

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*

February 2020

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

Father Stavros' Message

Only God is Infallible

Many of us are familiar with the concept of "infallibility." When we think of this word, most often we think of the Roman Catholic Pope, who is said to be "infallible." And most people think that the infallibility of the Pope means that the Pope can never say anything that is wrong. Which is not what it means at all. When the Pope speaks "ex cathedra," which means from his Papal throne at the Vatican, he speaks with absolute authority, in other words, from this particular place, he can make new doctrine for the church which is unimpeachable during the time that he is Pope.

In the Orthodox world, there is no infallibility of a single individual. Orthodoxy is a synodal system, in that each person in the Orthodox world exists in relation to others. The clergy "belong" to a Bishop. Thus, the priests are limited in what they can do based on what their bishop will allow. The bishops belong to a Church, meaning they belong to one of the fourteen autocephalous churches. So, Metropolitan Alexios belongs to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. So does Archbishop Elpidophoros of America. Neither of them operate independently. Even the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew belongs to the Patriarchal Synod in Constantinople. He sits as the first Hierarch of the Synod, but the Synod still votes on policies that govern our church.

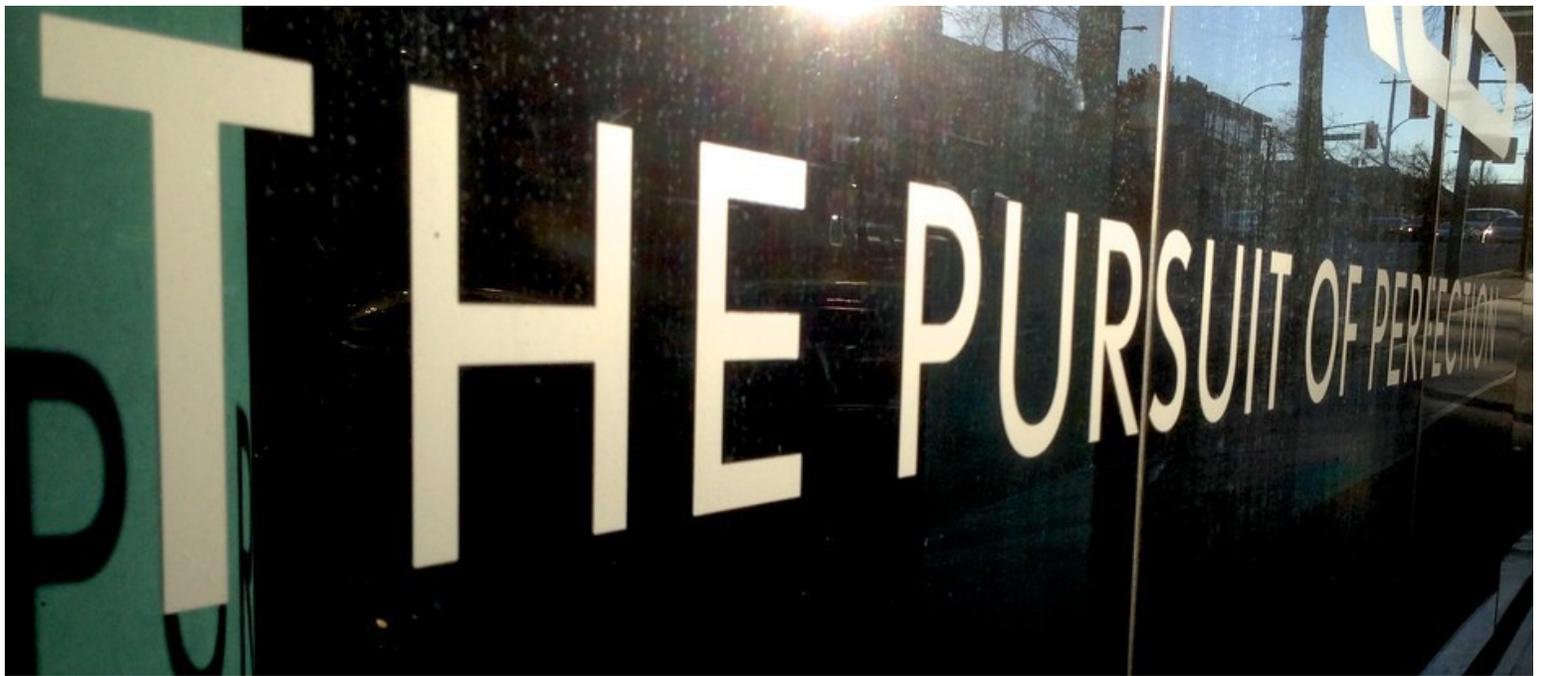
The Infallibility of the Church

In the Middle Ages, the Church was seen as infallible. The Roman Catholic Church was the church that dominated the civilized world. Western Europe was almost entirely Roman Catholic. Eastern Europe was almost entirely Orthodox. In the late 15th Century, the Orthodox lands were almost entirely captured by the Ottomans. And by the end of the 15th century, Orthodoxy was a religion in captivity, surviving in secret, something it would be forced to do until the early 19th century, almost 400 years later.

In the early 16th Century, the Catholic Church fractured. The Church had espoused the sale of indulgences, in other words, sins could be forgiven by paying money for forgiveness. Because the church was seen as infallible, incapable of doing or saying wrong, people went along with this practice. However, the voices of the many people cried foul. And in 1517, Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the door of a cathedral in Germany and thus began the Protestant Reformation.

The Infallibility of Scripture

One of the Protestant contentions against the Catholic Church was that the church was not infallible. Rather, Scripture was infallible. Scripture was unimpeachable. Nowhere in the Scriptures was the sale of indulgences mentioned. And there were lots of other things that were not mentioned in Scriptures. So the Reformation and the resulting churches threw out a lot of traditions, under the guise that they were not in scripture. The Reformation



changed the thinking of society that it was not the church that was infallible but that the Scriptures were infallible.

In the Orthodox Church, Scripture works in harmony with Tradition. There is nowhere in the Bible where it says to build churches and adorn them with icons, there is no mention of the Divine Liturgy, or vestments. There are no instructions for how to celebrate a wedding, baptism or funeral. The foundation for everything we do in the Orthodox Church has its basis in Scripture. That is a true statement. Over centuries, Biblical concepts have evolved into Traditions that have been codified (universally agreed upon) throughout the world. For instance, Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He took bread and wine and shared them as His Body and Blood, instructing His followers to share Him in this way.

The Infallibility of Science

There were two events in the 19th century that shifted attention away from the infallibility of Scripture—the Industrial Revolution and the theory of evolution espoused by Charles Darwin. The Industrial Revolution (1760-1840) brought about new manufacturing processes and new inventions that put science and business and the forefront of society. In the mid-19th Century, Charles Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species*, espousing a theory of evolution which debunked the Biblical notion of a 7-day creation, or that the world was less than 10,000 years old. And if the Bible wasn't a literal truth, was it true at all?

In the Orthodox Church, we do not interpret the Bible literally. The Creation of the world did not take place in seven literal days. The hand of God was behind each step in creation. Man and woman were intentionally created in by God in His image. We do not believe that we evolved from monkeys. Even the fossil record does not support the hundreds of thousands of changes that would have to occur for a monkey to evolve into a man. Adam and Eve were not literal people. They had three sons, according to

the Bible. How then would the rest of human race have been created? “Adam” means “humanity” and “Eve” means “motherhood.” God created the human race with a way to recreate itself. The “fall” of Adam was not the sin of one man, but the collective falling away of humanity from God.

The problem with the non-literal interpretation of the Bible is that people then dismiss the entirety of the Bible, as if any of it is subject to interpretation or reinterpretation. The issue rests with how the Bible was put together. We know how the New Testament was put together. We know that the Evangelists were either eyewitnesses to the accounts in their Gospels or were recipients of oral history from actual eyewitnesses. There is still much debate over how the Old Testament was written, and obviously no one witness the beginning of the Creation of the world or the creation of the first human beings. Much of the Old Testament is factual. Names of kings and prophets are part of an historical record.

Over the past two centuries, people have used science to try and disprove God. They've used science for many centuries prior to the last two as well to try and disprove God. We can know a lot about God, though we can't know everything. And we can get a scientific understanding of a lot of things, but not everything. Science will never be able to prove what caused the very first thing that happened to happen. Because God is Who caused the first thing to happen. Once we believe that God is the cause of the first thing, then everything else falls in line as far as faith, and the position of God as infallible. Let's come back to that. . .

The Infallibility of Self

Many people describe the period of time we are living in as a post-Christian world. While Christians still make up the majority of the world's population, as well as the United States population, Christianity is in decline. Even those who are Christians in name are not as faithful, many

are “Christians of convenience.” In today’s world, we have anointed ourselves as infallible. We are living in a time when just about any behavior you want to engage in is okay if a person thinks it is okay. We can change our identity for any identity we want. (I recently read a serious article about a 15 year old boy who was suddenly orphaned when both his parents died. He lives with his grandparents in a retirement community that advertises that only 55+ may live there. The Home Owner Association is trying to evict the grandparents because having a 15 year old living there violates the HOA. There were many comments about the article, most slamming the HOA. However, one comment said, “why not just say you identify as a 55 year old, and all is well. Why not? We seem to be okay with any and every other kind of identity change). Every day, we see acts of rudeness and selfishness. As an example, recently I was driving near church,

on a street that was already narrowed by the creation of a bike lane. And there was a pack of bikers that instead of biking in the bike lane, were riding their bikes on the only lane where traffic is now allowed. How many accidents are caused by texting? Despite easy access to Uber and other driving services, people are still drinking and driving and killing others in the process. It’s like we operate without thought to others.

We often elevate our opinions to unimpeachable truth, rather than just opinion. Discussions about politics have ended friendships. And how many of us experience the overaggressive driver riding on our bumper—it’s like an almost every time I get in the car experience.

The Infallibility of God

So we have to ask ourselves seriously, who is at the center of our lives—is it us, or is it God? There can only be one center of anything, including our lives, and only one thing can occupy the center. We can’t share the center with God. Either He is in the center or we are in the center. There are undoubtedly many people (myself included) who trade off giving the center to God. On Sundays and at other times, we cede the center to Him. But when we need to, or when we feel like it, we take the center for ourselves.

So the question is, who is infallible in your life—is it you, or is it God?

We know that the Church is not infallible—the Church is a God-ordained institution now run by human beings. I

am a priest, but also a sinful human being. I make mistakes all the time, just like every other human being, including all clergy. The church is most certainly fallible.

It is hard to say that the Scripture is not infallible. The Gospels and the words of Christ are true and unimpeachable. When He tells us to love God and love our neighbors, there is nothing impeachable about that. The Resurrection happened. That is the center of Christianity. However, there are pieces especially of the Old Testament that cannot be taken literally. This doesn’t mean that we throw out the entirety of Bible, or even throw out any of it. It is why, however, we should study the Bible, and read commentaries, participate in Bible studies, and listen to homilies to help us understand what we are reading.

Science is not infallible, because there is one critical question that science will never answer—what thing started everything. Because science seeks to separate itself from God and God is the answer to this question, science indeed is fallible.

And we most certainly are not infallible. We human beings are fallen creatures. We are not omniscient. Even the most egotistical people admit they make mistakes. No, they might not publicly admit them, but anyone who has ever changed direction in business or finance, or even bought a better house has admitted

they are not infallible. Because infallible things need no change. We are constantly changing, right down to each time we buy something new.

Only God is infallible. Only God is perfect.

This doesn’t mean that God is comprehensible. Because He is greater than us, we cannot fully comprehend Him. Because if we could, that would raise us to a level that is equal or greater than Him. And because God is not comprehensible, this leaves us with questions about why certain things happen in life, why He allows certain things, why He seems to create miracles in some instances and at other times seems absent. We try to ascribe things to God’s plan, trying to figure out how certain things could possibly be part of God’s plan. Because we can’t comprehend God, it is impossible to comprehend God’s “plan.”

