

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*



December 2018

VISION:

Love God, Love your neighbor and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as an Orthodox Christian community.

MISSION:

The mission of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is to welcome and serve people with love, truth, joy and peace, and to create an environment that encourages all to seek salvation through Orthodox Christianity.

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Christ is Born!

Father Stavros' Message I Offer Him My Life

Glorify Him!

A couple years ago, Nicholas' school Christmas program was called "Dude, You Hear What I Hear?" There was a cute song that was part of the program, which I quote below. I encourage you to find it on YouTube and listen to its words, sung by children. It's called "I Offer Him my Life:"

*Jesus came from heaven to earth
Left His throne for a humble birth
No greater love ever seen
No greater gift we've ever received.*

*Wise men travelling far
On a journey follow a star
Bearing gifts for a King
Bowing down with their offering.*

*What am I to bring?
What's a gift fit for a King?
My alleluias and my praises ring
His worship fills the sky*

*No other gift is fit to bring the King
So I offer Him my life, I offer Him my life.*

For this month's message, I will address the issue of "What am I to bring?" several times as well as the question "What's a gift fit for _____?"

For those who will be invited to Christmas dinner or Christmas parties somewhere, you'll ponder on the questions: "What am I to bring?" and "What's a gift fit for this gathering?" Will it be a box of candies? A dessert? A side dish? A bottle of wine? I know what it won't be—It won't be ONE piece of candy, or

ONE serving of a side dish, or ONE glass of wine and it won't be nothing. We will bring something to share, something "fit for the party we are going to."

Most of us will buy gifts for someone, and we will address the question "What's a gift fit for _____?" What's a gift fit for my child? Or my parent? Or my child's teacher? Or my boss? Or my best friend? We are not going to give an inappropriate gift, let's say "I brought you one peanut," or "I brought you one post-it note" or "I brought you a pen that has no cap" or "I brought you a pair of socks with holes in them," or "I'm giving you some second-hand underwear" or "I brought you a ten year old phone." This are outrageous examples of gifts that we wouldn't buy because they are not really fit for anyone. We will carefully select gifts for the people who will be receiving them.

There are at least four decisions we will make in December that concern giving:

*What will I give today?
Who will I give my time to on December 24?
What will I give people for Christmas?
What will I Christ on stewardship Sunday?*





I have listed these four decisions in order this order on purpose, which I'll explain as we go along.

What will I give today?

Assuming we all make it through the month of December, we are going to wake up 31 times and begin 31 new days. Christmas won't be until day 25 of the month. That means that before Christmas, we'll wake up 24 times. Before we give our gifts to our families and friends on December 25, there will be 24 more opportunities to give. After all, giving isn't something that should be limited to Christmas. If God gave us a gift by allowing us to wake up today, what are you going to do with this gift? And what are you going to give back to God this day? What's a gift fit for today? Here are a few ideas of a gift fit for today. (and everyday)

Give thanks—before you get out of bed, offer a quick prayer just to thank God for the gift of today. Ask God to show you how you can serve today.

Give encouragement—deliberately choose a person who you are going to encourage TODAY.

Thank someone—tell someone that they mean a lot to you.

See positive possibilities, rather than negative ones—look for the best in people.

Give assistance—look for an opportunity to help someone.

Here is a radical idea of something to do for the first 24 days of December. Choose a person you know, whose heart is heavy, who you know needs God more in their life, and pray for them, one minute a day, for 24 days.

Or there is this idea: Pray for someone who doesn't know God, or who has fallen away from the church for 24 days. And then invite them to church with you on December 24. Even if they don't accept the invitation, that's okay. Christ tells us to pray for one another and to encourage one another.

Here are some questions to fill out (answer these questions EVERY DAY) during the month of December:

Something I am grateful for TODAY _____

Someone I will encourage TODAY _____

Someone I will go out of my way to thank TODAY _____

At the end of the day, answer this question: Who did I help TODAY? _____

Someone who I can pray for whose heart is

heavy _____

Someone who I can pray for who does not know God _____

Who will I give my time to on December 24?

Will you come to worship on December 24? Not the Sunday closest to the 24. (come then too) Not a Sunday in December (come on those). Not the Sunday of the Sunday School Christmas Program (come then too). Will you come on the day of the Nativity, to remember Christ on the DAY we celebrate His Incarnation? We don't call our family and close friends "close" to Christmas. We call the most important people on our lives ON Christmas. So, we should not only worship our Lord "around" Christmas but we should worship Him ON the feast of the Nativity.

There will be two Divine Liturgies on December 24, one in the morning and one in the evening (See Liturgical Notes below), so that everyone can come and sing the hymns of the Nativity, and everyone can hear the Scripture Readings, and most importantly, so that everyone can receive Christ in the Eucharist. The greatest gift we can receive on Christmas is Christ Himself. The greatest gift we can give to Him is US, our presence at the chalice on this day.

So, plan ahead and get the shopping, baking, cooking and wrapping done by December 23, so that on this feastday of the Lord, we can give ourselves first and foremost to Him, and so that we can receive Him.

Fill in the answer to these questions: What's a gift fit for Jesus that I can give Him on December 24?

I'll offer Him my _____

What will I give people for Christmas?

Many of us agonize over this question for months leading up to Christmas. As the days to Christmas count down "Only _____ shopping days left" many will stress out. The lines and the traffic jams at the malls will help us understand how busy Bethlehem was during that census 2,000 years ago (and even though I can't stand the lines at the malls, there is at least something redeeming about them—they put us in the story) and how it was actually possible that a city packed with people could all miss the multitude of angels lighting up the nighttime sky. I mean, in the throes of traffic in the mall, we'd probably miss them too.

Back to the challenge of buying gifts—we will all evaluate what is the appropriate gift to get for each person on our list. We will all ask ourselves, "What am I to bring? What's a gift fit for me to give (fill in the blank)? Many of us will put some thought into our gifts and the people on their lists. Even if you are like me and buy a gift card (everyone likes money, right?) no one is going to get someone a \$1 gift certificate.

One great gift to give to people is the gift of appreciation, given through a heart-felt letter. Honestly, these are my favorite gifts to receive, because they last the longest. Years after I've used a gift card or gotten a massage (my favorite kind of gift certificate), I can take out a letter and read it. In fact, I have a file in my file cabinet called "things to read when I'm having a bad day." It is filled with heart-felt letters that provide instant encouragement on days I need some. So, as you buy gifts, and ponder on what to get people, take a few moments and write

some words of appreciation and encouragement to the people in your life who mean the most to you.

What Will I Give on Stewardship Sunday? What Will My Gift to Christ be for 2019?

The first question to address is what we will give to Christ through the Church for our stewardship in 2019. This phrase, “give to Christ through the Church” is intentionally chosen. When we offer our gift of stewardship, it is not a gift to St. John Greek Orthodox Church but rather we should see it as a gift to Christ. We do not pledge to a church, or to an average, or to a goal, but to the Lord Himself. As we have previously discussed, the correct definition of “Church” comes from the Greek word “Ecclesia” which refers to a gathering of people called out by God to be separate from other people, to have a holy purpose, which is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So when it comes to our offering of stewardship, there are two questions:

What’s a gift fit for a King? What am I going to offer to Christ for 2019?

What do I have to offer to the “Ecclesia” that will aid her in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Many people will base their stewardship on our parish’s goal, or our budget, or an average. When you consider your pledge for 2019, please don’t consider any of these things. If Christ offer us His LIFE—He died for us, He gave everything for else—what will you bring? What is a gift fit for OUR KING? Based on your life, and the gifts that God has given you, what is a gift fit to offer back to Him?

Is He worth more than we spend on coffee? Is He worth more than we spend on travel? Is He worth more than we spend on cable TV? Where does our gift of treasure fit in our monthly

budget? For most of us, it will be behind our mortgage, taxes and school tuition and groceries. But will it be behind entertainment? Alcohol? Dinners at restaurants? Movie tickets?

I’m not writing this to make people feel guilty, because any gift to Christ should be a gift of joy and gratitude, not guilt. Part of the reason I think people have never “gotten” the concept of stewardship is that we equate stewardship to what we give the Church, as opposed to what we give to the Lord. Everything we have, starting with our very life, is a gift from God. It is a gift when we wake up in the morning. I know that many of us, myself included, think about our lives years from now. I think about working for many years, and eventually retiring. I don’t think of today as a gift, it’s more like an “automatic.” I assume I’ll be alive next year and for many years later. And assumptions like this move us into a posture of entitlement rather than gratitude, like “I’m entitled to live for many years.” A posture of gratitude makes one more generous and more humble. When we wake up every day, we should feel grateful to be alive, and that should motivate us to do something for the One who has given us a new day, who has given us another day of life.

When we offer to Christ through the Church, we express not only gratitude to Christ but an understanding of what the Church truly is and the role we play in it. As we have discussed, the Church is the place we commune with Christ. We can learn about Him at home, we can learn about Him when we are alone reading the Bible. But we can only commune with Him in the context of a Church community, at the Divine Liturgy. The Church exists to give us the opportunity to commune with God. The Church also exists to teach us and encourage us. It seeks to spread the message, so the Church exists for evangelism. And the Church exists for service—it is a base from which we are to launch philanthropic ministries which seek to help our fellow man.

The stewardship theme for 2019 is “Bridge the Gap.” Materials were mailed to each home mid-November and I hope



you've had a chance to review them. Our budget is roughly \$763,000. We raised roughly \$500,000 on stewardship in 2018. If we were to raise \$600,000 on stewardship, we could have a budget that didn't rely on the festival. **THAT DOESN'T MEAN THERE WILL BE NO FESTIVAL**—it means we won't have to rely on the festival to keep our doors open. It means that the festival can be used for capital improvements, needed repairs, debt service and charity—not operating expenses. Will you help us bridge this gap? I encourage you to offer your stewardship on a weekly or monthly basis, instead of looking at it as cutting one check per year. I encourage you to have stewardship as a monthly item in your budget, rather than a yearly one. This way, it can be something that you do throughout the year, instead of just once. Giving on a monthly basis will also allow you to more easily give more.

The other reason we don't "get" stewardship is because we equate stewardship strictly with money. We forget that just as important as the offering of financial resources is our offerings of time and talent. As we are asking ourselves, "What have I to bring?" let us each ask ourselves "What have I to bring when it comes to talent I can offer Christ?" Some of us can sing. Others can teach. Others can write. Others can encourage. Others can organize. Others are good with conversation. Others are good listeners. All the talents are needed as we do the work of the Church and all talents are wanted. If you are good with numbers or electronics or technologies or repairing things, we need everything.

