

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*

June/July 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 months of June/July. As we have been doing each month, we lead off The Messenger with some pastoral guidelines related to Covid-19. Should regulations be made more or less strict, we will adjust accordingly. As of May 15, we have not received any updates regarding wearing masks in relationship to the new CDC guidelines. If and when those should change, we will inform everyone.

We have made some significant changes in our parish during April and May in regards to Covid-19. The church is open to full capacity, meaning that every pew can be used. We are again using the front doors to enter the church, light candles and venerate icons. There are a few things to still keep in mind:

1. On Sundays, you may sit in any pew that you wish.
2. We will fill but not pack the pews.
3. Please do not congregate in the Narthex.
4. There will be no standing in the aisles. When the pews are full, everyone else will be directed to worship in the hall.
5. There will be social distancing in the hall.
6. We are going to discontinue the practice of celebrating Divine Liturgy on Saturdays. Divine Liturgies on Saturdays that are on the regular liturgical calendar will continue to be celebrated.
7. We will offer Antithoron after Holy Communion if we have enough help. Altar boys will hand out antithoron using tongs when there is a sufficient number of them to serve.
8. MASKS ARE STILL REQUIRED IN CHURCH AND ON THE PROPERTY. They may be removed momentarily in order to receive Holy Communion, and while seated at coffee hour.
9. We will discontinue the use of SignUpGenius. Just come to church.
10. Paraklesis will now be held once a month, rather than once a week.
11. We will be resuming some semblance of a coffee hour sometime in May. Stay tuned for more information.

For those who are not able to worship in person, we will continue to live-stream all services. Sunday school is off for summer. It will resume in August with normal schedule, regular in person classes for all grade levels up through high school.

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.

Finally, a big thank you for the small crew of volunteers who have assisted us so faithfully 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.

Fr Stavros' Message

The Journey of 2021

Christos Anesti! Christ is Risen!

There are many things to share with you this month. The first thing, however, is a word of thanks, for a beautiful Holy Week journey. For the first time in two years, we took this journey together in person. In 2020, we struggled in this journey—we struggled with fear, as we were in the early weeks of the pandemic crisis. We struggled with isolation—the church was empty and we were forced to make the journey from our homes. In the church, the few of us who were present struggled to make it relevant and meaningful.

This year, we returned with joy. What a beautiful journey it was. Even though we are now a month removed from Pascha, allow me to share some of the highlights of the week with you.

Saturday of Lazarus began our journey, with the church nearly full and three priests at the altar. Palm Sunday saw us fill both the church and the hall. Dozens of children participated in the procession, screaming out “Hosanna” and imitating the children of that first Palm Sunday 2,000 years ago. Palm Sunday, Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday evening saw our young girls take on the role of the bridegroom maidens. It was truly wonderful to see many people, especially our children, involved in the Holy Week services.

Pictures of Holy Week are available on our flickr page (www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa/) and some are presented in this issue of *The Messenger*.

Holy Wednesday saw the church filled at both services, as people reverently approached to be anointed for the healing of soul and body. Holy Thursday evening was a moving service, as we read the twelve Gospel passages of the Passion of Christ. The most harrowing photograph of Holy Week 2020 was a picture of me carrying the Cross around an empty church. How beautiful it was to have people witnessing the procession in person this year, with the choir singing the Hymn “Simeron Kremate” “Today is hung upon the tree” so solemnly in the background.

Good Friday brought back a real look of normalcy, as there was again a Good Friday retreat for our children. We thank our children, our parents and our teachers for organizing and participating in this retreat. We had over 30 children in attendance. At the afternoon service, we all knelt at the tomb of Christ.

The highlight of Holy Week for me was Good Friday evening. In 2020, it was also the highlight. On that night last year, we made the procession with the Epitaphios around the inside of the church. There was no need to go outside, as there were no people in church. We made the procession with only a few

candles burning. It was quiet, peaceful, somber and appropriate. Many people commented how moving it was even via their computers. I decided that night that in 2021 we would do the procession in the same way, so that everyone could experience what we felt last year. We made the procession with only candles burning through the hall and through the church. We put up the Epitaphios on stilts in the middle of the church. Everyone sang together. It was magnificent. We now have a new tradition in our church, as we will do it like this going forward. A special thank you to the seven young ladies who were our myrrh-bearing women.

Holy Saturday morning was emotional for me. There is a beautiful hymn “Praise the Lord and exalt Him to all ages” that is sung repeatedly at the service. Every year, I invite the people to sing along. Last year, there were no people. And it was hard to think about praising and exalting the Lord at a time when we all felt unsure and sad to not be together. This year, there were people in church and we sang it together as leaves were scattered around the church and the young children again ran around collecting them.

Pascha was glorious! We went outside to proclaim the Resurrection of Christ to the world. Last year, we were not allowed to share the Light. This year, we resumed the beautiful and symbolic tradition of lighting candles and spreading the Light of Christ throughout the church as well as outside of it. The sermon I gave on Pascha was like the healing of a wound that had been open for a year. The sermon is reprinted in this issue of *The Messenger*.

This year, we welcomed two priests who shared the Holy Week journey. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski and Fr. John Stefero have become an integral part of our community, being present at the Holy Altar each Sunday, on feastdays and throughout Holy Week. What a joy to sing together with them, to add dignity and more pageantry to the services, for our individual voices to come out in the Scripture readings and prayers, and for our combined voices to join together in the

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hymns. I am so thankful to God for bringing them here.

Charlie and Alex, our pastoral assistants, did a great job chanting throughout the week. Even more so, they did a great job with all the behind the scenes work, our technology and live-streaming, the vigil (thank you Charlie for doing this for the 9th year in a row) and for “setting the table” for all of our services.

The choir not only returned this year, they added two more nights of singing than they have done in the past. How wonderful it was to hear the beautiful hymns again sung by our awesome choir!

I am thankful to the altar boys, the maidens, the myrrh-bearers, the ushers, those who were our readers throughout the week, those who helped decorate (and a big thank you to Engie Halkias for leading our efforts to have a decorated church) and most especially to you, our faithful members, who filled the church each day with your faith, your hope and your love. The journey of 2020 was sad because you were not present in person. The journey of 2021 was the best ever, because it was the year we all came back after a one-year absence.



We will bid farewell to Charlie on August 1

Charlie Hambos, our pastoral assistant for the past seven years, will be leaving our parish on August 1. He has been reassigned to the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity in Orlando as of August 2. He will initially be serving as their pastoral assistant. After he gets married in Tampa in November, he will be getting ordained to the Diaconate and the Priesthood and

will serve as the assistant priest at Holy Trinity in Orlando. Thankfully, he will still be close enough to Tampa that we will still see him occasionally.

There aren't enough words for me to personally convey not only my thanks to Charlie but to express what he has meant to our parish and to me personally. I met Charlie on my first Sunday here back in 2004. He was one of two altar boys who was serving. He was 16. I remember the first time we talked about his call to the priesthood. He stayed so faithful to God throughout college. Then he went to the Seminary, and we sent him off with great joy. Four years later, he returned to become our pastoral assistant. We had never had one of those in our parish, and no one knew exactly what to expect. Over seven years, Charlie has not only grown into the role, but established himself as an integral part of our ministry at St. John. He had been our lead chanter, Bible study leader, technology coordinator, logistics person, editor, greeter, teacher, counselor, leader and friend. Charlie's work was done mostly behind the scenes and without great fanfare. He has faithfully visited hospitals and shut-ins. He has met anyone and everyone who walked in off the street, including parishioners who needed someone to talk to, people who had just moved to Tampa who have now joined our parish because of Charlie, people who were curious about Orthodoxy and homeless people looking for food who he took to the food pantry. We will all miss Charlie. I will miss Charlie—I will miss his help, his friendship, his counsel and the confidence I had to entrust him so much and that he would come through every time.

We are arranging for a farewell luncheon for Charlie on Sunday, August 1. Ministries will also have opportunities to say smaller good-byes. We will be putting out a gift box for Charlie and whatever gets put into that will be used for vestments, which Charlie will need when he gets ordained. What a wonderful gesture it will be for us to offer gifts to Charlie so that when he gets his first sets of vestments, he will remember that they came from us, the home parish that gave him his foundation of faith and his first experience of ministry.

Charlie, you are truly Axios (Worthy) of your new position. And we look forward to the day you return to visit us as a priest, so that not only will we be able to celebrate with you, but you will be able to celebrate the Divine Liturgy with us, offering us your blessings.

Please stay tuned for more details about the farewell lunch on Sunday, August 1, for Charlie.

Thank you Charlie for everything!





Now what?

This question has been on my mind a lot this month, as we have completed the journey of Lent, as we are preparing for a transition with Charlie leaving, as we start thinking out our plans for fall, and several other things. Let's ponder on this question from these and other angles.

