

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*

January 2021

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

Pastoral Guidelines related to Covid-19

The *Messenger* goes to the printer on the 15th of each month for the following month. The calendar of events may or may not be reflective of what we will do in the month of January. As we have been doing each month, we lead off *The Messenger* with some pastoral guidelines relate to Covid-19. Should regulations be made more or less strict, we will adjust accordingly.

We are now allowing up to 125 people to worship each Sunday, the first 85 who arrive will be seated in the church and the remainder in the hall. We still will ask that everyone sign up on SignUpGenius to attend services. It is safe for 85 worshippers plus 10 workers to be in the church at one time and still be social distancing. We will continue to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Saturdays and Sundays (with the exception of January 2). If the rule on social distancing should change during the month of January, the Saturday Divine Liturgies will be cancelled.

We will celebrate Paraklesis each Wednesday, beginning on January 13, 20 & 27 at 6:00 p.m. Due to the pandemic, the Epiphany Celebration in Tarpon Springs will be scaled back, and services will be held in all the churches of the Tampa Bay area. On Tuesday, January 5 we will have the Royal Hours of Theophany from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.; the Vesperral Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great at 6:00 p.m. followed by the Blessing of the Waters at 7:00 p.m. On Wednesday, January 6, we have Orthros at 8:45 a.m. and the Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. for the Theophany followed by the Blessing of the Waters at 11:00 a.m.

Until the pandemic is over and we hear otherwise, we will continue to utilize SignUpGenius in order to attend the Divine Liturgy and other services. We will continue to check temperatures and seat people according to social distancing guidelines. We will continue to ask that people not congregate after services. Our Parish leadership meets on a regular basis to discuss taking the next steps, and proceeding cautiously as we open up "a little more" each month.

You may sign up for any Sunday or any other service where you wish to worship. Also, if you are able to worship not on a Sunday, please do so, so that we can reserve Sunday for those who can only worship on Sundays. If you sign up and can't make a service, please take your name off the list as soon as you know you can't attend, so make room for others to come. We want all services to have as many people as possible. **Also, the crew who helps outside at the check-in table will leave the outside table to worship at 10:15 a.m. Please be courteous and arrive on time. If you arrive after 10:15 a.m., please knock on the side door and someone will come outside to assist you. However, no one will be admitted to the church during the Gospel and the sermon as this is disruptive. This is approximately 10:20-10:30 a.m. Thank you for your cooperation on this.**

For those who are not able to worship in person, we will continue to live-stream all services. We will also continue to provide Sunday school materials for our children, our teens and our adults on-line until this pandemic is over, for those who are not worshipping in person. We will be offering in person Sunday school on Sundays beginning in January. More on that below.

The latest information will always be available on our website and through constant contact. Both our Metropolis and parish protocols for coming back to church safely are on our website. Thank you for your patience in filtering through all of our constant contacts. It is really the most effective way to communicate news and comments during this time.

Pastoral Guidelines Continued on the next page...

Pastoral Guidelines continued...

Finally, a big thank you for the small crew of volunteers who assist in order to make sure we are safe at every service—the nursing ministry, the welcome ministry, the ushers, the altar servers, and the guest chanters. Everyone has done a great job coming together to make sure we can offer regular worship, as well as these extra services in a way that is safe.

Father Stavros' Message

One word to Define 2021: RENEW

For the past three years, I have encouraged you to choose a word to define your year. And in each of the past three years, we have chosen a word to be our guiding word for our parish. Why one word? Because it's easy to remember one word. Many people make lists of resolutions for the new year that are quickly forgotten. Not only do we forget to do the things we write down, we forget the very things we wrote down. By choosing one word to define the year, we have a better chance of remembering that one word.

In 2020, the word for our parish was “Time.” That word was chosen because we wanted to encourage people to evaluate how they spend their time, how much time we give to praying, worshiping, etc. “Time” seemed like a good word, as we marked the beginning of not only a new year but a new decade. No one could have foreseen a year ago how we would mark the time of 2020. Most of the year was derailed by the covid-19 pandemic, that we are carrying into 2021. Life, as we knew it, changed significantly. Who knows what will happen in 2021? Will we return to what we knew as normal? Will we emerge from the pandemic with a new normal? Only time will tell, no pun intended.

The word of the year for our parish for 2021 is RENEW. This word has several meanings. When a person rents an apartment, the lease comes up for RENEWal every year. That means each year, they have to RENEW their commitment to the lease, and they sign up for another year of renting. People RENEW library books. When a person checks out a library book, it is loaned to them for a period of time, let's say three weeks, and at the end of the three weeks, the book must be returned or RENEWed. Oftentimes, we RENEW library books because we haven't finished with them, or as is the case with me (and maybe some of you), we didn't start them yet. Another use of the word RENEW has to do with relationships. People might RENEW a relationship that had stopped. For instance, you meet your college roommate that you haven't seen in twenty years and you start talking regularly—this is an example of RENEWing a relationship. A husband and wife who have neglected their marriage might pay more attention to it and grow closer—this is another example of RENEWing a relationship.

The year 2021 is a good time to RENEW our relationship with God and with the Church. Like the apartment lease, we now begin a new period of twelve months, and it is a good time to make goals for how we will spend these next twelve months. What spiritual goals will we set? What do we want to accomplish in our spiritual journey between now and next January? Like the library book we haven't finished reading, we haven't finished our journey, our life is not due back to God today (though for some of us, that will happen in the next year). The new year provides an opportunity to recommit ourselves to the Lord and to living the Christian life. The new year also provides us an opportunity to RENEW our relationship with the Lord. Some of us have been estranged from the Lord for a long time.



Some of us have a strained relationship. Some of us don't have a strong relationship. And some of us are doing well in our spiritual lives. Wherever you are at, it's a good time to RENEW, in the sense of paying closer attention to our relationship with the Lord. And especially for those who are estranged from God, it's a great time to restart the relationship.

The word RENEW can mean coming at something with fresh perspective or greater energy. One thing about the Christian walk is that no one ever maxes out in their relationship with God. No one can ever get to the point where they feel they can't get any closer to Him. There is always room to deepen the relationship. And what better time than the start of the new year?

The pandemic has caused each of us to take stock of our lives in some way. As cases have spread, we've had to decide which things are worth taking a risk in doing and which things it would be better to skip. We've had to make hard choices about whether to fly to another state to see family or whether it is better not to. Many of us have stopped eating out or seeing friends face to face. Hopefully this pandemic has caused us to take stock of our Christian lives. In the face of more people dying, including young people, have you wondered “Am I ready to die? Am I ready to stand before the awesome judgment seat of Christ?” I know I have, and when I think about this seriously and soberly, I really hope to change some things, to RENEW myself spiritually, so that the prospect of meeting the Lord is one that will be joyful and not fearful.

We will discuss more below but the pandemic has changed our thinking of how we “do church.” No, we're not talking about how we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, but the overall priorities in the church community. The year 2020 saw no Festival, no

Junior Olympics, no summer camp, no choir for much of the year, and for 2.5 months, no worship in person. We were forced to be creative in how we got the message of Christ across to our parishioners. We found strengths that we didn't think we had, and we had weaknesses exposed that we didn't think were problems. The year 2021 is going to be a time to reassess and RENEW how we are working as a parish to spread the word of God.

RENEW is the word of the year for 2021 for our parish. Have you chosen one word to shape your year?

As usual, my message is lengthy, so curl up in your favorite chair under a warm blanket, with an open mind and open heart. I feel it is important to write to you each month, words of encouragement and words that provoke thought, and change. Thank you for reading what I write each month.

The Tent on the Beach

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.
II Corinthians 5: 1-7

Last summer, my family bought a small “tent”, about 10 feet by 10 feet, to take to the beach to provide shade for us. Many of us own these kinds of tents. The tents are sold with stakes, so that the posts of the tent can be anchored into the ground on a windy day. While these tents provide good shade on a calm day, they are no match at all for any kind of a storm. On a windy day, they would blow away, (the stakes will not prevent that, they are designed to prevent the tent from moving in a relatively gentle breeze) and on a really windy day, they would probably be ripped to shreds. Many of have spiritual lives that resemble the beach tent. All is well as long as there is no storm. But when the storm comes—the crisis of the day, unemployment, health crisis, covid, etc.—the tent of our soul gets ripped to shreds.

Our soul is not supposed to represent a tent, but rather a cathedral, built solid to withstand the storms of life. When our souls

represent solid structures, it is easy to have good courage, even in the storm. Even when things are chaotic, and God may even feel distant, there is no panic. When our souls are like a tent, and the storm comes, we begin to “sigh with anxiety” (II Corinthians 5:4), either with fear that we will not have the strength to withstand the storm, or with a longing for the greater protection that faith affords us. Hopefully, in this storm we are in, we feel more longing for God, than fear of lacking strength.

“What is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” (5:4) Isn’t that the truth? How many people entered 2020 never envisioning what would happen with the pandemic. None of us ever gave it a thought. Yet, many have died and many more have become sick, and all have become stressed and anxious. It seems as the life we knew has gotten swallowed up by this unexpected event. Yet in verse 5, we read that God “has prepared us for this very thing,” because He did not create us as tents, but as cathedrals, with spirits and souls that are strong enough to withstand any storm, provided they are anchored in faith in Him. Verse 7 reminds us that “we walk by faith, not by sight.” No, this verse is not about blind obedience. Rather it is an honest assessment that we can’t see what’s ahead of us in life. Like no one could foresee the pandemic of 2020, nor do we know, as we enter 2021, how this is all going to end. So we can’t and won’t enter 2021 with a perfect vision of what lies ahead. However, we can enter with faith that we will have the strength to endure whatever will come our way.

Is your soul more like the tent on the beach, beautiful, functional but fragile? Or is it more like the Cathedral, which perhaps isn’t as carefree as the tent, but is strong, solid and unmovable. If we are going to be RENEWED in our faith this year, a great place to start is with the state of our soul, focusing on building a faith that is solid.

Why We Go to Church

A great place to start RENEWING our faith is by going to church. There are many reasons to go to church. To receive the Eucharist is the number one reason, because this is the thing we can only do at church. Being part of a community is important, because a community offers us encouragement, validation and support. The arguments against the need to go to church include “God is everywhere so I don’t need to go to church.” Or “I can worship God in my own way, I can be spiritual on the beach as well as I can in the church.” Or “it’s the same every week, I can do better designing my own program.” I saw a great quote on why we go to church that I’d like to share with you:

One man asked a priest, “If God is everywhere, what do I go to church for?”

To which the priest replied, “The whole atmosphere is filled with water; but when you want to drink you have to go to a fountain or a well.”

Sure, we can experience God anywhere. And we should experience Him outside of church. We should pray at home. We should think about God in all places. However, there is a thirst that can only be quenched in church, through Communion, through community.

For those who enter with faith, reverence and fear of God, not with full understanding.

One of my favorite petitions of the Divine Liturgy (and it is also in all the other divine services of the church) says “For this holy house, and for those who enter in it with faith, reverence



and the fear of God, let us pray to the Lord.” This petition doesn’t seem spectacular, in fact, it might be one we easily overlook. However, this petition is one of the most comforting. Because it doesn’t pray for those who have it all together, or who have it all figured out. Rather it mentions those who enter with faith, reverence, and fear of God. We don’t have to enter with full understanding, or even with enthusiasm. We are accepted by God when we enter with faith (which is NOT full understanding, but a desire to understand more), reverence for God (One who is greater than us, with an understanding that HE and not us, is the center), and fear, in the sense of awe, and deep respect.

For those who are staying home because they are worried about getting COVID

There are three categories of people who choose not to attend worship. Those who are afraid, those who are annoyed, and those who are busy. This note is for those who are worried. If you are in this category, there is no issue. I’m not a fan of asking people to do things that they feel are unsafe. Uncomfortable yes, unsafe no. Lots of challenges in life make us feel uncomfortable—we should embrace some of those. The ones that makes us feel unsafe, we shouldn’t.

If you are worshipping at home, it is important that you “worship,” not just watch. Many people who are tuning into the livestream are doing just that, tuning in. The service is on in the background, as we have our breakfast, as we sit with our feet up on the couch, or as we do our household chores, catch up on email, etc.

If you want to get a spiritual benefit from worship at home, you have to work at it, because worship is work. And yes, it is going to be work to turn off or ignore the myriad of distractions that are in our homes. It is going to be work to get off the comfortable couch to stand during certain parts of the Divine Liturgy.



gy. If you are worshipping at home, here are some guidelines that will help keep you focused.

1. Sit with your feet on the ground, not propped up on something.
2. Turn off your phone, unless you are watching livestream on your phone.
3. Do not multitask. Focus on worshipping.
4. Stand during the reading of the Gospel and during the Creed. Recite the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. Kneel and pray at the consecration.
5. If you need to sit at other times, that’s fine, but stand at the Gospel and during the Creed and kneel at the consecration.
6. Tune in by 10:00 a.m. for the beginning of the Liturgy, and “stay on” until the end.

Two more suggestions for those who are nervous to attend worship in person.

1. The weekday services, i.e. the Liturgies held Monday-Friday, generally have less than ten people who attend. Weekly Paraklesis general has less than five people. If you come to Divine Liturgy in January on January 18 or January 25, there will most likely be less than 10 people in church. You can spread out far away from everyone else. Saturday Liturgies get between 30-50 people.
2. A few families (and sadly, it has been only a few) have made appointments to receive Holy Communion outside of the Divine Liturgy. They’ve come after service or in the middle of the afternoon to receive Holy Communion when no one is around. I am happy to accommodate that at any time. Some of you haven’t received Holy Communion in almost a year. You should consider coming by the church privately to receive Holy Communion.

For those who are staying at home because they are irritated we have to wear masks

There are a number of people who have told me, or who have told others who have told me, that they aren’t coming back to church as long as we have to wear masks. There are people who think this whole thing is a hoax. Others are worried about government overreach into our right to worship. I don’t like the masks any more than you do. The request to wear masks in church during services comes directly from our hierarchs. I have actually received “hate mail” criticizing me for wearing a mask during Holy Communion. I’m obeying my superiors. We are a hierarchical church. Some have questioned my faith. Well, the pandemic hasn’t stopped me from interacting with people, and it hasn’t stopped me from consuming the remainder of the Holy Communion, though there is a very likely chance that I have given Holy Communion to people who have tested positive for Covid in the past nine months. Here are three things you should keep in mind.

1. From the looks of things, we’ll probably be wearing masks until summer 2021. Does that mean you won’t be back in church for another six months? Will you miss out again on Lent and Holy Week?
2. What is going to happen once we can come to church without masks? Will you be back immediately and joyfully? Will you be back with resentment? Will you have figured out something else to do with your Sunday mornings and not be back at all? Or come only occasionally?
3. What about your children? We know that the majority of teenagers will drop out of church once they go to college. Keeping them home from church for a year makes this even more likely.

4. The early Christians knew that going to church could potentially be a death sentence. They risked their lives even going to church. We read in Hebrews 11 how people were stoned, sawn in two, tortured, and ripped apart by animals for their faith. We can't even wear a mask. It is going to sound like a flimsy argument if you go to the Lord and say "I avoided worship for a year to make a political point." I'm not sure what the point is, "I'm angry that we have to wear a mask, so I'm going to deprive myself of Holy Communion for a year." I'm not sure what the argument is here. I don't like wearing a mask, but I'd rather worship with a mask on than not worship at all. Finally, we all wear masks to the grocery store. We haven't stopped shopping for food in the pandemic, so why would we stop worshiping?
5. I've heard some various excuses why people don't worship, including "masks mess up my makeup" and "I don't come to church because there is no coffee hour." Both of these sentiments are ridiculous.

Speaking personally here, if you are in this category, I miss you! Please come back, for yourselves, for your children!

For those who are staying away because they are busy

This situation isn't unique to the pandemic. There are many people who come to church once in a while, that's just their habit. Please read below, the comments about scorched earth and how it can't absorb water.

When we stay away, we become like that scorched earth that can't receive the very thing we need and want.