Most important when considering your stewardship is to ask yourself, "What time am I going to give to God this coming year?" How much of the Bible will I read? How often will I pray? How often will I worship? How often will I plan to receive Holy Communion? Will I keep the fasts? Will I go to confession at least once in 2019? Will I take the Orthodoxy 101 class? Or go to a Bible study? Will I seek to deepen my understanding of Christ in 2019?

We eagerly give to many causes. We will eagerly buy gifts this month. We eagerly support fundraisers at our kids' schools. We eagerly spend money when our friends invite us out. Most of us eagerly spent a lot of money at the Greek Festival. We

eagerly spend hours in front of the television each week. We eagerly and mindlessly look at things on our phones.

Does not our King deserve more than what we offer Him.

Offer a gift of financial resources that is joyful, sacrificial, challenging and appropriate, when compared to the other things we spend money on.

Offer back a portion of the unique talents with which God has blessed you.

And as for time, we need to all give God at least as much time as we mindlessly spend on the phone. We need to spend as much time in the Bible as we spend on internet surfing.

Conclusion

At some point in December we will each think about these four questions:

What will I give today?

Who will I give my time to on December 24?

What will I give people for Christmas?

What will I Christ on stewardship Sunday?

The answers come in the form of question from the song I quoted at the beginning:

What's a gift fit for a King? What's a gift fit for MY KING!

He offer us His life. How much of ours will be offer back? How much of yours will you offer back? How much of mine will I offer back?

I will gift my best today!

I will be in church on December 24!

I will give as many gifts of appreciation as I can this month!

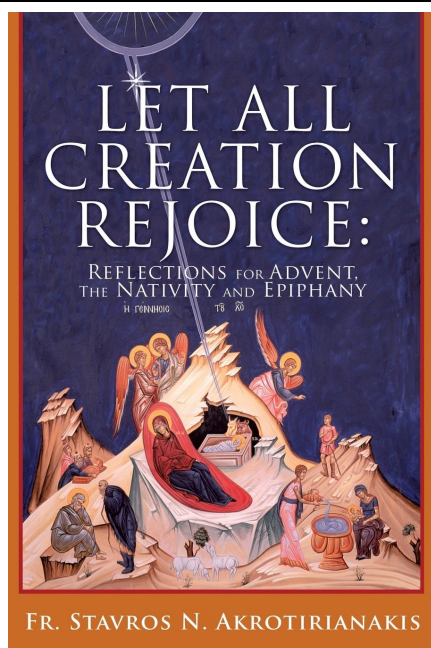
I will bring a gift that reflects sacrifice and joy!

What will you bring?

On behalf of Presbyteria Lisa and Nicholas, I wish you all a Blessed Nativity and a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year 2019!

With love in the Incarnate Lord,

+Fr. Stavros



Let all Creation Rejoice: Reflections for Advent the Nativity and Epiphany

This book is a series of short daily reflections on the scripture readings of Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany, to be read between November 15 and January 7. Order your book today at www.xulonpress.com/

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 1350 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 3 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Charlie at charlie.hambos@gmail.com and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Charlie or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the "forward to a friend" option. Also, make sure frstav@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

Reflections on the 2018 Tampa Greek Festival

by Fr. Stavros

Congratulations to our community on another successful Greek Festival! From a financial perspective, once all the bills are paid, 2018 will probably go down as the best festival we've ever had from a monetary standpoint. That is a great thing, a big win for our community, for which we can all be proud.

Special thanks to our Festival Committee of Alkis Crassas, Mike Xenick, Theo Camene, Theo Panopoulos, Chris Kyrus, Sandra Pappas, Gary Ward, Dan Bavaro and Florin Patrasciou. They, along with MANY others, labored for several months to get ready for the Greek Festival. Thank you for all who came to volunteer during the festival weekend, to those who came to our baking days, to the dancers and their instructors, to those who bought and sold raffle tickets, those who helped with our advertising and everyone who played a role large or small in making our festival a success. Also a special thanks to LifePath Hospice who brought many volunteers to help us during the entire weekend. We will be giving most of the ten percent of our profits we donate to charity to LifePath. This has indeed been a great partnership for 14 years!

There were five things I took away from our Greek Festival this year, in the days and weeks preceding it, as well as during the event itself.

First, our son danced "with the big kids" for the first time. He had a great time. It was a joy to see his joy. Our dance teachers did a great job in preparing our kids, not only to dance but to have a good time dancing. I didn't hear any harsh words when a dancer missed a step. There was no disappointment when one of our littlest kids got a little stage fright. It was just fun for them. I am so pleased with how Greek dancing works in our parish. It's not something we do year-round and I'm grateful for that. It is very time intensive before the festival and then takes a back seat to religious education and fellowship for our kids and adults. It is important to me that our son knows something about his Greek heritage. I shed a tear thinking how proud my Dad (of blessed memory) would have been to see his namesake dancing. I'm thrilled that our kids are growing up here at St. John with faith, fellowship and culture, and in that order. Thank you to our dancers, their parents and our instructors for making dancing something we do both well and also appropriately.

Second, the overall mood at the festival was great. In Greek, we have a word "kefi," which encapsulates hospitality, enthusiasm, etc. Yes, before the festival it was a little dicey trying to get all the volunteer positions filled. And yes, we crossed our fingers about the weather and selling raffle tickets. During the three days, this was, I believe, the smoothest Festival ever. And that is a credit to you. We encouraged everyone to smile, have fun and represent ourselves and our faith well. Thank you for doing such an inspiring job with that. There were smiles EVERYWHERE at our festival among our volunteers which was an awesome thing to see.

I also have to give the greatest credit to God. As I said on the Sunday before the Festival, years ago, the liturgical calendar called for Divine Liturgy to be celebrated on the Friday and Saturday of the Festival. I did this with some trepidation, i.e. would the festival committee be upset if some of the volunteers



came to worship. Of course, they weren't upset and we had the best festival ever, up to that point, that year. In the ensuing years, we now celebrate the Divine Liturgy on all the days of our festival. What a wonderful thing to call down the Holy Spirit on our community before we open our festival and what a joy that so many of our volunteers came to worship every day, wearing our OPA shirts—truly the Orthodox Powered Army that Alkis talked about—moving together first in worship and then in work. It was also a powerful thing to pray with the festival committee every day before we opened the festival, again putting everything first under the umbrella of our Orthodox Faith.

Third, people took away a good impression of our church. For the second year in a row, we opened our church throughout the festival and had volunteers stationed in our sanctuary all the time. Again, record numbers of people toured our church. They were greeted with enthusiasm and sincerity. The "come and see" atmosphere of our church could not have been more welcoming. The church tours were well attended. The choir sang again for the sixth year and that was well received. Someone described evangelism like a painter with a brush. The brush doesn't paint the painting, but the painter cannot paint without a brush. We are like the brush and the Holy Spirit is the painter. We did our part to invite the people to see our church, to tour the church, to get a sample of our music and then to a "come and see" dinner. The Holy Spirit will play a role in any conversion, as it is He who converts the heart for Christ.

Fourth, I saw over and over again, what Jesus saw when He said in Luke 10:2: "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Obviously, wear clergy clothes makes one a magnet for people who want prayer or need a sympathetic ear.

There were plenty of people who asked for prayer, some wanted advice, and a few even needed a good cry. I got the opportunity to talk to a couple whose child had recently died. Another man near the bar stopped me as I was passing by and asked for a prayer, right in the middle of the Opa Tent. A two year old child saw me praying with an older parishioner and asked me to pray with him, his four year old brother and their parents. We all knelt together on the solea to pray. None of these people is a member of our church. And they may never be. But at the moment they asked me to pray or to talk, they needed a sense of Christ's love, which I thankfully and gratefully stopped to give.

However, it is not just the priest who can give this kind of gesture. All of us are capable of doing this. All of us are capable of stopping to listen, or offering a prayer. And the need for this is GREAT!!! Inside of our community and outside of it. I would bet that if we put a sign out on our fence that said "Come and see us if you need prayer today" and had the front doors of

the church open, that there would be a steady stream of people coming in.

Fifth and finally, there is the issue of the future of the festival. Our Festival Committee has done an exemplary job in leading our **SIX MOST SUCCESSFUL FESTIVALS** these past six years. They have done well. It is their desire for others to pick up the mantle of leadership. It is our desire to not have to rely on the festival to make our budget. What the festival looks like in the future and how much we will need to rely on it is a collective decision of the community. The community will decide whether we bridge our budgetary gap with stewardship or the festival or whether the festival proceeds can be used for capital improvements, charities, debt service or whether it goes to pay our budget.

As for this moment, I applaud our Festival Committee, as well as our community, for a job well done, another successful Greek Festival. Thank you, and most of all, let us thank God for His blessings upon us!

A Question I Get Asked Often about God in the Old Testament

by Fr. Stavros

I get asked this question at least once a month, and it came up several times during the Festival weekend. In an effort to help us understand the Bible more, here is the question along with my answer.

Q: Can you help me understand why the Old Testament makes God seem so angry, mean and demanding? And the New Testament shows God as merciful, loving and graceful?

A: A few months ago, we were having our women's Bible study group. We met on the solea at St. John and one of the women asked me the same question you did. Here is the answer I gave: We are sitting here on the solea of our church, a group of loving women who support one another, who pray for one another and who help one another. Imagine that a group of gang members were to come into the church right now, holding weapons. Would you ask them to join our loving and supportive group? They probably wouldn't even know what "loving" and "supportive" means. The first thing we'd do is yell at them to put down their weapons. We might even use foul language, because that is a language that they would understand. It would take some time before we could actually talk to them about love and support. In the Old Testament, after the Fall, God couldn't start talking to His people about redemption and repentance. They weren't ready to hear the message. So, He spoke to them in a "language" they could understand. They understood violence and selfishness, anger and meanness. So this is the language He used with them. Eventually, He softened the message through the prophets to prepare them to receive the Christ. Because just like the gang member example, if we spoke to them immediately about love, they wouldn't have understood. If God had spoken to His people right after the Fall about kindness and mercy, they wouldn't have understood either. He spoke the way He did and eventually changed the language to a language of love, through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

At summer camp, the first lesson we teach is about rules and keeping everyone safe. That is not the last message we give. First, we talk about rules and consequences, and once everyone understands the rules, then we move to the main topic, which is



love and encouragement. Rules are necessary, because they set the tone and the foundation. They are not the end goal though.