Our journey of Lent this year was focused in part around a journal that highlighted our core values of LOVE, WORSHIP, COMMUNITY, LEARNING, SERVICE. Have you memorized these five words yet? Do you understand why they are important, especially in the life of our community?

As a side note, when we go to summer camp, I teach all of the staff members that our efforts at camp are focused around three words—safe, edifying, fun. Everyone knows these words, what they mean and why they are important. Safety is our first priority. The first rule for camp is that everyone goes home in one piece. Second, we want people to learn something about their faith. And third, we want them to have fun. These three

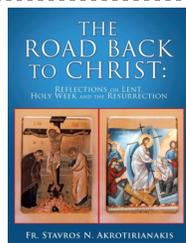
words are purposefully injected into every activity we do, even the ones that are focused on worship and learning. And everyone knows these words.

This is how it should be (and needs to be) in our parish. We need to know these words and why they are important and then we need to inject them into everything we are doing. If something we are doing is not congruent with these values, then that thing needs to be changed or eliminated.

So, now that Pascha has come and gone, did anything change for you? What is going to be different for you, for us, or for our parish? If the answer is nothing, then the journey was pointless. We make journeys in life so that we can experience something different, so that we can change in some way. A simple journey to the store makes us different, as we bring something home that we didn't have before. The journey of Pascha should change us in some way.

The good news that Christ is risen is big news. However, most of the world isn't paying attention to it. We certainly won't hear about it on the endless news cycle or read about it in the newspaper. This is why it is critically important that we are connected to a church community—so we can hear the news, be encouraged by others, and share this joy with people like us.

The Apostle Thomas, whom we criticize by labeling him "Doubting Thomas" is actually a very redeemable figure, because HE SHOWED UP, doubts and all. He wasn't with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them on the evening after His Resurrection. However, when the Disciples gathered eight days later, Thomas was there. He could have easily disappeared but he didn't. He stayed. There is a temptation for us also to disappear, when it's summer, when there is no Sunday school, after Pascha, when we get busy, when we have doubts, you name the reason. May we all be like Thomas and show up. Because in showing up, we give ourselves the chance to grow up in our faith.



The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection is now on sale! It is a series of daily reflections to be read from the beginning of Triodion (this year started on February 21) through All Saints Day (this year that is June 27). Pick up your copy today so you can read it from now until All Saints Day. This book costs \$18.99 and all monies taken in at the bookstore go to the church.



This Matters

Christ is Risen and that matters. Why does that matter? Because one day, we are all going to pass away from this life. It won't matter if we were rich or poor, whether our life was easy or hard, whether we succeeded or failed, because none of those things will go with us to the grave. What will go with us is our faith and our effort to live the faith and spread the faith. That is all.

Redefining "Life" and "Death"

Let's go back to Good Friday for a moment, to the word "Epitaphios." "Epitaphios" literally means "in the tomb," and is the word for the icon that depicts Christ going into the tomb, the icon that we place in the "Kouvouklion" (the tomb of Christ) which we carried around the church. Let's also redefine a few other words.

"Death" is the absence of God.

"Life" is being in the presence of God.

The time we spend on this earth, which we call "life" should really be called "preparation."

The day we leave this earth, should be called "passing" rather than death.

We will all be on this earth for a finite amount of time, our time of preparation. For some it will be 100 years, for others 80, for others 50 and for others 5. At some point, we will pass away and we will lay as "epitaphios," we will lay "in the tomb", as

Christ did.

Then we will go to God for judgment and we will be sent to one of two places. Either we will go to "life" meaning we will go to Paradise and be with the Lord, or we will go to "death," meaning we will go to Hades and be permanently estranged from God.

Before the time of Christ, all those who laid "epitaphios" in the tomb went to Hades. They went to death and separation from God. When Christ died, He also went to Hades. And then He promptly destroyed the power of Hades. That's why the icon of the Resurrection depicts broken locks and shattered gates, because Christ destroyed the power of Hades and the devil's power to make people die. Through Christ, we all have the opportunity to have life, instead of death, to live forever with God instead of to forever be estranged from Him.

The world by and large doesn't understand this. "Life" is defined as the period of time we are on this earth. The purpose of life, the world tells us, is material gain and enjoyment. Death is seen as the end of gain and enjoyment. The problem with the way the world encourages us to live is that we are encouraged to live for ourselves and our gain, rather than for others or for God. Which makes the journey through life a narcissistic romp, where we avoid death at all costs, rather than a purposeful journey to salvation, or preparation for eternal life.

Either we live our lives for ourselves, or we live them other God and others. That is not to say we can't enjoy ourselves, or take a vacation, etc. It means that the overall focus of life is either on our own pleasure and honor, or the pleasure and honor of others. Let's take that word "honor" for a moment. If we each set out daily to honor others, to prop up and encourage others, not only would we improve the lives of others, but we would find our own joy in honoring others because when we see others succeed or be happy, it will make us happy.

Back to the Resurrection. It matters. Because it gives us a destination, a purpose, and a goal. Which today should give us focus, and as the years of life go by, it should give us joy that we are closer to our eternal destination, rather than sorrow and confusion because we've based our life solely on material gains that will eventually end.





Looking Ahead in our church

There are several things for us to think about as we look ahead to the next few months. First, who will replace Charlie? One answer is that we are actively looking for another pastoral assistant, but this search may take some time. Another answer is that we will need many people to replace what Charlie did. When we break down what Charlie has done over the past seven years, we see just how special Charlie is, because the breadth of his knowledge and skills is more than we can expect any one person to replace. So, we are going to be looking for some help with things that Charlie did. One thing we are going to establish is a technology ministry, so that whoever is doing our chanting is not responsible at the same time for troubleshooting our livestreaming. If you are interested in helping with technology, please let Fr. Stavros know. We will be establishing this shortly. We also need to rethink how we do coffee hour going forward, and several other things.

Before the pandemic, our parish was humming along on many fronts. Coming out of this 18 month disruption, we are seeing things that will need to be changed or redone.

First, we have some ministries that are lacking heads. This includes our head usher, youth protection point person, and a couple more that will be opening in the next couple of months. Second, there has been a lot of attrition in our ministries—fewer people are coming to GOYA, or Sunday school, choir, Bible study and pretty much everything else, than were coming before the pandemic started. So, we need to encourage and reach out to people to return. We need to reach out to people we haven't seen in a while in our respective ministries and invite them back. And when people return to church or to ministry, we need to welcome them with open arms.

Before the pandemic, we were crafting a long range plan for the church. We will need to revisit that and plot out a course for where we are going.

Perhaps the biggest paradigm shift that needs to occur in our parish is the collective mindset that we are producers of something rather than consumers of something. We are collectively, all of us, disciples who learn, and apostles who recruit. Our role in the church doesn't end once we know a few things about Christ. Learning about Christ is supposed to be a life-

long process. And at the same time we are learning, we are supposed to be sharing Christ with others. Whether we are learning or sharing, we are supposed to be serving at all times, honoring one another, helping one another.

Back to the core values of love, worship, community, learning and service, these are five things that should not only be the leading words of this church community, but the leading actions of all who are part of this church.

As I write this message in mid-May, the world is bombarding us with messages of anger and frustration. Whether it is the efficacy of the covid vaccine, the border crisis, a run on gas, social unrest, political division, and on and on, these messages are anything but positive. The message of the Church is supposed to be positive. Because the message of the Church is the message of Christ, who was an optimist because He saw the good in people, in all people, because He called all to the same goal, and because He would stoop down and serve and honor everyone, from the greatest saint to the greatest sinner.

On a positive note, we are doing so many good things in our parish. And over the past many years, we've done a lot of amazing things here. During the pandemic, we've welcomed several new families. So, as the dust settles and we look at what remains, there is certainly a lot to build off of. Yes, some aspects of our community will have to be repaired or rebuilt. But not the foundation. Because the foundation of our community is Jesus Christ and He hasn't changed at all. Neither has the mission of our church, or even how to carry it out. I'm not going to encourage you to "let's put it back together this fall" because we are starting to put it back together right now, piece by piece.

The message I leave you with is not "have a nice summer" as if to say "see you in a few months." The message I leave you with is, as you recharge this summer, make sure you come to the place that gives us the strongest recharging, our church. Recharge yourselves in worship, in the Eucharist, in confession (for those who didn't go during Lent, this is always available) and in fellowship. And help others, whoever you encounter in your life, to recharge themselves by honoring and serving them, and even more, in honoring and serving Christ through service to others!

May God bring us to His Holy Resurrection again in 2022, with one voice and one heart, that we may proclaim once again: Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen! Christos Anesti! Alithos Anesti!

