to purchase service dogs for wounded warriors suffering from PTSD. 22 veterans die every day from suicide as a result of PTSD. The program has already purchased the first dog from AHEPA Chapter 517 and the dog’s name is AHEPA! Ahepa Chapter 12 will contribute all funds raised for this to the national project. Brother Nick Katzaras is chairing this project. Please consider making a contribution to this worthy project.

Become a member of AHEPA or the Daughters of Penelope today!
Things can happen to you in a second’s time that changes your life forever! We have all heard someone say “God has a plan for us.” I have learned to really believe that!

All my life I have been a busy person! I learned to keep house and cook at nine years old when my mother found herself a single mom who had to go to work. I would come home from school, get my five year old sister from the sitter, make supper and do my chores until Mother got home from work. When Mother remarried and there were three more siblings to come along I became like a second mom to all of them that carried through our lives.

This kind of schedule has carried throughout my life. Always there has been more to do than I ever believed that I could accomplish. There have been many challenges that I still can’t believe that I got through! Some I handled very well and others I made mistakes. With all I learned and knew in my heart that I had tried my best and I believe that I made a difference in many ways. Most of all, I always felt that I had been there if someone needed me.

One night six years ago, Anna Vourloumis and Engie Halkias approached me with the idea that I could serve our church by running for the Parish Council. I was shocked! It had never occurred that I who am not Greek and certainly not an authority on either the religion or business end of our church could do such a thing! That is where it all began.

It has been six years now. I was elected three times! This is where I thank you for that. I really mean I THANK YOU!

I hear so often people say they don’t want to be on the Parish Council! I hear, “I don’t have the time” or “Oh no! Not me!” (With a laugh at the very thought of such an outlandish idea!)

This year Father Stavros gave each member of the P.C. a book which we have read, studied and discussed together. It is called “Spiritual Leadership” by J. Oswald Sanders. One quote from the book that strikes me is “We must aim to put more into life than we take out.” How many really do that?

Another is “A true and safe leader is likely one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into position by the inward leading of the Holy Spirit and the press of circumstances.” (A.W. Tozer) Also, “Leaders take lessons from the past, but never sacrifice the future for the sake of continuity. People of vision gauge decisions on the future; the story of the past cannot be rewritten.”

I want to say to you that when someone approaches you to serve the church on the Parish Council, to please give it some consideration no matter how busy you are because you will get far more back than you can possibly give. I certainly have!

No smart person would ever ask a lazy man to do something! A busy man or woman is your best bet! I also read that in the little book (thank you again Father Stavros). One more, “Our problem is not too little time but making better use of the time we have.” Each of us has as much time as anyone else, all twenty four hours. Others may surpass our abilities, influence, or money but no one has more time.

I wish I had more time. My six years on the Parish Council has come to an end. Thank you to Engie and Anna for pushing me toward this those six years ago. I have gained so much and learned so much. I thank each and every one that I have served with and learned so much from. I am so proud of what we have accomplished together. We have open communication with our church that includes every voice and every person can go to our webpage and know just what we are doing and how we hope to get there.

I would just say again to all of you; if someone approaches you to serve in one of the many positions that are of need of you, please give it some thought. Don’t just blow it off! Really consider how you might be of help to our church. It can be a most wonderful and fulfilling experience that you will never forget.

Thank you every one, thank you Father Stavros and thank God for His many blessings on us all. I will be lurking on the sidelines if I can help with anything.

Carole Fotopoulos

~Save the Date ~
Saturday, February 3
Tickets for the Young at Heart Dance will be on sale soon.
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, please contact Fr. Stavros at 813-876-8830 ext. 103, or frstav@gmail.com 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.

We would like to 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        Mary Spanos - St. Augustine, FL
William J Camarinos - Alexandria, VA        Bessie Bliziotes - Palm Cost, FL
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC       Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL        Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL William & Kane Chapman - Palmetto, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI              Lillian Thomas - Highland, IN
Perry & Fay Stamatides - Asheville, NC       Kathleen Mendez - Ponte Vedra, FL
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI      Theodora Poletis - Baltimore, MD
Wesley & Melissa Thompson - Clearwater, FL    Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
Demetrios & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH

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 the Baptist 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.
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<tr>
<th>Sun</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AHEPA Christmas Dinner Ticket Sales 11/26, 12/3, 12/10</strong></td>
<td><strong>GOYA Christmas Card sales 11/26, 12/3, 12/10</strong></td>
<td><strong>Philoptochos Spanakopita sale 12/3, 12/10, 12/17</strong></td>
<td>1 **</td>
<td>2 **</td>
<td>YAH – Christmas Dinner Theater</td>
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<td>3 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. G. Christmas Card AHEPA/Daughters GOYA</td>
<td>4 ** St. Barbara Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study</td>
<td>5 ** WBS 9:45 a.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.</td>
<td>6 ** St. Nicholas Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>7 ** Young at Heart 11:30 a.m. Adult Greek School</td>
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<td>9 ** St. Anna Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday School Christmas Program Rehearsal</td>
<td>10 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday School Christmas Program PC Elections GOYA</td>
<td>11 ** Bible Study</td>
<td>12 ** WBS @ Church St. Spyridon Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. SBS Basketball 8:00 p.m.</td>
<td>13 **</td>
<td>14 ** Adult Greek School</td>
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<td>15 ** St. Eleftherios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA Christmas Dinner</td>
<td>16 ** Community Outreach</td>
<td>17 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Stewardship Sunday YAL</td>
<td>18 ** Service of Preparation for Nativity 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>19 ** WBS 9:45 a.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.</td>
<td>20 **</td>
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<td>21 ** Adult Greek School College student even</td>
<td>22 ** Royal Hours of Christmas 6:30-8:00 p.m.</td>
<td>23 **</td>
<td>24 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Vespers 7:00 p.m. Orthros 8:30 p.m. Liturgy 10:00 p.m.</td>
<td>25 No Services</td>
<td>26 No Fasting This Week Basketball 8:00 p.m.</td>
<td>27 Choir Christmas Party</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>29 Evening Liturgy for St. Anysia Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>31 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

2418 W. Swann Avenue
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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.

Choir
Artie Palios, Director 813-831-1294
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

Community Outreach
Botty Katherine Katsamakis 813-468-1596

Dance Group
H ΓΑΡΓΑΡΙΛΑ ΣΕΝΤΑ ΛΟΥΤΖΑΝΟΥΣ
Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
Parea, 813-877-6136
Marina Choundas, Anna Maria Bavaro 732-239-9085
Panigyr, Vanessa Aviles 813-221-2194

Daughters of Penelope
Maria Zabeta, President 813-748-7709

Finance Committee
Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Food Pantry
Anetta Alexander 813-758-2689

Gastralia Parking
John Kokkas 727-992-4615

GOYA
Maria Koutroumanis 813-245-3854
Kara Katzaras 863-669-6739

Hope/Joy
Debbie Nicklow 813-690-0671

Junior Olympics
Dean Koutroumanis 813-624-4620

MOMS
Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862
Lindsay Skourellos 813-503-7845

OCF
Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Oratorical Festival
Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374
Philoptochos
Lisa Alina 813-728-1094
Small Group Bible Study
Men, Mike Palios 813-523-0346
South, Bessie Palios 813-523-0347
Women, Debbie Kavouklis 813-258-5571
Strategic Planning
Marc Edquid 813-422-8940
Gary Ward 813-846-3898
Stewardship
Sandra Pappas, Pete Trakas 813-785-3747
813-305-2193
Sunday School
Vickie Peckham 813-406-5626

Welcome Ministry
Maria Xenick 813-765-0947
Young Adult
Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471
Young at Heart
Carole Fotopoulos, Mary Nenos 813-935-2096

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.

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frstav@gmail.com
Pastoral Assistant Charlie Hambos
813-876-8830 (Office) 813-843-8471 (Cell)
Charlie.hambos@gmail.com

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Mike Xenick, VP 813-340-8737
Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898
Sandra Pappas, Secretary 813-785-3747
George Chagaris 727-420-1920
Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0497
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Catherine Mitseas 813-571-0658
Ryan Kindone 704-564-2046
Aris Rogers, II 813-309-5525
Dante Skourellos 813-765-9534

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Adult Greek School
Magda Myer 813-909-2327

AHFA
Gus Paras, President 813-254-6980

Altar Angels
Engie Halkias 813-932-5859
Sia Blankenheit 813-968-8855

Basketball
Perry Katsamakis 516-403-3118
Jimmy Konstas 813-220-7352

Bible Study
Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Chantry
Nick Andreadakis 813-516-6081

Holy Spirit, be with you all.” From the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.