It's the same thing when it comes to how we practice our faith. The first thing we teach our children is a lot about rules and traditions—how to make their cross, or light a candle. We teach them "Old Testament" Christianity. The problem becomes when the lessons stop with that. We have to teach our children not only about traditions and rules but about Christ. We have to teach them about faith, love and service.

After all, the Old Testament had 613 commandments. The New Testament had only TWO—Love God and love your neighbor. The Old Testament was about order, the New Testament about love. We need to have safety before we can have learning or fun. But safety without other things is like a foundation without a building on it. We need both a foundation and a building. And we need both the Old Testament and the New Testament. However, if you've never read the Bible, start off with the New Testament—the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles, before you venture back to the Old Testament.

Liturgical Schedule for December 2018

Sunday, December 2 **14th Sunday of Luke**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew **Ushers:** Nick Kavouklis, George Trimikliniotis, Peter Theophanous
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Skip Higdon, Debbie Kavouklis; Ambassador: Maria Karounos Caller: Betty Katsamakis
Getting Acquainted: Bessie Palios, Mike Palios **Coffee Hour:** Photography Ministry **Bookstore:** Zhana Temelkova

Tuesday, December 4 **St. Barbara/St. John of Damascus**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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

Sunday, December 9 **10th Sunday of Luke / Conception of the Theotokos by St. Anna**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Mark
Ushers: Ron Myer, Jim Armstrong, John Alexander
Welcoming Ministry: Greeter: Julie Palios; Ambassador: Edie Kavouklis; Caller: Tanya Robinson
Coffee Hour: Philoptochos' Season of Necessities Luncheon **Bookstore:** Pam Irwin and Elaine Daniels



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

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

Sunday, December 16 **11th Sunday of Luke**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke **Ushers:** Brett Mourer, Michael Bocancollins, Amin Hanhan
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Cindy Xenick, Despina Sibley; Ambassador: Lisa Alsina Caller: Kalliope Chagaris
Coffee Hour: Young Adults **Bookstore:** Rita Bedran and MaryAnn Rose

Monday, December 17 Candle-Light Prayer Service in Preparation for Christmas 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Sunday, December 23 **Sunday before Nativity**
Orthros 8:15 a.m. Doxology 9:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

Choir will be singing the Liturgy of Peace, so the service will begin earlier than normal.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve
Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas **Welcoming Ministry:** Greeters: Vickie Peckham, Donna Trakas; Ambassador: Genie Carter; Caller: Christene Worley **Coffee Hour:** TBA
Bookstore: Thom and Angie Bougas



Services for the Nativity of Christ 2018

Sunday, December 23 Royal Hours of the Nativity 6:00 p.m.

Monday, December 24 **Eve of the Nativity of Christ**
Vespers and Divine Liturgy of St. Basil
Vespers 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 9:30 a.m.

Nativity Liturgy
Orthros 5:30 p.m. Doxology 6:45 p.m. Divine Liturgy 7:00 p.m.

After Liturgy, the choir will sing Christmas Carols, including the Hallelujah Chorus

Sunday, December 30

Sunday after Nativity

Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone Attending May Serve

Ushers: John Christ, Byron Nenos, Chris Kavouklis

Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Dwight Forde, Ewana Forde; Ambassador: Carole Fotopoulos Caller: Maria Karounos

Getting Acquainted: **Coffee Hour:** AHEPA/DOP **Bookstore:** Brett and Ana Mourer

Tuesday, January 1, 2019

Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil/New Year's Day

Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, January 4

Royal Hours of Epiphany 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Saturday, January 5

Eve of Theophany

Vespers Liturgy 9:00 a.m. Blessing of the Waters 10:15 a.m.

Sunday, January 6

Theophany (Services at St. John) - Times to be announced

Altar Boys: Captains and St. John

Ushers: Tammy Christou, George Mitseas, Nick Patides

Welcoming Ministry: TBA

Getting Acquainted: **Coffee Hour:** TBA **Bookstore:** John and Anetta Alexander

Sunday, January 6

Great Vespers for the Feast of St. John the Baptist 6:30 p.m.

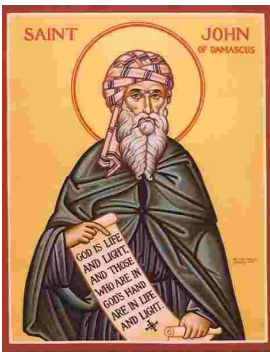
Monday, January 7

St. John the Baptist—Feastday of our Parish

Orthros 8:30 a.m.

Hierarchical Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.

Liturgical Notes for December 2018

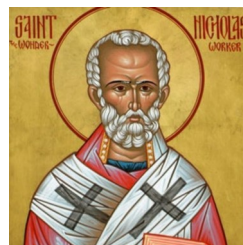


Tuesday, December 4 - Feast of St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus

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.

Thursday, 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.

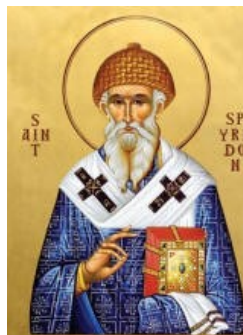


Sunday, December 9 - Feast of St. Anna

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).

Wednesday, 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.



Saturday, December 15 - Feast of St. Eleftherios

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

Are we communicating effectively??? Is there something we can do better?? We would love to hear your feedback.

Please email Charlie Hambos, our Pastoral Assistant, at charlie.hambos@gmail.com or call him at 813-843-8471. He would love to hear from you.

Monday, December 17—Candlelight Service in Preparation for the Nativity 6:30-7:30 p.m.

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 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 a wonderful opportunity there is in the year to invite non-Orthodox friends to our church.*



Choir to Sing Responses from the “Liturgy of Peace” on Sunday, December 23—Services will begin earlier on Sunday, December 23, 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 23.

Sunday, December 23 - Royal Hours of Christmas 6:00-7:30 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 6:00-7:30 p.m. on Sunday, 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

There are traditionally two Divine Liturgies celebrated in connection with the feasts of Christmas, Epiphany and Pascha. On December 24, in the morning, we will celebrate the Great Vespers of Christmas followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. The Vespers of Christmas includes Old Testament Prophecy Readings. It is hoped that those with young children and those who do not drive at night will take advantage of this morning Liturgy, which will be celebrated on December 24 with Vespers at 8:45 a.m. and Divine Liturgy from 9:30-11:00 a.m. On the evening of the 24th, the Church will be open for a time of silent prayer beginning at 5:00 p.m. Orthros will be celebrated at 5:30 p.m., followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom at 7:00 p.m. From 5:00-6:45 p.m., the church will be illumined

only by candlelight. Many of you have made a tradition of coming to church for this vigil of prayer and the Orthros and Liturgy and many people who have done so have commented to me how powerful the celebration of Christmas was for them.

Sunday, 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.

Donations needed for the Altar

We have several sets of altar cloths where we don't have the complete set. For instance, we have the cloth for the altar table but not for the sacraments tables or the icon stand. We'd like to complete the sets we have (we will not be ordering additional sets but would like to complete the sets we have). If you'd like to donate towards this, please see Fr. Stavros.



St. John the Baptist Community News

Parish Registry

Baptism-Maddox (Maximos) William Gregory, son of Daniel and Alicia Gregory, was baptized on Saturday, October 20. Fr. John Stefero and Fr. Stavros officiated. Richard Nicholas Schechter and Jessica Ann Turner were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Wedding-Joshua Michael Preston and Marian Hanhan were married on Sunday, November 3. Kristina Hanhan was the sponsor. Congratulations!

Funeral-Clara Manikis passed away on October 23. Her funeral was held on Monday, October 29. May her memory be eternal!

Get Acquainted Sunday, December 2

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.

MOMS - Ministry of Mother's Sharing The MOMS group will begin meeting once per month at church for a gathering of prayer and fellowship! Mothers of all ages and stages are welcome to join us. We will alternate morning and evening meeting times to accommodate diverse schedules. We hope you can join us! Here is the schedule:

December 6 - Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St. Nicholas 10 a.m. with MOMS fellowship to follow.

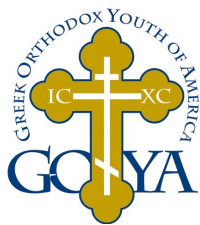
Please contact mapkonstas@gmail.com with any questions and to be sure you are on the MOMS email list.

Stewardship Sunday is December 9

Please bring your completed Stewardship form for 2019 to church on Sunday, December 9. If you are not able to attend church that Sunday, please mail your form in to the church office prior to December 9. Thank you.

Parish Council Elections, Sunday, December 9

The Parish Council Elections will be held on Sunday, December 9, following the Divine Liturgy.



GOYA Meeting, Sunday, December 9

The December GOYA meeting will be Sunday, December 9, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

St. John the Baptist 2018 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 25, December 2, and December 9 in the Kourmolis Center. If you have any questions, please contact Maria Koutroumanis at 813-245-3854.

Thank you GOYA—On Saturday, October 20, 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!



Young Adult Ministry - Sunday, December 16 - The YAL fellowship dinner will be on Sunday, December 16, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Please RSVP to Charlie if you are going to attend. Dates may change. Charlie will send an email.



College Student Night, December 18 - 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 Tuesday, December 18 from 6:30-9:30 p.m. and in will include dinner and discussion. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros by December 14 (frstav@gmail.com) if you are able to participate. There is no charge for this event.



Community Outreach - Holiday Tent

Metropolitan Ministries is looking forward to having St. John Greek Orthodox Church volunteer on the following day and time at 905 Governor Street, Tampa, FL 33602.

**Sunday, December 23, 2 p.m - 4:30 p.m. –
We need a group of 50**

Below is the link that each person should use to register for this volunteer opportunity:

<https://metromin.volunteerhub.com/lp/stjohnsgreekorthodox/>

It is imperative that each person pre-registers for this opportunity as unfilled slots will be filled 1 week before your scheduled date.

Thank you for being HOPE this holiday season!

***Connect Through Christ* Special Needs Ministry for Children**

Vision / Mission Statement and Goals

Vision Statement

Connect through Christ Special Needs Ministry for Children believes that everyone is made in God's image and is a unique and valuable part of God's creation and our Church. Jesus's ministry not only included, but welcomed people and children of all abilities, and St. John's wants to be a church that does the same.