With love in the Risen Lord,
+Fr. Stavros





Paschal Sermon 2021 by Fr. Stavros Rejoice

“Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” I closed my Paschal sermon one year ago with these verses from Romans 8:38-39. The church was empty, save for a handful of people. I emerged from the altar with the light of Christ, not only facing an empty church, but the realization that a momentary loss of electricity had stopped our livestream and no one heard the end of the sermon. We had to sing “come receive the Light” a second time with the camera on. We go outside for the Resurrection Service not only to imitate the journey of the women on the first Pascha, but also to proclaim to world, while out in the world that Christ is Risen from the dead. One of the most meaningful photos I have of last Pascha is a picture someone took looking over my shoulder at midnight with the bank across the street in the background. While we were not allowed to go outside, there was nothing stopping us from opening the door. We did sing Christos Anesti, facing the world. Sadly, as I opened the door, there were a few parishioners wishing for a light that I couldn’t give them. The pandemic kept us from coming to church last Pascha. But it didn’t keep us from Christ. It didn’t keep us from loving Him. It didn’t keep Him from loving us. It stopped a lot of things. However, not one service was missed. There wasn’t a week that went by that we didn’t pray for everyone out loud, by name. Sometimes it was me, Charlie, Alex and a video camera. But we never missed a week, and we never missed a name.

Fast forward one year. This verse holds as true tonight as it did last year. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Not a mask, not social distance, not fear of illness, not political rancor, not social unrest. Society seems to be trying hard to cancel Jesus. And they can’t. Because He is the light that shines in the darkness, and no darkness can overtake His light. As you know, each day of Holy Week, we’ve focused on one word for

each day. And the word for today is rejoice. The verse we are focusing on is Psalm 118:24: “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Notice how the verse says “This is the DAY the Lord has made.” It doesn’t say the week, or the year or the lifetime. The Psalmist encourages us to find something to rejoice about today, to find something positive today and rejoice over it. There is always at least one thing to rejoice over every day, and that is that we are alive and breathing. We can rejoice tonight because we are standing in a place where we could not last year and we are alive to be standing here. We can rejoice that Jesus “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (I Timothy 2:4) In other words, He is rooting for us. He wants us to enter into His heavenly Kingdom. It is ours to lose. We can rejoice that “the love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 103:17), and that “there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” (Luke 15:7) That means no matter how far we get off track, He will always graciously provide a way back for those who want it. As we will hear later in the Gospel of John 1:12 “To all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God.”

Like every other word we’ve reflected on this week, “rejoice” is a verb, a call to action. It is also a choice. None of the words we looked at are feelings. They are all things we can choose to do even if we feel tired, or scared or angry. Feelings are funny in that they are constantly changing. I can feel tired and that feeling will dominate all other feelings. Same thing when we feel hungry or angry or even happy. The words we have looked at this week are all choices. As we celebrate Pascha this year, I encourage us to focus on choices more than feelings. Make a choice to rejoice each day, the moment you wake up. See each day as a privilege, not an

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entitlement. On any given day, there are many blessings we have that we can rejoice in, and honor God with. If you aren't counting your blessings, I encourage you to start.

As you receive the Light of Christ in a few moments, choose to receive it with joy. Be thankful for the privilege of being alive tonight, for the privilege of standing in this sacred space, for privilege of feet that will carry us outside, and mouths that can sing about the triumph of not only His Resurrection but ours as well. Because the hymn doesn't just proclaim "Christ is risen from the dead," but that "to those in the tombs He has granted life."

On Wednesday night, I referenced I Corinthians 13, the well-known chapter on love. Verse 6 says that "love does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right." If only we could make a collective choice to live out this verse, to choose to rejoice in the right than fixating on the wrong. There is no such thing as a collective choice. That's because choices are personal. It is up to each person to choose to rejoice. Reflecting on our words from this week, we can choose to let the message of Jesus Christ transform us. We can choose to engage in the life of Christ, which includes regular worship, rather than occasional activity. We can choose to do something with the talent God entrusted us, rather than wishing He had given us something different. We can choose to repent of sin rather than suffering under its heavy weight. We can choose to find spiritual healing through regular prayer and worship, rather than running to God only when the circumstances become dire. We can choose to abide in God, to embrace Him and hold on to Him, rather than trying to do it without Him. We can choose to remember the words of the Lord, rather than constantly attempting to re-write them to fit our own thoughts. We can choose to place our hope in the Lord, to make Him our purpose, our goal and our destination.



Three words defined our Lenten journey this year—renew, return, rejoice. Three choices to make daily. After all, we can't rejoice in yesterday—it is over. And we can't rejoice in tomorrow because it is not a guarantee. So let us rejoice in today, make the most of it, and honor God in it. As the clock approaches midnight, another day dawns. And as the Light of Christ makes its way through the church, another opportunity is gifted to us. We didn't get to do this last year. Let us never take this for granted. It is a blessing that we have returned. I pray that this week has given us a time to renew. And if it hasn't, that's okay, because renewing is a choice we can make at any time. In a moment when your candle is lit with the light of Christ, that is all you will have in that moment. Will you rejoice in that? Would you rejoice in Christ if you had everything else taken away? Going back to St. Paul's words to the Romans, nothing can separate us from the love of God. You can lose everything you have. Your life can feel as dark as this church right now. And you can still rejoice. Because no one and nothing can take Christ's light from you. Ever. So receive His light again on this day He has made, and let us rejoice and be glad in it and in Him!



Holy Week Testimonials

Jennifer Alastanos

Christos Anesti! This year Holy Week was special for so many reasons, but before sitting down to write my reflection I knew there were three things that really stood out. First, being able to experience Holy Week back in the church. Second, having my mom and dad to celebrate Holy Week and Pascha in Tampa with me. Finally, the honor of being chosen to be among the first three to receive the light. What I didn't realize until I looked back at my Holy Week at home reflection from last year is how similar these were to what I reflected on then.

First, I prayed to be back in the church and not at my apartment. After experiencing Holy Week through my computer screen it brought me so much joy to be inside the church. There are so many details throughout the week that quite simply can't be experienced at home. Second, I reflected on the ability to experience Holy Week virtually with my family last year. This is my fifth Holy Week at St. John's, but the first year my parents were able to travel from West Virginia to experience it with me. This year instead of singing

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invitation, “ With the fear of God, faith, and love, draw near” we heard a sweet little voice say clearly, “I’m ready.” What a humbling response! This small



child understood what a blessed invitation was being offered. I pray that in our hearts, we can all say fervently, “I’m ready!” when our Lord issues His invitation to us to draw near.

Christos Anesti via FaceTime they were standing right next to me. I have never had a more special Holy Week than those experienced in Tampa. I have always wanted my parents to be able to experience this with me and they were able to this year.

Finally, I reflected on how I missed the experience of receiving the light from the person in the pew next to me. The Resurrection Service is always one of my favorite experiences throughout the liturgical year. One year ago I never imagined I would be chosen as one of the first to receive the light directly from Father Stavros. As he mentioned to me, it’s like experiencing a glimpse of Heaven here on earth and it’s certainly a moment I will never forget. I am so thankful we were all able to return back to church safely and celebrate together this year.

Joan Williams-Kargakos

I have never seriously tried fasting before Great Lent 2021 and indeed, I am renewed and rejoicing. I not only choose what goes into my body more carefully but I also more carefully consider what comes out of my mouth. My relationship with my husband is improving and it has been edifying learning more about the Orthodox church together. I enjoyed the services of Great Lent more than those of Holy Week. I had been greatly looking forward to the resurrection service, as I had never been to one, but I found myself distracted by people talking, both outside as we were singing and inside while the lights were still off. It appears that **return** means a return to old behavior as well. I suspect I will be reading an etiquette reminder from you quite soon.

While I left the resurrection service feeling more annoyed than blessed, a pre-Great Lent Joan probably would have never prayed for the people who were annoying her. I am excited for the next fasting period and am engaging in daily prayer in the meantime. The most valuable thing Pete has brought to our marriage is Orthodoxy.

Suzu Balasis

*“out of the mouth of babes and sucklings”
Matthew 21:16*

On Holy Tuesday morning at the Presanctified Liturgy, there was a small group in attendance. Among them, was a family with two small daughters. They attend regularly, and the girls are always very attentive and well-behaved.

As Fr. Stavros came forward with the Chalice and spoke the

Engie Halkias & Kalliope Chagaris

Christos Anesti! Christ is Risen! Thank You, Thank You, Thank You to the wonderful ladies who helped decorate our Church and our Kovouklion: Kathy Kaburis, Jeanie Nenos, Vickie Peckham, Suzanne Pileggi, and Marilyn Sandborn. What a “glorious” journey it was. The journey started the middle of March and ended on Pascha. We all worked together to glorify God and beautify our Church. Our Church looked very beautiful, very warm and very Bright. We would like to thank Fr.Stavros for his guidance, support and understanding. We would also like to thank Charlie Hambos and Alex Limberatos for the wonderful help and assistance they provided. We could not have done it without you. Thank You, Thank You, Thank You! May the Light of the Resurrection brighten your lives and grant you good health, love, peace, joy and happiness.