The Importance of Reading the Bible

Something is happening to our brains, the more we click on things on our computers or our phones. And it has to do with our attention. If a news story or an article doesn't make its point in the first fifty words, we are already clicking to the next article. Twitter has gotten us used to absorbing only 140 characters (not words, 140 letters) at a time. So, many people can't read more than a few paragraphs. That's why I break up my lengthy articles each month into different topics with at least one heading on each page, knowing that people will probably not read the whole article or they will skim only the first sentences of each section. Perhaps this is why no one reads the Bible anymore. If we can't handle more than a paragraph or a page of anything, how will we be able to make it through the whole Bible, all 1500+ pages of it.

There is a saying, "you eat an elephant one bite at a time." Read the Bible a few verses at a time. If it takes you your whole life to read the Bible, that's okay. Start with the New Testament. Read the four Gospels. There are a total of 90 chapters in the four Gospels. Read a chapter a day, it will take you three months. Read a fourth of a chapter a day, ten verses or one story, and it will take you a year. Make 2021 the year you make it through the Gospels at least once. Take five minutes, read a few verses, take a note pad and jot down thoughts. Highlight verses that speak to you. Will you understand every verse? No, you won't. I've read the Gospels many times and there are still passages I don't understand. However, there are many passages I do understand, which impact and shape my life. And there are MANY passages that when I read



them multiple times, I understand even more deeply. If you need help in creating a plan to read the Bible, please contact me, or Charlie, or Alex—we LOVE to have conversations about the Bible with people, because sadly, they are few and far between. If you don't understand something you read, please call us with your questions!

The Pandemic Allowed Us to Focus on The Most Critical Things the Church Does

2020 will be a forgettable year for many people. There are many parts of the year that I hope to forget. However, there are two things we did as a parish that we've never done before, two things I will always remember. One of those things may never repeat. The other one I hope will repeat every year.

In 2020, our church set a record for most Divine Services held in a year. There were 244 times when we opened the doors of our church for worship. We had Divine Liturgy on almost every Saturday since June 1, and we had Paraklesis (or Holy Unction) almost every Wednesday since late March. We will continue both the Saturday Liturgies and the Wednesday Paraklesis services for as long as the pandemic continues, until we can resume normal life. Hopefully that will not be more than half of 2021. If the pandemic continues beyond June, we may again set a record for Liturgical services. Personally, in 2020, I celebrated Divine Liturgy over 130 times, and including the Pre-Sanctified Liturgies of Great Lent, received Holy Communion over 140 times. Never in my life have I done either of these things. With some liturgical help now on the way (see below), even if we stay in the pandemic throughout this year, I may not ever break this record for personal services presided over. For this reason, I will always have a positive reason to remember 2020.

We also set a record in our parish for charitable giving. We gave away more than \$35,000 to charitable causes. A detailed list was given in the December *Messenger* of the charities we supported. I hope we will break this record this coming year and in the years to come.

However, the Pandemic Exposed a Critical Flaw in the Church

Despite these two very important things that our church did well in 2020, the pandemic exposed a critical flaw in the Church, not only in Tampa but across our country. The Greek Orthodox Church, including Saint John, is a program-centered church, rather than a liturgically-centered church. I asked someone recently why they haven't been coming to church, and the response was "because there is no in person Sunday school." They indicated that once Sunday school starts, they will come back. This is a dangerous way of thinking. For many people, no Sunday school equals no church. Hence, no need to come to church in summer (in non-covid years), and no reason for children to stay in the church past age 18 when Sunday school ends. This is probably the main reason why our children leave the church when they go to college, and when I say leave, I mean leave permanently. Because they've been conditioned to "go to church" for Sunday school, GOYA, basketball and dancing, or some other program, and once these are over there is no need to go. Our primary emphasis has to be on worship. We go to church to worship God, whether there is Sunday school or not. The Pandemic has exposed a critical

flaw in the church. When everything but worship was taken away from our calendar, there are many people who stayed away (and continue to stay away) because they come for the programs and not the worship. It is incumbent on us to RENEW our focus on worship. If there is no love for worship, then no program is going to truly work.

Programs and ministries are there to enhance worship and build community, but they do not take the place of worship. As you make your spiritual resolutions for 2021, make worship one of the things at the top of your list.

A lack of church programs and entertainment is not why our youth are leaving the church. Our youth have no relationship with Jesus and that begins at home. Until we focus on fixing that, all the entertainment in the world won't keep them. As we begin 2021, focus on spirituality in your own home. Pray at meals as a family. Pray with your children when you tuck them in at night. Pray with your spouse in bed each morning. Read the Bible to your children or with your children. Discuss what you read. Use the New Year as an opportunity to RENEW spirituality in your own home.

How and When Will the Pandemic End?

The simple answer is; I have no idea. I have no idea if it's going to get worse before it gets better. I have no idea what Lent and Holy Week will look like, (though we are already making three different plans for how to do it, if we are the same, better or worse). Will we be back to normal by then? Will there be a new normal? What I do know is that we will continue to put an emphasis on worship, we will continue to offer pastoral care and we will continue to make a great effort to spread the Gospel in a way that is understandable and hopefully inspiring. Will people flock back to the church when this is over? Will we have a full church again as we did at the beginning of 2020? I have no idea. All I can control, all we can control, in our lives is our effort. We can focus on hypotheticals. We can mourn over losses. Or we can embrace the present, that which is right in front of us.



Truth Trumps Feelings

Name a feeling that never ends. Most people will say "love." And I would argue that "love is a choice, not a feeling."

There is no feeling that never ends. Feelings compete for our brain space. When we feel hungry, that feeling dominates and we can't think of anything else but food. When we feel tired,

YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE

so tired we can barely keep our eyes open, we can't feel joy, because we just feel tired. There are many times when one feeling will dominate, until that feeling is satiated and then another feeling takes over.

Love is a choice. So is gratitude. We can love, even when we are tired. We can be grateful, even when we don't feel great.

Society is allowing feelings to lead the way and truth is somehow getting lost. Here is an example, a dialogue between Fr. Stavros and Paphnutios (a made up name):

Fr. Stavros: Paphnutios, what color is my black shirt? (an obvious question).

Paphnutios: Well, it's black.

Fr. Stavros: You sure about that?

Paphnutios (looks closely at the shirt): I think so.

Fr. Stavros: Ok, so now you are not sure. Would you put a hundred dollars on the fact that my shirt is black?

Paphnutios (thinks carefully, and then answers, a little bit unsure): Yes, I think I would do that.

Fr. Stavros: Ok, what if I told you the shirt is green (something it obviously is not).

Paphnutios (looks again very closely): Well, I guess I can see that. But I think it's probably still black.

Fr. Stavros: Well, Paphnutios, you seem like a nice guy and we could probably be friends but if you don't think the shirt is green, you are hurting my feelings.

Paphnutios: Well, I don't want to hurt your feelings so the shirt can be green or whatever you want it to be.

And there you have an example of how truth and feelings get mixed up in our world today. We don't want to hurt the feelings of others, so we leave the truth—the shirt is black, I'd stake my life on that—and we change it so that no one's feelings get hurt. Try this exercise with people of different ages. Many people will end up like Paphnutios in this exercise. They won't be able to stand on a truth with any kind of conviction.

Jesus says in the Bible, "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me." (John 14:6) He also says that "you will know the truth and the truth will make you

free." (John 8:32)

Feelings are getting in the way of obvious truths. This is true on a practical level. For instance, we might say "I feel like I want to buy that (something)." The truth is that "I can't afford it." Which wins more in your life in this instance, truth or feelings? Or, "I know this is wrong, but my friends are doing it and I don't want them to feel disappointed that I'm not." Do we succumb to peer pressure, or do what we know is right?

Back to the spiritual. The truth is that God made us, in His image and likeness. Therefore, every life has value. The truth is that God is the Creator. Someone greater than us made us. Therefore, we are not the center of the universe. The truth is that the purpose of this life is to glorify God, in preparation for everlasting life. We can't live for ourselves first and say we are living for Him first. Either we are living first for ourselves or we are living first for God.

The truth is that we live in a post-Christian world. The term "post-Christian" defines a world where most people have been baptized, but most of us have moved past Christianity. Most people were baptized Christians but in increasing numbers are not identifying as Christians.

The truth is that we are moving from a post-Christian world to an anti-Christian world, where most people coming into the world will not be baptized and will not identify as Christian, and will in fact, persecute those who strive to live the truth of the Gospel. Notice, I said the truth of the Gospel intentionally. There are plenty of people who are taking the truth of the Gospel and manipulating it to fit a contemporary narrative (a post-Christian narrative, where "Christians" pick and choose what to follow, and where there is an attempt at a hybrid between Christianity and moralism—and of course the problem with moralism, as we have discussed many times, is that is changes with the wind).

As we seek to RENEW our faith in 2021, we can start by reaffirming the truth of our faith. Making sure what we believe is in line with the truth of the Gospel, and how we live is in line with that truth. And whether 2021 is a good year or a bad year, whether we feel joyful or frustrated, whether we are trending up or down, faith is a choice, so is love, kindness, joy, repentance and so many other Godly virtues.

The Nativity Bags Project

Each family in our parish who lives in Tampa received a Nativity Bag at the beginning of the Nativity Fast, November 15. I hope that you spent the last six weeks using these materials, especially the journal. Many of you have dedicated time each day to pray and reflection. They say that something becomes a habit after 30 days, so hopefully over the course of the 50 days of this journal, you've gotten more into the habit of prayer and reflection. I'm so thankful to our parish leadership for supporting this project, to the small group of people who helped develop this project, to the volunteers who delivered the bags, and to



you who have participated, who have given such good encouragement and feedback about how this experience is helping you grow in your faith. We are already working on a series for Great Lent.

Multiple Priests

We are blessed in our community to have two retired Greek Orthodox priests, Fr. Stratton Dorozenski and Fr. John Stefero. Both have served with distinction in our Archdiocese. Both have children who are members of our parish, which is why they retired to this area. Before the pandemic, Fr. Stratton was with us for about two months each Sunday. And he has been serving on Sundays since the beginning of October. Fr. John joined our church in mid-December. Now, a priest is a priest forever. Which means that either Fr. Stratton or Fr. John could be summoned at any time by our Metropolitan to fill in in a parish which suddenly is without a priest, or they could be called to fill in while a priest is on vacation. Otherwise, they will be here at St. John. All of us will offer Holy Communion on Sundays, so it is possible that you'll receive Holy Communion from one of them. It's the same Communion no matter who you receive it from. It is likely that one of them will celebrate some of the Divine Liturgies that are held on Saturdays. I have served every Saturday since the beginning of June. I had hoped that we would do the Saturday Divine Liturgy through the end of 2020 and then be able to stop, but with the pandemic continuing, it is likely we will continue to need this in the early months of 2021. I can't keep up a pace of having no days off. It's not healthy or smart. So don't be surprised or disappointed if I am not at every service. As we come out of this pandemic, hopefully soon, we will be discussing how to integrate both Fr. Stratton and Fr. John into the life of the community as they are comfortable doing so. Between them, there is over 80 years of priestly experience, and that is something our community will greatly benefit from.

Verses of the Year—Psalm 50/51: 10-12

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

These are the last verses from the Nativity “Come Let us Adore Him” Journal, for the week of January 3-9. They will be our first verses with the Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks: The Bible Project, which now enters into its third year. I hope that you will spend some time reflecting on these verses in your journal. Allow me to reflect on them here.

In a book that I am reading, called “Get Your Life Back,” an image is painted of scorched and dried earth. Dirt likes to receive water. Fertile soil craves it. We are living our lives at such a frantic pace that instead of being like fertile soil, we are like scorched and cracked earth, like what you’d find in the desert. When rain falls in the desert, instead of absorbing the water, the water runs off. When it rains a lot, there are flash floods. In this case, the water actually become dangerous instead of nourishing to the ground.

Weekly worship and daily prayer/Scripture reading help cultivate the soil to absorb God’s love. They help us absorb love from others. They help us to love others. When we are absent

from prayer, worship and Scripture, our hearts become dried and scorched, so that when we experience love from God, or from others, it rolls off of us like water in the desert.

The clean heart and renewed spirit referred to in Psalm 50 would be greatly aided by a personal decision to slow down, and take time to worship weekly and to pray daily. Even if we worship weekly without a daily check-in, we risk the possibility that worship will be like water falling on dried and cracked earth, we won’t be able to absorb the benefits. Perhaps that is why many people are not worshiping weekly, because they aren’t praying daily and they are unable to absorb the benefit and the spiritual nutrients of worship. It stands to reason that we will get a lot more out of weekly worship if it is supplemented with daily spiritual practices of prayer and Scripture reading.

A desire to be restored in the joy of God’s salvation is a choice. God will not turn away anyone who comes to Him, He will not cast anyone away from His presence. He will not take away His Holy Spirit from anyone. We have an opportunity to choose God, to choose prayer and to choose love on any day and at any time. Any Sunday is an opportunity to worship, and in these days of the pandemic, there is worship on Saturdays and Wednesdays as well, as well as many other days. Use the New Year as an occasion to work on the soil of your heart, and if it is dried and cracked, slow down, and nurture it, so that the water (grace, the Holy Spirit, the Eucharist) that we put into our hearts will absorb into them, rather than be washed away from them.

As we begin 2021, I encourage you to be RENEWED in the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, lived through the Orthodox Christian faith, expressed in the ministry of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church.

Have a Happy, Healthy and Blessed New Year 2021!

With love in the Incarnate Lord,

+Fr. Stavros

*Create in me a
CLEAN HEART
O God; & renew a right
Spirit within me.*

PSALM 51:10

Let's Have a Joyful (Re)New Year!

This is the Way—What the Mandalorian has to do with Orthodox Christianity

By Alex Limberatos

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:6

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

Ephesians 6:13-18

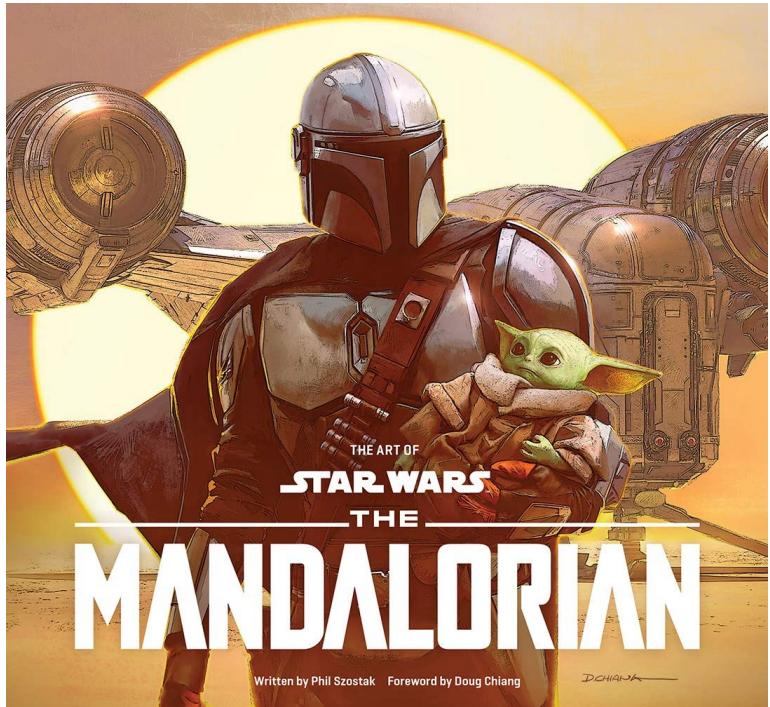
My wife and I agree that the new Star Wars Series, the Mandalorian, is worth our Disney+ subscription alone. Not only have we been avid fans of the show since its release last year, but we've become a bit nerdy quoting the movie to one another around the house, and even singing its catchy theme song to our daughter who giggles each time she hears us trumpet its crescendo.

The Mandalorian can be best described as the resurrection of the spaghetti western franchise, draped as a sci-fi. The show follows a nameless, faceless space cowboy that hunts bounties for a living; for those of you who remember the laconic Bobba Fett from Star Wars Episodes 5 & 6 of the Original Star Wars, imagine his spiritual successor only a lot faster on the draw. Our protagonist only goes by "Mando" short for Mandalorian, a "creed" for the galaxy's most skilled warriors.

But what of this Mandalorian "creed"? It is not as succinct or overt as our Nicene Creed, but as the show progresses we learn bits and pieces of the duties, customs, and rules of Mandalorians.