Faith is like a puzzle

Faith then is not only belief in a God we cannot fully comprehend, but cooperation in a plan we cannot fully understand. In some ways, God’s plan is like a giant puzzle.



zle. Imagine a puzzle so big we can't see the whole thing. Imagine, if you will, a puzzle that is so big it would cover several football fields. If you stood around the border of the puzzle, you would only see the details close to you, you wouldn't be able to see that other side of the puzzle. We all know that when putting a puzzle together, every piece is important, because if even one piece is missing, the puzzle is incomplete. In God's grand plan of salvation, each of us has been entrusted a piece of the puzzle. Some pieces are edge pieces, a few are the rare corners, and most are somewhere in the middle. Some pieces are colorful and complex. Others may seem plain. It is obvious where some fit and other pieces it will be a struggle to find where they fit. Some fit smoothly, and it will be a



challenge to get some to click.

God chose each piece of the puzzle. He made each one unique. He has given each of us our own unique piece to the puzzle, our own unique role to play in His plan for the salvation of all people. When you think about it this way, it is really impossible to know the impact that each of us will make on the entire history of humanity. We can't even see the whole puzzle. All we know that each of us has a piece in it, and our salvation is contingent on the effort we give, based on the faith we have, in the role that God has given us to play.

God has given us a role—do we accept that role? That is

faith in God. God asks for our best effort. That is love for our neighbor.

Taken together with His grace, we have the salvation equation of faith (loving God) + works (loving our neighbor) + grace (the intangible gift from God which completes what is lacking in each of us) = salvation.

The Prodigal Son

We are all familiar with the story of the Prodigal Son, as told in Luke 15:10-31. In this well-known Parable, we meet two sons and their father. The younger son one day says to his father, give me my share of the inheritance that will come to me when you die. This is greed. The son is asking for something that is not supposed to be his. He is saying in essence that he wishes that his father was dead. This is an example of the infallibility of self, referred to above. The younger son placed himself at the center of everything.

The father acquiesced to the request of the younger son. He gave him half of his property. This represents the generosity of God who offers us freely gifts and talents and gives us the free will to do what we want with them. The younger son quickly takes his inheritance, goes to a faraway land and squanders all that he has in loose living. This is sin. Sin is when we take what God has given us—time, talent, opportunity, faith—and we waste it.

Soon the younger son has nothing—no money, no friends, and no food. He decides to go to a farm and gets a job feeding pigs, in exchange for eating the food of the pigs. How low he has fallen. He can't even get a job for money, but is reduced to the level of an animal. He lives with the pigs, he eats with the pigs. When Saint Paul writes that the "wages of sin is death," we see that personified in the younger son, who is no longer living like a human being but like an animal. He is essentially dead.

The key moment in the story is when the younger son "came to himself" and realizes that even his father's servants live better than he does. This is confession, a realization that we have lost our way and need to fix what is broken. The younger son doesn't just sit with his thoughts, he makes a plan to come back. This is repentance. Because just recognizing our sins is not enough, redemption is found in the plan we make to come back from them. His plan involves asking his father to be treated as a hired hand, rather than as a son. The younger son makes his journey home.

The father, seeing his son coming from a distance, runs to his son and embraces him. The son tells his father he would rather be treated as a hired servant. The father will hear none of it. He orders the son to be clothed with the best clothes, that a ring should be put on his hand, and that the fatted calf should be killed so that the return of the son can be celebrated. The mercy of the father mirrors the mercy of God when we come back to him in repentance.

The older son hears of his brother's return, and instead of being joyful, becomes angry. He won't go in to the celebration. When the father comes out to the older son and

asks him why he won't come in, the older son tells the father that the older son has never disobeyed the father, and yet has never had a party in his honor, but the younger son, who has done so much damage, does not deserve the honor given him. There are two problems with this. First, we are all sinners. There is no one who never disobeys the Father. Second, we should rejoice for those who repent, those who have found their way back. This is part of the work of the church, to show the way back to the sinners (all of us), to encourage us to come back, and to rejoice when we do.

The Upcoming Lenten Period—A time to evaluate our center

The word for our parish for 2020 is "time." Time means many things, as we discussed in the last issue of the Messenger. We are about to enter a period of time that the church calls "Great Lent." During the month of February, the church will mark the period of the "Triodion" a four-Sunday period of time before Great Lent that prepares us for the Lenten journey. In terms of the Prodigal Son, this is the time when we evaluate ourselves, where we examine where we sit. Are we with the pigs or with the Father? Are we using our inheritance (His gifts to us) wisely, or have we squandered them? Do we want to come back or

are we happy with the pigs? Lent, which begins March 2, is the period of time when we make our journey back, and ends with Pascha, our arrival "home" and the celebration thrown for us by the Father.

And so the operative question to ask ourselves is this: Who is at the center of your life—is it God, or is it you?

Do our lives operate on the premise that we are the ultimate authority, the infallibility of self? Or do we operate on the premise that God is the ultimate authority, the infallibility of God?

What happens when there is a conflict between God's commandments and our wishes, who wins? Infallibility and who has it in your life is where the answer to this question lies.

The ultimate answer is that it is not the church, science, or the self that are infallible. It is not the politicians, the athletes, the actors or the activists. It is God Himself who is the ultimate source of infallibility. It may take us a lifetime to figure that out, and that's okay. As we approach this year's Lenten journey, let's make plans accordingly to take a few more steps away from the infallibility of self and towards the infallibility of God.

+Fr. Stavros

Wanting to Want to Yearn for God

By Charlie Hambos

God has given us each a special gift. Every single human being has been given this gift from God. It's buried deep within us. Our goal in life is to unwrap the many layers of wrapping paper to expose it and to let it see God. Some of the wrapping paper is kind of loose and some of the wrapping paper is tight. Some layers will be easy to remove and some will be very difficult. Some layers we even put on our selves and some are put on by others. Regardless of how many layers, hopefully, we can still feel it's force to move us towards God.

This gift is not a talent, like playing a sport or being able to sing or being able to listen. It isn't a physical organ. It isn't our brain or our thoughts. On a more surface level, we call it our soul. It is our soul, though, that has a couple different layers or should we say parts or dare say jobs. Our soul is what connects us to God. God gave it to us to protect, to foster and to grow. The part of the soul, however, that we want to discuss here, is the part that yearns for God. According to Google dictionary, the word, yearn means, "to have an intense feeling of longing for something, typically something that one has lost or been separated from."

This definition of yearn works quite well, when we think about our salvation history. God created us. He breathed His Breath inside of us, which is our soul. We were walking and talking with God in paradise. Then we got bored,

as if all of that wasn't enough to satisfy us. We got bored and wanted something more than we could chew, both literally and figuratively which was the knowledge of good and evil. That knowledge separated us from God.

This brings us back to the part of our soul, which is on a full time mission to connect with God, and tries to compete with all the other distractions of this world, making the job slightly impossible. Throw in the concept that the church and worshipping God is becoming obsolete if not taboo and the picture doesn't look so good.

Yet, in God's wisdom, that part of our soul is still there and sends out little but noticeable signals saying, "Hey! Remember God! Hey! Remember God! Hey Remember God!"

But, what happens, when we lose it? What happens when we don't want to remember? What happens when we don't want to yearn? What happens when we try to suffocate that signal? What do we do? The good news is, as hard as we try, and as much as we think we have succeeded, we can never ever suffocate that signal because it is given by God to us, to keep us connected. But we have to want it. Everybody knows what I'm talking about.

Sometimes, in these days especially, we just want to want to yearn for God. That's a start. That's a good start. God wants to be in a relationship with us whether we like it or not. However, it is us, sometimes that does not want to be in a relationship with Him. It happens. It isn't good though.



thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is."

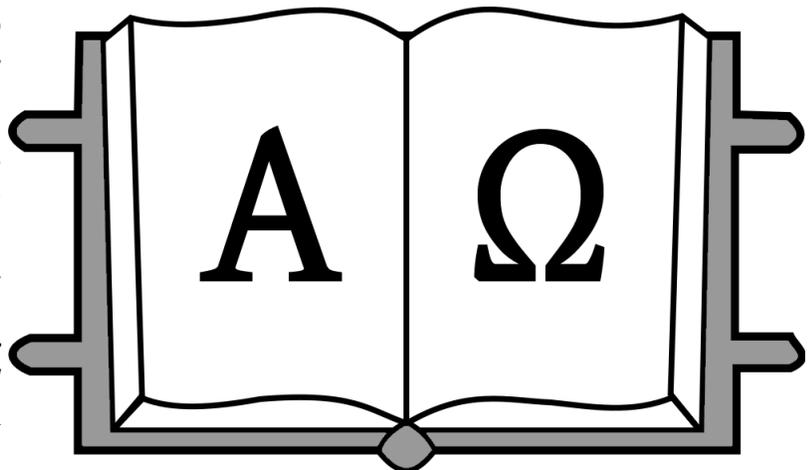
It's quite funny sometimes. God gives us the choice. Yearn for me. Thirst for me. Or don't. Yet, besides that part of our soul that is constantly asking us to yearn and to thirst for Him, He may even create the opportunity from outside ourselves to yearn or to thirst for Him. In Amos 8:11 it says, "*Behold, the days are coming,*" says the Lord God, "*when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.*" This means then that even if we don't thirst for God, God will make us thirst for Him. This could be by circumstances in our life or even when He hardens the hearts of those around us and somehow shines his glory through all of it.

Just remember, God has given us this very important gift. Our job is to uncover the many layers. Layers include things such as distractions, sin, monetary gain, worldly desires, things which seem more tangible than God himself. One doesn't have to rebuke the world completely in order to unwrap the wrapping paper. We have to live. We have to let the light shine deep within us. It is our effort that does it. God has already given us that part of the soul that constantly yearns for God.

When we realize, that emptiness inside of us is that yearning for God. A void which seems impossible to fill, we may start to feel completely defeated. David says in Psalm 119:20, "*My soul is consumed with longing for thy ordinances at all times.*" It's happening within us, we must accept and we must chase after God. In Isaiah 26:9 it says, "*My soul yearns for thee in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee. For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.*" This is what we ought to want. We want our soul to yearn for God in the night and we want our spirit to be intentional about seeking Him. It is then that we will see God is trying to instill righteousness in the world. This idea of our soul hoping and yearning for the Lord is found within both the Vespers and Orthros Services of the Orthodox Christian Church. One of the verses intoned before the hymns of the particular day during the Vespers services from Psalm 130:5 says this, "*Because of Your law, O Lord, I waited for Your; My soul has waited for your word. My soul has hoped in the Lord.*" And in Orthros from Psalm 143:5-6, "*I remembered the days of old, and I meditated on all Your works; I meditated on the works of your hands. I spread out my hands to You; my soul thirsts for You like a waterless land.*"

This brings us to another verb that should describe our wanting to want to yearn for God. Thirst. We ought to thirst for God In Psalm 42:2 it says, "*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?*" It's ok if we don't because we often try to quench our thirst for God in other ways with other drinks. But those drinks will not quench our thirst for God. It is almost like those other drinks don't even count. In Psalm 63:1, it says, "*O God, thou art my God, I seek*

Water is a major component of life. A major component of our body and a major component of the earth. God understands that and He uses it and the church uses it. When Christ met the Samaritan Woman at the well in the Gospel of John, He spoke about the water that only God can provide and that is what we should want to want to yearn to drink. In John 4:13-14, it says, "*Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'*" Of course, the question, we always ask ourselves is, What is this water? This water is the result of unwrapping the paper and letting our soul behold the Glory of God. We have to focus every part of our being to look towards God so our soul can see and establish a connection with Him so we can be fulfilled and complete. So we can hear, like the Evangelist John heard in Revelation 21:6. "*And he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment.'*"



Liturgical Schedule for February 2020

Sunday, February 2 **Presentation of Christ in the Temple**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains & St. Luke **Ushers:** David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Katherine Sakkis, Despina Sibley Ambassador: Cindy Xenick Caller: Elaine Daniels
Coffee Hour: Philotochos OCMC Luncheon **Bookstore:** Zhana Temelkova