Archangel Michael Winners

And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. -2 Corinthians 8:5

The Archangel Michael Feast was prayerfully conceived by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios upon arriving in Atlanta, as the annual double feast of the Metropolis family. Since 1998, the Metropolis family comes together in Atlanta on the weekend of, prior to or following the November 8 Feast day of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. It is to honor and celebrate the Patron Saint of our Metropolis and the lives of two people from each parish, who are living examples of the Orthodox Christian life and journey to Theosis. By extension, this special Metropolis feast also serves as the annual Metropolis celebration and thanksgiving for all devout stewards of the faith, giving their time and talent.

**This year’s award winners are Gary Ward and Kalliope Chagaris
Congratulations Gary and Kalliope!**



The Priest Is Trying To Get Better Cell Reception

By Alex Limberatos



Once upon a time, we would raise our cellphones high above our heads in a desperate act to reconnect with our dropped call or send a text in a land of poor reception. Fortunately, with how far our technology has come with our cell phones, cell towers, and wifi, we don't as often have this issue of reception. Nonetheless, if we were to show this gesture in a movie clip fifty years from now or fifty years ago, the person seeing this gesture would perhaps think it silly, and perhaps centuries ago others would think we are attempting to commune with the divine.

Recently, I've been listening to the great Orthodox iconographer Jonathan Pageau's podcasts titled "The Symbolic World". In one of his episodes, Pageau jokes, "when the priest raises the gifts, he's just trying to get better reception from a cell tower." Pageau makes this joke to comment on how we largely have forgotten the meaning of not only this liturgical gesture, but many of our liturgical gestures.

Orthodox Christianity is full of liturgical gestures that go far beyond the priest lifting the Holy Gifts; the laity engage in dozens of liturgical gestures, such as bowing, processing, lifting hands, kissing, just to name a few. While one of the beautiful things of Orthodoxy are these liturgical gestures, they can easily become mechanical motions or mimicry if we have no awareness of the meaning/merit of these rituals. Too often we take it for granted and go through the motions.

As mentioned before with raising our cell phones, we possess our own secular liturgical gestures, albeit most of these gestures are pragmatic. The handshake was originally designed as a gesture of safety, involving two parties grabbing each other's forearms to make sure there was no dagger hidden in their sleeve/bracer. Bowing in other cultures functions in the same way, lowering your head as a sign of trust that the other person won't strike you while your eyes are down and while you expose and put within reach a vulnerable part of your body: your skull. At the peak of the pandemic, hand-washing was perhaps the most common "liturgical gesture" the entire world engaged in, rubbing our hands together with a substance we trust is for our cleanliness in order to wipe out a threat that is invisible.

When we look at both cases of lifting our cell phones and hand-washing, we have to realize how serious we take these actions given that the outcome we are looking for happens to be invisible. We don't see the waves of our cell phone or of the cell tower, and yet we lift our phones. We don't see the virus on our hands, and yet we wash. These actions are not just gestures we trust, it's something we have absolute faith in for the sake of our well-being. We don't do these gestures in vain, without explanation or cause, and yet maybe we can imagine a context thousands of years from now that someone might mistake these gestures as religious gestures.

Orthodox or not, we are liturgical, ritualistic, symbolic creatures. We perform hundreds if not thousands of liturgical actions even outside of the context of the Church. Some of these gestures we perform with full knowledge of the context of why we do them (washing our hands), some out of mimicry (shaking hands), and some out of superstition (not stepping on a crack). It'd be interesting if we paid close attention to some of these gestures and see just how many we do on a daily basis.

But while raising our cell phone in the air or washing our hands are gestures easy for us to understand in what they are attempting to do or accomplish, lifting the Holy Gifts, doing our Cross, etc may not be so obvious. One could write a book on all the different liturgical gestures the clergy and the laity perform in and outside of the Divine Liturgy, but for now the purposes of this article, I'd like to focus on the aforementioned gesture of lifting, of the Gifts, of our hands, and of our eyes.

The gesture of lifting of the Gifts is packed with meaning and intentionality, and we can appreciate it more once we give this gesture

some more attention. To begin, the priest lifting up the chalice and the disc is an act of putting God in His rightful place: above us. We ought to stipulate here that we are not speaking of literal geography, that God is somewhere in a cloud above us—we know that the Holy Spirit is everywhere present and fills all things, and that Christ is in our midst where two or more are gathered in His name. Rather, by lifting the gifts, we place God higher than us in a hierarchal manner, declaring Him sovereign and bestowing Him His due honor by putting Him above and before ourselves. We don't merely do this to "remind" ourselves of where God is, but rather by lifting the gifts we are aligning earth with heaven, we are making the prayer in the Lord's Prayer a reality before our eyes: "thy Kingdom Come...on Earth as it is in Heaven." This gesture is not something we should take lightly, but rather a holy moment wherein we all get to bring God and His Order into our chaotic, fallen world. This gesture happens to be reminiscent of an Ancient Custom of raising a leader—an emperor or general—on the shields of the army, lifting him high, as a proclamation of that leader's sovereignty and authority. This happened to be how St. Constantine was "promoted" and granted him the authority to lead a large size of Rome's army to reunite Rome under a banner of Christianity. We, the army of the Church Militant, get to raise Christ, proclaim His authority to the entire world, to the worldly powers that we see and to the invisible powers we cannot see.

This gesture of lifting the Gifts not only is our way of putting God in His proper place in our world, but it's also an expression of our desire to reach Him. We know that children are fantastic communicators through body language, and that lifting up of their arms is an innate and universal gesture for a parent or caretaker: "pick me up!" When we lift up our hands in worship and lift up the Holy Gifts, we express a childlike desire of being picked up by God, of reaching for His embrace. It's interesting how children will stretch out their body and raise their hands as high as they can, making every bit of effort to try and get to a place they know they can't be on their own—that's where the grown-up comes in, bows down, and meets the child "in the middle". This gesture of childlike desire of being lifted up into the arms of our God is also a gesture of synergy, of asking God to work with us and what little we are able to do to meet Him. We reach as high as we can with our arms, hoping God will bow down and receive our gift and receive us to be lifted up. My daughter does not lift up her arms towards me or raises her doll above her head to remind me, "dad, it's good for you to pick me up / pick up my doll" but rather, she does this with an expectation that something will happen with her request: "dad, pick me up / receive my gift!" This expression isn't a reminder for us, it's a gesture to God for something to actually happen.

The last big piece of this gesture of lifting is the calling of attention, a gesture we are all very familiar with. In school, we are told to raise our hand in order to speak or pose a question, and in Summer Camp two fingers are raised in the air to call everyone's attention to the Camp Director. When the Holy Gifts are lifted, we call everyone's attention to the most important part of the Liturgy and to the most important element in the Liturgy, why we come to Divine Liturgy in the first place: the Body and Blood of Christ. When we see a hand raised or see someone look up at something, our eyes go to them, to watch them or look at the thing their eyes are raised to. When the priest raises the bread and the wine, he is orienting us, directing our attention to the most important thing not just in our lives but in the entire world. Perhaps it's a challenge for us to focus our attention solely on this the entire Divine Liturgy, or even focus on Christ during our busy lives. That being said, this gesture trains our attention to be spent on Christ not only in church but outside of church, that in any time of distress or anxiety that we can lift up our eyes and expect Christ's salvation and transformation of ourselves through Holy Communion.

Continued...



The richness of our faith in its liturgical gestures unfortunately gets buried when we take these movements for granted or even boil them down to superstitious mnemonic devices of remembering something. Everything we do matters and carries weight, because we are created in the Image and Likeness of God. Our gestures in our everyday life carry an impact, visibly or invisibly, consecrating the space we work/study/dwell in to God. So too, the liturgical actions we do in church constantly consecrate the space we worship in to God, constantly imprint God's holiness through our action, our attention, our gestures.

So next time you see ANYTHING lifted in church, ask yourself: what's actually happening? Is it just some scripted stage directions from some very old playwrights? Perhaps it's helpful to think of the priest and the congregation merely trying to get a better cell reception from the heavens!

Let us get curious what it is we do as Orthodox Christians, and realize how we can make holy the space we worship in and the space we work, study, and dwell in.

The Mechanical Engineer Who Charged a Fair Price

A giant ship's engine broke down and no one could repair it, so they hired a Mechanical Engineer with over 40 years of experience. He inspected the engine very carefully, from top to bottom. After seeing everything, the engineer unloaded the bag and pulled out a small hammer. He knocked something gently. Soon, the engine came to life again. The engine had been fixed!

Seven days later the engineer mentioned that the total cost for repairing the giant ship was \$20,000.