"This is the Way" punctuates much of the show as the new Star Wars mantra. The line is typically used when a Mandalorian, or an ally of a Mandalorian, is compelled to a specific action, and is often rallies the characters towards a single purpose or common goal.

One of the things that I enjoy about this line is that "the way" harkens back to the name for the Early Church and for Early Christians. In the Book of Acts, we see "The Way" mentioned in 9:2, 19:9 & 23, 22:4, 24:14 & 22, all referring to those who subscribed to the Christian faith shortly following Ascension and Pentecost. It is likely that this language and image of "The Way" harkens back to



Jesus' referring to Himself as "The Way, The Truth, and The Life" (John 14:6), referring to Christ being a path we must choose to take, a narrow road of strong guard rails to keep our behavior from driving us off the cliff from our salvation. The language of "Way" also encourages perpetual motion for us Christians, a journey that requires us to keep moving forward in our Christian walk, to make progress down that road. Lastly, it implies that there are many paths that we are free to choose, and by calling it "THE Way" we understand that it is set apart from all other worldly roads and therefore leads us to a unique destination.

So, is the Mandalorian "Way" an allegorically Christian path? Perhaps not overtly at least, but there are two unique elements to the Mandalorian "Way" that I think might be helpful to remember in our own Christian walk.

Tread lightly, very small spoilers ahead...

For one, we find that the rule of not removing one's own helmet is a strict code that our hero and his clan adhere to. There are points of temptation to remove his helmet, but it is clear that there is a stark boundary that prohibits these Mandalorians from showing their faces. At first glance this may seem like an act of anonymity, a form of protection in the hopes of masking or completely removing their old identity. I think a case could be made that these Mandalorians find a new identity by putting on their helmets, but more than that I find this adherence of not taking off the helmet to be a physical manifestation of never removing their code. As Christians, we are told "those who are

baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" which is to say we are dressing as Him, putting Him on over our identities and souls as though He were a vestment. At times, I wonder, if we feel tempted to temporarily take Christ off our identities and souls, to compartmentalize "wearing Christ" when it becomes inconvenient to live humbly, prudently, and mercifully. Our nameless hero, the Mandalorian, is religious about not removing his helmet, and I wonder if we can emulate that same religious boundary he examples by not removing our "helmet" of salvation, our helmet of Christ.

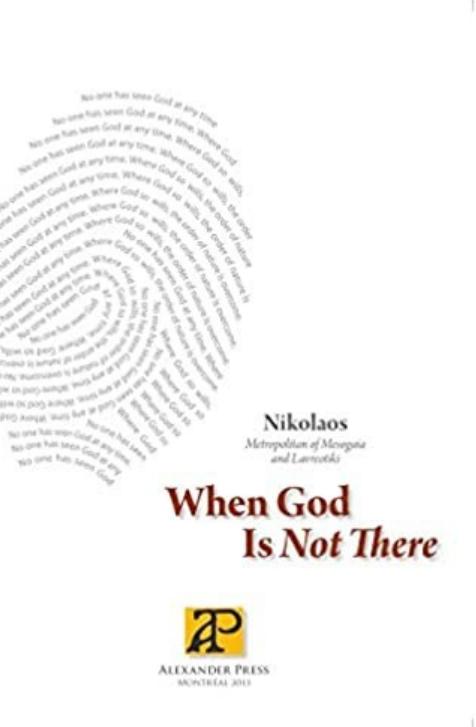
Secondly, the Mandalorian punctuates in his speech—to everyone—a reminder of his creed: "this is the Way". While it is typically repeated when it has to do with his armor and the rules that go into wearing it, it is also mentioned when it comes to offering a hand to help his kinsmen, his allies. Our hero goes to many peoples aid, and many in return come to his, and anytime this aid seems far too generous or even dangerous, a character goes to recite this series' best line in an always matter-of-factly fashion: this is the Way. I find the repeating of this line when it comes to helping out one's neighbor to be helpful to us as Christians, that we repeat this line in our own lives when it actually might seem difficult or inconvenient to help our neighbor. Further, I enjoy how freely the line is used among Mandalorians and among others not Mandalorian, as it shows a cavalier attitude of sharing this creed. The Mandalorians don't hide their creed. Whenever a thank you is extended to them they return with "this is the

Way", almost as to witness to what they are about. I wonder if this is possible for us when we assist others, that we freely share with our neighbor in need, and when they see our generosity and mercy that we can put to words what compels us towards this charity and love. Would it be so hard for us to say "thank God" or "God bless you" or during their respective seasons to share "Merry Christmas" or "Christ is Risen"?

To conclude, the Mandalorian is an incredibly fun show that takes you by the hand and invites you into its culture and universe. After each episode you feel like a sojourner to the space cowboy, and perhaps you'll pepper into your normal conversations "this is the Way" or "I have spoken." And while the show is inherently immersive and well written, I think it too can provide us with some points to consider in our faith.

We've all been given an armor at our baptism, the armor of faith, bullet proof like the Mandalorian's. Do we cherish this armor like our hero? Do we take it off at times when adhering to that armor's rules is too cumbersome? And we are successors to the ancient Christian "Way". Do we see our lived Christian faith as a path, a journey? Do we feel we are moving somewhere with our faith, or do we feel stuck, and how can we keep moving forward? Do we check to see that we are still on the right road and ask Christ to show the way, to take the wheel, to guide our paths?

When God Is Not There, a Book Study on Suffering Starting on January 26 at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom, Hosted by Alex Limberatos



"The world we live in has been called a 'vale of tears', a 'place of weeping' -- perhaps with good reason. This book records simple events and conversations, all the while grappling with difficult questions. Its aim is to convey the sense of the discreet yet persuasive presence of the true God precisely in situations where He is not visible: in pain, in disability, in the tragedies of life, in inexorable death, as this comes across in true events and is reflected in the lives of real people".

Alex Limberatos will be hosting a Zoom Book Study on Tuesday Nights at (6:30 pm) starting on January 26 in six sessions.

If you are interested in joining, please e-mail Alex at alex@stjohntpa.org or call the office at 813-876-8830

The church has copies of the book, free of charge. You can also buy an electronic copy of the book for \$10 on the Google Playstore, Amazon Kindle, or the Barnes and Noble App, or buy a copy on Amazon.

Liturgical Schedule for January 2021

Friday, January 1, 2021	St. Basil the Great/New Year's Day Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, January 3	Sunday before Epiphany Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday, January 5	Eve of Theophany Royal Hours of Theophany 9:30-11:00 a.m. Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great 6:00 p.m. Blessing of the Waters 7:00 p.m..
Wednesday, January 6	Theophany (Divine Liturgy to be held at St. John) Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Blessing of the Waters 11:00 a.m.
**Because of the pandemic, the Epiphany Celebration in Tarpon Springs will be scaled back, and Divine Liturgy will be held in all the churches of the Tampa Bay area.	
Great Vespers for Parish Feastday of St. John the Baptist 6:30 p.m.	
Thursday, January 7	St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Saturday, January 9	Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, January 10	Sunday after Theophany Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis Service of Supplication 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, January 13	Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Saturday, January 16	Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, January 17	St. Anthony Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, January 18	Sts. Athanasios and Cyril Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis Service of Supplication 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, January 20	Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Saturday, January 23	Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, January 24	14th Sunday of Luke Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, January 25	St. Gregory the Theologian Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis Service of Supplication 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, January 27	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Saturday, January 30	Three Hierarchs Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, January 31	Sunday of Zaccheus Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday, February 2	Presentation of Christ in the Temple Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis Service of Supplication 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, February 3	Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Saturday, February 6	St. Photios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Liturgical Notes for January 2021

Divine Liturgy on Saturdays of January - In order to facilitate people being able to worship on a weekly basis, we will celebrate Divine Liturgy on all the Saturdays of January, with the exception of Saturday, January 2.

Paraklesis to be celebrated every Week - We will continue to celebrate Paraklesis every week until the end of this crisis, at which point a Holy Unction service will be offered to mark the end of this crisis. In January, Paraklesis will be offered as follows: Wednesday, January 13; Wednesday, January 20; and Wednesday, January 27. Paraklesis will be at 6:00 p.m. on all of those nights. **Should the restrictions change in January and allow for all of us to worship together, the Saturday and Wednesday services will be discontinued.

Friday, January 1 - The Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil - New Year's Day Three things are commemorated on the first day of each year. First, the circumcision of Christ, which occurred historically 8 days after His Nativity. He was circumcised according to the rites of the Jewish law and given the name Jesus. Secondly, we commemorate the feast of St. Basil the Great, one of the Great Hierarchs of our church. St. Basil authored one of the Divine Liturgies used in our church, which is celebrated on his feastday. He also helped found monasticism. St. Basil was a friend to the poor, often baking bread with money in it and throwing it through the windows of widows and the poor. Hence the tradition of the Vasilopita, the bread with the coin baked inside, which we cut at the New Year. Finally, we are supposed to pray every day and commemorate all of life's milestones with prayer. So, we open a new year, 2021, with prayer and the Divine Liturgy.

Tuesday, January 5 - Royal Hours of Theophany 9:30 - 11:00 a.m. Like Nativity and Pascha, there is a service of the Royal Hours which is celebrated in anticipation of Theophany. This service consists of prayers, Psalms, hymns and Gospel readings which both foretell and recount this Great Feast of the church year.

Tuesday, January 5 - Wednesday, January 6 - The Feast of Theophany The Feast of Theophany commemorates several things: First, and most well-known, it commemorates the Baptism of Christ. Christ was baptized in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist. Second, at the moment of His descent into the River, the Jordan River reversed its course, and all of Creation changed its course with the presence of the Christ. Third, the Holy Trinity was made manifest for the first time in human history, as the Son of God was in the water, the Holy Spirit hovered over as a dove, and the voice of God was heard. The feast of the Theophany is the manifestation of God, as well as the Baptism of Christ. The name "Epiphany" refers to the enlightenment of the world. After the Divine Liturgy, there is a service called the Blessing of Waters during which water is blessed and sprinkled over the church and over the people as a way to renew and reconsecrate ourselves on this feastday. There is a beautiful and powerful prayer that is offered only on January 5 and 6, asking God to reconsecrate the world.

Because of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Epiphany celebration in Tarpon Springs is being scaled back significantly. Because of this, ALL churches in the Tampa Bay area will be open for Divine Liturgy on Wednesday, January 6. As is the Tradition with the Feasts of the Nativity and Pascha, two Divine Liturgies are celebrated in connection with the feast of Theophany. The Vesperal Liturgy of St. Basil is celebrated on January 5. The Orthros and Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom will be celebrated on January 6.

In an effort to accommodate as many people as possible, we will hold the Divine Liturgy on January 5 at 6:00 p.m., hoping to attract those who are working and who can't come during the day. Divine Liturgy will be held on Wednesday, January 6 at 10:00 a.m. The Blessing of the Waters will follow the Liturgy each day.

At a time when we need prayers over the whole world, I humbly ask each of you to make every effort to attend one of these two services. We will have room for overflow seating if necessary. This is a time for all of us to focus our prayers on the healing of our whole world. This is what the prayers of Theophany ask each year. Never has it been more important for us to come and offer them together.

+Fr. Stavros

Wednesday, January 6 - Great Vespers of St. John the Baptist - 6:30 p.m. The Vespers Service is the service that begins the liturgical day. In our church, the day begins at sundown. Thus the feast of St. John the Baptist, celebrated on January 7, begins with the sunset of January 6. Properly celebrated, all feastdays should begin with the celebration of Great Vespers, including every Sunday which should begin with Great Vespers on Saturday evenings. Because this is not practical in most parishes, Great Vespers is celebrated in most parishes on a limited basis. We will, of course, celebrate the complete cycle of services related to our feastday of St. John, which will begin with Great Vespers.

Thursday, January 7 - St. John the Baptist The day after a major feastday often commemorates the secondary figure of the Feast. On January 6, we celebrate the Baptism/Epiphany of Christ, who is obviously the major figure. The secondary figure of that feast is St. John the Baptist, whose feastday we commemorate the next day, January 7. St. John is the LAST of the Prophets before Christ and the first of the Saints, those who believed in Christ. Righteous figures who came before Christ are called either "Righteous" or "Prophet." Holy People who came after Christ are called Saints. St. John the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist, as both titles.

Sunday, January 17 - St. Anthony St. Anthony is recognized as one of the fathers of monasticism. He lived in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries. He founded a monastery in Egypt which still exists to this day. He authored many of the monastic rules that are still in practice today. He also was a major contributor to the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in 325, where the Nicene Creed was first authored. He was one of the leaders against the heresies of Arianism.

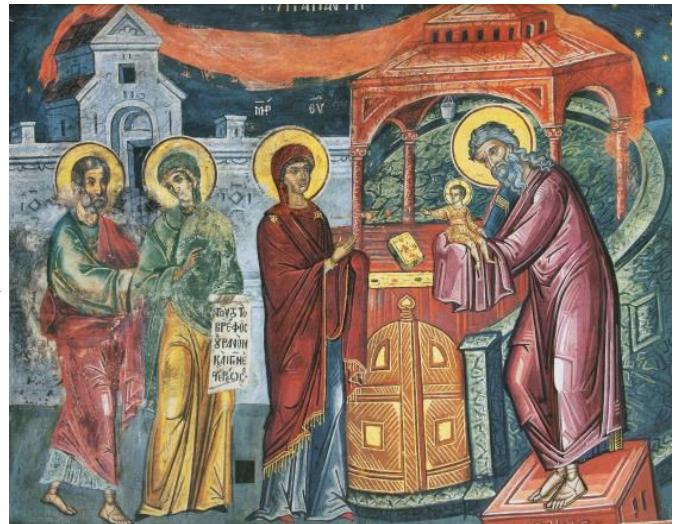
Monday, January 18 - St. Athanasios and Cyril St. Athanasios was born in 297 and was ordained a priest in 319. At the tender age of 28, he was one of the leaders of the First Ecumenical Council in 325 in Nicea, and defended the Faith against the heresies of Arius. He contributed to the development of the Nicene Creed which was authored in 325 and edited in 381 at the second Ecumenical Council. St. Athanasios became a bishop and later Patriarch of Alexandria. St. Cyril was actually born after the death of St. Athanasios, so even though they are depicted together and celebrated together, they never met one another. Saint Cyril was also the Patriarch of Alexandria and presided over the Third Ecumenical Council in 431.

Monday, January 25 - St. Gregory the Theologian One of the Three Hierarchs, also lived in the 4th century. He was a friend and contemporary of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom. He was an accomplished speaker and writer, was the Bishop of Nazianzos and was one of the Bishops who presided at the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381, which finalized the Nicene Creed that we recite to this day.

Saturday, January 30 - The Three Hierarchs The Three Hierarchs are St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. Each had his own feastday and all are honored together on January 30, ironically because of a controversy over which was the greatest. (Imagine a church meeting where we debated which saints were the most important!) Each of them lived in the 4th Century, each was an accomplished writer and speaker, each was a Bishop, each authored a Liturgy and each is remembered prominently in the history of our church to this day. The Three Hierarchs are Patron Saints of Teachers and Education.

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.



Pastoral Notes

Last month I discussed the topic of “rebaptism.” Though I may not have this section every month in the Messenger, I will write a few notes as things come up in pastoral ministry. This month’s notes concern Holy Communion.

*Then flew one of the Seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin forgiven.”
Isaiah 6:6-7*

A lot of debate has been had these past few months on how to properly and safely receive Holy Communion. There has been debate about whether we should wipe our mouths on the cloth, or close our mouth on the spoon. In Isaiah 6, the Prophet Isaiah has a vision in the temple which prefigures our receiving of Holy Communion. The angel takes the live coal from the altar with tongs (which is what the Communion spoon represents), and touches it to the lips of the Prophet (in other words, the lips make contact with the tongs, the coal is not flipped into the mouth of the prophet). What follows in verse 7 is what the priest says after he receives Holy Communion—this has touched my lips, taking away my iniquity and cleansing me from my sin.” The cloth that is held under a person’s chin when they receive Holy Communion is not supposed to function as a napkin, to wipe the lips of the communicant. Rather it is there to protect the Holy Gifts in case anything falls from the spoon between the chalice and your mouth. When we close our lips on the spoon, there is nothing left over on our lips that will need to be wiped away. That being said, we should lick our lips after receiving Holy Communion, and wait until we’ve eaten a piece of antithoron before venerating an icon. We are not venerating icons right now anyway because of covid, but when this is over, it is actually not appropriate to venerate an icon right after receiving Holy Communion. +Fr. Stavros

St. John the Baptist Community News

Parish Registry

Wedding - Stephen Michael Lepire and Kyra Elaine Hagan were married on Saturday, November 28. Fr. Paul Mayernick officiated. Frank Mayernick was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

Wedding - Christopher Attanasio and Kelsie Bailey were married on Saturday, December 5. Fr. Stavros and Fr. Nicholas Louh officiated. Cassie Poulos was the Koumbara. Congratulations!