Sunday, February 9 **1st Sunday of Triodion (The Publican and the Pharisee)**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains & St. John **Ushers:** Tammy Christou, Jim Armstrong, Florin Patrasciou
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Lisa Alsina, Kathy Bouinekis Ambassador: Genie Carter Caller: Julie Palios
Coffee Hour: AB Families **Bookstore:** Andrew and Kathy Bouzinekis

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

Sunday, February 16 **2nd Sunday of Triodion (The Prodigal Son)**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains & St. Matthew **Ushers:** Brett Mourer, John Alexander, Amin Hanhan
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Helen Cauthorn, Kalliope Chagaris Ambassador: Axl David Caller: Maria Karounos
Coffee Hour: Sunday School **Bookstore:** Bill Manikas

Monday, February 17 **Orthodoxy 101-Teaching Liturgy**
Divine Liturgy 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, February 22 **1st Saturday of Souls**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Memorial Service at the end of the Liturgy

Sunday, February 23 **Sunday of Meat Fare**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains & St. Mark **Ushers:** John Christ, George Mitseas, Bryon Nenos
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Ewana Forde, Carole Fotopoulos Ambassador: Elaine Halkias Caller: Betty Katsamakias
Coffee Hour: Choir Brunch **Bookstore:** MaryAnn Rose & Rita Bedran

Saturday, February 29 **2nd Saturday of Souls**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Memorial Service at the end of the Liturgy

Sunday, March 1 **Sunday of Cheese Fare**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains & St. Luke **Ushers:** Skip Higdon, George Trimikliniotis, Peter Theophanous
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Donna Hambos, Elaine Daniels Ambassador: Skip Higdon Caller: Vickie Peckham
Coffee Hour: CD Families **Bookstore:** John and Anetta Alexander

Monday, March 2 **Beginning of Great Lent--Clean Monday**
Canon of St. Andrew of Crete 10:00-11:00 a.m.
Sacrament of Holy Unction 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday, March 4 Reading of Great Lent 5:30 p.m.
Presanctified Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Friday, March 6 Salutations to the Virgin Mary-1st Stanza 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 7 **3rd Saturday of Souls**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Memorial Service at the end of the Liturgy

Sunday, March 8

1st Sunday of Lent--Sunday of Orthodoxy Procession of icons at the end of the Liturgy
Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:40 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains & St. John

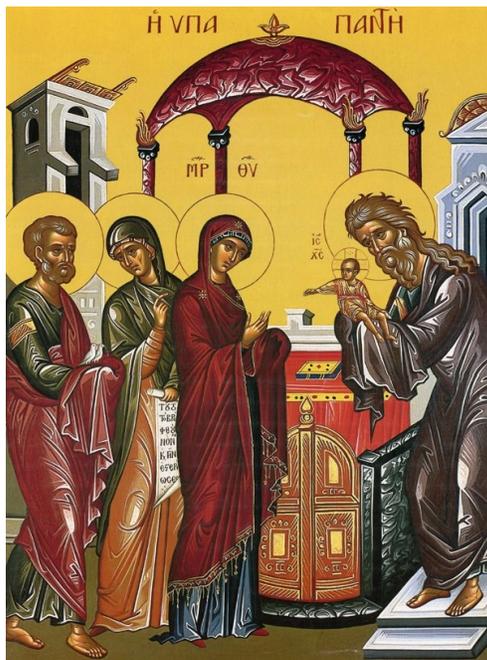
Ushers: Nick Kavouklis; Ed Gerecke; Pete Trakas

Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Louis & Georgia Stratigakos Ambassador: Julie Palios Caller: Christine Worley

Coffee Hour: EFG Families **Bookstore:** TBD

Liturgical Notes for February 2020

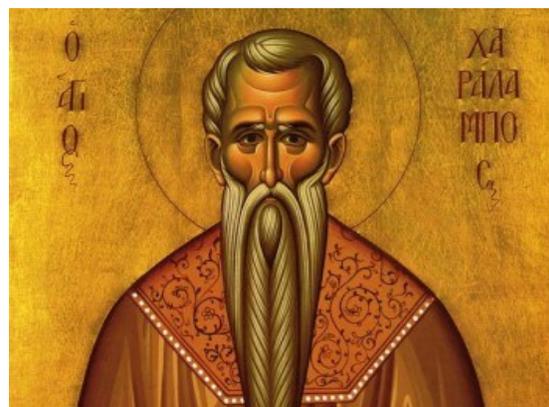
Sunday, February 2 - The Presentation of Our Lord into the Temple.



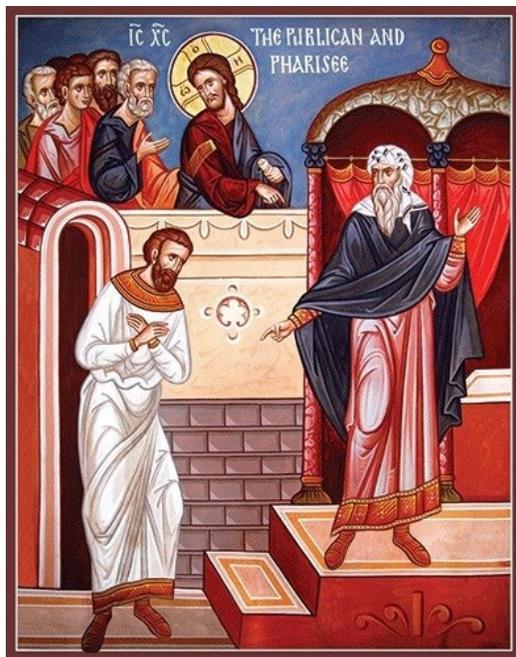
The Presentation of Christ is a major feastday of the church and commemorates the day, 40 days after the Nativity, when Christ was brought to the temple when He was 40 days old. According to the Law of Moses, every male child was brought to the temple on its 40th day, together with a sacrifice of pigeons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

Monday, February 10 - St. Haralambos

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



Monday, February 17 - Teaching Liturgy in the Evening



As part of the Orthodoxy 101 Class, we will have a teaching Divine Liturgy from 6:30-8:30 p.m. on Monday, February 17. The service will be interrupted frequently for explanations and questions. Anyone is welcome to attend the Divine Liturgy, even if you are not taking the Orthodoxy 101 class.

What We Celebrate on the Sundays of Triodion and Lent

Sunday, February 9 - Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

The focus this Sunday is on the Gospel of Luke 18:10-14, in which two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, an externally decent and righteous man of religion, and the other was a publican, a sinful tax-collector who was cheating the people. Though the Pharisee was genuinely righteous under the Law, he boasted before God and was condemned. The publican, although he was truly sinful, begged for mercy, received it, and was justified by God. There is NO fasting this week, in preparation for our great journey.)

Sunday, February 16 - Sunday of the Prodigal Son

On this Sunday in the preparation for Great Lent, Orthodox Christians are to read Christ's parable about God's loving forgiveness (Luke 15:11-24). They are to see themselves as being in a foreign country far from the Father's house and to make the movement of return to God, where we truly belong. The parable gives assurance that the Father will receive them with joy and gladness in their journey through Great Lent, their journey home.



Saturday of the Souls – Saturdays, February 22, February 29, March 7

It is a Tradition in the Orthodox Church to offer prayers for the souls of all of our loved ones who have departed this life, in the hope of the Resurrection to Eternal Life. There are four Saturdays of the year that are dedicated specifically to this purpose. There are three Saturdays at the beginning of Lent and the Saturday before Pentecost. Everyone is encouraged to submit the names of their loved ones to be commemorated at the services. Everyone is encouraged to attend one of these services (and bring Kolyva) if you are able, as a way of honoring the people in your family who have passed away, once a year.

Saturday, February 22, Liturgy at Garden of Memories

We will hold the Divine Liturgy at the Garden of Memories Cemetery at 4207 E. Lake Avenue in East Tampa. We will have Orthros at 9:00 a.m., Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m., with a memorial service at the end of the Liturgy. After Liturgy is concluded, Father Stavros will visit the graves of the relatives of all attendees of the Liturgy. This is the seventh year that we will be doing this liturgy at the Garden of Memories. Please come and join us praying for the souls of our loved ones, as we also pray for strengthening and inspiration for ourselves.

Sunday, February 23 – Judgment Sunday (Meatfare)

Judgment Sunday is also called - Meatfare Sunday because it is the last Sunday, according to the fasting canons, that the faithful eat meat before Easter. During the following week, we do not fast on Wednesday and Friday (except for meat, of course). On this Sunday, we call to mind something that has not even happened yet: the Second Coming of Christ. Our Lord has promised us that He will come again, “to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end” (from the Nicene Creed). We call to mind the “criteria” of our entrance into Paradise, as our Lord said in today’s Gospel: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

Sunday, March 1 - Forgiveness Sunday (Cheesefare)

Cheese-Fare Sunday is the last day in which dairy products are allowed. The Monday after Cheese-Fare Sunday is the official beginning of the Great Lent; this Monday is also called Clean Monday (Kathara Deftera). On Cheese-Fare Sunday the Church commemorates the sending away of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Paradise. Adam and Eve were in complete harmony with God, nature and themselves. They were tempted by the devil and they agreed to eat from the tree of knowledge, in order that they themselves might become gods. The result was fatal; they were cast out of Paradise and sin came into the world. The Holy Fathers selected this event to remind us of our obligations to God and about the laws of fasting and Christian behavior (Matthew 6:14-21).

Sunday, March 1 - Forgiveness Vespers

Great and Holy Lent begins on Monday, March 2, a day called Clean Monday, or “Kathara Deftera” in Greek. Vespers is the service that ends one day and begins another, so we will celebrate the Vespers of Forgiveness and beginning of Great Lent on Sunday evening, March 10, at 6:00 p.m. This service lasts about an hour and marks the beginning of Great Lent, which is announced during one of the hymns mid-way through the service. During this hymn, the priest changes vestments from white to purple, the lights in the church are dimmed and the mood of the service becomes somber. In fact, it is the opposite of the Resurrection Service on Easter, where everything begins dark and goes to light. The service concludes with a prayer of forgiveness being read over the congregation and the exchange of mutual forgiveness among the members of the congregation. This service is an especially appropriate way to begin the Lenten season, and for those who attended last season, is one of the most moving services of the church year.

Monday, March 2 - Canon of St. Andrew

The Penitential Canon of St. Andrew will be read from 10:00-11:00 a.m. on Monday, March 2 as we begin Great Lent. The Canon, in its entirety, takes hours to read. We will read and chant an abridged version of this Canon on Clean Monday. Service books for this service will be available in the narthex.

Monday, March 2 - Holy Unction on Clean Monday

The Sacrament of Holy Unction is always offered during Holy Week on Holy Wednesday. But the sacrament can be done at any time of the year. The emphasis of this sacrament involves, spiritual healing, spiritual cleansing and repentance. What better way to begin Great Lent than the sacrament of Holy Unction. Please bring your Holy Week book to follow along. The service will be held on Monday, March 2, from 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Looking ahead to March

GREAT LENT BEGINS March 2

We will have our Wednesday Night Series again this Lent. Each Wednesday evening of Great Lent, we will have Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, a free Lenten dinner sponsored by one of our ministries, a presentation by Fr. Stavros, and then time for discussion in small group.

The schedule will be as follows:

6:00 p.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy

7:15 p.m. Lenten Dinner

7:45 p.m. Presentation

8:15 p.m. Small Group Discussion

8:45 p.m. Concluding remarks and closing prayer

So, mark your calendars and plan from now to be part of our Wednesday evening Lenten Series. The dinner/discussions will be held on the following dates with these corresponding topics:

TEACH US TO PRAY: THE LORD'S PRAYER

March 4: Our Father

March 11: Thy will be done

March 18: Our daily bread

March 25: Forgiveness of others and ourselves

April 1: Avoiding Temptation

April 8: Beyond the Lord's Prayer

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 2187 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 4 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.