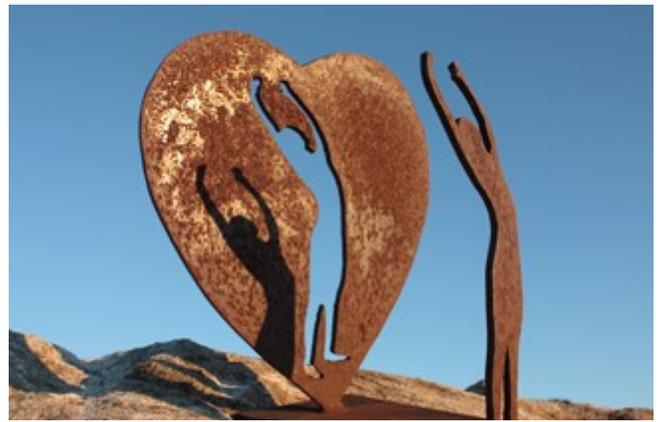
"What?!" said the owner. "You did almost nothing. Give us a detailed bill."

The answer is simple:

Tap with a hammer: \$2

Know where to knock and how much to knock: \$19,998

The importance is appreciating one's expertise and experience...because those are the results of struggles, experiments and even tears. If I do a job in 30 minutes, it's because I spent 20 years learning how to do that in 30 minutes. You owe me for the years, not the minutes.



On the Lighter Side

In 20 years when kids ask about the 2020 toilet paper shortage, I'm telling them we had to drag our butt's across the lawn. In the snow. Uphill. Both ways. Dodging murder hornets!

Nobody wants to hear about your diet. Just be quiet, eat your lettuce and be sad.

On the Serious Side

We must picture Hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance and resentment.

~C.S. Lewis, Preface, *"The Screwtape Letters"*

"If you took an (unrepentant) sinner to heaven, he wouldn't like it there; he could hardly wait to leave. Heaven would be hell for him because all his life, he has conditioned himself not for love, not for God, but for sin and selfishness." --C.S. Lewis

Something is seriously wrong when the world is offended by everything but sin.

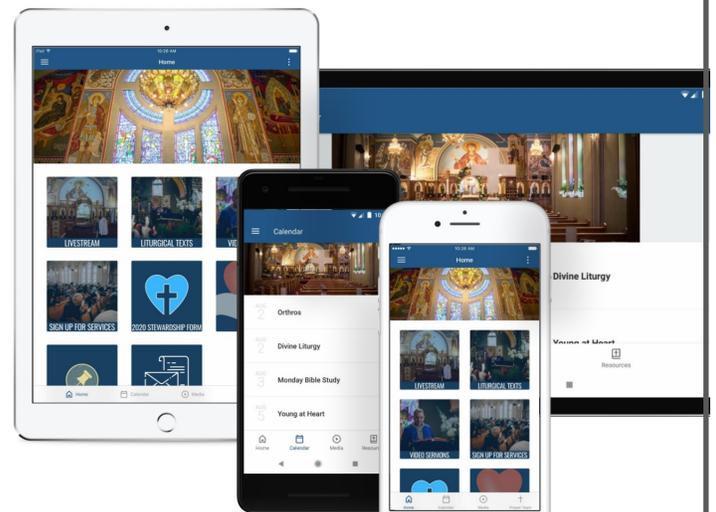
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THE CHOSEN—Review

By Fr. Stavros



During the month of April, I became aware of a series called “The Chosen.” It is about the life of Jesus. Many of us have seen movies about the life of Jesus. The longest movie ever made about Jesus is probably “Jesus of Nazareth” which is 8 hours long. This series on “The Chosen” is going to have 7 seasons. It will be 56 episodes long. That is 56 hours on the life of Jesus. As of this writing, all of season one is done and four episodes of season two have aired. I personally have seen all of them. My first impressions of this series are as follows:

The series shows the humanity of Jesus.

There is ample time for character development—we see characters like Mary Magdalene, Matthew, Peter, Andrew, and Thomas (so far) and begin to understand the back story. The often-overlooked character of Nicodemus is also solidly developed. One episode focused mainly on the wedding of Cana. Another focuses on the healing of a paralytic. The series will be long, so there is ample time to develop the characters.

Before there were videos, prior to 75 years ago, people had to imagine everything. So imagining what Biblical figures looked like was something people did. With videos everywhere, in many ways we’ve lost our imagination. So people have become disinterested in reading the Bible because it is hard to imagine how these stories looked and happened. This series helps fill in the blanks for how the life of Jesus likely played out. There are lots of culturally accurate nuances that make His life and ministry understandable.

Watching this series has caused me to open the Bible more, which is the intention of the producers. I think it

will do the same for you.

We all spend time and money giving ratings to action movies and R-rated movies. We should spend time and give ratings to a series on the life of Jesus.

I highly encourage you to watch it, as well as interviews and other things associated with it. It is available on YouTube and also on “The Chosen” app. This movie will not take the place of worship or reading the Bible or praying. However, it will fill in some very big blanks many of us have and will only help to bolster our faith in Christ. I highly recommend it!

As We Celebrate Fathers’ Day



Here’s to all the dads

~who paid for a dinner that no one was grateful for

~who didn’t know if they’d make it to pay day

~who are trying their best to be a good man, in a society that devalues men.

~who lost their patience multiple times a day because they see their life passing with their dreams still in their chest.

~who never hear “I’m proud of you,” because those are important words to a man.

~who work long hours, and leave all the days frustrations at the door to be there for his kids, cause that’s what dads do.

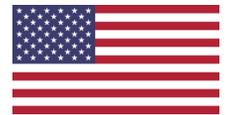
~who love so much even when they feel they’re failing

~who shoulder the weight of the world for their family.

You’re doing a great job. I’m proud of you!

Liturgical Schedule for June/July 2021

Sunday, June 6	Sunday of the Blind Man Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday, June 8	Leave-Taking of Pascha (Apodosis)—Evening Liturgy Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, June 9	Paraklesis 5:00 p.m. (note earlier starting time for Paraklesis)
Thursday, June 10	Ascension Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, June 13	Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Saturday, June 19	Saturday of the Souls Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. <i>A memorial service will be held at the end of the Liturgy</i>
Sunday, June 20	Pentecost Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m. Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit 11:00 a.m.
Thursday, June 24	Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, June 27	All Saints Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday, June 29	Sts. Peter and Paul Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, June 30	Holy Apostles Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, July 4	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, July 11	St. Euphemia Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, July 18	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, July 25	Dormition of St. Anna Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, July 26	St. Paraskevi Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, August 1	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, August 2	Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary—6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, August 4	Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary—6:00 p.m.
Friday, August 6	Transfiguration of our Savior Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, August 8	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.



Liturgical Notes for June/July

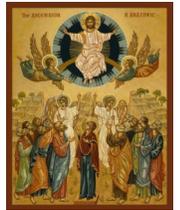
The Pentecostarion - The 50 Days After Pascha—The period of 50 days between Pascha & Pentecost is referred to as the “Pentecostarion.” The period of forty days between Pascha Sunday and the day of the Ascension is known as the period of Pascha (or Easter). It is a period set aside by the Church for the specific celebration of Christ’s glorious resurrection. It is a celebration of “rebirth”. . . The rebirth of God’s creation which surrounds us, and the rebirth of the spirit within each and every one of us! This period is not merely a ritualistic celebration but a celebration which can be seen, felt, heard and talked about. It is a very REAL celebration which CAN make our entire being jump with JOY. It is a celebration which offers us HOPE. It is a celebration which offers us the TRUE FREEDOM found only in Jesus Christ! During the 40 days of Pascha, we are to greet each other with the greeting “Christ is Risen” or “Χριστὸς Ανέστη!,” to which the response is “Truly He is Risen” or “Ἀληθῶς Ανέστη!”

No Kneeling until Pentecost—It is actually the Tradition in the Orthodox Church that we not kneel on Sundays in honor of the Resurrection of Christ. Because we do not worship on a daily basis in our church communities, priests have encouraged people to kneel on Sundays, the thought being that if we do not kneel on Sundays, that we’ll never kneel in church. It is a Tradition, that for 50 days after Pascha, we do not kneel in honor of the Resurrection. The next time we will kneel after Pascha is on the Feast of Pentecost (this year on June 20) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again on bended knees let us pray to the Lord.”

Paraklesis to be held once a month—One of the beautiful things that came out of the pandemic was spending 14 months praying every week for all the members of our parish by name. Prior to the Pandemic, we held Paraklesis almost exclusively in August, when it is called for as part of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary cycle of services. We will of course, offer many Paraklesis in August, per Tradition. However, we will start a new tradition in our parish of offering Paraklesis once a month. During June, it will be Wednesday, June 9 at 5:00 p.m. (note earlier starting time)

Sunday, June 6, Sunday of the Blind Man—The theme of LIGHT! Commemoration of the healing of the blind man which leads us to the reality of the healing of our own spiritual blindness.

Tuesday, June 8, Apodosis (Leave-Taking) of Pascha—This marks the end of the Paschal Season. It is a repeat of the Resurrection Service and Liturgy of Pascha and is the last time of the Liturgical year that we sing Χριστὸς Ανέστη. We will celebrate this feast on Tuesday, June 8, with an evening Liturgy at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros will begin at 5:15 p.m. and is a replication of the Resurrection Service from Pascha).