Mission Statement

Connect through Christ purpose is to break down barriers that keep children with disabilities and their families from being able to participate in the Church community.

Goals

- To show families of children with special needs that we believe that each child is a unique creation of God.
- To provide a safe and loving environment where children with special needs and their families can worship God and learn about Jesus.
- To nurture each child's individual skills and abilities while learning about the Greek Orthodox faith.
- To cultivate an inclusive community for children with special needs and their peers.

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 love "counting the wins" of our parishioners.

Congratulations to Sophia Crassas—Sophia is a member of the cross country team at Robinson High School. Her team recently placed 9th in the state cross country finals held in Tallahassee. Sophia placed 45th for the entire state! Congratulations Sophia!

Testimonials on Bags of Love

Our Philoptochos Society sponsored a "Bags of Love" project, where they prepared 50 bags of love for parishioners to give to people on the streets that we encounter every day. Following are a few testimonials from people who gave their bags away and what happened:

Greg and I grabbed two Bags of Love!
First, what a fantastic, hands on, eye to eye idea!
Thank you Philoptokos!

In Tampa on Tuesday morning we went to a Love, Inc. breakfast which was so proactive and refreshing to see "all denominations" coming together for the common good!

As we approached the "Portico" Methodist church downtown Tampa, which also includes the Portico Cafe...there was what appeared to be just a blanket on a bench in front of the venue...I stopped and asked Greg, is someone under that blanket? We discerned there was a homeless person sleeping, as often seen, was hard to say...because this person's total body was covered head to toe, wrapped like a thin mummy. So sad.

We decided after the breakfast meeting to see if that person was still there, and if so...to present the Bag of Love! When Greg approached—he was there! The gentleman lit up like a Christmas tree! He was very excited in receiving a gift....his eyes were big and he was very happy! He didn't speak, but his expressions of thankfulness were abound as he dug into the Bag of Love!!!

We altered his day with LOVE for that specific moment— and that's the answer...in Christ's name...he felt it!

God Bless each and everyone of the Homeless and their struggles to survive, one Bag of Love can make a day's difference, even if for a few hours.

This is a GREAT Idea and I commend the Bags of Love and those that filled them!
If many people in our parish participated to deliver these, we could make a difference. Hour by hour or day by day for someone!!

-Greg and Victoria Melton

I gave one to a homeless young man at Kennedy & Ashley. . . .so easy, so well packed. The man said thanks for stopping, for speaking with him, and for all the goods in the bag. He added, "God bless everyone at St. John's." The day was extremely hot and I watched him slug down the water and the food. It was a good experience.

-Martha Kapetan

December 2018 Stewardship Message

“What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

-1 Corinthians 4:7

Bridge the Gap in 2019 – with your Time, Talents and Treasure

What a joyous year we have celebrated at St. John united in our love of God and community. The sacrificial giving of our loyal parishioners help sustain our church Vision & Mission and we thank each and every one of you for your gifts this past year. We continue to grow and have welcomed many new parishioners as Orthodox Christians in addition to new families relocating to Tampa Bay and many simply rediscovering the beauty of our faith. Our Church Vision: ‘Love God, Love your neighbor and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as an Orthodox Christian community’ is clear and strong and one to continue to strive for as we enter a new year.

Stewardship of Time and Talent was on full display at our Annual Greek Festival in November. Feedback from Volunteers and Guests was overwhelmingly positive and everyone spoke of the ‘happy and loving atmosphere’ throughout the weekend. One volunteer shared the following sentiment ‘The festival was an inspiration to me. Everyone, I really mean everyone, was so accepting and generous in giving instruction and help to a newbie at their first festival. I saw everyone working in love and devotion to each other, to St John's, and in serving our community. I never heard one complaint from anyone. I met so many amazing beautiful people - it was truly a privilege to be among you.’

It seems the light of Christ shined bright in our hundreds of Volunteers. Our Church Mission: ‘to welcome and serve people with love, truth, joy and peace, and to create an environment

that encourages all to seek salvation through Orthodox Christianity’ – resonated all weekend! Our guests heard prayer at the start of each day and learned about our faith from church tours and individual conversations. Many attendees professed they were Greek Orthodox but don’t come to church. May we continue to reach out to friends and family you haven’t seen in quite some time. Those small gestures can make all the difference. Invite them to celebrate liturgy versus a once a year gyro sandwich and frappe!

Fr. Stavros writes in detail about our 2019 Stewardship Campaign ‘Bridge the Gap’ and Stewardship Sunday set for December 8th. Our church is not without challenges. We need more Time, Talent and Treasure! Much of the work of the church falls on a small number of people. A great deal of treasure is from a small number of givers. Everyone, giving more Time, Talent and Treasure will make a difference and help Bridge the Gap! We humbly ask for your careful consideration as you complete your Stewardship Pledge Form for 2019. We understand there will be times in our lives where many give more Time than Treasure. And stages where many give more Treasure than Time. It’s all a balance but ask yourself ...an honest ask...if you’re doing all you can do to support the Vision and Mission of St. John to keep our church growing and thriving for years to come. May our Heavenly Father continue to shine a bright light and provide grace to each and every one of us for many years to come.

With Love in the Lord, your Stewardship Committee

~ Stewardship Housekeeping ~

Please complete your 2018 pledge by year-end as we prepare for a new Stewardship Year! Tax Letters will be compiled in January 2019 to reflect donations received in the 2018 calendar year. We can address any questions you may have regarding your remaining commitment.

We 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 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.

Year to Year Comparison ~	2018*	2017*
Pledged Year to Date	\$436,512	\$412,776
Received Year to Date	\$410,175	\$391,473
Average Pledge	\$1,412	\$1,293
Median Pledge	\$800	\$600
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	350	354

*YTD as of 11/14/18 & 11/20/17

Please don’t hesitate to call us anytime to discuss Stewardship or simply share your thoughts- officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com or speak directly with Fr. Stavros, Sandra Pappas or Pete Trakas -Stewardship Co-Chairs. We are here for YOU!

My Family Member Can't Take Care of Themselves Any More....Now What?

All of us experience life altering events; some good and some not good. With each life altering event, we change. We must find out what our new normal is. Marriage is a life altering event. You go from being single and now have to adjust to another person being part of your life forever and everything changes. The couple must find what will now become a new normal life.

Most of us will find ourselves at one time or another as a caregiver, probably of aging parents or possibly a family member with advanced health issues. Becoming a caregiver is a life altering event. You must juggle care giving with work, family and other responsibilities. It can be difficult, stressful, exhausting and challenging. It can be especially challenging when dealing with a family member with memory issues. We are not prepared. It's important to figure out what your new normal is going to be. But where does someone start? So many questions. Where can I find the answers?

First of all, caregivers need to take care of themselves. You will need help. Ask for it. If people offer to help, let them. Be specific in what you need and when you need it. Learn to say no when your plate is already full. Get plenty of rest. Eat healthy. Take high quality nutritional supplements to supply the nutrients that even eating healthy doesn't give you. You can't take care of someone else if you get run

down or sick.

What to do next: I highly recommend the following book: Connecting Caregivers. Answers to the questions You Didn't Know You Needed to Ask. by Linda Burhans. Linda is a Caregiver Advocate, Radio Host, author and lecturer on the topic of care giving. She learned first hand how challenging care giving can be when her mother was diagnosed with cancer. Linda has brought together professionals and lay people with experience and recommendations of sound advice and links to resources in putting this book together along with personal stories. This is a must have book for both current caregivers and future caregivers. Linda has also written Good Night and God Bless...Celebrating Love, Laughter & the Lessons of Loss. I hope to bring Linda to our parish in 2019 for a caregivers seminar. In the mean time, you can read her weekly blog and locate resources by visiting www.LindasCaregiverConnections.com.

Finally, don't forget that your parish nursing ministry is here to help. Reach out to us if you are feeling overwhelmed with care giving. We have resources that can help with the process. We can help you figure out what your new normal will be.

Stavrula Crafa, RNC

Parish Nursing Ministry Leader

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
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
Nicholas & Vaso Anton - Dunedin, FL
Gerald & Deborah Galovic - Tampa, FL

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.

2018 Tampa Greek Festival A Great Success

Thank you to everyone who helped make it possible







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's Hope/Joy children's 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 Christmas 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 day through Saturday, December 15. There will be a collection bin in the hall for the food every single Sunday. Please only non-perishable food donations. The kids will assemble the Boxes of Hope on Saturday, December 15.
- Donate \$25 (cash or gift card) for a Box of Hope.

A BOX OF HOPE contains:

• Gift certificate for a turkey or 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

"He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward him for what he has done." Proverbs 19:17



We Just Need a Little Love

By Fr. Panagiotis Sotiras

In the 1965 classic *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown picks a small, weak and flimsy-looking Christmas tree for the Christmas play he and his friends are putting together. When he goes to put an ornament on it, the tree falls. Charlie Brown is devastated. However, his friend Linus says the following: “I never thought it was such a bad little tree. It’s not bad at all really—maybe it just needs a little love.” At that point, Charlie Brown’s friends rush to help decorate that vulnerable tree and it is transformed and becomes beautiful, strong and bright.

I believe the aforementioned scene captures an essential theme of the great Feast Day of Christmas: weak, broken humanity is refashioned and made spiritually beautiful, strong and bright through the abundant love of God, by God becoming a human being, a reality that Orthodox Christians refer to as the Incarnation.

Charlie Brown did not reject this little, weak tree when he first saw it. God also, did not reject His weak, broken and sinful creation. Instead, the eternal Logos came down from heaven to dwell among us and when He did, He did not shun us. Many “righteous” people in the Gospels looked at spiritually weak, sinful and broken people such as the man born blind, the harlot, the tax collector, and the woman caught in adultery and wanted nothing to do with them. Our Lord, on the other hand, showed mercy, compassion and love to these individuals, establishing the fertile soil for their spiritual rebirth.

I believe many people are spiritually broken and weak because they do not have the love of God in their lives. What does it mean to be spiritually broken and weak? It can mean to be confused, lost, empty, selfish or in despair. To be spiritually beautiful, strong and bright means to be full of genuine hope, peace, joy and love.