No Basketball on Sundays - Sunday coffee hour is for fellowship, not for sports. Basketballs flying in all directions makes it unsafe for people who are sitting and eating. We've tried to curtail this but to little avail. Please cooperate by refraining from playing basketball in the Kourmolis Center during coffee hour.

No passing of trays —As of January 1, 2019, there will no longer be a tray passed at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. It is our hope that everyone will increase their stewardship in order to bridge this gap. Increased stewardship and less nickel-and-diming (trays) are the mark of a strong parish. This new policy is in line with our desire to be a strong parish. There will be a tray in the narthex. You can deposit your stewardship checks in that tray, give additional donations in that tray or ignore the tray. There is no charge for the small candles. The large candles (the red 7-day ones) will still cost \$5.

NEW PROCEDURE FOR UNCLAIMED COFFEE HOURS - We are excited to present a NEW procedure for hosting our weekly parish coffee hour for the weeks where no ministry has signed up for coffee hour. Certain letters of the alphabet according to last name, have been assigned to each open date. We will be emailing a link to a Sign-Up Genius. Please sign up for those Sundays which correspond to your last name. You may sign up for one or more items which include, set-up, serving, bringing items, or clean up on any particular date. Please see the dates and suggested items below. We would like to see as many different people as possible sign up, so that the burden will not fall on anyone repeatedly. It is also important that our worship experience not be compromised by putting on the coffee hour. Finally, if a family would like to pool together to go a coffee hour, to honor a loved one who has passed, or mark another occasion, please let us know and we'll reserve that date for your family. If there are any questions, don't hesitate to call the church office at 813-876-8830. Thank you for helping us to create an environment that encourages fellowship and community.

Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks: The Bible Project

By Fr. Stavros

In January 2019, we began the “Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks” Bible Challenge, to memorize one Bible verse per week for fifty two weeks. I will provide a verse per week (four or five per month in *The Messenger* and then repeated weekly in the bulletin). I will choose verses that are meaningful to me. You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have.

Most of us don’t spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don’t spend any time. If you want a challenge, do the following:

- Memorize the verse of the week.
- For a greater challenge, read the entire chapter of the book that the verse comes from.
- For a greater challenge, read the entire book where the verse comes from.

Another challenge to consider is to keep a journal and contemplate the verse each week. Read it, memorize it, and then contemplate it. Allow the Holy Spirit to move your mind and your thoughts and then write down those thoughts and keep them in a journal. If you do one reflection on Scripture each week, you will have the best book that could be. A book written by you, for you, guided by the Holy Spirit, who will guide your thoughts as you read the Scriptures.

Below are verses for the month of February. There is one verse for each week. I have written a few comments below each verse to get your mind going. Don’t let my thoughts be your interpretation. Contemplate the Scripture each week and let it speak to you. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you through your reflection on Scripture.

February 2-8

Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Thy people Israel.
Luke 2: 29-32

On February 2, we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. (see liturgical notes above) Luke 2: 29-32 is the Prayer of Simeon, which he prayed over the baby Jesus when he took Him into his arms for the first time. God had promised Simeon that he wouldn’t die until he saw the Christ. When he held Jesus, he knew that God’s promise had come true. And he thanked God for preserving him to that moment, and then exclaimed to God that if it was his time to die, indeed he was ready to die in peace because God’s promise to him had been fulfilled. The Prayer of Simeon is offered over every child in the Orthodox Church, when they enter the church for the first time on their 40 days. It is also offered at the end of Vespers each evening (we don’t do Vespers often, but when we do, this prayer is always offered, so we will hear it during Lent and Holy Week at the Vespers services we will offer). This is a beautiful prayer to offer each night when we go to sleep. It is an affirmation of our belief in God, and our faith in His plan. If it is in His plan for us to pass away in the night, we pray that we will pass from this life to eternal life and that we will pass peacefully, content that God has revealed Himself to us and we have embraced Him. This prayer is a prayer I offer (and you

can as well) after I receive Holy Communion, and I think about my own life and it’s length, praying that if I pass away after one Liturgy and before another, that I will go in peace, according to God’s word, the same way that Simeon did. This doesn’t mean we approach life or faith or God in a fatalistic way, but in a faithful one. To truly be faithful means to be totally open to God’s will, even if that will is for a shorter life on earth. This prayer conveys faith in God as well as hope in everlasting life.

February 9-15

A sword will pierce through your own soul also, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed. Luke 2:35

While most people are familiar with the Prayer of St. Simeon, which was the verses of last week, if one reads on ahead, we find another quote from Simeon, directed to the Virgin Mary. If we reflect on this comment, indeed it is pretty heavy. Simeon joyfully embraced Jesus. Mary and Joseph must have been proud and overjoyed with how Jesus was received. But then Simeon quickly tempered their joy with a prediction, that a sword would pierce through the soul of Mary, and from that, the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed. Which means that Jesus was going to die, the sword of pain and anguish of losing a child would indeed pierce the soul of Mary. But because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross, the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed. Because of His sacrifice, and hers, an untold number of people would come to salvation.

Now in my late 40s, I am convinced that God allowed medical trauma to happen to me as a child and as a teenager because it has made me more empathic to teenagers. I’m sure it plays a role in my directing summer camp. I’m sure my past pain helps me to be more effective at GOYA and hopefully even a better father to my own son. Sometimes a sword does need to pierce our hearts so that the thoughts of others may be revealed, so that others may be helped as a result of our pain. This is true for many of life’s sadnesses and illnesses. Medical breakthroughs only happen because people get sick. Imagine if you could get a terrible sickness but because of your sickness, thousands could be cured of theirs. What if God told a parent that He was going to allow their child to become very sick and die but research on that child would cure childhood cancer and an untold number of people would be healed. If you were a parent, would you agree to offer your child? Whether we are asked or whether we agree, there are two facts about life. Swords pierce our hearts and souls often, however, good can come out of these painful moments. We just have to be patient and allow that good to reveal itself over time.

February 16-22

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Matthew 6:3

We are obsessed with getting credit for things. Everyone likes to be recognized for what they’ve done. We feel unappreciated when no one knows what we have done. And we feel hurt when someone else gets credit for something that we’ve done, and instead of giving us credit, credit goes to someone else who didn’t do anything to make whatever is being recognized a success. God encourages us to do things out of love, not for any credit. He tells us, as an example, to give alms (charity) to the

poor and for no one to know what we are doing. He tells us to pray in the same way, not to parade ourselves around and make our prayers outwardly impressive but to remain quiet and humble in them. Same thing with serving others. One of the things that makes me sad in the Orthodox world is that in order for people to give money, we have to engrave their name on something. God knows who gives and who doesn't. And as long as my name is written in His book, it doesn't matter who else knows. In fifty years, when I'm no longer here, it won't matter if people gave me credit for anything I did, only that God gave me credit in the form of salvation. So, strive to do the right thing, whether anyone notices or gives you credit. Because it only matters what God things. And on the other hand, if we've been rewarded by others but have done our work with pride rather than humility.

February 23-29

An He determines the number of the stars, He gives to all of them their names. Psalm 147:4

In a week we will begin Great Lent, which is supposed to be our annual journey back to Christ, a journey of repentance. Repentance begins not with confession that we've done wrong or even humility that we are not perfect. It begins with faith in God. Because if there is no God, there is no need to repentance. Faith is not contingent on mastery of theology, or knowledge of God. Even limited knowledge can produce strong faith. The first step in our faith journey is a belief that God created us, someone greater than us created us. This puts God at the center, rather than us. A great way to connect with God is to look at the stars. There are too many stars to name. Just as we can never have mastery over God, we will never have complete knowledge of the stars, as they are infinite in number and in beauty as well. It is God who has placed each star in the sky, just like it is God who has called each of us to a unique calling. We are like the stars, too numerous to count, infinite in beauty and diverse in talent.

Policy for Letters of Recommendation

Every year, Father Stavros gets many requests for letters of recommendation for students to get into college or for scholarships. Here are some guidelines to assist those who will be making these requests.

The person for whom the letter is being written needs to contact Father Stavros, not their parents. Please give Father at least two weeks' notice to write a letter. Please send your information to Father in an email at frstav@gmail.com.

1. Your current school, year of study, major, and career objective
2. The name of the scholarship, who it is to be addressed to, and whether the letter is to be mailed, or given to the student in a sealed envelope.
3. The kind of scholarship that you are applying for - is it for sports, or writing, or business, etc.
4. The due date of the letter
5. Some information about yourself that will be helpful in writing the letter - i.e. if the letter is for leadership, please send leadership activities.

St. John the Baptist Community News

Parish Registry

Baptism-Miriam Pavlidis Levine, Daughter of Lawrence Levine and Maria Pavlidis was baptized on Sunday, December 15. Dimitrios and Georgia Malandrinos were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Adult Baptism-Sara Lynne Winston was baptized on Sunday, December 22. Pauline Katsouli was the Godmother. Na Zisei!

Baptism-Ellie Agni Langas, daughter of Dimitris and Maria Langas, was baptized on Sunday, December 29. Polyxeni Langas was the Godmother Na Sas Zisi!

Funeral-George Kaburis passed away on January 2. Funeral service was held on January 8. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Peter Antoniou on the passing of his mother, Athena Antoniou, on January 1. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to Perry Katsamakis and family, on the passing of his grandfather, Pericles Katsamakis, on January 3. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Jenny Paloumpis, on the passing of her father, Joe Abene, on January 10. May his memory be eternal!

The Prayer Team will celebrate its 5th Anniversary on February 20!

For five years, Fr. Stavros has been writing a daily reflection. It comes out every morning at 12:30 a.m. via Constant Contact. From Monday-Friday, Father will be writing on the subject of "The Heart of Encouragement" and on Saturday - Sunday, Father is writing on the Scriptures of each Sunday of Triodion and Lent.

Celebration of Theophany and our Feastday of St. John

The first weekend of 2020 brought a lot of activity to the Orthodox of the Tampa Bay area. First, on January 4, a group of parishioners from our parish went to Tampa International Airport to greet His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros, as he arrived in Tampa for his first visit to the Tampa Bay area.

On Sunday, January 5, we hosted His Eminence, as he celebrated his first Divine Liturgy in Florida as our Archbishop. The church was filled beyond capacity (there were 100 people in the hall watching via livestream) as His Eminence celebrated the Divine Liturgy and Blessing of the Waters service, assisted by Fr. Stavros and Fr. Stratton. His Eminence stayed with us in the Kourmolis Center well after the service ended, enjoying fellowship with our parishioners.

On January 6, we had 8 young men from our parish dive for the cross at the Epiphany Celebration in Tarpon Springs. They were, Joseph Hambos, Dominic Garcia, Nicholas Kataras, James Kataras, James Kavouklis, Antonio Bavaro, Taki Tsetsekas and Spiro Grapsas. Many of our parishioners were also able to interact with the Prime Minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who was in attendance at the Epiphany services in Tarpon Springs.

On the evening of January 6, Fr. Stavros and Fr. John Bociu (Sarasota) celebrate Great Vespers for the Feastday of St. John. A big thank you to the Philoptochos Society who sponsored a reception following Great Vespers.

On January 7, His Grace Bishop Sevastianos celebrate the Divine Liturgy for our Feastday. He was assisted by Fr. Stavros, Fr. Stratton, Fr. John Stefero (St. Pete), Fr. Jim Paris (Clearwater), Fr. Andrew Pavlakos (New Port Richey), Fr. Theofanis Katsiklis (Tarpon Springs) and Fr. William Damaskos (Clearwater). We are very thankful to Mary Nenos, who offered the Artoklasia for both the Vespers and the Liturgy. Special thanks to the Hambos family, who cooked for the Feastday luncheon. Also thank you to our choir who sang so beautifully on both January 5 and 7. A big thank you for everyone who attended and who helped make our feastday weekend truly special!

Parish Council News—The Parish Council officers for 2020 will be as follows: President-Jim Armstrong, Vice-President -Euripides (Rip) Panos, Secretary-John Zelatis, Treasurer-Gary Ward. Ryan Rindone is also leaving the Parish Council. We thank Ryan for his years of service on the Board. Carole Fotopoulos has been appointed to the vacant spot.