Condolences to Jeanie Nenos and Tom Nicklow, on the passing of their father, Vasilios, on Sunday, December 6. May his memory be eternal!

	2020	Registry Statistics for 2020			
		2019	2018	2017	2016
Weddings	8	7	8	9	9
Baptisms	13	20	27	20	36
Funerals	12	10	9	9	9
Chrismations	5	5	6	7	4

***Due to the pandemic, several baptisms were postponed until 2021, which is the reason why that number is abnormally low.*

Welcome Fr. John and Pres. Denise Stefero

As stated in Fr. Stavros' message for this month, Fr. John and Pres. Denise Stefero will be worshipping with us regularly beginning in at the end of December. We are blessed now with two retired clergymen in our community, as we also have Fr. Stratton Dorozenski and Pres. Denise. We welcome them and will appreciate their help at Divine Liturgy on Sundays, and perhaps in other ways as well. Just an FYI, it is still a goal to have a second full-time priest serving our parish in the near future, and other priests serving here does NOT mean that our goal has been met, or has changed.

Ministry News & Updates

GOYA – The GOYA Meeting for January will be Sunday, January 24. We will meet from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner will be served. Parents are welcome to join us.

Altar Boys - Until the end of the pandemic, we will not be having altar boy groups. We will reconstitute all the groups at the end of the pandemic.

Looking for Ushers - We are looking for more ushers to help at the Divine Services of our church. If you are interested, please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com.

Men's Group - The Men's Group will meet on Sunday, January 17 at the church at 5:00 p.m. We will walk to a nearby restaurant, eat dinner, then return to the church for discussion, concluding by 7:30 p.m.

Women's Bible Study will meet in January on Tuesday, January 12; Tuesday, January 19 and Tuesday, January 26. We are studying the Epistle of St. James. We meet via ZOOM. Fr. Stavros leads this group. If you would like to join our women's Bible study group, please contact Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com and he will add you to the Zoom link. At some point, we will be resuming in person, however when we do, there will continue to be a zoom option.

Monday Night Bible Study with Charlie will be held on Mondays, January 11, 18 and 25, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Bible study is held via Zoom. If you are not currently part of the Monday night Bible study and would like to join in, please contact Charlie at chambos@stjohnpta.org and he will add you.

12 Disciples Program - In August, we started a program called "The 12 Disciples." There are twelve pages of names that comprise all the members of our parish. Father Stavros prays for all twelve pages of names each week at Paraklesis. The idea for this program is for each "disciple" to take one page of names and pray for that group of people every day. For every twelve "disciples" who sign up, every page of people will be prayed for. We currently have over 60 "disciples" meaning that each person in this community is being prayed for by at least five people every day. If you'd like to join this program and receive a page of people to pray for, please contact either Charlie or Alex.

GriefShare Ministry Starting on Thursday, January 21 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 Thursdays, starting January 21, for 13 weeks, ending on Thursday, April 22. For January, GriefShare will meet January 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. For the time being, Griefshare is meeting via zoom.*

Meeting of Ministry Heads, Tuesday, January 12- On Tuesday, January 12, there will be a meeting of ministry heads via zoom from 6:30-7:30 p.m. Each ministry head is requested to attend and other members of each ministry are invited to attend. If the ministry head cannot attend, please ask someone else in your ministry to attend, so that all ministries are represented.

Sunday School Teachers' Seminar, January 30- On Saturday, January 30, from 11:15 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. (following Divine Liturgy), there will be a seminar for all Sunday school teachers. You may attend in person or via zoom.

Prayer for Teachers on Sunday, January 31 - On January 30, we celebrate the feast of the Three Hierarchs, who are also the patron saints of teachers. On January 31, at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, we will offer a prayer for all teachers and anyone who works in education in our community.

Philoptochos Vasilopita Sunday Cancelled for 2021 - It has been decided in consultation with Father Stavros and the Philoptochos, to cancel Vasilopita Sunday for 2021. Our parish will be making a donation through Philoptochos to St. Basil's Academy, and on Sunday, January 10, we will have a tray near the baptistery for anyone who wants to contribute additionally. You are also welcome to send a check to the church office. Please make it out to "Philoptochos" and write "St. Basil's Academy" on the memo line.

Hope & Joy Box of Hope Drive a Huge Success
We collected 1,000 lbs of food (25 boxes), \$1,981 in cash and checks and \$145 in gift cards. Thank you everyone for bringing hope to those who need it the most.

Participate in the Oratorical Festival



Learning about our Orthodox Christian Faith is one thing. Practicing it is another. Getting up in front of a group of people and teaching them about it is one of the greatest ways to make it real in our life. This is the opportunity that the Oratorical Festival provides for every single participant. Our parish will be participating this year. The 2021 topics are available online. Although we are not having in-person Sunday School classes at the moment, we believe through Zoom and other socially distanced in-person meetings we can make the most of this season and get more people involved than ever. If you or your student is in the 7th thru 12th Grade and are interested in participating, please email Peggy Bradshaw at peggykbradshaw@icloud.com or call her at 727-244-1374 or email Charlie Hambos at chambos@stjohnpa.org or call him at 813-843-8471. We are planning some General Interest Zoom meetings for January 2021.

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

Monday, February 15 Orthodox Spirituality—Introduction to the Sacraments

Monday, February 22 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, March 1 Orthodox Traditions—fasting, icons, prayer, and separating Theology from “yiayialogy.”

Classes will be held on these three Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary.

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

Kolyva during the Time of the Pandemic

The Philoptochos will resume making Kolyva for those who wish to have Kolyva at memorial services. Here are the new guidelines:

1. The Kolyva will be made on a small tray that will be given to the family at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. The Kolyva will not be mixed or handed out in the hall until further notice.
2. Kolyva will be made as requested for 40 day memorials and 1 year memorials only.
3. The cost of the Kolyva will be \$50, with checks made payable to Philoptochos.
4. Kolyva is not necessary for a memorial to be done.
5. Once the pandemic is over, we will again resume making the larger Kolyva for distribution to the community at a cost of \$100.
6. If you wish to have Kolyva offered, please contact the office at least TWO weeks prior to the Memorial service you wish to request.



Using Amazon Smile to Donate to St. John - If you use Amazon Smiles, make sure to choose our church so a donation will be given to our parish every time a purchase is made. So far, since August 2017, we have made **\$864.59**. Every bit helps!



Need a Mask? We have many!

Through the generous donation of a few parishioners, we have reusable cloth masks available. We are thankful especially to Paula (Sakellaris) Weinburg, who made and mailed many of them from Virginia. If you need a mask, please contact the church office and we can arrange to get you one.

Thank you also to the many parishioners who have made and donated masks to us.

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

By Fr. Stavros

Most of us don't spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don't spend any time. Each week since January 2019, we provide in *The Messenger* and then repeated weekly in the bulletin, a verse or two. I choose verses that are meaningful to me, or well known or ones that have meaning in contemporary times. You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have.

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 January. 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.

January 3 - 9

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Psalm 50/51:10-12

A short reflection on this verse is part of Fr. Stavros' Message this month.

January 10 - 16

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.

Colossians 3:9-10

As we celebrate the Feast of Epiphany from January 6-14, we reflect on Christ reconsecrating the creation. In the spirit of our parish word of the year which is "renew", we read in Colossians 3: 9-10 about putting off the old nature and putting on the new nature. These verses are actually offered as part of a prayer at the sacrament of Baptism. We are not "naturally" bad. God made us after His image and likeness, which means that we are innately good. We naturally incline to what is good. To act poorly is something we learn. We go against our true nature, which is to be Godly, and we become lying and deceitful. Saint Paul tells us in these verses to put off this "old nature", where we are not honest with one another, and to put on the new nature (which is a return to our "natural" state), renewing

ourselves after the image of our Creator. He is careful to point out that this is done "in knowledge." This means that a return to our original nature requires us to learn and to change. It doesn't just "happen." As you look at your life as we begin 2021, ask yourself how much of your "nature," or what now seems natural to you, is actually in line with how God made you to be. And the basic question is, does our life reflect our true nature, does it reflect God, or does our life reflect a false presentation of God, in other words a lie? As Saint Paul says, let us not lie to one another or pretend that we have a new nature. Let us actually work to put on that new nature, through work and knowledge, so that reflect the image of our Creator.

January 17 - 23

Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:22-24

This week's verses also talk about our old nature and putting on a new nature. In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul tells us that to follow after Christ is life-changing. It does, and it should, change our lives. To follow after Christ is a choice, and it requires following, which requires clearing things out of our path that inhibit us from following. For instance, we can't follow Christ if we can't see Him. So the things that "blind us" spiritually need to be removed from our lives. Looking at things that are inappropriate will blind us spiritually. They will not allow us to see Christ. Dwelling on certain things in our minds will block our minds from focusing on Christ. It is important to reflect on what our eyes are seeing consistently and what our minds are thinking consistently, and if necessary, to change the things we gaze upon and the things we think about so that these things are more in line with Christ. We need to clean up our "former manner of life," (sinful habits we have in our lives), which becomes corrupted "through deceitful lusts" and renew our minds to focus on Godly things. In this way, we will put on a new nature, which reflects the likeness of God and is defined by "true righteousness and holiness." Evaluate what you see each day and the thoughts that dominate your minds. If 90 percent of our stimulation is taken in visually, cleaning up what our eyes see will go a long way to cleaning up our eyes as well as our minds, which dwell on the things we see. Putting holy things in front of our eyes, will bring holy things to our minds, which will lead us to righteousness (what is right in the eyes of God) and holiness (being set apart for the things of God).

January 24 - 30

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.

II Corinthians 4:16

For those of us who are over 30, we've all had moments when we've "felt our age." We are not young and as full of vitality as we once were. Should this be cause for despair? NO! Because as St. Paul writes in II Corinthians 4:16, even "though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being re-

Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks continued...

newed every day." Through Christ, there is an opportunity to be renewed spiritually every day. Do I wish I had my 30-year-old body back? Absolutely, especially my metabolism. Do I wish I had my 30-year-old mind back? NO! Because I'm a lot more intelligent than I was back then, I know a lot more now. Do I wish I had my 30-year-old sense of God back? Absolutely not! I am much more in tune with God now than I ever was back then. I suspect as I get older, my body will waste away more and more with each passing year. However, I also anticipate that I will grow closer and closer to God, at least that is my goal. We can't stop our outer nature from wasting away. We can certainly slow that down with eating better and exercising. But we can't stop it. What we absolutely can do is be renewed in our inner nature, constantly, and at any time. Any age is a good age to grow closer to God. And something it is the ones who have the most infirm bodies that are the closest to God. So don't only focus on the outer nature—what you wear, how much you weight, etc.—focus on the inner nature, and work to bring it ever closer to God.

January 31 - February 6

*But as for me, my prayer is to Thee, O Lord. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of Thy steadfast love answer me.
Psalm 69:13*

When is the acceptable time for our wishes to come true? When will we find someone to marry, or land our dream job, or get out of this pandemic? God gives us all answers at the time that He deems acceptable. That is not necessarily on our schedule. As we continue to mark this time of the pandemic, my prayer increasingly moves away from God swiftly ending our anxiety, but instead, I pray for help in coping with whatever comes our way. The ultimate goal in life cannot just be being able to be together without wearing masks. It's got to be more than that. As I reflect on this verse, it brings to mind the thought that my prayer to God is for Him to answer my questions in a way that will lead me to salvation, to give me only the things that I ask for that lead to salvation. In fact, I don't want God to give me all the things I ask for, because in my human frailty, I may ask for something that will not get me to salvation. Rather than demand God answer my requests, I pray for discernment and joy as I answer His requests for my life.

Prayer List: Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our Souls and Bodies, visit and heal your servants: Kathy & Andrew Bouzinekis; Anastasia; Amanda, Andrew, Colton, Miranda, Charlotte Elizabeth, Nuha, Nabeel, Michael, Amal, John, Elaine, Olga, Virginia Georgiou, Ron Myer, Toula Tsaros, Fr. Pat Legato, Nellie Pringle, Yolanda Webb, Angela Bougas, Tony Ekonomou, Ron, Jason Vickers, Rex Garrison, Tina Chakonas, Ann Demas, Alex Martinez, Adriana Martinez, Aaron Martinez, Christina Noel Kouzes Houck, Evangeline Xeroteres, Nichole Ross, Daniel Ross, Daniella Ross, Ashley Henderson, Natalie Henderson, Chris, Debbie, James, Avery, Lily, Jacob, Jesse, Ann, Rosario, Antonia Caffentzis, Alissa, John, Angela, Joey, Christine Scourtes, Steven, Matthew & Family, Phyllis, John Zelatis, Reagan, Peter Zaharis, Alexandra Ferrarolis, Leon & Despina Botham, Cindy Xenick, Mary Ellen Evdemon, Marie Sofia Panagopoulos, Maria Hursey, Chris Vamvakias, John Myer, Mike Trimis, Robert and Alice Stoccardo, John Alexander, Michael Romero, George Hambos, Dean Kondilis and Family, Bill and Nancy Manikas, Patricia Costello, Anastasia Smyrnakis, Ekaterina & Anna Shushaalykova, Dora Koudouna, Ana Mourer, Debbie Phelps, Mary Voykin, David Voykin, Anne Sakellaris, Denise Badrane, Sia Blankenship, Don Payne, Zhana Temelkova, Stanislava Terzieva, James, Jude and all victims of war, terrorism, crime, natural disaster, and all of whom we are unaware.

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.

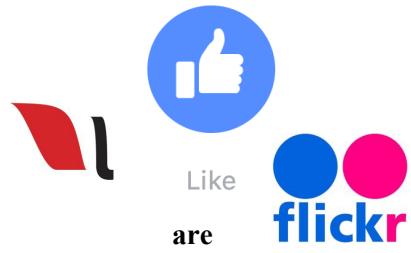
Live Streaming

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: stjohnpta.org,
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 available to watch at anytime."

Pictures Go to Flickr.com and search "St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church" or go to www.flickr.com/photos/stjohnoctampa



2021 Stewardship Update

"You are the light of the world!" Matthew 5:14

Year to Year Comparison ~	2021*	2020*	2019*
Pledged Year to Date	\$115,893	\$519,060	\$497,896
Received Year to Date	\$7,561	\$528,748	\$444,951
Average Pledge	\$1,545	\$1,417	\$1,434
Median Pledge	\$1,000	\$700	\$800
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	75	398	375
*YTD as of 12/15/20, 12/15/20 & 12/4/19			

Be the Light in 2021!

We hope you enjoyed the videos during Stewardship Month in December. We want to thank all of the families for participating. We also want to thank all of you for turning in your 2021 Stewardship Pledge Forms. Forms can be mailed, filled out on our website and even on our church app. If there are ever any questions about Stewardship, please call the church office. We look forward to Being the Light with all of you in 2021!

Thoughts on Stewardship

By Fr. Elias Villis

There is an ancient legend about the monk who found a precious stone, a precious jewel. A short time later, the monk met a traveler, who said he was hungry and asked the monk if he would share some of his provisions. When the monk opened his bag, the traveler saw the precious stone and, on an impulse, asked the monk if he could have it. Amazingly, the monk gave the traveler the stone.

The traveler departed quickly overjoyed with his new possession. However, a few days later, he came back, searching for the monk. He returned the stone to the monk and made a request: "Please give me that which enabled you to give me this precious stone!"

Fr. Elias Villis is the Proistamenos of the Greek Orthodox Church of Our Savior in Rye, NY.

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over **2882** people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 5.5 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 Alex at alex@stjohntpa.org 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 prayerteam365@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.