All people need the love of God to be to be spiritually beautiful, strong and bright. The love of God is found in the Church. And who is the Church? We are – both clergy and laity! Every baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christian constitute together the Church of Christ. Just like that little tree was transformed through the love of Charlie Brown’s friends, we too, as the Church, transform the spiritually broken and weak we encounter by giving them the love of Christ.

We, as the Church, give the love of Christ by not giving up on people because of their spiritual weakness and brokenness. We, as the Church, must see in others what others may not see in themselves: their goodness, value, worth and that they are lovable. We, as the Church, give the love of Christ by treating all people with kindness, respect, care, concern, mercy, and compassion.

The tragedy is that it is possible that this love of Christ may not be experienced in a parish. We must make sure that we do our part so that anyone who attends our services, ministries and functions, can tell others that they are loved, welcomed, cherished and embraced.

Above all, I hope we ourselves--spiritually broken and weak though we might be--have experienced transformation; being made spiritually beautiful, strong and bright through the love of God found in the Church. It is this love of Christ, and only this love, that can fulfill us and restore us.

May you and your loved ones experience the transformative love of Christ in His Church this Christmas, now and always.

Fr. Panagiotis Sotiras is the Proistamenos of St. Basil Greek Orthodox Church in Stockton, CA.

HOPE/JOY Fall Harvest Celebration 2018

The Hope/Joy Fall Harvest Celebration was held on Sunday, October 21 with a over 50 children 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 every parent that attended and helped with the set up, crafts, food and clean up, to all the GOYA kids who helped, to Olya Clifton for capturing all the fun on camera and finally to all of our amazing Hope/Joy kids who came dressed in costume and made the night fun! Thank you! In Christ, Debbie Nicklow



Keeping Christ in Christmas

By Fr. Photios Dumont

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Paul Harvey Aurandt (September 4, 1918 – February 28, 2009), better known as Paul Harvey, was an American radio broadcaster for the ABC Radio Networks. He became famous especially for his *The Rest of the Story* segments aired on radio. The following story was first broadcast on Christmas Eve, 1965, though it has since been replayed several times since then.

This is about a modern man, one of us, he was not a scrooge, he was a kind, decent, mostly good man, generous to his family, upright in his dealings with others. But he did not believe in all that incarnation stuff that the Churches proclaim at Christmas time. It just didn't make sense to him and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just could not swallow the Jesus story about God coming to earth as man. I'm truly sorry to distress you, he told his wife, but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve. He said he'd feel like a hypocrite. That he would much rather stay home, but that he would wait up for them. He stayed, they went. Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier, then went back to his fire-side chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound. Then another and another. At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. Well, when he went to the front door, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They had been caught in the storm and in a desperate search for shelter they had tried to fly through his large land-scape window. Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze. He remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter -- if he could direct the birds to it. He quickly put on his coat and galoshes, trampled through the deepening snow to the barn, opened the door wide, and turned on a light. But the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in and he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs, sprinkled them on the snow making a trail to the yellow lighted wide open doorway of the stable, but to his dismay the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them, he tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms -- instead they scattered in every direction except into the warm lighted barn. Then he realized they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature, if only I could think of some way to let them know they can trust me. That I'm not trying to hurt them, but to help them. How? Any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him. If only I could be a bird myself he thought. If only I could be a bird and mingle with them and speak their language, and tell them not to be afraid, and show them the way to the safe, warm barn. But I'd have to be one of them, so they could see and hear and understand. At that moment the church bells began to ring.

The sound reached his ears above the sound of the wind. He stood there listening to the bells. Adeste Fideles (Oh Come All Ye Faithful). Listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And he sank to his knees in the snow.

The man in the story above has a revelation, whereby he understands in a simplistic way part of the mystery as to why God became man. This is indeed a great mystery that God has taken on human flesh, in order to be with us, one of us, taking on all that is our life, so that we may completely share in His. Our hearts are filled with gladness and thanksgiving towards our Lord, Who has done everything for us. The purpose of our worship as a church is to glorify God and offer Him thanks. The Divine Liturgy is a deep mystery in and of itself, and is the most devout form of thanksgiving that we offer to God: thanking Him by remembering all that He has done for us — His birth, His Crucifixion, His Resurrection, and ultimately His Second Coming. Within the Liturgy, we offer our Lord bread and wine, and He gives us His flesh and blood... His very life!

Every feast day we celebrate a Divine Liturgy, giving thanks to God for all He has done, and He in return, gives us His life through Holy Communion. Sadly, so many churches of other denominations are closing on Christmas day due to the fact that their faithful prefer to stay home with their loved ones instead of going to church. The faithful reason that Christmas is a time for families to be together. As the number of churchgoers attending Christmas services each year has steadily declined, the pastors of those communities have decided to not 'fight it' any longer, but have given into the reality, and closed their parishes for the celebration of Christ's birth. Unfortunately, the number of congregations imitating this practice continues to increase each year. As Orthodox Christians, we cannot help but be grieved over this situation. What it really means is that Christians world-wide have lost the understanding of thanking God for His birth, let alone for His sacrifice on the cross, and promise of Eternal Life. We have especially lost sight of the fact that God has given us our families, and that we ought to properly give Him thanks as a family, every day of the year, but especially Christmas Day, by first attending church, and then celebrating the feast.

Oh, come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant!

Oh, come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem.

Come and behold him, Born the King of angels;

Oh, come, let us adore him;

Oh, come, let us adore him;

Oh, come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.

I Wish you and your families a most blessed Christmas!

In Christ's love,

+Fr. Photios Dumont

Fr. Photios Dumont is the Proistamenos of St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church in Seattle, WA.

The Ancestors of Christ, a Sermon

by Dn. Michael Azar

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Let's be honest. Today's is not the most interesting Gospel reading. It is not one that is easily remembered. It is not terribly exciting. The reading is almost entirely a large list of odd names.

But if Matthew felt it was important to include this list in the few pages he had in which to record the story of Jesus (paper was not cheap), and if the Church feels it important enough to include on the Sunday before the Nativity--then surely there must be something more significant about the list.

If we give Matthew the benefit of the doubt that he wasn't merely attempting to provide yet another excuse for readers of the Bible to drift off to sleep, we can pause to consider why it was so important for him to begin his story this way.

Matthew in this passage identifies Jesus by four titles or names, each of which clearly speaks to who Jesus is:

- 1) He is Son of Abraham--he is a true descendent of the great Old Testament Patriarch and therefore a true Child of Israel, not an outsider.
- 2) He is Son of David--he is a descendent of the once great King of Israel, David, to whom God had promised that one of his descendants would rule his people "forever."
- 3) He is Jesus--the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua, who was the ancient Israelite leader that led the People of Israel in their military conquest of the Promised Land.
- 4) He is Emmanuel--a name that means "God with us". But besides those four titles easily available on the surface, Matthew is more subtle; he goes a step further to show the significance of this particular person (after all, plenty of people when Matthew wrote were identified as "sons of David," and Jesus, oddly enough, was not the only prophetic preacher in the first century who was arrested and tried by the Romans).

If we look beneath the surface, there are two odd features of this genealogy:

First, Matthew includes women--that is something unusual for his time. More specifically, Matthew includes four women who seem to have nothing else in common other than that they were involved in seemingly immoral, sexual situations (e.g., one was a prostitute, another an adulterer). Yet, from these four women around whom rumors swelled, the lineage of the Messiah still continued.

Second, Matthew, through some fancy footwork, shows that Jesus's ancestry is neatly divided into three sets of 14 generations. We have to assume that this wasn't an accident because the Hebrew name "David" actually spells out the number "14". What Matthew has done, in other words, beneath the surface, is show that the story of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus is not the first time that the lineage of the Messiah, on which the name of David is written everywhere, was continued through questionable situations.

But this, to me, raises a question: Why was Matthew so subtle, why didn't he get out his soapbox and proclaim his message more directly, more in-your-face? Why did he not boldly start off his book by claiming that the Messiah had humble begin-



nings in seemingly questionable situations and that there was nothing wrong with that?

The answer may be simple: While the People of Israel were expecting a Messiah, they weren't expecting THAT kind of Messiah--and unless Matthew's readers were to laugh at him at the beginning of his message and stop reading, Matthew had to be careful with the way he presented Jesus.

By the time Jesus was born, the Jews had for generations lived under the rule of the Roman Empire (and for many of the centuries preceding, a slew of other, foreign and oppressive regimes).

As time went on, many of them looked more and more for God to send a deliverer like Moses, Joshua, or David--someone who would physically and violently defeat the foreign enemies and occupiers and restore the land to their control. This person, they believed, would be called the "Messiah" and "Son of David", and the telltale sign that he had come would be the defeat of Rome.

Needless to say, when the Messiah, Jesus, appeared, the people were not impressed. And so, the Gospel writers, each in their own way, had a difficult task: To demonstrate that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, that he indeed was the Son of David and

Son of Abraham, the Joshua that was expected, but not EX-
ACTLY what was expected.

Yes, Jesus was the Messiah and King who freed us from our enemies, but those enemies were not the Romans or any other literal, physical enemies, but our own sins.

THIS JOSHUA would not gain for us the Promised Land as a physical piece of real estate, but the Promised Land of the Kingdom of Heaven.

THIS Joshua, THIS Son of David, would not win his victory by a violent overthrow of his enemies, but by a quiet, degrading self-sacrifice TO his enemies.

As we approach Christmas and consider our relationship to this Messiah and, especially, our own expectations for what this Messiah is supposed to be, we must remember the set of misdirected expectations that Matthew faced.

Jesus was rejected by so many people, by nearly all of the religious authorities of his day, not because they were “legalistic” and offended by this rabble-rouser, not because they were simply “jealous” that the common people liked him better; not because there was anything uniquely disdainful about him. The reason that so many people rejected Jesus, rather, had less to do with what Jesus WAS and far more to do with what he WAS NOT.

Jesus was rejected because the people who were expecting a Messiah were not expecting a Messiah like THAT, and when Jesus claimed to be Messiah, the people were left with a choice:

Either accept Jesus and leave behind their expectations or reject Jesus and hold to their expectations; either come to know Jesus and reject what they thought they knew, or remain content with what they thought they knew and reject Jesus.

And this same exact dilemma faces us now: As we await the arrival of Jesus in seven days, we must ask ourselves, “Whom are we expecting?”

Are we, like many people then, expecting someone that God does not ultimately send?

Do we the vengeful believe in a Jesus who did not say, “Turn the other cheek” (Matt 5:39) or “Love your enemies” (Matt 5:44)?