Thursday, June 10, Ascension—This marks the feast where Christ ascended to heaven, 40 days after the Resurrection, thus completing His earthly ministry.

Sunday, June 13, Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council—We pay homage to the collective triumph of the Church over false doctrine. The first Ecumenical Council authored the Creed. It took place in Nicaea in the year 325. This is why we call the Creed “The Nicene Creed.” This Council also established the date of Pascha and decided on which books would comprise the Bible. This commemoration is always done the Sunday after Ascension.

Saturday, June 19, Saturday of the Souls—There are four Saturdays set aside during the year for us to honor our loved ones who have fallen asleep. One of them is the Saturday before Pentecost, this year on June 19. We will have Divine Liturgy and a memorial service that day. Please send the list of names of those whom you would like to have commemorated (separate sheet provided). You may bring kolyva as you wish. We will not be having a communal kolyva (hopefully this will resume next year), so each family will take their own back.

Sunday, June 20, Pentecost—This feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles fifty days after Pascha, filling them with power, strength, wisdom and courage to spread the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ to the entire world. Pentecost is the celebration of the birth of the Christian Church!!! A special Vespers Service will be held after Divine Liturgy on Pentecost (June 20), where three prayers will be offered, asking for the Holy Spirit to descend upon us as we mark this feast day. As a reminder, we do NOT kneel in church until AFTER the Divine Liturgy on Pentecost (we do not kneel at the Divine Liturgy on Pentecost) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again ON BENDED KNEES let us pray to the Lord.” There is no fasting the week after Pentecost. However, there is a fast for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul which lasts from the Monday after all Saints Day (June 28), so this year it is only one day. The length of the fast period is determined by the date of Pascha each year.



Sunday, June 27, Sunday of All Saints—The period of the Pentecostarion is now complete with the commemoration of “All Saints.” This feast not only honors all the saints who have ever lived, as well as the ones who are unknown. It reminds us that our goal is for all of us to become saints.

Thursday, June 24, Nativity of St. John the Baptist—This marks the feastday of the Nativity (birth) of St. John the Baptist, the Forerunner of the Lord and patron saint of our parish.

Tuesday, June 29, Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Paramounts of the Apostles—Sts. Peter and Paul are the two greatest of the Apostles who were at one time two of the greatest sinners. St. Peter denied Christ and St. Paul was

persecuting and killing Christians. God used these men for good despite their sins, a lesson for all of us.

Wednesday, June 30, Synaxis of the Holy Apostles—On the day following Sts. Peter and Paul, June 30, the Church commemorates the Twelve Apostles.

Sunday, July 4, Independence Day—While July 4 is not a day that is usually commemorated with a Divine Liturgy, it is a great day to have one, and wonderful that it falls on a Sunday this year. At a time when our country has had so much unrest, first with the Coronavirus and then with the civil unrest, it is a great day to pray for our country, for our citizens, for our first responders, and for our freedom.

Sunday, July 11, St. Euphemia—St. Euphemia was martyred for her Christian faith in the year 303. At the 4th Ecumenical Council in the year 451 in Chalcedon, there was a dispute over the two natures of Christ. The bishops at the council argued over two doctrines about Christ. They then put each doctrine on a scroll and opening the tomb of St. Euphemia, placed both scrolls in her hands. After three days, the tomb was opened and the scroll of the correct teaching of the two natures of Christ was in her right hand, while the scroll about Christ having only one nature was at her feet.

Sunday, July 25, Dormition of St. Anna—St. Anna is the mother of the Virgin Mary. She was granted by God to have the Virgin Mary as her daughter at a very old age. She reposed when the Virgin Mary was about three.

Monday, July 26, St. Paraskevi—St. Paraskevi lived in the second century. She was orphaned at the age of 20 and was left a large fortune by her parents. She sold all of her possessions to help heal human suffering and remained a virgin her entire life, leading a monastic life. She was strong in eloquence and spoke persuasively to Romans, converting many to Christianity. She was sentenced to be martyred by the emperor Antoninus, by being thrown into a cauldron of oil and tar. When she was put in the cauldron, the material cooled instead of burning her. The emperor approached to see what was going on and the steam from the cauldron blinded him. St. Paraskevi then healed the emperor, who set her free. She was martyred by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, Antoninus' successor. St. Paraskevi is the patron saint of our eyes, and optometrists.



Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

Evelpistos, Gerakina, Ierax, Justine, Pyros, Thespesios - June 1
Marinos, Nikiforos - June 2
Ieria, Ypatia - June 3
Martha - June 4
Apollon, Dorotheos, Nikandros, Ploutarhos, Selene - June 5
Ilarion - June 6
Panagis, Sevastianis, Zinasis - June 7
Kalliopi, Nafkratis - June 8
Rodanthi - June 9
Nefeli - June 10
Bartholomeos, Luke, Varnavas, Zafeirios - June 11
Onoufrios - June 12
Trifilios - June 13
Elissaios, Nefron - June 14
Afgoustinos, Avgousta, Ieronymos, Livyi, Monica, Ortansia - June 15
Tichon - June 16
Felix, Ismail - June 17
Erasmus, Leontios - June 18
Paisios, Zosimos - June 19
Kallistos, Methodios - June 20

Afrodiosios, Korenna, Kori, Korina, Korinos, Triada - June 21
Efsevios, Zinas - June 22
Agrippina, Aristoklis, Loulou - June 23
Panagiotis - June 24
Erotas, Fevronia - June 25
David, Makarios - June 26
Pierre - June 27
Anargyros, Germanos - June 28
Pavlos, Peter - June 29
Apostolos, Meliton - June 30
Anargyros, Cosmas, Damianos, Mavrikios - July 1
Anatolios, Yakinthos, Zoumboulia - July 3
Lampados - July 5
Lykios, Satyros - July 6
Kyriaki - July 7
Prokopis, Theofilos - July 8
Pagratios - July 9
Amalia - July 10
Efimia, Olga - July 11
Verenic, Veronica - July 12
Iliofotos, Sarah - July 13
Akylas, Nikodimos - July 14

Julitta, Kirikos, Vladimir - July 15
Alexandra, Alike, Marina - July 17
Emilianos - July 18
Dias, Garyfallia, Makrina - July 19
Elias - July 20
Magdalini, Markella, Marylena, Mene-laos - July 22
Athinagoras, Boris, Christina - July 24
Anais, Ann, Efpraksia, Olympias - July 25
Ermolaos, Ersi, Oreozili, Paraskevi - July 26
Pantelis - July 27
Afxentios, Akakios, Drosos, Drosoula, Hrysovalantou, Irini, Timon - July 28
Kallinikos, Theodoti - July 29
Adronikos, Silouanos - July 30
Evdokimos, Freideriki, Freiderikos, Josef - July 31



St. John the Baptist Community News

Ministry News & Updates

Interested in serving as an altar boy? Any of our young men who will enter 4th grade in the fall, or who are older and are not serving presently, are welcome to serve in the altar beginning in August. If you are interested in having your son added to an altar team, please contact Fr. Stavros by June 30. The new schedule will not take effect in August.

GOYA - The June GOYA meeting will be Sunday, June 6, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

GOYA Junior Olympics - We will hold a scaled-down version of the GOYA Junior Olympics June 11-12. On June 11, the GOYAns will have a dinner/dance beginning at 5:30 p.m. On June 12, there will be games held all day on our campus. If you'd like to volunteer to help at anything, please contact Mike Palios at mpalios@gmail.com. We are looking for volunteers to help serve food on June 12.

Men's Group - Our men's group will be on hiatus for summer. We will resume meeting in August.

Thank you Demosthenous Mekras for your service on the Parish Council. Deme Mekras, his wife Louisa and their children, are relocating back closer to home in Miami. Thus, Deme has resigned from the Parish Council. We thank Deme for his service. The Parish Council will be appointing someone to fill the vacancy.

Women's Bible Study will meet in June as follows: Tuesday, June 8 and Tuesday, June 15. We are finishing our study on 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. After June 15, we will be on hiatus until late August/early September.

Fr. Stavros will be going to summer camp July 1-10. **Fr. Stavros will also be on vacation** at some point in June/July. Fr. John Stefero will fill in for all pastoral emergencies and scheduled services.

Monday Night Bible Study with Charlie will be held on Mondays, June 7, 14, 21 and 28. (CHECK THESE DATES WITH CHARLIE) 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@stjohntpa.org and he will add you.