Welcome Fr. Stratton Dorozenski and Pres. Denise—Fr. Stratton and Pres. Denise Dorozenski have served the church for over 40 years. Their two daughters, Stacy and Tia (and their spouses and children) have been part of our parish for years. Fr. Stratton recently retired to this area and will be serving with us on many Sundays. We warmly welcome him and Pres. Denise to our parish.

Orthodoxy 101 Class will Begin in February

Fr. Stavros offers this class two times per year, in the spring and in the fall. This will be a Four-week course of study on Monday nights to make people aware of the basics of being an Orthodox Christian. The classes will be part lecture, part discussion, with lots of time for questions and answers.

Who should attend the Orthodoxy 101 class?

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

The four sessions will be done as follows:

Monday, February 3 A Tour of the Orthodox Church: What we see in the Church and what it means

Monday, February 10 Orthodox Spirituality—Introduction to the Sacraments

Monday, February 17 The Divine Liturgy—This will actually be a “teaching” Liturgy on the solea of the church. If you have taken the class, or if you wish to only attend THIS session, please feel free to do so.

Monday, February 24 Orthodox Traditions—fasting, icons, prayer and separating Theology from “yiyalogy” Classes will be held on these three Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary.

Please sign up with Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com, so he has enough materials for everyone. There is no charge for this class.

Young Adult Ministry Sunday, February 16

The YAL will have our dinner and discussion. We'll meet at 5:00 p.m. in the Kourmolis Community Center, walk somewhere close by to have dinner, then walk back for some discussion. Please RSVP to Charlie if you are going to attend. Dates may change. Charlie will send an email.



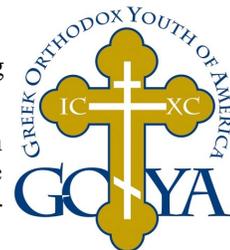
Vasilopita--\$1,600 raised for St. Basil's Academy from our Vasilopita Sunday on January 12. Thank you to our Philoptochos Society and Jeanie Nenos for organizing our annual Vasilopita Sunday.

Thanks for helping hands for Christmas Candlelight and Christmas service—A big thank you to Tony and Carole Fotopoulos, who donated the food for our annual Christmas Candlelight Service in December, as well as to Skip Higdon who helped set up everything. Many people attended, and were able to enjoy fellowship and food after the beautiful and emotional service. A big thank you to Jim Armstrong and his crew, as well as AHEPA for the beautiful Christmas Eve “breakfast for dinner” after our Christmas Eve Divine Liturgy. These opportunities for fellowship are very important in the life of our parish. We are not only a community that prays together but one who laughs together, cries together and shares fellowship together. If the Body of Christ is the people, the most important thing we do is worship together. But getting to know one another through fellowship is what allows us to help and serve one another.

GOYA NEWS

Lockin on February 8 - Our GOYA will have its annual spring lock-in on Saturday, February 8, beginning at 5:00 p.m. and ending after Divine Liturgy on Sunday, February 9.

Meeting - February 23 - Father/Son Retreat, regular meeting for girls. There will be a GOYA meeting on Sunday, February 23. For this meeting, all fathers and sons will have a special session with Fr. Stavros. We invite all dads to come with their sons. The girls will have a guest speaker. The meeting will be from 5:00-7:30 p.m. (Fathers and Sons event will finish at 8:00 p.m.)



Bible Studies are Continuing

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)

Location: Administration Building meeting room

Studying: The Book of Revelation

Group Leader: Charlie Hambos

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

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

Meeting Dates: February 3, 10, 24

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

Location: At the church

Group Leader: Rotates between members and Father Stavros

Meeting time: Tuesday mornings from 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Meeting Dates: February 4, 11, 18, and 25

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: John Kokenis

jkokenis@stjohntpa.org; 630-306-7716

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

Meeting Dates & Topics:

February 4--Christian Anthropology

February 11--Palm Sunday

February 25--Crucifixion of Christ

GriefShare Ministry Continues on Tuesday

It may be hard for you to feel optimistic about the future right now. If you’ve lost a spouse, child, family member, or friend, you’ve probably found there are not many people who understand the deep hurt you feel. This can be a confusing time when you feel isolated and have many questions. “Going to GriefShare feels like having warm arms wrapped around you when you’re shivering.” GriefShare groups meet weekly to help you face these challenges and move toward rebuilding your life. Each GriefShare session has three distinct elements: Video seminar with experts, support group discussion with focus and personal study and reflection. We will meet from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in the Administration Building Meeting Room on Tuesdays (note date change), starting January 14, for 13 weeks, ending on Tuesday, April 7. For January, GriefShare will meet January 14, 21, and 28. For more information please contact Donna Hambos at 813-843-8412 or dhambos@msn.com. Books for the program will be provided. Donation for the book suggested but not required. Open to all family and friends. *Griefshare remains open enrollment with support towards healing and hope. You can begin at any time. If you attended last semester and missed a day or two, you can come for those days or repeat the whole thing.*



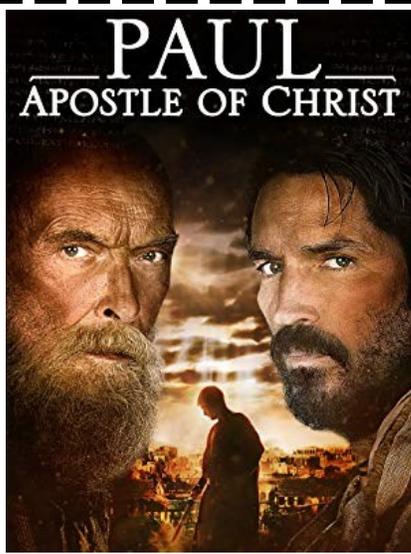
GO RED SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16-February is healthy heart month. We celebrate Valentine’s Day. We get our hearts ready for Great Lent. And we recognize the need to live healthier lives. As a show of support for our hearts and an opportunity to do something together, everyone is asked to wear RED on Sunday, February 16. We did this last year and it was great. See you in red on February 16.

MEN'S
GROUP

Men’s Group - Our men’s group meeting for February will be Sunday, February 16, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. We will meet at church at 5:00 p.m., walk to a nearby restaurant for dinner and fellowship and then return to the church for discussion. All men of our parish are welcome and you can bring your non-Orthodox friends as well. Our March meeting will be Sunday, March 29.

Get Acquainted Sunday, February 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.



MOVIE NIGHT FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Dinner: 6:30 p.m. Movie: 7:15 p.m.

Join us for dinner, a movie and discussion in the Kourmolis Center
(There is no charge for this event)

“Paul the Apostle of Christ”

As darkness spreads over the Roman empire, Paul and Luke defy a ruthless emperor, risking their lives to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Philoptochos News



We hope you had a blessed holiday season with family and friends.

The children and their families of Ruskin Elementary were very appreciative for the food that donated by Philoptochos during the holiday season. We fed 66 children, rice, black beans, breakfast items, snacks etc.

Saturday Feb 1 9:00-12:00 p.m. --Please join us for our Philoptochos retreat with Father Stavros. Please notify Katherine Sakkis @ Ksakkis@sakkisgroup.com or Lisa Alsina @ Lisaalsina@gmail.com if can attend so we may have enough refreshments.

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Fr. Stavros will present on the following topics:

- ~Encouragement to Pray
- ~Encouragement to Read Scripture
- ~Encouragement to grow in Faith
- ~Encouragement to encourage one another
- ~Encouragement to be who God has created you to be

Sunday Feb 2 OCMC Luncheon

Philoptochos will sponsor its 9th Annual Missions Sunday to support overseas Orthodox Missions. There will be a luncheon to benefit missions work with all proceeds going toward the Mission Center.

March 8 Membership Tea Party--- Save the date



St. John Greek Orthodox Church's Young-At-Heart Ministry

Open to everyone

For more information, contact
Michael Trimis, President, 813-784-4872
TrimisM@gmail.com
Mary Nenos, Vice President 813-508
5553 MaryNenos@gmail.com

MEETING DATE AND TIME: First Thursday of Each Month at 11:30 a.m. (unless otherwise posted)

LOCATION: Zaharias Room in Peter and Sophia Kourmolis Hall at St John Greek Orthodox Church.

Everyone is welcome. We have added 1 new members this month for a total 32 and our "friends" email list is another 32.

We welcome people of all ages to join our email list as a member or a friend of YAH.

Lunch is either a pot-luck lunch or we visit one of our local parishioners' restaurants.

OUR ACTIVITIES INCLUDE

- Welcome new members
- Celebrating Birthdays,
- Wellness committee visitations
- Sharing and giving thanks to recent happiness events
- Games and activities
- Humor Time

OUR EVENTS

- February 6, 2020 - Pot Luck Lunch in the Zaharias Room at St John Church
- January 2, 2020 - Lunch at the new Psomi Bakery and Restaurant
- December 7, 2019 - Trip to the Show Palace Dinner Theatre featuring Elf the Musical
- October 5, 2019 - Ybor City Museum State Park and lunch at the Soup Stone Grill



OUR OCTOBER ACTIVITY INCLUDE	
LOVE	Eight visitations were conducted to people who are home-bound or at a facility
WORSHIP	Weekday Church Services is attended by many YAH members
COMMUNITY	YAH members played a large part in this year's Church Festival
LEARNING	Five YAH members attend bible studies
SERVICE	YAH performs a service to seniors and the homeless

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

Thirsting For God In A Land Of Shallow Wells

by Matthew Gallatin

The author devoted more than twenty years to evangelical Christian ministry. No matter how hard he tried, he was never able to experience the God he longed to know. His quest was a dream that could not find fulfillment, a deep question that could not answer itself, an eternal thirst dwelling in a land of shallow wells.

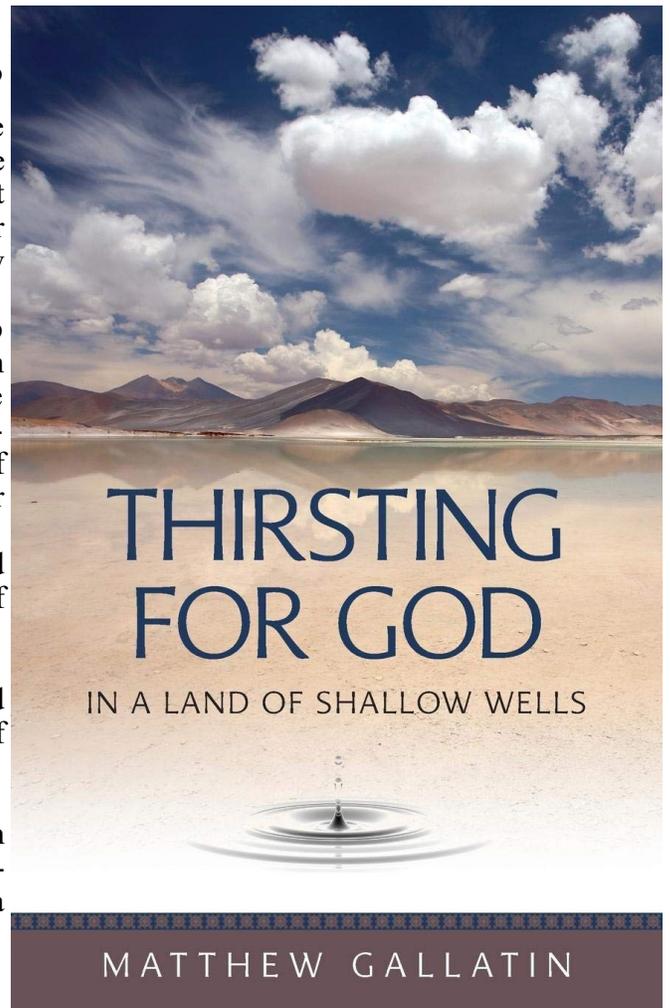
Ultimately, Gallatin's thirst was quenched by the deep waters of the historic Orthodox Christian Faith. In "Thirsting for God," Gallatin expresses many of the struggles a Protestant will undergo in coming face-to-face with Orthodoxy; he also gives readers a taste of the encounter with the living God that lies in store for them in the Holy Eastern Orthodox Church.