Do we with lots of stuff prefer a Jesus who did not say, “Sell all you have and give it to the poor” (Luke 18:22)?

Do those of us who are lustful prefer a Jesus who did not suggest that it was better to pluck out one’s eye than to lust (Matt

5:27–30)?

When we honestly consider what we want Jesus to be versus what he actually is, we must continually keep in mind something St. Mark the Ascetic said in the fourth century: “The thing that prevents one from knowing truth is thinking that one already knows it” (Philokalia v. 1).

The greatest threat to our coming to know the Truth that is Jesus, in other words, is not lies and falsehoods themselves, but our own false sense that we already know the truth.

If the most recent election cycle, or my few years of teaching theology to college students, has taught me anything about the way that we learn, it is that most of us are willing to expand our minds, to reshape our expectations, with nearly any subject, but when it comes to matters of faith (“Religion”) or “Politics” -- those are the two subjects that everyone seems to know everything about all of the time.

When it comes to issues of faith or politics, we seem most often only willing to learn the things that confirm what we already know.

We listen to the pundit that confirms our view of Trump or Clinton or Obama; we read the Bible or listen to the sermon so long as it conforms to what we already know about God and religion.

This is chiefly why the Fathers of the Church say time and again that the greatest vice—the worst threat to the spiritual life—is pride: that feeling that we get when we believe we have nothing more to learn, especially from someone who may hold a different view.

And this is also why the Fathers likewise say that the most important quality to have if one is to understand Christ and his Gospel—the one quality that is necessary even if one should fail at all other virtues, all other moral tasks, all other commandments—is humility.

For without humility—without, that is, our confession to God that we do not yet know all that we need to know—we will make the mistake of so many of Jesus’s contemporaries, who THOUGHT they knew what Messiah was supposed to be and so turned away from Jesus the Messiah when he came. When we encounter Jesus’s birth in seven days, let us do so in a way that continually calls into question what we WANT Jesus to be so that we do not miss who Jesus actually is.

Amen.

This sermon was delivered on December 18, 2016, at the Greek Orthodox Church of our Savior, in Rye, NY.

Our Food Pantry is very active helping people near and far in the Tampa Community.

Here are some special requests we have:

- Pasta
- Spaghetti Sauce
- Tomato sauce/chopped tomatoes etc.
- All kinds of white flour
- Canned Tuna
- Canned Chicken
- Gluten Free Foods and Flours
- Cereal
- Whole wheat rice and pasta
- Men's and Women's razors and shaving cream (travel size)
- Toothbrushes
- Gift cards in any amount for Publix, Walmart or Save-a-lot

All food items offered are accepted. Thank you for supporting those who need it the most. For more info and questions about our Food Pantry please contact Anetta Alexander at 813-758-2689 or exchange2861@yahoo.com.

December 2018 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.

Our topics for November were ST. COSMAS & ST. DAMIAN - SERVING WITH LOVE and CHARITY-THANKFULNESS. Our 6th Graders also made Proshpora this November.

November 4th was our YOUTH SUNDAY SERVICE. Our children sang beautifully throughout this service. We would like to thank them and Matthew Robinson for doing such a great job reading the Epistle. The parishioners of St. John's are truly blessed to have such wonderful children.

Our SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PAGEANT will take place on December 16th. The SUNDAY SCHOOL/HOPE AND JOY Christmas Party starts after the Divine Liturgy on Saturday, Dec. 15th. We hope everyone attends the Liturgy. The Mandatory Pageant rehearsal begins promptly at 1:30 p.m.

DECEMBER SUNDAY SCHOOL CALENDAR

Sunday, December 2
Topic: Stewardship
Charlie: Toddler (Vessels)
GOYA Christmas Card Sales

Sunday, December 9
Topic: Nativity
Boxes of Hope (HOPE/JOY) -
Kindergarten - 5th Grade
GOYA Christmas Card Sales
GOYA Meeting 5:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 15
Sunday School Christmas Retreat and
Program Rehearsal

Sunday, December 16
Sunday School Christmas Program

Sunday, December 23
No Sunday School Classes

December 27 -30: Winter Youth Rally

Sunday, December 30
No Sunday School Classes

Sunday, January 6, 2019
Sunday School Resumes
Topic: Epiphany/St. John

Saturday, January 13
Sunday School Teacher Retreat
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

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



Saturday, December 15
10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

(St. Eleftherios – Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m.)

**Christmas Party will follow at 11:00 a.m. in the
Kourmolis Hall**

****Christmas program rehearsal at 1:30 - 3:00 p.m. in the church****

Rehearsal for all speaking parts starts promptly at 1:30 p.m.

**All children welcome for an after-
noon 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!**



Christmas: God's Arrival Makes All Things New

by Fr. John Vlahos

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." (2 Cor 5:17)

A new car. New shoes. New toys. A new suit. A new razor. There is something about the 'new' feeling that is so pure and invigorating; so filled with endless possibilities. We are overjoyed when we receive a new item and when we give gifts, we likewise give the feeling of newness to another.

As we celebrate the Birth of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, we must take to heart the fact that He came to offer us a 'new' life. The chosen people of God during that time were so looking forward to the arrival of the Messiah. They were filled with the hope that He would come and make things better. Our Lord has come and has given us a new outlook on life. A model of love, service, gentleness and purity. A new life that gives us freedom from destructive habits, petty quarrels and guilty feelings.

In and through His Birth, Crucifixion and Resurrection, the old has passed away; the new has come. The 'new' is the Church, the final and everlasting covenant of God with man, the Kingdom of God on earth. The Church in her mystical reality is the foretaste and experience now of the new age to come, the new life of the new creature in the new heaven and the new earth. For the Lord said, "Behold I make all things new!" The knowledge and experience of this saving fact is given to man in the life of Christ's Church. It is in the Lord's house where we are washed, enlightened and sanctified. ***As a Spiritual Hospital, we enter the Church dirty and we leave clean; we come in wounded and we leave healed; we come in sinners and we leave saints.***

Then, as healthy and Spirit-filled Christians, we fulfill our mission of being bridges that connect people to Christ and the Church. And it is our conviction that there is nothing else to be offered and nothing else that is necessary. Our witness is to this conviction and our service is to this end.

In the Parable of the Great Banquet, the master invites numerous people to this Feast, pulling out all the stops and when all is ready, He sends His servants to bring in the guests. Those invited guests made excuses why that could not attend. The angry master told his servants to go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come so that His house may be filled. The servants brought them in, and YET THERE IS STILL ROOM!

Today, my beloved Christian, there is still space in the Master's House. There are still empty seats in the Master's House. We are called to:

Tell the drug dealer there's still room
Tell the convict there's still room
Tell the molested teenager there's still room
Tell the abused wife there's still room
Tell the aged person there's still room
Tell the addicted gambler there's still room
Tell the exotic dancer there's still room
Tell the divorcee there's still room
Tell the unwed parent there's still room
Tell the addict there's still room
Tell the abandoned child there's still room
Tell the backslider there's still room
Tell the denominational follower there's still room
Tell the unemployed there's still room
Tell the broken, bruised, and burdened there's still room
Tell the weak, wayward, and wanton there's still room
Tell the damaged and depressed there's still room
Tell the sick, suffering, and sinner there's still room
Tell the anguished, afflicted, and anxious there's still room
Tell the tempted, tried, and tortured there's still room
Tell the lost, lame, and least there's still room
Tell the outcast, over-looked, and overtaken there's still room
Tell the poor, persecuted, and perverted there's still room

There is still room in the House that heals, purifies and saves! If we say that the Lord Jesus and His Holy Church are the answer to these crying needs, we must be ready to make every effort and sacrifice to verify our claims by our actions, witnessing and serving with love "not in words and speech, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

Fr. John Vlahos is the Dean of the Archdiocesan Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New York City.



Join the IOCC Emergency Action Team

Are you interested in helping your neighbors get back on their feet after a disaster? When a disaster strikes, families often need help removing debris, tearing down water soaked walls, or ripping out buckled floors. In the event of a disaster in your greater community, IOCC will reach out to you to join one of our Emergency Action Teams. If you are willing to travel to a disaster affected area that is not in your greater community, please let us know that as well. Go to <https://www.iocc.org/take-action/join-action-team/emergency-action-team>.

Our Philoptochos is Awesome

Philoptochos Christmas Spanakopita & Tyropita Sale



Philoptochos will be selling Spanakopita and Tyropita after church

on Sunday Dec 2, 9, & 16

48 piece triangle tray
Spanakopita/ Tyropita \$30

2lb spanakopita pan \$20



Philoptochos

Sunday December 16

12:30 p.m.

CHRISTMAS BRUNCH

Palma Ceia Golf & Country Club

& Meeting

1601 S. MacDill Ave, Tampa, FL

The cost of the brunch is \$28. Please RSVP to Lisa Alsina by Wednesday, December 12 with a check payable to **Philoptochos**. You can mail your check to 812 S. Poinsettia Dr. Tampa, FL 33609 or to the Church address- *attention Philoptochos*. We must have your cash or check to reserve your place. Please RSVP early as we have limited seating. We hope you can join us for this festive event. New members Welcome!

Season of Necessities Luncheon on December 9 and Donation Drive to Benefit The Spring Of Tampa Bay

On **December 9** the Philoptochos will host a luncheon to benefit **The Spring Of Tampa Bay**. All proceeds from the luncheon will go 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 Necessities donation drive for

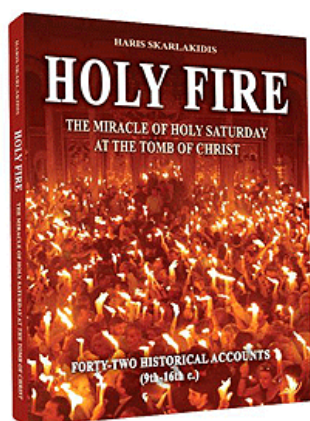
The Spring.

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



THE SPRING
OF TAMPA BAY

Featured Book of the St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church Bookstore



“Holy Fire—The Miracle of Holy Saturday at the Tomb of Christ” by Haris Skarlikidis

This inspiring book re-tells the story of the annual miracle at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem on Holy Saturday.

The descent of the Holy Fire at the Tomb of Christ every Holy Saturday is the only miraculous event in human history which has taken place each year on the same day for more than one thousand years. Covering a period of eight centuries, from the 9th to the 16th century, this book assembles historical accounts of the celebrated event.