**The Prayer Team has a new dedicated website: PrayerTeam365.com
Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!**

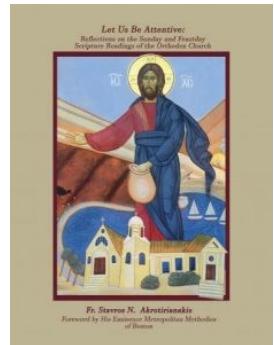
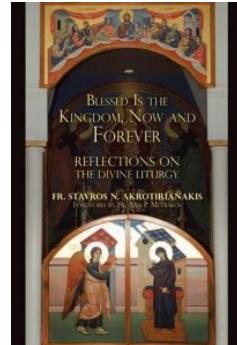
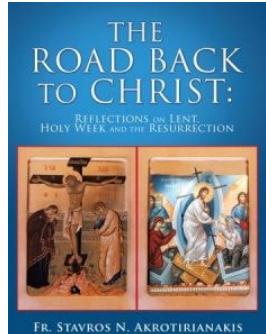
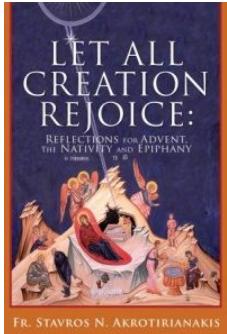
Father Stavros has authored four books that are available both in the bookstore and on-line. They are entitled:

Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany

The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection

Blessed is the Kingdom, Now and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy

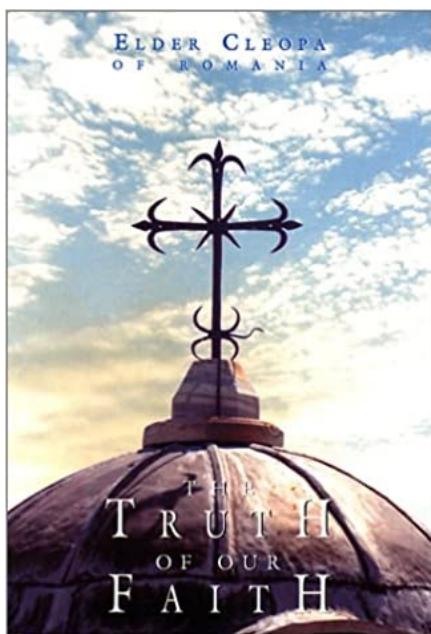
Let us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church



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

“The Truth of Our Faith”

by Elder Cleopa of Romania



This illumined and trustworthy instructor of Christian Truth is hard to find in this age of doctrinal relativity and spiritual insensibility. Thus, when one encounters the wisdom, inspired knowledge of Scripture and authority with which the Staretz Cleopa (1912-1998) speaks, it is not hard to distinguish his discerning words from the myriad of opinions being bandied about in society today. As an inheritor of two thousand years of Apostolic Tradition, trained from his youth in the ascetic struggle against the passions, a man of continual prayer and fasting, and possessing an encyclopedic knowledge of Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers, Elder Cleopa is an exceptionally qualified guide of the Christian Faith.

In nearly one-thousand references and explanations of Holy Scripture, Elder Cleopa answers the questions of inquirers on such subjects as: the presuppositions of personal salvation; the study of Holy Scripture; the veneration of icons, relics, the saints and angels, the Virgin Mary, and the True Cross; the offering of prayer for the dead; the Second Coming of Christ; His thousand year reign; speaking in tongues; and the keeping of the Lord's feast on Sunday instead of Saturday.

This book is an ideal resource concerning the truth of our Faith and the tenets of Orthodox Christianity. This book is a must-read for every seeker of Christian Orthodoxy.

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

January Sunday School Update

The Sunday School Staff and children would like to wish everyone in our parish many blessing in the New Year and we hope that you all had a wonderful Christmas with your family. The first half of our Sunday School year was truly unusual due to this pandemic.

We went virtual with many video lessons provided by our teachers and written ones created by Jenivieve Elly. We also had limited, in person Sunday School sessions, led by Charlie Hambos and Alex Limberatos.

Fr. Stavros and Alex provided our older students and adults with weekly lessons on the Gospel Reading.

We are so thankful to all of the people who have dedicated so much of their time and talents for the children of St. John's. Without them, our Sunday School would not be successful.

WHAT DID YOU THINK OF OUR ZOOM CHRISTMAS PAGEANT THIS YEAR?

We hope you enjoyed watching it along with last's year's pageant. What a difference a year makes!

Let's pray that next year we will all be together for Christmas. We are so proud of all of our students who participated this year. They did a fantastic job. We would like to thank their parents and the amazing cast of The Gifts of Christmas:

Narrators - Sofia Stonestreet and Maggie Trakas
Archangel Gabriel – Ariadne Stonestreet

Mary – Wren Robinson

Joseph – Kris Christopher

Innkeeper – Leo Sengsouvanna

Angel of the Lord: Julie Konstas

Angel 1: Elaina Edquid

Angel 2: Phoebe Sengsouvanna

Littlest Angel: Zoe Sengsouvanna

King Herod – Gabriel Gonzales

Bible Scholar – Charlie Hambos

Shepherd - Constantine Ameres

King Galthazar – Peter Konstas

King Melchior – Theo Edquid

King Gaspar – Luke Stonestreet

In addition to our Pageant, our Sunday School topics covered in December were STEWARDSHIP, with a video provided by Heidi Borgeas, and THE ICON OF THE NATIVITY. Thank you Fr. Stavros for this video lesson on The Nativity. Thank you all for your participation in our BOXES OF HOPE program and the VIRTUAL CHRISTMAS GREETINGS VIDEO. It was such a joy to see so many smiling faces from our parishioners and children.

We hope you utilized your Nativity Fast Bag and your Nativity Wreath this Christmas season. The Wreaths were provided by our Sunday School for each of our families.

Thank you to Debbie Nicklow for making them. The themes covered each week were LOVE, GRATITUDE, HOPE, GENEROSITY, JOY, FAITH, and PEACE.



Sunday School Calendar

We will continue to offer our programs online.

IMPORTANT UPDATE: We will offer IN PERSON SESSIONS ON SUNDAYS with the hopes, based on participation, that we will offer more and more opportunities for in-person lessons. Lessons will be on the solea in the church right after the Divine Liturgy which starts at 10 a.m. every Sunday. As the group gets larger we will split the groups with one class in the church and another in the hall with the hopes we can meet with all groups weekly once again. Please contact us with any questions or concerns.

Sunday, January 10

St. Basil/Epiphany/Vasilopita

+++IN PERSON LESSON FOR TODDLER 2'S - 1ST GRADE

Sunday, January 17

Worship/The Divine Liturgy/ Holy Communion

Sunday, January 24

Light of Christ – Making Faith Personal

+++IN PERSON LESSON FOR 2ND - 6TH GRADE

Saturday, January 30

SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS MEETING

Sunday, January 31

Sacramental Life of the Orthodox Church

Community Outreach

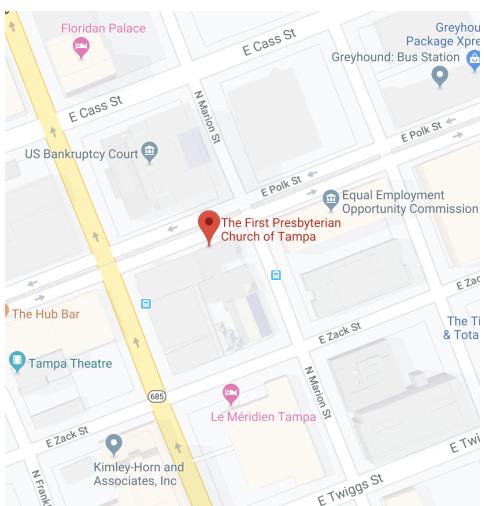
Saturday, January 16

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 can 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..



Scan with your
Smartphone to
Sign-Up Today

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

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

Here are some special requests we have:

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



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.

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

MEETING DATE AND TIME: We will meet on Saturday, January 9 at 11:30 a.m. instead of the 1st Thursday of January. We encourage everyone to attend the Divine Liturgy from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and then we will have our meeting afterwards.

We will also meet on Saturday, February 6 and March 6.

Please look for an announcement.

LOCATION: St John Greek Church in the **Kourmolis Hall** and we will also be on a **ZOOM Video Conference for those whom cannot attend.**

Everyone is welcome.

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

We will continue our YAH Meetings with discussions on the CHURCHES THAT TOUCHED OUR LIVES.

We were asked to prepare a list of Churches where we; 1) Grew up, 2) Married in, 3) Raised Children, 4) Moved to, 5) Vacationed and 6) visited. In addition, we asked people to share any blessing or miracles that had occurred. It has been indeed a moving experience.

- We continue to reach out to those who are homebound during the pandemic.
- We will continue with the theme how the “CHURCHES THAT TOUCHED OUR LIVES”
- We continue to learn more about our Church Family from the Churches and we attended during our lives.

OUR COMING EVENTS

- We will having our next YAH meetings to on Saturday Jan. 9 , Feb. 6, March 6 & Apr. 3 at 11:30 AM
- We will have our socially distant IN PERSON YAH meeting with masks in the Church Hall and continue to use Zoom for those who cannot attend our meeting.
- For those whom had not spoken, we encourage you to bring your thoughts and blessing on how “CHURCHES TOUCHED YOUR LIVES”.
- We are also planning on visiting our neighboring new Greek Churches in Clearwater and Palm Harbor.

For more information,
contact Michael Trimis, President,
813-784-4872 (vm/t)
TrimisM@gmail.com

PASSED ACTIVITIES

- Dec. 5 - We held socially distant IN PERSON and Zoom meeting in the Kourmolis Center
- Nov. 7 – We held socially distant IN PERSON and Zoom meeting in the Kourmolis Center.
- Aug. 5, Sept. 3 & Oct 1. Our discussions were on the CHURCHES THAT TOUCHED OUR LIVES.
- July 2, 2020 – Revisited 60 years ago in the years 1960 to 1969
- March 5, 2020 - Visited St Michael Greek Orthodox Shrine in Tarpon Springs
- 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

Mary Nenos, Vice President
813-508-5553
MaryNenos@gmail.com



2019 Trip to the Show Palace Dinner Theater

Greeks on the Frontline of Finding A COVID-19 Vaccine

Source: Neos Kosmos

Greek scientists around the world are at the forefront of finding a vaccine for COVID-19. We look at some of the top names in the race towards a COVID-19 cure.

Albert Bourla of Pfizer

Dr Albert Bourla, Pfizer Chairman and CEO, said the world “can see light at the end of the tunnel,” after the US pharmaceutical giant announced its coronavirus vaccine was more than 90 per cent effective in preventing COVID-19 for those who had not shown previous infection.

“Given how effective this vaccine is, and we are aware that the demand will be much higher than anything we can produce, we are also looking right now to see if there are other ways, thinking out of the box, that we can increase even further the manufacturing capacity,” Dr Bourla told CNBC.

The Greek business and veterinarian who serves as the chairman of Pfizer has been with the company since 1993. Before that, he was born a Jew in Thessaloniki, and earned his doctorate in Biotechnology from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki’s Veterinary School. He left Greece at the age of 34 and still has a home in Chalkidiki.

Menelas Pangalos

Greek geneticist Menelas Pangalos, the Executive Vice President of BioPharmaceuticals Research and Development at AstraZeneca, from Chios is part of the team creating the vaccine, called AZD1222. The vaccine is under development in collaboration with UK-based global pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca. Trial results published in the Lancet medical journal earlier this year found that the strongest response was seen in people who received two doses. He said the company hoped the COVID-19 vaccine it was developing with the University of Oxford would “be effective for at least a year, maybe longer.”

The British neurosurgeon was born in Ealing to a family of Greek diaspora. Both his parents descended from the island of Chios and his mother was born there. He spent all his childhood summers on the island and is fluent in Greek. Following his Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (First Class Honours) from Imperial College London and subsequent PhD in Neuropharmacology from University College London, he conducted his training under the tutelage of Professor N. K. Robakis at the Mount Sinai Medical Center of New York.

George Yancopoulos

George Yancopoulos, co-founder of Regeneron Pharmaceuti-



cal, is the Greek American biomedical scientist behind Donald Trump’s COVID-19 antibody cocktail. The holder of more than 100 patents, Dr Yancopoulos is the principal inventor and developer of Regeneron’s six FDA-approved medicines, as well as of Regeneron’s foundational technologies for target and drug development, such as its proprietary TRAP technology, and the VelociGene and VelocImmune antibody technologies.

“We were contacted by the White House on 1 October, just two days after we had announced the results of the clinical trials. We got the process moving and were able to get emergency authorization from the US Food and Drug Administration to administer the cocktail. There were, as you can understand, extensive discussions with his medical team and we decided to go ahead because he was the ideal candidate,” he told Kathimerini newspaper.

“This cocktail is particularly effective in patients in the early stages of COVID-19, with a high viral load, who have mild to moderate symptoms and whose body has not had a chance – or cannot because of a weak immune system – to produce antibodies. That last factor is absolutely essential. And of course it is not recommended for people who have a high risk of side effects of the disease because of age or underlying health problems.”

Along with Dr Yancopoulos, Dr Christos Kyriatsos from Koza-ni, and Dr Roy Vagelos from Pindaros are also working with Regeneron for a COVID-19 vaccine.

The article was originally printed in Neos Kosmos (neokosmos.com) and was asked to be published in The Messenger by the Young at Heart.

Laughing Keeps us Young

Sponsored by the Young at Heart

Oldies, but goodies.

Couple in their nineties are both having problems remembering things. During a check-up, the doctor tells them that they're physically okay, but they might want to start writing things down to help them remember ..

Later that night, while watching TV, the old man gets up from his chair 'Want anything while I'm in the kitchen?' he asks.

'Will you get me a bowl of ice cream?'

'Sure.'

'Don't you think you should write it down so you can remember it?' she asks.

'No, I can remember it.'

'Well, I'd like some strawberries on top, too. Maybe you should write it down, so as not to forget it?'

He says, 'I can remember that. You want a bowl of ice cream with strawberries.'

'I'd also like whipped cream. I'm certain you'll forget that, write it down?' she asks.

Irritated, he says, 'I don't need to write it down, I can remember it! Ice cream with strawberries and whipped cream - I got it, for goodness sake!'

Then he toddles into the kitchen. After about 20 minutes, the old man returns from the kitchen and hands his wife a plate of bacon and eggs. She stares at the plate for a moment.

'Where's my toast?'



An elderly couple had dinner at another couple's house, and after eating, the wives left the table and went into the kitchen.

The two gentlemen were talking, and one said, ' Last night we went out to a new restaurant and it was really great. I would recommend it very highly.'

The other man said, 'What is the name of the restaurant?'

The first man thought and thought and finally said, 'What's the name of that flower you give to someone you love? You know, the one that's red and has thorns.'

'Do you mean a rose?'

'Yes, that's the one,' replied the man. He then turned towards the kitchen and yelled, 'Rose, what's the name of that restaurant we went to last night?'



Hospital regulations require a wheelchair for patients being discharged. However, while working as a student nurse, I found one elderly gentleman already dressed and sitting on the bed with a suitcase at his feet, who insisted he didn't need my help to leave the hospital.

After a chat about rules being rules, he reluctantly let me wheel him to the elevator.

On the way down I asked him if his wife was meeting him. 'I don't know,' he said. 'She's still upstairs in the bathroom changing out of her hospital gown.'



A senior citizen said to his eighty-year old buddy:

'So I hear you're getting married?'

'Yep!'

'Do I know her?'

'Nope!'

'This woman, is she good looking?'

'Not really.'

'Is she a good cook?'

'Nah, she can't cook too well.'

'Does she have lots of money?'

'Nope! Poor as a church mouse.'

'Well, then, is she good in bed?'

'I don't know.'

'Why in the world do you want to marry her then?'

'Because she can still drive!'



A man was telling his neighbor, 'I just bought a new hearing aid. It cost me four thousand dollars, but it's state of the art. It's perfect.'

'Really,' answered the neighbor. 'What kind is it?' 'Twelve thirty.'

Moe, an 82 year-old man, went to the doctor to get a physical.

A few days later, the doctor saw Morris walking down the street with a gorgeous young woman on his arm.