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

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

Brett and Ana Mourer



THE ROAD BACK TO CHRIST:

REFLECTIONS ON LENT,
HOLY WEEK AND THE RESURRECTION



FR. STAVROS N. AKROTIRIANAKIS

The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection is now on sale! It is a series of daily reflections to be read from the beginning of Triodion (this year that is February 9) through All Saints Day (this year that is June 14). Pick up your copy today so you can begin reading it on February 9. This book costs \$18.99 and all monies taken in at the bookstore go to the church.

FEBRUARY 2020 SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

January was a very busy month for the Sunday School. Our topics for January were the Epiphany/ St. John the Baptist, the Vasilopita/St. Basil, Making Moral Choices, and our new topic: The Fruits of the Spirit. Cindy Xenick did a lesson on Kolyva and memorials for our 7th and 8th graders on Jan. 19. On Jan. 26, John Kokenis visited our 2nd graders and 3rd graders.

Congratulations to the young men who dove for the cross at the Epiphany Service in Tarpon Springs. They are Joseph Hambos, Dominic Garcia, Nicholas Katzaras, James Katzaras, James Kavouklis, Antonio Bavaro, Taki Tsetsekas, and Spiro Grapsas. They represented our church and our faith in a beautiful way!

On Saturday January 11, the Sunday School Teachers participated in a retreat with Fr. Stavros. The Sunday School teachers are truly blessed to have Fr. Stavros as our spiritual leader of our Sunday School. Our Sunday School program would not be what it is today without him. THANK YOU Fr. Stavros for dedicating so much of your busy schedule to our Sunday School.

On Sunday, January 12, the Sunday School had their own Vasilopita Celebration. Each student received a piece of this sweet bread and two lucky student found the coin in their piece. Pictured below are those students: Madeline Moran and Vasilios Panos. May they have a year of good fortune. We would also like to congratulate Penn Serbanos for receiving the coin in his Vasilopita piece that was distributed in the church. He was representing All of our Sunday School Students.

We would truly like to thank Melissa Krinos for making this Vasilopita for our Sunday School Children year after year. It was delicious and appreciated by all of our children.

We also had our YOUTH SUNDAY on Jan. 19. The children sang beautifully, our Epistle Reader did a fine job and the Prospora, made by our students, was delicious as usually. Our children are truly great stewards of St. John's.

The next few months will be busy as usual for the Sunday School. Our older students are preparing for the Oratorical Festival and everyone is getting ready for Pascha.

Each Sunday School student in 1st Grade through High School will have the opportunity to participate in the important Sacrament of Confession. The dates are as followed: (Feb. 9: 5th and 6th Grade), (Feb. 16th: 1st and 2nd Grade), and (Feb. 23: 3rd and 4th Grade). Our 7th - High School Students will participate during their GOYAN LENTEN RETREAT on Friday, March 27 – Sunday, March 29 Of course, we will also have a Pre-Lenten Retreat and a Retreat on Good Friday.



February 2020 Sunday School Calendar

Sunday, February 2

Youth Sunday (6th-8th Music 11:50)
Topic: Presentation of Christ
John Kokenis: 7th/8th Grades

Saturday, February 8

GOYA Lock-in starts at 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, February 9

Topic: Publican & Pharisee
John Kokenis: 1st Grade
Prospora: 2nd Grade

Sunday, February 16

Sunday School Coffee Hour
Topic: Prodigal Son

John Kokenis: 5th & 6th Grades

GOYA Meeting 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, February 23

Topic: Last Judgement
Prospora: 1st Grade
Kolyva: 5th/6th Grades

HOPE & JOY NEW

“Souper Bowl of Caring”

Which team will raise the most donations for the children of Hope Children's Home?

Sunday, February 2 is not only BIG game where we cheer for our favorite football team, it is also “Souper Bowl of Caring” Sunday a nationwide, youth-led initiative to TACKLE hunger! Pick your favorite team and join our HOPE/

JOY youth ministry collect donations to be given to the children at Hope Children's Home – a Christian home that takes abused, unwanted, discarded or orphaned children and is entirely supported by churches, private individuals, clubs and organizations.

Our Sunday school children will be near the side doors on Sunday, Feb. 2nd holding pots to collect your cash donation or food item. Pick your favorite team's pot to donate to! The BIG winner: HOPE CHILDREN'S HOME!

~ February 2020 Stewardship Message ~

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Matthew 6:21

Let God come into focus in 2020 through your offering of Time, Talents and Treasure!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we experienced another milestone year, with over \$558,732 in Stewardship Gifts from 380 Individuals/Families in 2019! We are deeply humbled and express sincere gratitude for the blessings our loyal parishioners have provided to our beloved church!

The light of Christ shines bright in the hearts of our parishioners and our community has grown touching the lives of many with our mission to ‘Love God & Love thy Neighbor and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as an Orthodox Christian Community.’

We now welcome 2020 with great joy, appreciation and faith we will continue to grow on this beautiful foundation! **To date we have received 210 pledge forms representing \$381,345 in pledges for the year including 16 new Stewards! Our goal to have every parishioner of St. John the Baptist complete a 2020 form.**

It is your sacrificial giving that enables us to sustain our beautiful church, enjoy fellowship, learn and most importantly worship together as Orthodox Christians as we experience the blessings of our Heavenly Father.

‘Do I need to complete a Pledge Form each year?’ – YES! – per our Bylaws to participate & vote at Parish Assemblies. Additionally, our office retains key information including address, ministry interests and your talents that are needed throughout the year. And putting our pledge in writing helps us think about our individual sacrifice and commitment. Pledge forms are available in the Church Narthex, Office, Bookstore and Online. We make it easy! Don't hesitate to call our office or your Stewardship Co-Chairs with any questions.

Housekeeping Notes: Please use the memo or comments field to identify Stewardship Year when submitting a check or via PayPal. We still have many parishioners fulfilling 2019 pledges for which we are grateful.

FEBRUARY IS HEART MONTH



Although heart disease is sometimes thought of affecting mostly older males, heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the United States, about 1 in every 5 female deaths.

Heart disease often develops over time. The warning signs of heart disease may not be obvious and not every person has the same symptoms.

Warning signs

- Certain signs such as chest pain, ankle swelling, and shortness of breath may be signals that something is wrong. Learning the early warning signs and watching for them is important. Identifying them early can help you get treatment and help prevent a heart attack or stroke.
- Chest pain can occur when the heart is not getting enough blood or oxygen. The pain may vary from person to person. Chest pain differs in its type and intensity.
- Some people may feel a crushing pain, while others feel only mild discomfort.
- Your chest may feel heavy. It may feel like someone is squeezing your heart. You may also feel a sharp, burning pain in your chest.
- You may feel pain under your breastbone or in your neck, arms, stomach, jaw, or upper back.
- Chest pain often occurs with activity or emotion. It often goes away with rest or a medicine called nitroglycerin.
- Indigestion can also cause chest pain.
- Some people, like women, older adults, and people with diabetes, may have little or no chest pain. They are more likely to have other symptoms, including:
 - Fatigue
 - Shortness of breath
 - General weakness
 - Change in skin color or greyish skin (episodes of change in skin color associated with weakness)

How can I reduce my risk of heart disease?

- ♥ Know your blood pressure and keep it regulated. High blood pressure has no warning signs, so it's important to have your blood pressure checked regularly. You can do this at the doctor's office or at a grocery store or pharmacy.'
- ♥ Exercise. Any amount of exercise helps to reduce your risk for heart disease.
- ♥ Ask your health care team if you should be tested for diabetes. Uncontrolled diabetes raises your risk of heart disease.
- ♥ Quit smoking. If you don't smoke, don't start.
- ♥ Discuss checking your blood cholesterol and triglycerides with your doctor.
- ♥ Make healthy food choices. Being overweight or obese raises your risk of heart disease.
- ♥ Limit how much alcohol you drink to one drink a day.
- ♥ Manage stress levels by finding healthy ways to cope with stress.
- ♥ When to Call the Doctor
- ♥ Expand Section
- ♥ If you have any signs of heart disease, call your health care provider right away. Don't wait to see if the symptoms go away or dismiss them as nothing.

Call 911 if you experience:

- Chest pain or other symptoms of a heart attack
- If you know you have angina and experience chest pain that doesn't go away after 5 minutes of rest, or after taking nitroglycerin
- If you think you may be having a heart attack
- If you become extremely short of breath
- If you think you may have lost consciousness

If you have questions or need more information, please contact:

Marcelle Triantafilou, RN-BC, BSN
Nursing Ministry



AHEPA FAMILY NEWS – FEBRUARY 2020

AHEPA FAMILY OF TAMPA SCHOLARSHIP DINNER AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL - DECEMBER 21, 2019

The AHEPA Family of Tampa held its annual SCHOLARSHIP DINNER AND CHRISTMAS SOCIAL at the Floridan Palace Hotel on Saturday, December 21, 2019. Scholarships were awarded to four outstanding members of our community: Alexa Alsina, Matthew Robinson, Mia Lenardos, and Sophia Crassas. Since 2010, the AHEPA Family of Tampa has awarded forty-three scholarships to worthy students in support of their educational goals. This year's theme was "Making a Difference in our Community". Edie Kavouklis, Chairperson of the Scholarship Committee, was presented with a special award in honor of her extraordinary efforts to develop and manage the program. We would like to thank all who attended this successful event and all who have contributed to our scholarship fund.



Pictured from Left: Nicole Leontsinis (President DOP), Scholarship Recipients Alexa Alsina, Matthew Robinson, and Mia Lenardos, Tom Sakaris (President AHEPA)



Scholarship Dinner Attendees - Group



Award Presented to Edie Kavouklis by Past Chapter President Gus Paras, AHEPA Chapter President Tom Sakaris, and DOP Chapter President Nicole Leontsinis.

SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINES

There three levels scholarships offered from AHEPA.

1. Deadline: Mar. 31, 2020 National Scholarship: AHEPA - Educational Foundation (AEF) Scholarship Application 2020 <https://ahepa.org/education>
2. Deadline: April 1, 2020 AHEPA Family Florida Citrus District 2 Scholarship <http://www.ahepad2.org/district-forms/d2-scholarship-form/>
3. Deadline: November 30, 2020 Local AHEPA Family of Tampa Scholarship
Please contact: Thomas Sakaris at tomsak1234@gmail.com or Edie Kavouklis at edie.kavouklis@gmail.com

Beyond the scholarships themselves, there are four other AHEPA National programs:

<https://ahepa.org/education/>

- AHEPAcademy – Washington Mentorship
- Journey To Greece – Summer Excursion
- Odyssey in Athens - Study Abroad
- MBA Program – Master's Program

For More Information, please contact:

Michael Trimis, AHEPA Florida Citrus District 2 Governor at 813-784-4872, mtrimis.ahepa@gmail.com

Community Outreach

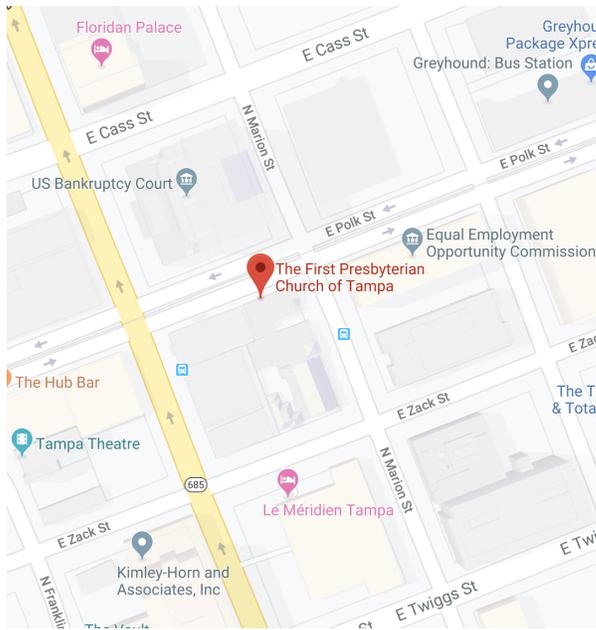
Saturday, February 15

We Want You to Serve with Us!