Forty-five authors from thirteen countries describe this great miracle of the Christian world: the Holy Fire which, like lightning, descends from the heavens on Holy Saturday at the Tomb of Christ, a few hours before the celebration of His Resurrection.

Furthermore, the scientific measurements that were taken in the tomb of Christ on Holy Saturday in 2008 by the Russian physicist Dr. Antrey Volkov, confirm the descent of the Holy Fire and reveal three phenomena, which he himself characterizes as incredible and entirely inexplicable.

This book is available in the bookstore. We would love to hear from you, particularly what you think of the book after reading it.

P.S. If there is an Orthodox Christian religious item that you would like the bookstore to order, please contact us. We are often able to get a discount as a bookstore.

P.S.S. **The St. John Bookstore has all kinds of wonderful Christmas gift ideas** for you for your loved ones (e.g., beautiful crosses and icons, nativity sets, children's books, nativity ornaments, etc.). This season let's not forget to keep "Jesus in Christmas." Please check us out after Sunday liturgy.

Brett and Ana Mourer

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)

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 3, 10 and 17

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 4 (at church), 11 and 18

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.

Meeting Dates: December 4, 11 and 18

New Policy and Steps for Memorial Services at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Step 1 – Call the office to schedule a memorial service date.

Any date can be chosen to the closest date of passing if it is for a 40-Day memorial and a 1-year memorial. Any less (6-month) or more than (1+ years) can happen on a designated Memorial Sunday predetermined at the beginning of the calendar year by the Church Office.

Step 2 – Name and Initials

When making the initial phone call to the office, please provide the baptismal name of the deceased and the initials needed, if a Kolyva is desired.



Step 3 – Reserving pews.

A certain amount of pews can be reserved for the family of the Memorial Service. Please request when making the initial phone call to the office. The pews will be reserved in the church on the scheduled Sunday until 10:20 a.m. (if the Divine Liturgy begins at 10:00 a.m.) and 20 minutes after the start of the Divine Liturgy if there is an earlier start time for whatever reason. If your family arrives after 10:20 a.m., the reserved pews will be forfeited to the general public.

Step 4 – Reserving tables in the Kourmolis Center.

Tables can be reserved in the hall for your family. Simply reserved. Tablecloths and other decorations (flowers, candles, etc.) are used at the family's discretion but is not required to be provided by the Philoptochos Society or the church.

Step 5 – Kolyva from the Philoptochos.

Our Philoptochos Society is responsible for making Kolyva. Please notify the office if you would like the Philoptochos Society to make the Kolyva. Do not contact the Philoptochos Society directly. The Church Office will make the requests and the Philoptochos will confirm. There is a three-week minimum notice needed in order to ensure someone can make the Kolyva. There is a \$100 suggested/enforced donation. This includes the Philoptochos Society to scoop the Kolyva for coffee hour on the designated memorial dates.

Step 6 – Making your own Kolyva or getting someone else to prepare.

Please notify the Church Office when scheduling the Memorial Service date that your family or someone you know will be making the Kolyva. If a family chooses to make their own Kolyva, the family will be responsible for scooping the Kolyva in the kitchen after the Memorial Service to share with the entire community. The Philoptochos is not required to scoop the Kolyva even if they prepared a Kolyva on the same Sunday.

Step 7-Luncheon and other food items requested on a Memorial Sunday.

Additional food can be provided, whether that is simply Paximathia (memorial cookies) or an entire lunch or Coffee Hour. The family is responsible for working with the ministry or the families scheduled to host coffee hour to provide additional food/help necessary to set up, serve and clean up a coffee hour/luncheon for food that is provided for the whole community not just for the family of the memorial service.

If there are ever any questions about this, please call the office and ask to speak directly with Fr. Stavros or Charlie at 813-876-8830 or email the office at officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com.

Joseph's Dream

From the Book "On This Holy Night" by Max Lucado

Joseph... did what the Lord's angel had told him to do.
— Matthew 1:24

The white space between Bible verses is fertile soil for questions. One can hardly read Scripture without whispering, "I wonder..."

"I wonder if Eve ever ate any more fruit."

"I wonder if Noah slept well during storms."

"I wonder if Jonah liked fish or if Jeremiah had friends."

"Did Moses avoid bushes? Did Jesus tell jokes? Did Peter ever try water-walking again?"

"Would any woman have married Paul had he asked?"

The Bible is a fence full of knotholes through which we can peek but not see the whole picture. It's a scrapbook of snapshots capturing people in encounters with God, but not always recording the result.

So we wonder:

When the woman caught in adultery went home, what did she say to her husband?

After the demoniac was delivered, what did he do for a living?

After Jairus's daughter was raised from the dead, did she ever regret it?

Knotholes and snapshots and "I wonders." You'll find them in every chapter about every person. But nothing stirs so many questions as does the birth of Christ. Characters appear and disappear before we can ask them anything. The innkeeper too busy to welcome God — did he ever learn who he turned away? The shepherds — did they ever hum the song the angels sang? The wise men who followed the star — what was it like to worship a toddler? And Joseph, especially Joseph.

I've got questions for Joseph.

Did you and Jesus arm wrestle? Did He ever let you win?

Did you ever look up from your prayers and see Jesus listening?

How do you say "Jesus" in Egyptian?

What ever happened to the wise men?

What ever happened to you?

We don't know what happened to Joseph. His role in Act I is so crucial that we expect to see him the rest of the drama — but with the exception of a short scene with twelve-year-old Jesus in Jerusalem, he never reappears. The rest of his life is left to speculation, and we are left with our questions.

But of all my questions, my first would be about Bethlehem. I'd like to know about the night in the stable. I can picture Joseph there. Moonlit pastures. Stars twinkle above. Bethlehem sparkles in the distance. There he is, pacing outside the stable.

What was he thinking while Jesus was being born? What was on his mind while Mary was giving birth? He'd done all he could do — heated the water, prepared a place for Mary to lie. He'd made Mary as comfortable as she could be in a barn and then he stepped out. She'd asked to be alone, and Joseph had never felt more so.



In that eternity between his wife's dismissal and Jesus' arrival, what was he thinking? He walked into the night and looked into the stars. Did he pray?

For some reason, I don't see him silent; I see Joseph animated, pacing. Head shaking one minute, fist shaking the next. This isn't what he had in mind. I wonder what he said...

This isn't the way I planned it, God. Not at all. My child being born in a stable? This isn't the way I thought it would be. A cave with sheep and donkeys, hay and straw? My wife giving birth with only the stars to hear her pain?

This isn't at all what I imagined. No, I imagined family. I imagined grandmothers. I imagined neighbors clustered outside the door and friends standing at my side. I imagined the house erupting with the first cry of the infant. Slaps on the back. Loud laughter. Jubilation.

That's how I thought it would be.

The midwife would hand me my child and all the people would applaud. Mary would rest, and we would celebrate. All of Nazareth would celebrate.

But now. Now look. Nazareth is five days' journey away. And here we are in a... in a sheep pasture. Who will celebrate with us? The sheep? The shepherds? The stars?

This doesn't seem right. What kind of husband am I? I provide no midwife to aid my wife. No bed to rest her back. Her pillow is a blanket from my donkey. My house for her is a shed of hay and straw.

The smell is bad; the animals are loud. Why, I even smell like a shepherd myself.

Did I miss something? Did I, God?

When You sent the angel and spoke of the Son being born — this isn't what I pictured. I envisioned Jerusalem, the temple, the priests, and the people gathered to watch. A pageant perhaps. A parade. A banquet at least. I mean, this is the Messiah!

Or, if not born in Jerusalem, how about Nazareth? Wouldn't Nazareth have been better? At least there I have my house and

my business. Out here, what do I have? A weary mule, a stack of firewood, and a pot of warm water. This is not the way I wanted it to be! This is not the way I wanted my son.

Oh my, I did it again. I did it again, didn't I, Father? I don't mean to do that; it's just that I forget. He's not my son... He's Yours.

The child is Yours. The plan is Yours. The idea is Yours. And forgive me for asking but... is this how God enters the world? The coming of the angel, I've accepted. The questions people asked about the pregnancy, I can tolerate. The trip to Bethlehem, fine. But why a birth in a stable, God?

Any minute now Mary will give birth. Not to a child, but to the Messiah. Not to an infant, but to God. That's what the angel said. That's what Mary believes. And, God, my God, that's what I want to believe. But surely You can understand; it's not easy. It seems so... so... so... bizarre.

I'm unaccustomed to such strangeness, God. I'm a carpenter. I make things fit. I square off the edges. I follow the plumb line. I measure twice before I cut once. Surprises are not the friend of a builder. I like to know the plan. I like to see the plan before I begin.

But this time I'm not the builder, am I? This time I'm a tool. A hammer in Your grip. A nail between Your fingers. A chisel in Your hands. This project is Yours, not mine.

I guess it's foolish of me to question You. Forgive my struggling. Trust doesn't come easy to me, God. But You never said it would be easy, did You?

One final thing, Father. The angel You sent? Any chance You could send another? If not an angel, maybe a person? I don't know anyone around here, and some company would be nice. Maybe the innkeeper or a traveler? Even a shepherd would do.

I wonder. Did Joseph ever pray such a prayer? Perhaps he did. Perhaps he didn't.

But you probably have.

You've stood where Joseph stood. Caught between what God says and what makes sense. You've done what He told you to do only to wonder if it was Him speaking in the first place. You've stared into a sky blackened with doubt. And you've asked what Joseph asked.

You've asked if you're still on the right road. You've asked if you were supposed to turn left when you turned right. And you've asked if there is a plan behind this scheme. Things haven't turned out like you thought they would.

Each of us knows what it's like to search the night for light. Not outside a stable, but perhaps outside an emergency room. On the gravel of a roadside. On the manicured grass of a cemetery. We've asked our questions. We questioned God's plan.

And we've wondered why God does what He does.

The Bethlehem sky is not the first to hear the pleading of a confused pilgrim.

If you are asking what Joseph asked, let me urge you to do what Joseph did. Obey. That's what he did. He obeyed. He obeyed when the angel called. He obeyed when Mary explained. He obeyed when God sent.

He was obedient to God.

He was obedient when the sky was bright.

He was obedient when the sky was dark.