A couple of days later, the doctor spoke to Morris and said, 'You're really doing great, aren't you?'

Morris replied, 'Just doing what you said, Doc: 'Get a hot mama and be cheerful."

The doctor said, 'I didn't say that.. I said, 'You've got a heart murmur; be careful.'



One more.....

A little old man shuffled slowly into an ice cream parlor and pulled himself slowly, painfully, up onto a stool... After catching his breath, he ordered a banana split.

The waitress asked kindly, 'Crushed nuts?'

'No,' he replied, 'Arthritis.'

Prayers of Protection from the Coronavirus

www.goarch.org

A Prayer To Be Offered in the Morning

Lord our God, You who are rich in mercy, and with careful wisdom direct our lives, listen to our prayer, receive our repentance for our sins, bring an end to this new infectious disease, this new epidemic, just as you averted the punishment of your people in the time of David the King. You who are the Physician of our souls and bodies, grant restored health to those who have been seized by this illness, raising them from their bed of suffering, so that they might glorify You, O merciful Savior, and preserve in health those who have not been infected. By your grace, Lord, bless, strengthen, and preserve, all those who out of love and sacrifice care for the sick, either in their homes or in the hospitals. Remove all sickness and suffering from your people, and teach us to value life and health as gifts from You. Give us Your peace, O God, and fill our hearts with unflinching faith in Your protection, hope in Your help, and love for You and our neighbor. For Yours it is to have mercy on us and save us, O our God, and to You we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever, to the ages of ages. Amen.

A Prayer To Be Offered in the Evening

Lord Jesus Christ our God, You traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At Your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of this virus, that we may experience Your healing love. Heal those O Lord who are suffering with this pandemic's illness. May they regain their strength and health through medical care. Heal us from our fears, which prevent nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another. Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders. Lord Jesus Christ, healer of all and physician of our souls and bodies, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow. Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with You in Your eternal peace. Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know Your peace. Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know Your protection and peace. Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to choose long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know Your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth. Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Lord Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace. For You are the Physician of our souls and bodies Christ our God and to You do we offer glory, thanksgiving and worship together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Another Prayer, To Be Offered At Any Time

O Holy Father, God of unknown, uncreated depth, You are beyond all description and expectation. You are the Creator of all worlds, physical and metaphysical. As You are only love, in love You created everything that truly is. Through Your Son, everything has form and purpose, and through Your Spirit, everything lives and moves back toward You. O Father, we are troubled by this scourge that is infecting Your people around the world. From the ancient Fall away from You, there are many consequences that we cannot begin to understand. As traces of this pestilence are being studied in labs, we shiver at its demonic malevolence for destruction, especially of the frail and the elderly. Our hearts are open to You, loving Father; we come to You as children, meek and lowly. We beg You to help the doctors who work to find a cure. We beg You to help our leaders to put away childish things, to forget political advantage, and to be good stewards of their people. We beg You to help us to be wise ourselves and to care for human life in the least of those around us. We cry out to You as One Who did not send this plague. We cry out to You as One Who only heals and redeems. You did not send this, but we know You can destroy it. So Father, cease this plague, and turn it back to the abyss from which it came. Heal Your people, the humanity of this earth, cleanse us and strengthen us toward You. We are weak, but You are strong, and in our weakness Your strength is revealed. Help us, we beg You, in the Name of Your Son, the Great Physician, Who, together with You and our Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Are due all glory and honor, to the ages of ages. Amen.

Beware of Emails Asking for Gift Cards

This is a common and very scary thing that is happening. People who are impersonating as Fr. Stavros have been emailing people and asking them to buy gift cards, scratch off the back to reveal the code, take pictures of the code and email them the pictures. Fr. Stavros would never under any circumstances ask for a gift card via email. If you receive an email like this, please call Fr. Stavros, Charlie, or Alex immediately. Many people these days are falling victim to scams like these. Please double check and even triple check any emails or phone calls that ask for money even if it looks real. Any questions? Please contact the office.

Opt-in on *The 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. We will no longer be mailing *The Messenger* unless you ask us to.

Have questions?

Just need to talk?

Worried? Sad? Happy?

We are here for you.

Fr. Stavros

813-394-1038

Charlie

813-843-8471

Alex

262-370-0586

We love you and we thank you for all of your support.

Happy Birthday!

John Alexander - January 1
Eugene Freeman - January 1
Annelisa Anghescu - January 3
Emmaline Luciu - January 3
Chloe Eleni Portier - January 4
Rosalie Apostoleres - January 5
Peter Dimas - January 5
Frankie Giallourakis - January 5
Andrea Anastassiades - January 6
Guilianna Roussos - January 6
Chace Sibley - January 6
David Colado - January 9
Andreas Paloumpis - January 9
Kris Christopher - January 10
Anthony Heilman - January 10
Alexandra Demas - January 11
Nicholas Demas - January 11
Axl David - January 12
Helen Katzaras - January 13
Eleni Stilian - January 13
Sophia Calamunci - January 14
Matthew Demetriou - January 14
Angela Johnston - January 14
Aristi Patellis - January 15

Bill Sotiropoulos - January 15
Elizabeth Xenick - January 16
William Yotis - January 17
Michael Kwasny - January 18
Niko Bavaro - January 19
Aris Rogers, Sr. - January 19
Maggie Trakas - January 20
Sophia Garcia - January 21
Olive Dumphy - January 22
Hunter Perry - January 23
Jaxon Horack - January 24
Artemise Giallourakis - January 25
Niko Koulianos - January 25
Madeline Moran - January 25
Ana Mourer - January 25
Ellie Kate Papataros - January 25
Taytum Parker - January 25
Michael Mellon Lynn - January 26
Vasiana Christopoulos - January 27
Karter Lenardos - January 27
Alec Papadakis - January 27

If we missed someone or if we need to know about a birthday, please call or email the office to let us know at office@stjohnpta.org.

Please do your best to support local businesses in general, and of our parishioners in particular.

Below, please find a list of small business owned and/or operated by our parishioners.

ABC PIZZA

(Owned by Anthony and Carole Fotopoulos)
1242 WEST HILLSBOROUGH AVE. TAMPA
(813) 237-3324 Take Out Only

Accustar Accounting Inc.

Fran Prokos, Founder and CEO
Tax Preparation, Business and Personal
Accounting, CFO services, Business Consulting, Business Start Ups.
Working from Home Office during Covid 19
Direct: 727-510-7378
Office: 813-886-4644
Fax: 813-888-8097
AccustarTax@gmail.com/AccustarTax@aol.com

AlexRoyEvents Music Entertainment.

Email alexroyevents@gmail.com
Ph. 813-455-2461 Website:www.djalexroy.com
Facebook: Alexandros Roy
Instagram : @djalexroy
Live Streams on Facebook and Instagram daily.

Bavaros

514 N Franklin St Downtown Tampa
813-868-4440 Bavarospizza.com
Tues-Sat 11-9pm
We offer Uber and Bitesquad for delivery and curbside pickup with
call ahead ordering/payment.

Bradenton Flower Shop

(Owned by Maria Geis)
5262 East St Rd 64
Bradenton FL, 34208
941-727-4111 www.bradentonflowershop.com
bradentonflowers@gmail.com
We are taking online and phone orders for curb side pickup and no
contact delivery.

Peggy Bradshaw

<https://peggybradshaw.floify.com/>
(727) 244-1374
Branch Manager of Van Dyk Mortgage South Tampa
3502 Henderson Blvd. Tampa, FL

George S. Chagaris, CPA, P.A.

2901 W. Busch Blvd., Ste. 405
Tampa, FL 33618-4582
(p): (813) 282-1990 e-mail: GChagarisCPA@aol.com

Homeschool Educational Resources & Usborne Books Consultant

Jenivieve Elly Jenivieve@homeschooleducationalresources.com
<https://www.homeschooleducationalresources.com/>
<https://n10680.myubam.com/1753738>
My homeschool advocacy website provides encouragement, materials, free lessons plans, and research to empower current and potential homeschooling families. As a former teacher, it's my mission to support those interested in the journey. I also offer homeschool consulting and mentoring services. Usborne Books are quality, engaging, and educational books. They are a favorite in our home and pair well with homeschool education.

John Demas - Classical Guitarist - Greek Bouzouki

813.240.5199
<https://sites.google.com/site/livemusicintampa/>
Instagram:<https://www.instagram.com/john.demas.music/>
<https://sites.google.com/site/johndemastheomegaproject/>

EVOS South Tampa

For other locations near you visit evos.com
Open 7 days for lunch and dinner
Order Delivery: UberEats-EVOS or evos.com

Order Takeout: EVOS/Toast app or evos.com

Text/email an EVOS gift card: EVOS eGift Cards

EVOS is locally owned and operated by the Crassas family.

Alexandra Fitos

Weichert Yates and Associates
Cell phone 813-943-6464

I am a realtor specializing in residential and commercial sales in Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco counties. I am currently working remotely Via virtual consulting and appointments.

JoAnn Hartung

Realtor with Fazzini Group at REMAX Realtec
Residential agent specializing in Pinellas County
727-432-0228

Markissia Touliatos Portraits and Other Fine Art

www.markissia.com
markissiat@gmail.com
727-560-8161

I am a freelance artist working from home in my own studio. I specialize in corporate and private original oil painted portraits. I do art restoration as well. I work from photographs that can be emailed to me.

Qvita Health and Wellness

Primary Care and Cosmetic Services
Peggy Demetriou, FNP, APRN-BC
2734 Windguard Circle, suite 101
Wesley Chapel, FL 33544
813-501-4130 www.qvitahealthandwellness.com

Retina Vitreous Associates of Florida

(Dr. Karina Findlay)
multiple offices throughout Tampa Bay
retinavitreous.com
(813)987-2000
Open 8:00-5:00 M-F with on call physicians nights and weekends
Retinal care and urgent ocular needs

Robinson Essentials -Young Living Essential Oils

text: 813-278-7450
www.TanyaRobinsonEssentials.com
Products for immune support, emotional support, and various other things

The Sakkis Group / KW Tampa Properties

Full service real estate with over 30 years experience
813-309-1073 ksakkis@sakkisgroup.com sakkisgroup.kw.com/

South Tampa Sugar Mama

Home baking business owned by Maria Xenick.
Custom homemade, hand-decorated cookies for holidays and special events. I operate under the Cottage Food Law of Florida, and during this time, I am also offering free delivery for contactless transactions.
maria@southtampasugarmama.com
<https://www.facebook.com/southtampasugarmama/>

True Life Wealth Management (Owned by Alex Skijus)

www.TrueLifeWealthManagement.com
We are a financial services business that specializes in reducing unnecessary taxes for individuals and business owners for their retirement.

Zomesa, LLC

John P. Zelatis
Accounting, Bookkeeping, Payroll, Taxes Back Office Support
15459 Martinmeadow Drive. Lithia, FL 33547
P: (813) 654-5144 F: (813) 433-2516 C:(813) 727-2271
jzelatis@zomesa.com www.zomesa.com

Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is excited to share that, beginning May 1st, we will be offering a Parish Assistance Program, PAP, with BayCare Behavioral Health. The PAP program will provide our parishioners access to free and confidential counseling services - offering additional support when life's challenges become overwhelming. The PAP utilizes a network of faith-based providers and are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors.

Parishioners can contact BayCare to request up to three free and confidential counseling sessions from a licensed mental health professional. The BayCare helpline, 800-878-5470, is answered 24/7 by mental health professionals. Many BayCare therapists are also offering telephonic and virtual counseling sessions to help parishioners maintain their emotional wellbeing during these trying times.

Through BayCare Behavioral Health, parishes enrolled in this program allow access to services for their parishioners who are suffering from emotional turmoil that results from the challenges of everyday life which span a lifetime. The BayCare network of providers understand the importance of compassionate care and are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve.

You can get more information on the BayCare Behavioral Health Community Services Program on their website at: <https://baycare.org/services/behavioral-health/our-specialties/community-health-services>

Help is available for life issues including:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family discord
- Marital problems
- Substance abuse issues
- Behavioral issues



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 Stamatiaades - Asheville, NC

Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI

Wesley & Melissa Thompson - Clearwater, FL

Demitrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH

Bessie Bliziotes - Palm Cost, FL

Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL

Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL

William & Kane Chapman - Palmetto, FL

Lillian Thomas - Highland, IN

Kathleen Mendez - Ponte Vedra, FL

Theodora Poletis - Baltimore, MD

Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA

Nicholas & Vaso Anton - Dunedin, FL

Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA

Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL

Artemis & Eric Mellen - Longwood, FL

Charles Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA

Pete & Carol Caldwell - Ringgold, GA

Judith Jogerst

Ms. Nadine Raheb

Victor & Cynthia Cucuz - Tampa, FL

Nicholas & Doris Andreadakis - Lititz, PA

Christopher & Georgette Tsavoussis - Dunedin, FL

Ron & Maria Gregory

John & Deanna Palmer - Greenville, SC

Emmanuel Chrysakis - Palm Harbor, FL

Tommy Koulouris - Tampa, FL

Rev. Fr. Michael Massouh - Seminole, FL

John & Deanna Palmer - Greenville, SC

Luke & Arianna Krinos - Arlington, MA

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.

Save Your Eyes: January is Glaucoma Awareness Month

By Marcelle Triantafilou, RN-BC, BSN, Nursing Ministry

Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness and vision loss and has no symptoms in its early stages. Glaucoma is a condition where the eye's optic nerve is damaged due to increased pressure in eye.

The purpose of this article is to help educate on the disease, including early detection, signs and symptoms, risk factors, treatment options and prevention.

Symptoms

Mostly asymptomatic but few common symptoms are:

- Loss of peripheral or side vision
- Seeing halos around lights
- Vision loss
- Redness in the eye
- Eye that looks hazy (particularly in infants)
- Eye pain
- Narrowed vision (tunnel vision)

Treatment

Treatment aims at reducing the intraocular pressure and preventing further damage to the optic nerves.

Risk factors

Glaucoma tends to run in families. In some people, scientists have identified genes related to high eye pressure and optic nerve damage.

Because chronic forms of glaucoma can destroy vision before any signs or symptoms are apparent, be aware of these risk factors:

- Having high internal eye pressure (intraocular pressure)
- Being over age 60
- Being black, Asian or Hispanic
- Having a family history of glaucoma
- Having certain medical conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and sickle cell anemia
- Being extremely nearsighted or farsighted
- Having had an eye injury or certain types of eye surgery
- Taking corticosteroid medications, especially eyedrops, for a long time



Prevention

- **Get regular dilated eye examinations.** Regular comprehensive eye exams can help detect glaucoma in its early stages, before significant damage occurs. As a general rule, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends having a comprehensive eye exam every five to 10 years if you're under 40 years old; every two to four years if you're 40 to 54 years old; every one to three years if you're 55 to 64 years old; and every one to two years if you're older than 65. If you're at risk of glaucoma, you'll need more frequent screening. Ask your doctor to recommend the right screening schedule for you.
- **Know your family's eye health history.** Glaucoma tends to run in families. If you're at increased risk, you may need more frequent screening.
- **Take prescribed eyedrops regularly.** Glaucoma eyedrops can significantly reduce the risk that high eye pressure will progress to glaucoma. To be effective, eyedrops prescribed by your doctor need to be used regularly even if you have no symptoms.
- **Wear eye protection.** Serious eye injuries can lead to glaucoma. Wear eye protection when using power tools or playing high-speed racket sports in enclosed courts.

Flight #2021—Ready for Takeoff

Hello, welcome to Flight #2021. We are prepared to take off into the New Year. Please make sure your Attitude and Blessings are secured and locked in an upright position. All self-destructive devices should be turned off at this time. All negativity, hurt and discouragement should be put away. Should we lose Altitude under pressure, during the flight, reach up and pull down a Prayer. Prayers will automatically be activated by Faith. Once your Faith is activated you can assist other passengers. There will be NO BAGGAGE allowed on this flight. The Captain (GOD) has cleared us for takeoff. Destination GREATNESS.

Inspirational Sayings

Church Hurt—If being hurt by church causes you to lose faith in God, then your faith was in people, not in God.

If a tiny virus can do this much damage. . .imagine what a mustard seed of faith can do.

World: "Follow your heart."

Jesus: "Follow Me."

World: "Believe in yourself."