Hello and WELCOME! My name is Greg Melton and on behalf of our Community Outreach Ministry I want to thank you for your interest in participating with our group. **On the third Saturday of each month**, we volunteer our time to provide for those of our community in need in downtown Tampa. We partner with Matthew 25 local charity, USF Medical School, and Metropolitan Ministries to serve breakfast, provide clothing, and care for the medical needs for our guests.

To Volunteer: Go to our Sign Up Genius, see URL below or scan the QR CODE and sign up.

Place: First Presbyterian Church @ 412 Zack Street East, downtown Tampa.



The entrance for volunteers is on the Polk Street side of building.

Time: 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Volunteer Check-In Process:

- 1) Sign in and choose the job you want on the Duty Sheet
- 2) Prepare and wear your name tag
- 3) Don't be shy...if not sure where to go or what to do to get started, ask someone who looks like they know what they're doing.
- 4) Set up and Preparation 8-9 a.m., Serving 9-10:15 a.m., Cleanup 10:15-10:30 a.m..

Matthew 25 founders Peggy & Mike Kanter, as well as Bill Stone from Metro Ministries, are Go To people if you have questions or need direction on where you may be needed when you arrive.

Here is the URL for the Sign Up Genius for every upcoming 3rd Saturday of Month. Find the dates that work for you and sign up.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0f48a5a62da3f49-community>

Please don't hesitate to ask any questions. Thank you and God Bless
Greg Melton 813-967-2074 gmelt12@gmail.com



Scan with your
Smartphone to
Sign-Up Today

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
- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Body Wash
- 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.

Every month, we ask someone to submit a reflection on their "Word for 2020." If you'd like to share your word and how it's shaping your year, please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com. This month's testimonial is from Christian Perry.

My One Word for 2020: Discipline

By Christian Perry

Discipline. I chose this word for quite a few reasons. Most people look at this word and they think punishment or consequences. However, when you take into consideration that discipline starts with yourself, it removes the negative meaning. It is up to ourselves to be disciplined and keeps us honest as well as holds us accountable for our own actions.

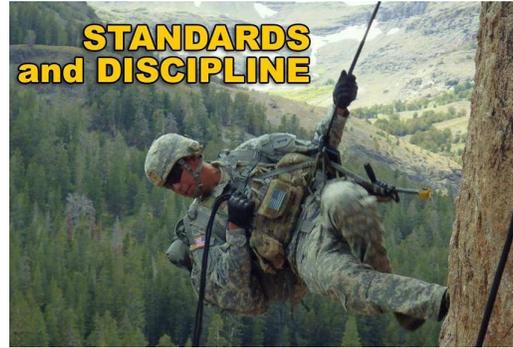
I am going to be more disciplined this year in many aspects. The first way I will be more disciplined is with my health. This is not a resolution, as I try to take pretty good care of myself normally. Minus the holiday indulgences. This is more of a vow so I can continue to be healthy for myself and my family. That brings me to my second reason. I owe it to my family to keep myself healthy so I can take my youngest son to lacrosse practice, teach my oldest son how to drive and help my wife build her garden. My discipline to be there for my family is strong, but it can always be stronger. The love in our family begins with discipline so we can strive to be at our best. And if one of us are not up to that at any time, the others are there to support them.

The final and most important reason for discipline is for the Lord. When I am sitting around the house, and not really motivated to do anything, I am going to try and be more disciplined to pick up the bible and read a few verses. Father has mentioned that in past sermons, and I don't know why I waited to do so, but I am now. I am going to be more disciplined to work more prayer time into my days. It doesn't take much effort or time to actually pray. As long as you have the passion to pray,

that's all that matters. It can be a prayer for a loved one's health, for peace to exist world-wide, the Lord to send someone your direction for you to help (another Father statement) or a simple thank you to the Lord for everything we have. On those gorgeous Sunday mornings, where the weather is cool, the sun is shining and we want to sit outside to enjoy a hot cup of coffee rather than go to church, I am going to tell myself that I should be going to church and thank the Lord for that beauty. Another cool day will come and we can appreciate it then.

Discipline is no longer a strong word that drives a negative thought. The root comes from disciple or a student or follower of Jesus. We are all disciples. That begins with self-discipline. When we become more disciplined, we become better pupils and followers.

Christian Perry is a member of our parish, together with his wife Athena and sons Hunter and Nicholas.



Opt-in on Messenger

In an effort to be more environmentally conscious, we will be mailing the Messenger **ONLY** to those who ask. If you wish to receive the Messenger by mail, you certainly may. We just ask that you indicate on your stewardship form, or let the office know, that you wish to receive the Messenger by mail. Beginning in **February 2020**, we will no longer be mailing the Messenger unless you ask us to.

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.

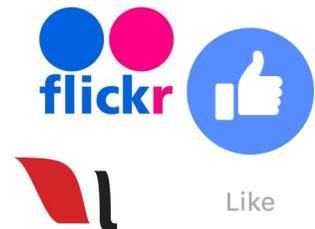
To access this page

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) and search "St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church" or go to www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa



Want to Learn Modern Greek?

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church Adult Greek School

- Speak Greek
- Read Greek
- Write Greek



- Basic Grammar & More.
- Some Greek History
- Book Included in Price!!

Teacher born, raised, and educated in Greece with over 22 years of experience teaching the Greek language. Adult classes for beginners taught @ St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church 2418 W. Swann Ave, Tampa, FL 33609. Classes are held at 6:00 - 8:30 p.m. on Thursday evenings, starting on October 3, 2019. This will be the first of three sessions, with each session lasting three months.

Price per session is \$100 for church members and \$125 for non-members.

Contact Ms. Magdalini Myer: at (813) 909-2327, aspis69@aol.com or the church office at (813) 876-8830.

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL
Barbara Akrotirianakis - Whittier, CA
William J Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Gabriel & Irene Hurst - Tampa, FL
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
John & Cathie Koch - Tarpon Springs, FL
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
Lillan Thomas - Highland, IN
Kathleen Mendez - Ponte Vedra, FL
Theodora Poletis - Baltimore, MD
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
Nicholas & Vaso Anton - Dunedin, FL
Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL
Artemis & Eric Mellen - Longwood, 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.

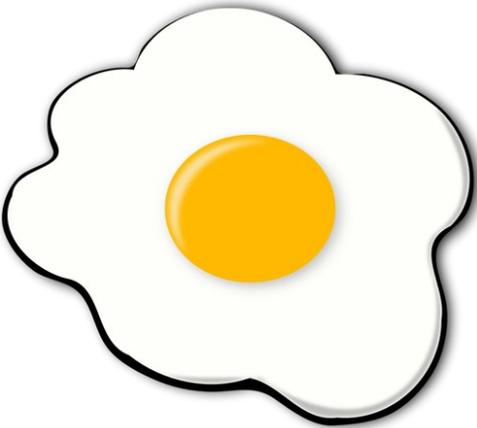
BUSY—Being Under Satan’s Yoke

By anonymous

Satan called a worldwide convention. In his opening address to his evil demons, he said, “We can’t keep the Christians from going to Church. We can’t keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the Truth. We can’t even keep them from traditional values. But we CAN do something else. We can keep them from forming an intimate, abiding relationship-experience in Christ.

If they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So let them go to Church, let them have their conservative lifestyles, but steal their time, so they can’t gain that experience in Jesus Christ! This is what I want you to do, angels: distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining that vital connection throughout their day!”

“How shall we do this?!” shouted the demons.



Satan responded, “Keep them busy in the non-essentials of life and invent un-numbered schemes to occupy their minds.” He continued, “Tempt them to spend, spend, spend, and then to borrow, borrow, borrow. Convince the wives to go to work for long hours

and the husbands to work 6 to 7 days a week, 10 to 12 hours a day, so they can afford their lifestyles. Keep them

from spending time with their children. As their family fragments, soon their homes will offer no escape from the pressures of work. Overstimulate their minds so they cannot hear that still, small voice of our enemy. Entice them to play the radio, or cassette players whenever they drive, to keep the TV, VCR, CD’s, and PC’s going constantly in their homes. And see to it that every store and restaurant in the world constantly plays non-spiritual music. This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ. Fill their coffee tables with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with the news twenty-four hours a day. Invade their driving moments with billboards. Flood their mail-boxes with junk mail, sweepstakes, mail order catalogues, and every kind of newsletter and promotional, offering, free products, services...and false hopes. Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their recreation exhausted, disquieted and unprepared for the coming week. Don’t let them go out in nature to reflect on God’s wonders. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts, and movies instead. And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotions. Let them be involved in soul-winning, but crowd their lives with so many good causes that they have no time to seek power from Christ. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family unity for the good of the cause.”

It was quite a convention in the end. And the evil demons went eagerly to their assignments, causing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy, and rush here, and hurry there.

Has the devil been successful at his scheme? You be the judge!

PLEASE COMMEMORATE THE NAMES OF MY DEPARTED FAMILY MEMBERS IN THE SATURDAY OF THE SOULS MEMORIAL SERVICES -

February 22, February 29, March 7

In Memory of

****You only need to write the first name of each person. Please mail to the church office by Friday, February 21.**

You may also email the names to office@stjohntpa.org

Don't Believe in God? Lie to Your Children

By Erica Komisar

As a therapist, I'm often asked to explain why depression and anxiety are so common among children and adolescents. One of the most important explanations—and perhaps the most neglected—is declining interest in religion. This cultural shift already has proved disastrous for millions of vulnerable young people.

A 2018 study in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* examined how being raised in a family with religious or spiritual beliefs affects mental health. Harvard researchers had examined religious involvement within a longitudinal data set of approximately 5,000 people, with controls for socio-demographic characteristics and maternal health. The result? Children or teens who reported attending a religious service at least once per week scored higher on psychological well-being measurements and had lower risks of mental illness. Weekly attendance was associated with higher rates of volunteering, a sense of mission, forgiveness, and lower probabilities of drug use and early sexual initiation. Pity then that the U.S. has seen a 20% decrease in attendance at formal religious services in the past 20 years, according to a Gallup report earlier this year. In 2018 the American Family Survey showed that nearly half of adults under 30 do not identify with any religion.

Nihilism is fertilizer for anxiety and depression, and being “realistic” is overrated. The belief in God—in a protective and guiding figure to rely on when times are tough—is one of the best kinds of support for kids in an increasingly pessimistic world. That's only one reason, from a purely mental-health perspective, to pass down a faith tradition. I am often asked by parents, “How do I talk to my child about death if I don't believe in God or heaven?” My answer is always the same: “Lie.” The idea that you simply die and turn to dust may work for some adults, but it doesn't help children. Belief in heaven helps them grapple with this tremendous and incomprehensible loss. In an age of broken families, distracted parents, school violence and nightmarish global-warming predictions, imagination plays a big part in children's ability to cope.

I also am frequently asked about how parents can instill gratitude and empathy in their children. These virtues are inherent in most religions. The concept of *tikkun olam*, or healing the world, is one of the pillars of my Jewish faith. In accordance with this belief, we expect our children to perform community service in our synagogue and in the community at large. As they grow older, young Jews take independent responsibility for this sacred activity. One of my sons cooks for our temple's homeless shelter. The other volunteers at a prison, while my daughter helps out at an animal shelter.