He didn't let his confusion disrupt his obedience. He didn't know everything. But he did what he knew. He shut down his business, packed up his family, and went to another country. Why? Because that's what God said to do.

What about you? Just like Joseph, you can't see the whole picture. Just like Joseph, your task is to see that Jesus is brought into your part of your world. And just like Joseph, you have a choice: to obey or disobey. Because Joseph obeyed, God used him to change the world.

Can He do the same with you?

God still looks for Josephs today. Men and women who believe that God is not through with this world. Common people who serve an uncommon God.

Will you be that kind of person? Will you serve... even when you don't understand?

No, the Bethlehem sky is not the first to hear the pleadings of an honest heart, nor the last. And perhaps God didn't answer every question for Joseph. But He answered the most important one. "Are you still with me, God?" And through the first cries of the Godchild the answer came.

"Yes. Yes, Joseph. I'm with you."

There are many questions about the Bible that we won't be able to answer until we get home. Many knotholes and snapshots. Many times we will muse, "I wonder..."

But in our wonderings, there is one question we never need to ask. Does God care? Do we matter to God? Does He still love His children?

Through the small face of the stable-born baby, He says yes.

Yes, your sins are forgiven.

Yes, your name is written in heaven.

Yes, death has been defeated.

And yes, God has entered your world.

Immanuel. God is with us.

St. John's to Partner with Love INC (in the Name of Christ)

Love INC (in the Name of Christ) networks local churches, church volunteers, and community organizations together to help people in need. Through Love INC, churches and individual Christians are mobilized to work together, across denominational lines, to provide coordinated help to struggling neighbors with basic needs such as food and clothing, to longer-term responses such as life skills training and transitional housing programs. For more information contact lhale@loveinctampa.org or www.loveinctampa.org. Charlie Hambos is our church contact. Contact him for more info. We look forward to being a strong partner both on an individual and community level.

‘Tis the Season ... Make Sure Your Will Keeps Pace with Your Life

Join the St. John Legacy Society Today!

Did you know your will reflects the time when it was created? Do you have good intentions to update your will but have failed to do so? Now is as good a time as ever to make changes just 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. We would like to properly thank you and include you as a member of the St. John Legacy Society.

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.

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

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](https://www.facebook.com/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.



Pictures

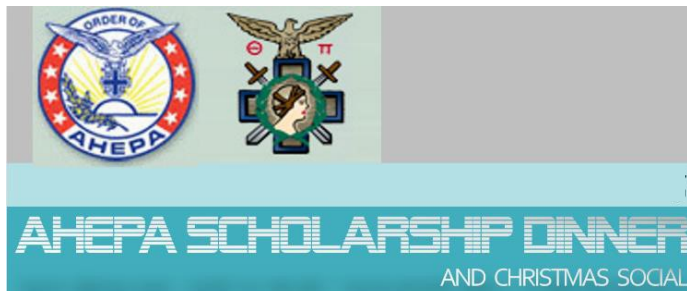
Go to [Flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa) and search "St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church" or go to www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa





AHEPA FAMILY NEWS – DECEMBER 2018

AHEPA FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP DINNER AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL DECEMBER 21, 2018



On December 21, 2018 the AHEPA FAMILY will host the annual **SCHOLARSHIP AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL DINNER** at the Floridan Hotel. We will be once again awarding scholarships to the young members of our community including high school seniors, college and graduate school students. To date Ahepa has awarded over 30 scholarships worth over \$30,000 to worthy students. Help us by making a contribution to our scholarship fund today!

We invite **everyone**, including Ahepans, Daughters Sons and Maids, friends, family and members of the community to attend this fun event

filled with holiday cheer to support the deserving young members of our community. Please make your reservations by calling (813)254-6980. THE ENTERTAINMENT THIS YEAR WILL BE STROLLING CAROLERS! Put it on your calendar and plan to attend. You will have a great time.

2018 WALK TO END ALZHEIMER'S On Saturday, November 3, 2018 the Daughters of Penelope and Ahepa participated in the "WALK TO END ALZHEIMER'S". The event was led by Maria Zabetakis and the Daughters of Penelope. A great time was had by everyone and they raised over \$1,500 for the cause to end Alzheimer's as part of the Hillsborough WALK. The Tampa-Hillsborough County Walk raised over \$300,000 with 286 Teams and 2,282 participants. BRAVO TO ALL. A lunch was held at Samaria Restaurant after the walk attended by Ahepa Family walkers and contributors to the cause.



THEATRE PRODUCTION FROM GREECE SUPPORTED BY AHEPA AND DAUGHTERS

Ahepa was one of the supporting organizations of the Tampa performance of "My Mother's Sin" by **G. Vizyenos**, presented under the auspices of the General Secretariat of Greeks Abroad - Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Hellenic Republic Ministry of Tourism, the Greek National Tourism Organization and the Greek Consulate of Tampa. The performance was presented for the first time in English. The performance traveled around the US in November and December 2018 and will be presented at universities and a wider audience of Hellenism abroad. In the United States it will be presented at Harvard University, Yale University, Columbia University, Floridan Palace Hotel, Tampa, Florida and the University of Illinois at Chicago.

AHEPA FAMILY MID-YEAR LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

AHEPA, Daughters of Penelope, Maids of Athena and Sons of Pericles, attended the District 2 Mid-Year Leadership Conference held in Pasco County. An outstanding weekend of constructive meetings, fun, fellowship, good food, dancing and most importantly, honoring our Past District Governors from the entire AHEPA family occurred. Ourania Stephanides, District Governor of the Daughters of Penelope, organized the event which was an outstanding success. Congratulations Ourania!

EPIPHANY BANQUET

The Annual Ahepa Epiphany Banquet will be held in Tarpon Springs, Florida on January 5, 2018 at the Innsbrook Resort. The Special Invited Guest is His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios. FOR TICKETS OR INFORMATION CONTACT Tim Keffalas, Chapter 16 President Email: timkeffalascampaign@gmail.com or call 727-510-3934 to pay by credit card.



TAMPA-HERAKLION SISTER CITIES – AHEPA FAMILY OF TAMPA SUPPORT

Substantial progress in our quest to establish Heraklion as a Greek Sister City in Tampa has occurred. Both the Mayor of Tampa and the Mayor of Heraklion have approved the establishment of a Sister Cities Relationship and approved the Agreement document. We have established and received tentative approval for having a Signing of the Agreement in Tampa and it is scheduled on January 31, of 2019. We will also have a formal Reception/Dinner for the Mayors and meetings with members of the Heraklion delegation. Supporters in addition to Ahepa Tampa include: the Greek Embassy Washington D.C.; the Greek Consulate in Tampa; The Tampa Museum of Art; the Pan Cretan

JOIN TODAY – BECOME A MEMBER OF AHEPA OR THE DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE
OR IF YOU ARE 14- 18 YEARS OLD BECOME A MEMBER OF THE
SONS OF PERICLES OR THE MAIDS OF ATHENA

~ December 2018 ~					
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Boxes of Hope		Philoptochos Collection for the Spring all month long		Philoptochos to sell Spanakopita Dec. 2-23	
2 **Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA Christmas Cards AHEPA Chapter Meeting	3 ** Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	4 ** St. Barbara Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. WBS (at church) SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	5 ** Choir Practice 7:15 p.m.	6 **YAH 11:30 a.m. St. Nicholas Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Greek School 6:00 p.m.	7 **
9 ** St. Anna Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Stewardship Sunday Philoptochos Luncheon GOYA Christmas Cards GOYA 5:00 p.m.	10 ** Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	11 ** WBS 10:00 a.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	12 ** St. Spyridon Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Choir Practice 7:15 p.m.	13 ** Greek School 6:00 p.m.	14 **
16 **Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Christmas Program Philoptochos Christmas Party YAL 5:00 p.m.	17 ** No Bible Study Service of Preparation for the Nativity 6:00 p.m.	18 ** WBS 10:00 a.m. SBS 7:00 p.m. College Student Event- 6:30 p.m. No Basketball	19 ** Choir Practice 7:15 p.m.	20 ** Greek School 6:00 p.m.	21 **
23 **Orthros 8:15 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m. MetroMin Holiday Tent 2-4:30 p.m. Royal Hours 6:00 pm	24 ** Nativity Eve Great Vespers 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Orthros 5:30 p.m. Liturgy 7:00 p.m. OFFICE CLOSED	25 Christmas Day No Services No basketball OFFICE CLOSED	26 No Fasting Until January 5 OFFICE CLOSED	27 Winter Youth Rally No Greek School	28 Winter Youth Rally
30 St. Anyisia Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Winter Youth Rally	31 No Bible Study				
					1 ** DOP District Governor's Luncheon
					8 **
					15 ** Com. Outreach St. Eleftherios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday School Christmas Party/Boxes of Hope Scholarship Dinner
					22 **
					29 Winter Youth Rally

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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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, VP	813-340-8737
Gary Ward, Treasurer	813-846-3898
Sandra Pappas, Secretary	813-785-3747
George Chagaris	727-420-1920
Amin Hanhan	813-846-2957
Edie Kavouklis	813-758-0305
Jimmy Konstas	813-220-7352
Ryan Rindone	704-564-2046
Aris Rogers, II	813-309-5525
Dante Skourellos	813-765-9534

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Magda Myer 813-909-2327

AHEPA

Gus Paras, President 813-254-6980

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

Brett Mourer 813-376-9315

Chanter

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Choir

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

Community Outreach

Greg Melton 813-967-2074

Connect Through Christ -

Special Needs Ministry for Children
Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534

Dance Groups

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

Daughters of Penelope

Nicole Leontsinis, President 703-585-7490

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

Hope/Joy

Debbie Nicklow 813-690-0671

Junior Olympics

Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

MOMS

Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862
Lindsey Skourellos 813-503-7845

Parish Nurse

Stavrula Crafa 727-409-0686
Edie Kavouklis 813-758-0305

OCF

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Oratorical Festival

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Photography Ministry

Olya Clifton 661-243-9352

Philoptochos

Lisa Alsina 813-728-1094

Small Group Bible Study

South, Bessie Palios 813-523-0347
Women, Debbie Kavouklis 813-258-5571

Strategic Planning

Marc Edquid 813-422-8940
Gary Ward 813-846-3898

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Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

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Vickie Peckham 813-406-5626

Usher

Tom Georgas 813-985-0236

Visitation Committee

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Welcoming Ministry

Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Young Adult

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Young at Heart

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

Youth Protection

Catherine Mitseas 813-571-0658

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.