Jesus: "Believe in Me."

World: "Discover yourself."

Jesus: "Deny yourself."

World: "Be true to you."

Jesus: "Be true to Me."

The purer the heart is, the larger it is, and the more able it is to find room within it for a greater number of beloved ones; whilst the more sinful it is, the more contracted it becomes, and the less number of beloved can it find room for, because it is limited by self-love, and that love is a false one; we love ourselves in objects unworthy of the immortal soul---in silver and gold, in adultery, in drunkenness, and such like. ~St. John of Kronstadt

What you are is God's gift to you. What you become is your gift to God. ~Hans Urs van Balthasar

Religion: I messed up. My Dad is gonna kill me.

Gospel: I messed up. I need to call my Dad.

In order to live by a Biblical standard, you have to know what the Biblical standard is. That's where so much of our society has gone wrong. We have gotten too far away from God's Word. ~Tony Evans

Ten Ways to Give Love

LISTEN without interrupting (Proverbs 1:8)

SPEAK without accusing (James 1:19)

GIVE without sparing (Proverbs 21:26)

PRAY without ceasing (Colossians 1:9)

ANSWER without arguing (Proverbs 17:1)

SHARE without pretending (Ephesians 4:15)

ENJOY without complaint (Philippians 2:14)

TRUST without wavering (II Corinthians 13:7)

FORGIVE without punishing (Colossians 3:7)

PROMISE without forgetting (Proverbs 13:2)

The Voice of God Versus the Voice of Satan

God's Voice

Stills you
Leads you
Reassures you
Enlightens you
Encourages you
Comforts you
Calms you
Convicts you

Satan's Voice

rushes you
pushes you
frightens you
confuses you
discourages you
worries you
obsesses you
condemns you

God is never early and He's never late. He's always right on time and His plans for you are good. God is a God of love and order. If the voice you are hearing doesn't sound like those things, then they are not from Him.

Be Still and Know that I Am God—Psalm 46:10

BE STILL

Stop Talking
Switch off your phone
Stop commenting
Listen
Stop arguing
Stop questioning
Stop moaning

AND KNOW

Stop doubting
Be sure
Have faith
No second opinion

THAT I AM GOD

God is Almighty
God is in control
God is love
God is King
God is my hope, rock, fortress
God is ever-present, a help in times of trouble
God is my Father
God is my shepherd—He will lead Me, nourish me, protect me and Restore me.

The Church on the Sofa Will Never Be the Same as Church in the Sanctuary

Jeff McNeil said this well-

As church attendance numbers fade across the nation and online services become very convenient (who doesn't love not getting ready in the morning or leaving the home?!), it's important to remember why church attendance for you and your family matters so much.

You can't serve from your sofa. You can't have community of faith on your sofa. You can't experience the power of a room full of believers worshipping together on your sofa.

Christians aren't consumers either. We are contributors. We don't watch. We engage. We give. We sacrifice. We encourage. We do life together.

The church needs you.
And you need the church.

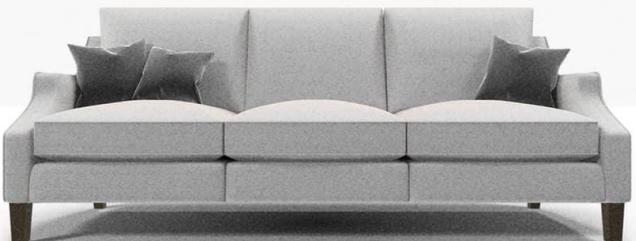
Wherever you are, find a local church where you and your family can be part of community and use your talents to advance the kingdom and reach others.

To come alongside one another physically, not just through a screen.

While I'm grateful for technology to keep people connected that can't physically come to a facility

CHURCH ON THE SOFA
WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AS

CHURCH IN THE SANCTUARY



or need to be away, it's absolutely not like being in the building. Never will be.

Yes, church on the sofa is nice.

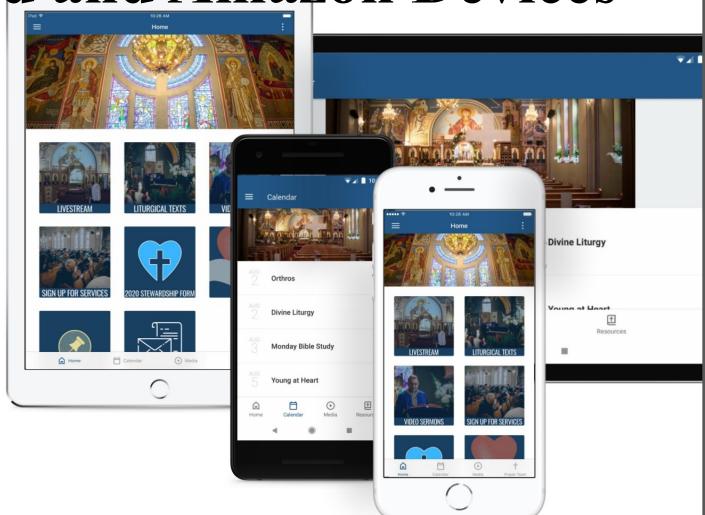
But it'll never be the same as church in the sanctuary.

Download Our Church App Today Available on Apple, Android and Amazon Devices



St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

DOWNLOAD NOW



Xρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

January 1

EMMELEIA, TELEMAHOS,
VASILIKI, VASILIS

January 2

SERAPHIM, SILVESTROS,
SYLVESTER

January 3

GENOVEFA, SYGLITIKI

January 5

THEONI, THEOPEMPTOS

January 6

FAIDON, FANI, FOTIKA, JORDAN,
OURANIA, PERISTERA, PHOTINI,
PHOTIS, THEOFANIS, THEOPOULA

January 7

CEDD, GIANNA, GIANNIS,
JEANNETTE, JOHN, PRODRMOS

January 8

AGATHON, DOMINIKI, KELSIOS,
PARTHENA, VASILISSA

January 9

EFSTRATIOS

January 11

THEODOSIOS

January 12

MERTIOS, TATIANI

January 13

ERMILOS

January 14

NINA

January 17

ANTHONY, THEODOSIOS

January 18

ATHANASIOS, CYRILLOS, THE-
ODOULA, EFRASIA

January 19

MAKARIOS

January 20

EFTHIMIOS, FABIANOS, THYRSI

January 21

AGNES, EVGENIOS, MAXIMOS, NE-
OPHYTOS, PATROKLOS

January 22

ANASTASIOS, TIMOTHY

January 23

AGATHANGELOS, DIONYSIUS

January 24

FILON, XENI, ZOSIMAS

January 25

GREGORY, MARGARET

January 26

XENOFON, HARIS, PALLADIOS

January 29

VARSAMIA

January 30

AVRA, CHRYSI, MAVROS, TRION
IERARHON

January 31

EVDOXIA, KYROS

Giving Thanks When Circumstances Are Tough

In the Netherlands during World War II, Corrie ten Boom and her extended family risked their lives helping many Jews escape extermination by the Nazis. Eventually their ingenious system for hiding and smuggling the Third Reich's most-wanted was betrayed to the Gestapo, resulting in many of the ten Boom family being sent to prison. Corrie and her older sister Betsie were eventually transferred to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, a women's labor camp in Germany.

Throughout their ordeal the sisters leaned heavily on their faith to make the best of whatever situation they found themselves in. Betsie, especially, insisted that they must be thankful for all things.

However, Corrie, whose gratitude had been remarkably resilient, finally came to the end of her rope in Barracks 28. Serving as housing for the prisoners, it was extremely overcrowded, foul smelling, and at the same time freezing cold. Many of the inmates were sick and dying, with the rest slowly starving, and the situation was made worse by the constant strife between nationalities.

All this was hard to bear, but the final straw for Corrie was the fleas. They infested the women's filthy mattresses, the scant bedding, and ragged clothing, making their unbearable life even more difficult.

But Betsie insisted. To be thankful for all things meant being grateful for the fleas as well. Not entirely convinced, Corrie tried to follow her sister's example.

Over the next few weeks something remarkable began to hap-

pen in Barracks 28. The small group of women who dared to meet together to sing, pray, and read aloud out of a smuggled Bible began to grow. Amazingly, the sadistic guards never came in to break up these meetings or search the women for contraband. A spirit of compassion began to spread among the prisoners. Women who had been divided by language and ethnicity joined together to care for the sick and share their scant food. And though their conditions were no less harsh, many regained a sense of hope.

Later Corrie found out why the Nazi officers had decided to stay out Barracks 28. They couldn't stand the fleas! Betsie had been right to be thankful for the little vermin.

Between the pandemic, the wildfires, social unrest, and political upheaval, many people are finding themselves in circumstances where it's difficult to be thankful. And some states' response to COVID cases are even complicating the possibility for families to gather together for Thanksgiving Day.

But there's always a reason to be thankful. And fortunately, it doesn't require you to deny your problems, but simply to shift your focus to the things you can be grateful for.

When frustration threatens to overwhelm your present outlook, take a few mindful minutes to identify just some of the many things in your life worthy of thankfulness. You'll find it won't take long to restore your perspective to a more pleasant view.

In that spirit we want to say how thankful we are for our relationship with you, and hope that you and your family are able to enjoy a meaningful Thanksgiving in whatever form it takes this year.

The Bible in 50 Words

In Father Stavros' Message, he wrote about the importance of reading the Bible. While this summary of the Bible in 50 words is meant to be funny, it actually is pretty serious. If you know the meaning of these fifty words, you'll have a good understanding of the Bible. However, you need to read the Bible to understand the meaning of these fifty words.

One Version

God creates
Adam ate
Noah floats.
Abraham's oath.
Jacob's schemes.
Joseph's dreams.
Bush lit.
Sea split.
Law spoken.
Tablets broken.
Judges appointed.
King anointed.
God forgotten.
Rulers Rotten.
Kingdom broke.
Prophets hope.
Mary favored.
Baby Savior.
Crucified.
Jesus died.
Third morn.
World reborn.
Spirit glows.
Love grows.
Earth awaits.

Another version

God made
Adam bit
Noah arked
Abraham split
Joseph ruled
Jacob fooled
Bush talked
Moses balked
Pharaoh plagued
People walked
Sea divided
Tablets guided
Promise landed
Saul freaked
David peeked
Prophets warned
Jesus born
God walked
Love talked
Anger crucified
Hope died
Love rose
Spirit flamed
Word spread
God remained.

The Importance of Reading the Bible

By Fr. Vasileios Tsourlis

It is unfortunately a fact that many people do find it difficult to go to Church on a regular basis not because of work, even to just light a candle and say a Prayer, at any day of the Week. Also they find it as well very difficult to read on a regular basis The Holy Bible.

Why is this happening? Is it because the world is getting busier every day? Is it because when we go to church we don't feel uplifted? Is it because of the language? Is it because of the Priest or the Chanters/Choirs etc? Is it because the Church has nothing to offer me on the 21st Century? Why? Why? Why?

Reading a book earlier this morning I came across the answer to this problem. St. Isaac the Syrian gives us the answer which is;

"The Holy Bible will keep you away from sin. Sin will keep you away from The Holy Bible."

"Η Αγία Γραφή θα σε κρατήσει μακριά από την αμαρτία. Η αμαρτία θα σε κρατήσει μακριά από την Αγία Γραφή." ~ Άγιος Ισαάκ ο Σύρος ~

And when someone is kept away from The Holy Bible he is distancing themselves away from The Church which Jesus Christ Himself founded so we can have a place to heal our Souls, to receive His real Body and Blood, to receive the Holy Sacraments and also to be able Confess our sins as Jesus commanded us to do so we can put away the old nature.

Every day is a new day, a new beginning! Let us all begin reading The Holy Bible and if possible by attending your Parish Bible Class. Also let us commit to ourselves that one day per week we will stop by our local Parish to light a candle, to do our Prayer and to visit our Parish Priest. Try to come close with your Parish Priest.

It is time to follow Christ not as we wish but as He has showed us through His life and talked to us through The Holy Bible.

Fr. Vasileios Tsourlis is the Dean of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Charlotte, NC.

Why God Let's Us Suffer

Indicates that life on earth is imperfect, fallen and flawed. Thus it makes us yearn and struggle for the next, perfect, painless, sin-free kingdom to come.

Detaches our souls from the love of earthly things: money, people, luxury, status, entertainment, etc.

Helps us replace our worldly habits with spiritual ones, i.e. prayer, reading, service, liturgy, etc.

Brings us deep wisdom and far-sightedness.

If we patiently, gratefully and prayerfully endure, it fills us up with divine grace and the Holy Spirit.

If we patiently, gratefully and prayerfully endure, it increases our heavenly treasures and glories.

Makes us seek a happiness and joy from another world, which transcends all sorrows of this life.

Makes us like the saints, i.e. the ascetics and martyrs—whose most prominent characteristic were the constant endurance of great sorrows and sufferings.

Weddings, Divorces, Baptisms, Funerals, Memorials as well as Office, Fundraisers and Hall Use Procedures

*The Greek Orthodox Church is not a church of rules. But without some guidelines to go by, there would be chaos. The following guidelines are rooted in Orthodox Tradition and Canon Law. These guidelines are printed in **The Messenger** in the beginning of each calendar year, and it is a good idea from time to time for people to review them. These guidelines have been copied from the 2020 Yearbook of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Please review them, and keep them in mind when planning for your important life events. If you have any questions, please contact Fr. Stavros. (Special requirements specific to sacraments at St. John the Baptist appear in italics.)*

We print these guidelines each year in January. With the covid pandemic, some of these are modified, or will return once the pandemic is over, i.e. kolyva policy below, and use of the hall.

Weddings



For the union of a man and woman to be recognized as sacramentally valid by the Orthodox Church, the following conditions must be met: The Sacrament of Matrimony must be celebrated by an Orthodox Priest of a canonical Orthodox jurisdiction, according to the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church, in a canonical Orthodox Church, and with the authorization of the Metropolitan.

Before requesting permission from the Metropolitan to perform the marriage, a Priest must verify that: a)Neither of the parties in question are already married to other persons, either in this country or elsewhere (if a person comes to the United States after age 18, they need to provide a letter from their country of origin that they are indeed free to marry); b)the parties in question are not related to each other to a degree that would constitute an impediment; c)if either or both parties are widowed, they have presented the death certificate(s) of the deceased spouse(s); d)if either or both of the parties have been previously married in the Orthodox Church, they have obtained an ecclesiastical as well as civil divorce. (The Ecclesiastical Divorce process is done after the civil divorce becomes final, and involves counseling with the parish priest, forms that are filled out, a review by the Metropolitan, a divorce hearing which in the Tampa Bay area is held in Clearwater, and this process usually takes several months to complete. Fr. Stavros will not set a wedding date for anyone until an ecclesiastical divorce has been secured, so please plan accordingly, the ecclesiastical divorce process often takes several months.) e)the party or parties who are members of a parish other than the one in which the marriage is to be performed have provided a certificate declaring them to be members in good standing with that parish for the current year; and f)a civil marriage license has been obtained from civil authorities.

No person may marry more than three times in the church, with permission for a third marriage granted only with extreme oikonomia.

In cases involving the marriage of Orthodox and non -Orthodox Christians, the latter must have been baptized in water, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church cannot bless the marriage of an Orthodox Christian to a non-Christian. The couple should be willing to baptize their children in the Orthodox Church and raise and nurture them in accordance with the Orthodox Faith. There is a list of religious groups that Orthodox are prohibited from marrying, i.e. Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and others. Fr. Stavros can provide you with this list. **This is IMPORTANT to consider when you begin to date someone. Make sure your children are aware of this!** Because circumstances exist where a couple is dating where one of the two is not eligible to be married in the Orthodox Church, and this causes heartache in the relationship and often leads to someone leaving the church.

An important change effective immediately. Fr. Stavros will not schedule a wedding for a couple where one of them is not Christian, until the non-Christian person is baptized. All too often, the situation arises where a couple asks for a wedding date to be set and one of them isn't baptized. They promise to come to church, take the Orthodoxy 101 class and then don't. This presents a dilemma and forces a priest essentially to do a "shot-gun" baptism, in order to satisfy a requirement so that the wedding may take place. So as not to put our priest in the awkward position to do a baptism for someone who hasn't prepared whatsoever, versus cancelling a wedding and dealing with that fallout, the wedding simply will not be scheduled until both parties present evidence that they are baptized (with at least one being Orthodox).