Such values can be found among countless other religious groups. It's rare to find a faith that doesn't encourage grat-

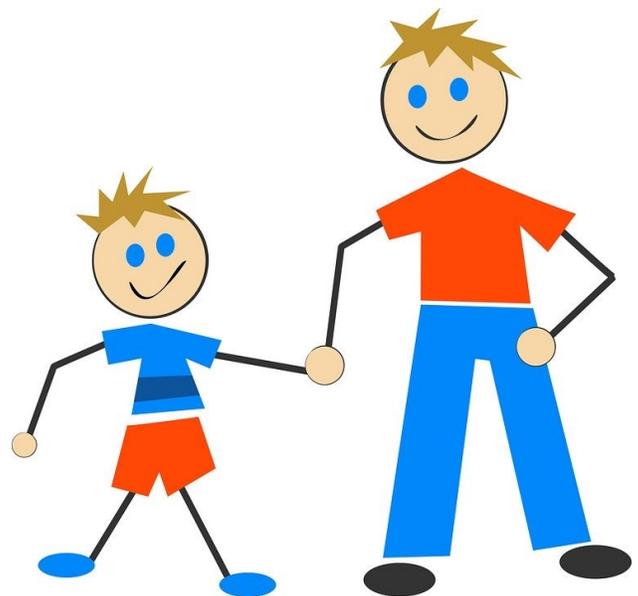
itude as an antidote to entitlement or empathy for anyone who needs nurturing. These are the building blocks of strong character. They are also protective against depression and anxiety.

In an individualistic, narcissistic and lonely society, religion provides children a rare opportunity for natural community. My rabbi always says that being Jewish is not only about ethnic identity and bagels and lox: It's about community. The idea that hundreds of people can gather together and sing joyful prayers as a collective is a buffer against the emptiness of modern culture. It's more necessary than ever in a world where teens can have hundreds of virtual friends and few real ones, where parents are often too distracted physically or emotionally to soothe their children's distress.

Religion or spiritual practices can teach children mindfulness, a sense of physical and emotional presence necessary for mental health. No matter how active my children were when they were young, they knew when they entered our temple for services they had to calm their bodies and relax their minds. Though they complained when they were kids, and still complain at times as adolescents, they have developed the ability to calm themselves when overwhelmed.

Today the U.S. is a competitive, scary and stressful place that idealizes perfectionism, materialism, selfishness and virtual rather than real human connection. Religion is the best bulwark against that kind of society. Spiritual belief and practice reinforce collective kindness, empathy, gratitude and real connection. Whether children choose to continue to practice as adults is something parents cannot control. But that spiritual or religious center will benefit them their entire lives.

Ms. Komisar is a psychoanalyst and author of “Being There: Why Prioritizing Motherhood in the First Three Years Matters.”



The Drunk Monk

Once on Mount Athos, there was a monk who lived in Karyes. He drank and got drunk every day and was the cause of scandal to the pilgrims. Eventually, he died and this relieved some of the faithful who went on to tell St. Paisios that they were delighted that this huge problem was finally solved.

St. Paisios answered them that he knew about the death of the monk after seeing the entire battalion of angels who came to collect his soul. The pilgrims were amazed and some protested and tried to explain to the Elder of whom they were talking about, thinking that the Elder did not understand.

St. Paisios explained to them: "This particular monk was born in Asia Minor, shortly before the destruction by the Turks when they gathered all the boys. So as not to take him from their parents, they would take him with them to the reaping, and so he wouldn't cry, they just put raki (a strong alcoholic drink) into his milk in order for him to sleep. Therefore he grew up as an alcoholic. There he found an elder and said to him that he was an alcoholic. The elder told him to do prostrations and prayers every night and beg the Panagia to help him to reduce by one the glasses he drank.

"After a year he managed with struggle and repentance to make the 20 glasses he drank into 19 glasses. The struggle continued over the years and he reached 2-3 glasses, with which he would still get drunk.

"The world for years saw an alcoholic monk who scandalized the pilgrims, but God saw a fighter who fought a long struggle to reduce his passion.

"Without knowing what each one is trying to do, what right do we have to judge his effort?"

The Monk And The Olive Tree

"One monk planted an olive tree and began to pray: "Lord, send down some rain for my tree." And the Lord sent down rain.

The tree was saturated and needed to dry. The monk prayed: "And now Lord, I ask you to send a lot of sun for my tree." And the Lord sent the warmest sun-rays. The tree grew.

The monk continued to pray: "Lord, send me a small frost to strengthen the roots and branches." The Lord sent the frost and the tree died. The monk was very upset.

He went to another monk to tell the story and to share his grief. "I also have an olive tree, see." said the other monk. His tree grew well. "But I prayed in a different way. I have told God that He is the Creator of this tree and knows best what is necessary for it. I just asked God to take care of it and He does.

This also applies to us. We often ask what we think we need. But God only knows what we need. Trust Him completely!"



St. John's is proud to offer a new ministry for families with special needs:

Connect Through Christ

According to the US Census, 18.5% of American Children under age 18 are Special Needs Children. That doesn't mean that they aren't smart, talented, or capable. Just that they have specific challenges that a "typical" student would not face.

There are four major types of special needs children:

Physical – muscular dystrophy, chronic asthma, epilepsy, etc.

Developmental – down syndrome, autism, dyslexia, speech delays, processing disorders

Behavioral/Emotional – ADD, bi-polar, oppositional defiance disorder, etc.

Sensory Impaired – Blind, visually impaired, deaf, limited hearing

Our mission is to break down barriers that keep children with disabilities and their families from being able to participate in the Church community. By discretely identifying families that Connect Through Christ can serve we hope to assist in providing a life long relationship with Christ. For more information please contact Lindsey Skourellos at 813-503-7845 and lskourellos@yahoo.com or Dante Skourellos 813-765-9534 and dand_skourellos@yahoo.com

No, Your Priest Does Not Want You To Buy Gift Cards for a Parishioner in Need

By Jamil Samara

Stop! I need your attention for a moment.

Stop everything you are doing right now and read this article. I promise you and your parishioners will be glad you did.

Cyber crime has been infiltrating our lives and our homes for years. It is now knocking at the door of our parishes.

Parishes and religious communities are being targeted by a phishing scam where the attacker poses falsely as the priest and asks the recipient for money. It often begins like this. An email arrives in an unsuspecting person's inbox from an email address that is similar

to but different than the priest's email address, something like `orthodoxpreist@gmail.com` (notice the typo!) or `frpeter.stgeorgenh@gmail.com`. The email might read something like:

Have you got a minute? I need you to complete a task for me discreetly.

P.S: I'm going into a meeting now and can't talk, so just reply.

The parishioner then might respond saying that he's willing to help. If your priest asked you to help him with something, of course you would say yes, right? The attacker is leveraging the trust that exists in parish communities between the priest and the parishioner. He then replies

Okay good. I need you to get me some gift cards, I have a few people I want to send gifts to. Let me know if it's possible for you to do get them right now so I can tell you which product we would need and the amount, you will be reimbursed.

Does it sound suspicious? Yes! Is it possible this is legitimate? Absolutely not! I can guarantee that your priest will never ask you to do something like this. If you receive something out of the ordinary, be sure to ask! Call your priest or the church office to find out more. Or contact us (see below)!

So, the scam continues like this:



What I need is an iTunes gift card of \$400 face value (200 x 2). You'll get the physical cards at the store, scratch the back out and send me the pictures of the back of the cards revealing the pin here, you can keep the physical cards for me.

Once the parishioner sends the photos of the cards to the attacker,

the money has now been transferred to their control. Some parishioners across the Archdiocese have already been tricked into giving away hundreds of dollars!

What Can We Do About this?

The most important thing that can be done is education. Edu-

cate yourself and your parishioners about emails and phone scams like this.

A clergyman will never reach out to his parishioners via email to request financial assistance, or in this case, gift cards. If email requests ever seems questionable, first and foremost, do not reply to the message, click on any links, or download any attachments. Try to verify the email by contacting the person or business directly via phone. Do not use contact information provided in an email or a website connected to the request; instead, check your personal records or contact lists, or for a business, a previous statement or bill, for contact information. Check out the links below for more information.

How to Report a Cyber Crime

If you or your parishioners have become victims of a cyber crime, be sure to report it immediately to us and the following

Federal agencies:

Federal Trade Commission: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2019/07/worshippers-targeted-gift-card-scam>

FBI: <https://www.fbi.gov/tips>

Archdiocese Tech Support System: <https://www.goarch.org/contact/helpdesk>

WORDS OF WISDOM

By unkwon

One day, a young boy asked an old man:

"Sir, which is the best day to pray?"

The wise old man replied:

My son, the best day to pray is the day before you die.

"The boy was astonished and replied:

"Sir, how can I know the day of my death?"

And the old man answered:

"No one knows the day of his death, that is why we need to pray everyday."

COMMUNITY LIFE



Top left: Fr. Reading Christmas stories to the children. Top Right: Christmas Candlelight Service. Bottom left: Vasilopita cutting. Bottom right: 2020 Parish Council Oath of office.



Below: Choir and GOYA Christmas Carols at retirement facility.



Hierarchical Visits January 5 & 7



Blessing of the waters after the Divine Liturgy.



MORE PHOTOS AVAILABLE ON THE ST. JOHN'S FLICKR ACCOUNT ONLINE.



~ February 2020 ~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
**Denotes Strict Fast Days						
2 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. OCMC Lunch Souper Bowl of Caring Youth Sunday	3 Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m	4 WBS 10:00 a.m. SBS 6:30 p.m Grief Share 6:30 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	5 **	6 Young at Heart 11:30 a.m. Greek School 6 – 8:30 p.m.	7 **	8 GOYA Lock-in 5:00 p.m.
9 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. DOP Valentine's Basket Bags of Love	10 St. Haralambos Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 Bible Study 6:30 p.m	11 WBS 10:00 a.m. SBS 6:30 p.m. Grief Share 6:30 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	12 **	13 Greek School 6 – 8:30 p.m.	14 **	15
16 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA Family Meetings Men's Group 5:00 pm. DOP Valentine's Basket Young Adults 5:00 p.m.	17 Orthodoxy 101— Teaching Liturgy 6:30	18 WBS 10:00 a.m. Grief Share 6:30 p.m. Parish Council 6:30 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	19 **	20 Philoptochos Board Meeting by phone Greek School 6 – 8:30 p.m.	21 ** Movie Night 6:30 Dinner 7:15 Paul the Apostle	22 Saturday of Souls Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. @ Garden of Memories Community Outreach
23 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bags of Love GOYA 5:00 p.m.	24 Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	25 WBS 10:00 a.m. SBS 6:30 p.m. Grief Share 6:30 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	26 **	27 Greek School 6 – 8:30 p.m.	28 **	29 Saturday of Souls Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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)
fstav@gmail.com

Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski
813-876-8830 (Office)

Pastoral Assistant Charlie Hambos
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Pastoral Assistant John Kokenis
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jkokenis@stjohntpa.org

Parish Council

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Euripides Panos, Vice President 813-352-3972
John Zelatis, Secretary 813-727-2271
Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898
Carole Fotopoulos 813-294-1623
Demosthenes Mekras 786-417-7256
George Chagaris 727-420-1920
Amin Hanhan 813-846-2957
Nick Kataras 863-581-2430
Edie Kavouklis 813-758-0305
Jimmy Konstas 813-220-7352

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debbie@stjohntpa.org fax:813-443-4899

Adult Greek School

Magda Myer 813-909-2327

AHEPA

Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319

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

Pauline Spencer, Director 813-390-1782
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
IIAPEA, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
Anna Maria Bavaro 732-239-9085
IIANHITYPI, 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

GriefShare

Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

Gasparilla Parking

John Kokkas 727-992-4165

GOYA

Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346
goya@stjohntpa.org

Hope/Joy

George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813

Junior Olympics

Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

Men's Basketball

Perry Katsamakias 516-403-3118

Men's Fellowship

Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

MOMS

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

Parish Nursing Ministry

Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026

Orthodox Christian Fellowship

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Oratorical Festival

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Photography Ministry

Karina Findlay 813-476-9632

Philoptochos

Jeanie Nenos 813-451-9116

Small Group Bible Study

South, John Kokenis 630-306-7716
Women, Fr. Stavros 813-394-1038

Strategic Planning

Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Stewardship

Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747
Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

Sunday School

Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102

Usher

Tom Georgas 813-985-0236

Welcoming Ministry

Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Young Adult

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Young at Heart

Mike Trimis, President 813-784-4872
Mary Nenos, Vice President 813-935-2096

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“May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” From the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.