Tuesday Night Book Study - Alex's Tuesday Night Book Study on "If There Is Life, I Want To Live" will continue in June & July @ 6:30 p.m. via Zoom, with the exception of breaking for **June 8th** (due to Divine Services held for the Leave-Taking of Pascha) and **June 22nd**. This Book Study features difficult questions coming from seekers of the faith

12 Disciples Program - In August 2020, 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 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 44 "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 to resume in August—Thank you to Donna Hambos for finishing our fourth semester of GriefShare, our small group ministry dedicated to people who have lost loved ones. This group will resume either in later August or early September with another 13-week program. We know that there have been several people this spring who have lost loved ones. Please keep this very beneficial program in mind over the summer so that you can participate in the fall.

We are looking for a donor for an Icon Box of 300 Festal Icons—Fr. Stavros owns an icon box of 300 icons, many of which our church does not own. This icon box is often used on our icon stand for veneration by the people. During the pandemic, we put the icon stand up on the solea, so that people on line could see what feastday was being celebrated. We now are going to have two icon stands, one in the back of the church and one for the front, so that people on line and in the pews can see the saint of the day. We would like to acquire a second icon box of 300 icons for this purpose. The icon box costs \$750. If you are interested in donating, please contact Fr. Stavros.



Names to be Commemorated for Saturday of Souls

Please write the names of all those whom you wish to be commemorated in the Saturday of Souls Service.

Please mail into the office or bring to church as soon as possible.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
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Congratulations Graduates!



Carmen Robinson (above) graduated with honors from Victory Village Christian Academy. She will be attending Southeastern University in the fall to major in Visual Arts.



Katerina Soteriou (above) graduated Steinbrenner High School with AP honors and will be attending Florida State University starting in the Fall. She has accepted multiple scholarships and is excited to soon be a Seminole!



Olympia Stilian (above) graduated with honors from Palm Harbor University High School. Since graduating 2 years early, at the age of 16, Olympia will be taking a Gap year.

James Stefan Kazaras (below) graduated from Lakeland Christian School and will be going to Polk State College.

Taki Tsetsekas (right) is a 2021 graduate from East Lake High School. He will attend Florida Poly University this fall and pursue mechanical engineering in the Elite Nuclear Propulsion Program.



Angelina Patricia Krinos (right) is graduating from Robinson High School as the IB Valedictorian. She will be attending Stanford University in the fall and plans to study Chemical Engineering and Materials Engineering.



Not Featured:
Madeline Schad is graduating from Wharton High School with high honors, #30 of 550 students. She will be attending Florida State University in the fall.

Congratulations Graduates!



Julia Leigh Blankenbaker (above) graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Behavioral Neuroscience from Florida State University.



George Hambos Jr. (above) graduated Florida Southern College
1. Bachelor of Science in Music with a concentration in Music Management
2. Bachelor of Arts in Music with a focus in Piano Performance
Magna Cum Laude

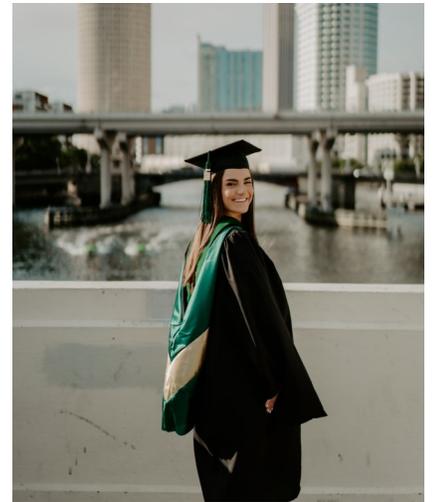


Alex Bakirdgi (above) graduated with an MBA in Marketing and Communications from Lynn University.



Stephanie Owens (left) graduated Cum Laude from Florida State University with a Bachelor of Science in Criminology along with a Certification in Emergency Management and Homeland Security. Stephanie will be furthering her education at Florida State University by pursuing a Master's in Criminology.

Alexa Alsina (right) PA-C graduated Cum Laude from the USF Morsani College of Medicine with a Masters of Physician Assistant Studies specializing in Interventional Radiology.



Peter George (below) graduated with a Doctor of Business Administration in Finance from Sacred Heart University.



Larissa Alexandra Krinos (below) graduated from the University of Florida on May 1 Summa Cum Laude with Honors with a degree in Sustainability in the built environment/urban planning. She will be continuing her education in the Urban Planning Masters degree program at the University of Florida.



Caroline Corcoran (below) graduated from the Academy of the Holy Names. She will be attending Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX.



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, read it, memorize it and contemplate the verse each week. 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 June/July. 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. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you through your reflection on Scripture.

June 6-12

So when they had come together, they asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

Acts 1:6-8

The disciples had followed Jesus for three years. Many times they didn't understand what His message was or what He was doing. They didn't always know where they were going. They were understandably saddened and scared by His crucifixion and rejoiced at His Resurrection. With all the ministry behind and prophecies fulfilled, the disciples asked Jesus a seemingly reasonable question—would He at this time give them political freedom from the Romans? This seemed reasonable to them. His answer must have been like a kick in the gut to them. It is not for you to understand the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority. In other words, what is logical to us may not be in God's plans for us. Rather, Jesus reassured them that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit. Their work was not to be political overthrow but spreading Christ's message. This is our cause as well, to spread the message of the Gospel, having been strengthened by the Holy Spirit to do so. Being a Christian doesn't mean political freedom, it doesn't mean all enemies are vanquished, it doesn't even mean that everything makes sense. It means that Christ sends His Holy Spirit into each of us to help us and give us grace to make it through rough patches, even as He gives us the ability to be His witnesses in some way.

June 13-19

"You shall have no other gods before Me."

Exodus 20:3

One a month, beginning this month, we will examine one of the Ten Commandments. We begin with the First Commandment—"You shall have no other gods before Me." This seems like a fairly easy commandment to follow (of course, once we examine each commandment, we will see that we break each one with regularity). However, in looking at this commandment, we must ask ourselves, "Is God the source and center of our lives?" Of course, He is not the source and center at all times. When we are sinning, we have given the center to temptation. The ideal life is for God to be the center at all times. As we think about the first commandment, think about the things that occupy your attention. Certainly family is a worthy occupant. Same with work. Hobbies. Friends. Exercise. Relaxation. Where is God on this list? Does He make the list? How about prayer, scripture reading, worship? Think about what you daydream about. Do you daydream more about winning the lottery or being in heaven? This commandment is not designed to make us feel bad, but to call our attention to what place God holds in our lives. These commandments are not just suggestions. They are commandments, orders if you will. The first order of these commandments is an order to give God the first place in our lives. The first place of our time, our focus, our goals and our purpose.

June 20-26

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him they worshipped Him; but some doubted.

Matthew 28:16-17

The verses this week and next week focus on the Great Commission, the end of the Gospel of Matthew. The eleven disciples (minus Judas, who had not been replaced yet) went to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. In other words, everyone worshipped Him. Everyone showed up. There were eleven disciples at this point and all of them came to worship the Lord. Some, however, doubted. These verses are refreshing, because as in so many other instances, they tell our story. We come to worship God. On some days we come with confidence. On some days maybe our confidence is shaken. The goal for us as Christians is to come, whether we come confident or filled with doubt. Keep coming. For those who are doubting, come for encouragement. For those who have confidence, give encouragement to those who are doubting. The verse doesn't say "the disciples had it all together, with unflinching faith." It says clearly that some doubted, but all came, doubts and all.

June 27-July 3

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always to the close of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

A commission in the military is an assignment, an order. Everyone in the military received a commission. They are sent to some place, and assigned to some duty,

Continued...

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

and they obediently follow. Christ gives each of us the same commission He gave the Apostles—to go, make disciples, baptize and teach. These are four specific actions that we are to do. We aren't to keep the information to ourselves but to share it. This Gospel passage is read at each Baptism. It is a commission for each person who enters the church through baptism. It is a reminder that Baptism isn't an achievement, or an end, but rather a beginning. Through baptism we enlist in God's army, with the same commission to make disciples of all nations. Each person will fulfill their commission in a different way—some as priests, some as parents, teachers, mentors, etc. There is room for variety here. However, each of us is commissioned and commanded to spread the Word of God and grow the church. This is a duty not just for the priests, but for all of us.

July 4-10

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

II Corinthians 3:17

This week, as we celebrate Independence Day, it is an important thing to remember that true freedom is found in the Lord. Why? Why can't we find it ourselves? There are two reasons that we cannot be representative of true freedom. Each of us has an agenda, which always has at least slight conflicts with other people. No two agendas are alike or in perfect alignment. Where there is imperfection, there is conflict. And where there is conflict, there isn't freedom. Because both sides become stressed by the conflict. Even when we have the seemingly perfect marriage or friendship, freedom is compromised every time there is conflict. And there is always some level of conflict even in the most perfect of relationships. The second reason is that even in the most perfect relationship, there is going to be an ending when we pass away. This imminent passage from this life causes conflict and anxiety in many people as they get older. And this stress compromises our sense of freedom. If one believes in God and in God's promise of eternal life, there is true freedom that is today is my last day or this year is my last year, something greater awaits me, given to me through God's divine mercy and grace. This is why true freedom is found in God, and the foundation of cultural and political freedom is the freedom to worship God. As we celebrate independence Day, we cannot forget the importance of religious freedom, to worship as we wish. Nor can we forget the ultimate freedom which is from God.