A baptized Orthodox Christian whose wedding has not been blessed by the Orthodox Church is no longer in good standing with the Church, and may not receive the Sacraments of the Church, including Holy Communion, or become a sponsor of an Orthodox Marriage, Baptism, or Chrismation. A non-Orthodox Christian who marries an Orthodox Christian does not thereby become a member of the Orthodox Church, and may not receive the Sacraments, including Holy Communion, serve on the Parish Council or vote in parish assemblies or elections. To participate in the Church's life, one must be received into the Church by the Sacrament of Baptism, or in the case of persons baptized with water in the Holy Trinity, following a period of instruction, by Chrismation.

Canonical and theological reasons preclude the Orthodox Church from performing the Sacrament of Marriage for couples where one partner is Orthodox and the other partner is a non-Christian. As such, Orthodox Christians choosing to enter such marriages fall out of good standing with their Church and are unable to actively participate in the sacramental life of the church. While this stance may seem confusing and rigid, it is guided by the Orthodox Church's love and concern for its member's religious and spiritual well-being.

The Sponsor (koumbaros or koumbara) must provide a current certificate of membership proving him or her to be an Orthodox Christian in good standing with the church. A person who does not belong to a parish, or who belongs to a parish under the jurisdiction of a bishop who is not in communion with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, or who, if married, has not had his or her marriage blessed by the Orthodox Church, or, if divorced, has not received an ecclesiastical divorce, cannot be a sponsor. Non-Orthodox persons may be members of the wedding party, but may not exchange the rings or crowns.

Days when marriage is not permitted

Marriages are not performed on fast days or during fasting seasons or on the feasts of the church as indicated: September 14 (Holy Cross Day), December 13-25 (Christmas), January 5 and 6 (Epiphany),

Great Lent and Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, August 1-15 (Dormition Fast) and August 29. Any exceptions can only be made with the permission of the Metropolitan. Also a wedding can only be done on a Friday, when Friday is a fast day, with the permission of the Metropolitan.

Prohibited Marriages

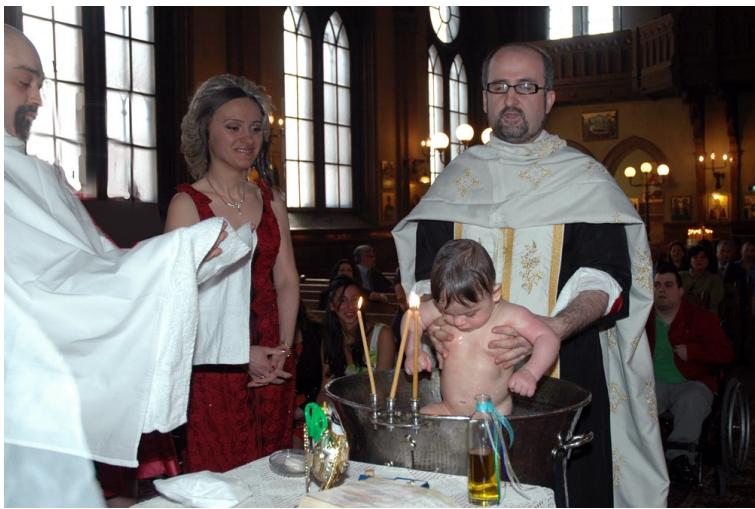
The following types of relationships constitute impediments to marriage:

Parents with their own children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren or Godchildren of the same Godparents; Brothers-in law and sisters-in law; Uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews; First cousins with each other; Foster parents with foster children or foster children with the children of foster parents.

Godparents with Godchildren or Godparents with the parents of their Godchildren. (In the Chrismation of an adult, one has potential marriage impediment. For any questions regarding, please see Fr. Stavros)

A date cannot be set for marriage unless one of the parties getting married, NOT THE PARENTS, contact Fr. Stavros, who sets all the dates for weddings. In order for the date to be locked in, one person in the couple has to come and meet with Fr. Stavros to go over the wedding procedures. Pre-Marital Counseling is also required for weddings at St. John the Baptist. There is a two-fold requirement. One is that the couples need to meet with Fr. Stavros for two sessions. Second, the Metropolis of Atlanta requires couples participate in a Saturday regional premarital counseling seminar. Contact the Metropolis of Atlanta or visit the Family Life Ministry section of their website for dates in 2021. For people who wish to be married at St. John the Baptist who are not members anywhere, a substantial fee is imposed for use of the church, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing. Also, the Koumbaro/Koumbara for a wedding must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John the Baptist, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

Baptisms



A person who wishes to sponsor a candidate for Baptism or Chrismation must be an Orthodox Christian in good standing and a supporting member of an Orthodox parish. A person may not serve as a Godparent if the Church has not blessed his or her marriage or, if civilly divorced, he or she has not been granted an ecclesiastical divorce, or for any other reason he or she is not in communion with the Orthodox Church. Baptisms may not be performed from during Holy Week, or on any of the Great Feastdays of the Lord.

For people who wish to have a child baptized at St. John who are not members anywhere, a fee is imposed for use of the church, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church

to be members in good standing. Also, the Godparent must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

Funerals

Funeral services are permitted on any day of the year, except for Sunday and Holy Friday, unless permission is granted by the Metropolitan. If you wish to have a service outside of the church, it will not be a funeral service. It will either be a Memorial Service or a Trisagion. A funeral service must be in an Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church does not allow for cremation. This is based on Ezekiel's vision of a valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37) and St. Paul's writing that the Body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19) and thus must be treated with dignity even in death and allowed to return to its elements naturally. The Orthodox Church will not allow a funeral service for someone who has been cremated. *Many people have mentioned in their will their desire to be cremated. Please discuss this with Fr. Stavros if there are any questions regarding this, and make the appropriate changes, because Fr. Stavros cannot grant oikonomia (dispensation) and do a funeral service if someone has been cremated.*

Additionally, eulogies offered in the church at a funeral service may only be offered by an ordained Orthodox clergyman. If members of the family wish to offer testimonials, these may be done at the funeral home the night before the funeral or at the makaria luncheon.

Memorials



Memorial services may not be chanted from the Saturday or Lazarus through the Sunday of Thomas, or on any Feastday of the Lord or any Feastday of the Theotokos. We customarily do not offer memorial services on the 1st Sunday of Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy) or the 3rd Sunday of Lent (Sunday of the Holy Cross), or the Sunday after September 14. In 2021, the Sundays when NO memorial services will be offered include: March 21 (Sunday of Orthodoxy), April 4 (Sunday of the Holy Cross); April 25 (Palm Sunday); May 2 (Pascha); May 8 (Sunday of St. Thomas); June 20 (Pentecost); September 19 (Sunday after Holy Cross Day).

Memorial Services may be scheduled through the church office.

You must contact the church at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service. Memorial services for 40 days and one year will be done on the Sunday closest to the appropriate date. All other memorials will be done on the designated Memorial Sunday each month. Please let the office know when you call or email whether you will be providing your own kolyva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a \$100 charge for this service - checks may be made payable to "St. John Philoptochos." Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.

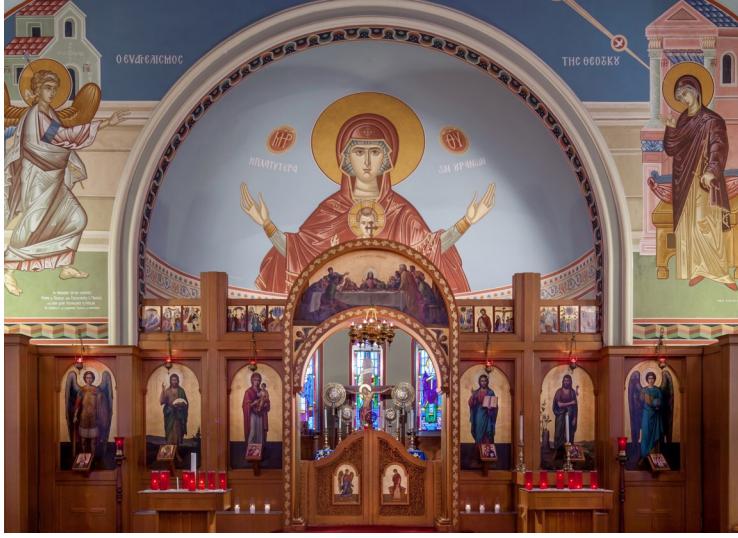
Organ Donation

The Orthodox Church allows the faithful to donate organs after death if they wish.

Forty-Day Blessings

Forty-Day Blessings for babies may be done on any day. The prayers of this service connect the 40-day churching of the baby with the mother of the child (if she is Orthodox) receiving Communion. Thus, if this service is offered on a Sunday, or before any Divine Liturgy, Father Stavros schedules them at 9:30 a.m., prior to the Divine Liturgy, so that the new mother can receive Holy Communion in the context of the Divine Liturgy.

Some Guidelines Unique to our Parish



In line with the guidelines from the Archdiocese provided above, we also have some guidelines for things in our parish that are helpful to review as we start the new year. The Parish Council has adopted what is below with the approval of Fr. Stavros. Most of these guidelines are old, though a few of them are new. For the "Good of the Order" at our church, we ask that everyone cooperate in following these guidelines. Please read these over carefully and if you have any questions, please address them to the Parish Council or Father Stavros.

We print these guidelines each year in January. With the covid pandemic, some of these are modified, or will return once the pandemic is over, i.e. kolyva policy below, coffee hour and use of the hall.

PROCEDURES FOR THE OFFICE:

- The deadline for submitting information for the weekly bulletin is Wednesday at 12:00 p.m. All submissions must be sent electronically to office@stjohntpa.org.
- The deadline for the Messenger shall be the 10th of the month. As a cost cutting measure we reduced the size of the Messenger, so no full page flyers will be put in. All submissions must be sent elec-

tronically via email. Simply send in your event information to officestjohnoctampa@gmail.com.

- Events may be advertised a maximum of two months prior to the event date for *The Messenger* and four weeks prior for the bulletin.

Open Office Hours and Monday - Friday 10:00 a.m. -2:00p.m.

Or By Appointment Only. If you wish to see Fr. Stavros or the office staff, you must make an appointment. Also, when meeting with the office staff, or when meeting with Father Stavros on a non-pastoral matter, please be efficient with your time. There is lots of work that goes on in the office and constant interruptions make for little progress. Planned appointments are fine, they are not interruptions.

FUNDRAISERS/HALL USAGE:

- All fundraisers and events by ministries or church affiliated groups should be scheduled at the August calendar meeting. For those, not scheduled at this meeting; please submit your event request to the Parish Council; via the office email officestjohnoctampa@gmail.com
- **Please clean up the kitchen after your event.** No food, trays, utensils, etc., should be left on the counters, sink, or drying rack. Please throw away all trash and wash all dirty dishes, trays, etc. and return to the appropriate places.
- All sales of tickets and other fundraising items, shall take place at designated tables immediately outside of the foyer and in the center of the hall. These tables will be preset for your use. Our foyer has become increasingly crowded and we need to maintain clearance per fire code.
- All contracts for caterers, bands, etc., made in the church name that obligate the church for payment shall be submitted and signed by the Parish Council.

COFFEE HOURS/FUNDRAISERS:

- Our time after Sunday Liturgy provides fellowship that we all look forward to and appreciate. This time is often a mix of simple to more elaborate coffee time and also includes fund raisers and more formal luncheons. As we begin a new year we would like to reiterate some procedures and policies. We have a calendar meeting in August to establish the schedule and luncheons that will be considered fund raisers during the year. Each Ministry is asked to give input before this schedule is finalized.
- The Parish Council discussed that each Ministry should determine what they bring to Coffee Hour without strict guidelines. With the end goal that our parishioners should not be pressured or asked to give additional money just to receive a cup of coffee and cookie. Luncheons/Fundraisers fall into a different category and will be published in the monthly calendar.
- Additionally, when a Ministry needs to setup a table for a special purpose - Information/Sales - **The ministry must call the church office to reserve a table during coffee hour.**
- Lastly any Ministry that wants to charge for a lunch (not on the original schedule) will need to get approval from the Parish Council by sending written notice prior to the monthly Parish Council Meeting.

Marriage

Marriage, like life itself, when held loosely in a carefree hand, is easily lost or stolen away.

When clutched tightly in a fearful hand, it is smothered and cannot grow.

But when embraced tenderly by a firmly committed heart and held there only by the liberating bond of love, it will more than endure it, it will flourish. ~L. Lundquist

On the Lighter Side

Lockdown can only go four ways. You'll come out a monk, a hunk, a chunk or a drunk. Choose wisely.

~ January 2021 ~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
3 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	4 5** Eve of Theophany Royal Hours 9:30 a.m. Vesperal Liturgy 6:00 p.m. Blessing of Waters 7:00 p.m.	6 Theophany (all services at St. John) Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Vespers 6:30 p.m.	7 St. John Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	8**	9 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young at Heart 11:30 a.m.	2
10 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	11 Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	12 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Meeting of Ministry Heads 6:30 p.m.	13** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	14	15 **	16 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Community Outreach
17 St. Anthony Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	18 Sts. Athanasios and Cyril Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	19 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. PC Meeting 6:30 p.m.	20 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	21 Griefshare 6:30 p.m.	22 **	23 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
24 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA 5:00 p.m.	25 St. Gregory the Theologian Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	26 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Book Study on Suffering 6:30 p.m.	27** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	28 Griefshare 6:30 p.m.	29 **	30 Three Hierarchs Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday School Teacher Retreat 11:15 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
31 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Prayer for Teachers						

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) frstav@gmail.com	Buildings & Grounds Euripides Panos 813-352-3972	Parish Nursing Ministry Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski 813-876-8830 (Office)	Chanter Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471 Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586	Orthodox Christian Fellowship Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830 (Office)	Choir Pauline Spencer, Director 813-390-1782 Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782	Oratorical Festival Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374
Pastoral Assistant Charlie Hambos 813-876-8830 (Office) 813-843-8471 (Cell) chambos@stjohnpta.org	Community Outreach Greg Melton 813-967-2074	Photography Ministry Karina Findlay 813-476-9632
Pastoral Assistant Alex Limberatos 813-876-8830 (Office) 262-370-0586 (Cell) alex@stjohnpta.org	Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534	Philoptochos Jeanie Nenos 813-451-9116
Parish Council Jim Armstrong, President 954-295-6665 Euripides Panos, Vice President 813-352-3972 John Zelatis, Secretary 813-727-2271 Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898 Demosthenes Mekras 786-417-7256 George Chagaris 727-420-1920 Amin Hanhan 813-846-2957 Nick Katzaras 863-581-2430 Edie Kavouklis 813-758-0305 Jimmy Konstas 813-220-7352 Marilyn Sandborn 813-855-8678	Dance Groups Η ΧΑΡΑ ΜΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668 Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347 Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963 ΠΙΑΠΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136 ΠΙΑΝΗΓΥΠΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668	Stewardship Pete Trakas 813-505-2193 George Mitseas 813-748-1220 Chris Kyurus 757-672-1920
Office Staff Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper debbie@stjohnpta.org fax:813-443-4899	Daughters of Penelope Nicole Leontsinis, President 703-585-7490	Sunday School Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102
Adult Greek School Magda Myer 813-909-2327	Finance Committee Gary Ward 813-846-3898	12 Disciples Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471
AHEPA Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319	Food Pantry Anetta Alexander 813-758-2689	Usher Tom Georgas 813-985-0236
Altar Angels Engie Halkias 813-932-5859 Sia Blankenship 813-968-8855	GriefShare Donna Hambos 813-843-8412	Welcoming Ministry Maria Xenick 813-765-3587
Basketball Perry Katsamakis 516-403-3118 Jimmy Konstas 813-220-7352	Gasparilla Parking John Kokkas 727-992-4165	Women's Bible Study Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038
Bible Study Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471	GOYA Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346 goya@stjohnpta.org	Young Adult Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471
Bookstore Brett Mouner 813-376-9315	Hope/Joy George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813	Young at Heart Mike Trimis, President 813-784-4872 Mary Nenos, Vice President 813-935-2096
	Junior Olympics Dwight Forde 727-685-9028	Youth Protection Catherine Mitseas 813-571-0658

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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.