July 11-17

You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them.

Exodus 20: 4-5

Once a month we will focus on one of the Ten Commandments. This month we focus on the Second Commandment, which is to not make graven images and worship them. Over the centuries, people have argued that having icons in churches violates this Commandment, though it doesn't. Because for the Orthodox, they are not graven or empty images but images of holiness. Many people hang pictures of their families on the walls of their homes. Does this violate the Second Commandment? No, because we put up pictures of our families in order to honor them. What about pictures of athletes? Here is where you might argue there is a problem. We put up pictures of peo-

ple we don't know because we "idolize" them. This is what we are not supposed to do, to make an idol out of something or someone. It's actually important that we put icons on our walls, as a reminder that we should be seeking to emulate the Lord, the Virgin Mary and the saints more than movie stars and athletes or even our own families. There is nothing sinful about decorating a room with pictures of athletes or music artists. What is wrong is when we see to imitate these people but we forget to imitate the Lord and the saints.

July 18-24

Moses said, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory."

Exodus 33:18

Many of us reach the period of our yearly vacation exhausted. We're tired, perhaps frustrated. No doubt Moses was frustrated leading the children of Israel for forty years through the wilderness. The conditions were treacherous. The people were not always cooperative and spent most of the time complaining. One day, God asked Moses what He could offer to Moses. Can you imagine if God asked you specifically what He could do for you? What would you ask Him for? And Moses had a simple answer "Show me Thy glory." Because Moses believed that experiencing the glory of God would sustain him through whatever challenges he was facing. God granted his wish. He didn't let Moses see the face of God, but He let Moses see the backside of God. When Moses came down from the mountain, he was so bright people couldn't stand to look at him, so he put on a veil to cover his face. God's glory changed Moses. And people could see that he was changed for the better. God's glory can change us, if we are open to it, and if we ask for it, as Moses did.

July 25-31

Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Psalms 103:22

As we start to wind down summer, taking trips before the start of the school year, it is a good thing to remember to bless the Lord in all places we may find ourselves. Whether at home, at school, at work, on vacation, at the beach, working in the yard, wherever we are, we are to bless the Lord, in all places of His dominion. It is important each day and in each circumstance to bless God and to thank God. We should make a regular habit of doing that in all locations. Imagine how thankful we would feel about life in general if everywhere we went, we first thanks God. I.e. Thank You God for the roof over my head as I wake up. Thank You Lord for the food that I will eat before leaving home. Thank You God for the car that will carry me where I'm going. Thank You God that I arrived safely, etc. Putting on a posture of thanks will certainly carry into the various things we do each day.



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!

Prayer List: Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our Souls and Bodies, visit and heal your servants: Lillian Thomas; Scotty; Desi Serreira; Ashley Kladakis; Dora Kallas, 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 Xeroteris, 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.

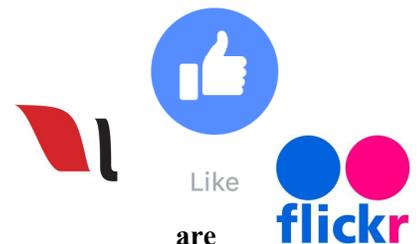
Live Streaming

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: stjohntpa.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/stjohngoctampa



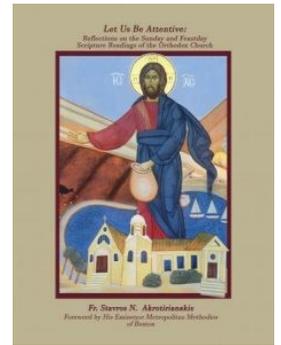
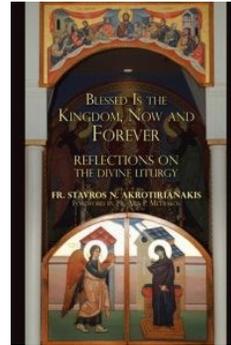
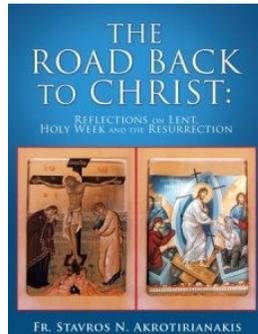
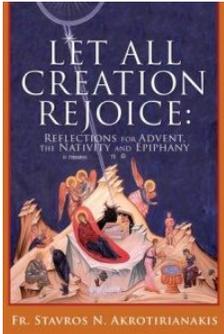
Father Stavros has authored four books that are available both in the bookstore and on-line. They are entitled:

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



American Foundation of Greek Languages & Cultures (AFGLC) **Scholarship Opportunities 2021**

This year the American Foundation for Greek Language & Culture is again offering the following scholarships:

- 2 Scholarships for "College" Students for the AFGLC Dr. Demetrios G. Halkias Scholarships (Graduate or Undergraduate college students majoring in the sciences and/or enrolled in pre-medical program of study)
- 2 Scholarships for "College" Students for the AFGLC Peter & Sophia Kourmolis Scholarships (No area of study requirements)
- 1 Scholarship for High School Senior for the AFGLC Dr. Byron P. Palls Scholarship (High School Seniors with an interest to continue or begin a career path in global studies, international business, world languages and/or world culture)



This year we are again offering (1) \$1000.00 Scholarship for The AFGLC Dr. Byron P. Palls Scholarship for "High School Seniors" for students with an interest to continue or begin a career path in global studies, international business, world languages and/or world culture. Dr. Palls was actually a member at St. Johns from 1977-2006 and was married at St. Johns. In 2006, he moved to Clearwater and became a member at Holy Trinity. Dr. Palls was the Past President of AFGLC and passed away in 2015. His wife wanted to offer this scholarship in her husband's memory to students at St. Johns again for the third year.

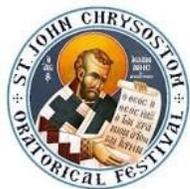
If you are eligible and interested in the aforementioned scholarships, be sure to pick up an application at church (forms will be left at the Baptistery).

For more information contact Kalliope at 813-789-4134 or khalkias@afglc.org.

The deadline for applications is **June 21, 2021**.

St John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival

As we read in *The Messenger* last month, we had two participants in the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival. Peggy Bradshaw was the chairperson of this event, as she has been for many years. Jason Owens (Senior division) and Kaitlin Zelatis (Junior Division) were our participants. Jason made it to the District Level of competition. Kaitlin made it to the Metropolis level, and was the Metropolis runner-up for her division. Their two speeches appear below:



The Significance of Hagia Sophia in the History of Christianity

By Jason Owens

There are many ways to describe what makes us Greek Orthodox. Apart from our core values and beliefs, as explained in the Bible and by our Church, what defines us is also the places in which we worship. It is widely understood, throughout all religions, that one should not practice their faith in an ordinary space. In Judaism, there are synagogues, in Buddhism, there are temples, in Islam, there are mosques, and in Greek Orthodoxy, there are churches for people to worship in. Therefore, it becomes clear that just as we value our holy sites, people of other religions naturally do the same with theirs. While this principle may seem straightforward, the world isn't simple and thus conflicts arise.

Take the recent developments with the Hagia Sophia in Turkey for example. While this phenomenal building was intended to be a church when it was built in 537, it eventually became a mosque before being converted to a museum. Less than a year ago, in July of 2020, the Turkish government declared that the Hagia Sophia would become a mosque once more. Undoubtedly, this is part of Turkish President Erdogan's efforts to undermine the Greek Orthodox people for political gain. To start, this decision cripples the compromise between Christians and Muslims, as both were able to treasure this astounding construction as a museum. Moreover, such a policy contradicts the Turkish government's officially secular stance. There are other explanations as well, such as that Erdogan did this to bolster nationalism, and therefore support, in a country where the vast majority of the population is Muslim or that this is part of a bigger attempt to expand Turkey's special economic zone in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea by unfairly reducing Greece's.

However, speculation is not what matters when Turkish intentions are as clear as they are. What matters is that Greek Orthodox Christians have a right to be frustrated that the Hagia Sophia is being used as a political tool, since this building is essential to the Greek Orthodox identity. Therefore, the question becomes what the correct and Christian response to this provocation should be. Thankfully, we can find solace not only in that the teachings of the Bible provide us with the answer, but in that

the Greek government's foreign policy already reflects it. You see, the Bible is very clear when it comes to conflict resolution. For instance, Hebrews 12:14 tells us that we should "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and ... be holy," Ephesians 4:26 advises us to "be angry but do not sin," James 1:19 instructs that "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry," and countless other verses and passages reiterate the same concept: we should try our best not to escalate conflict. As it turns out, this is precisely the policy that Greece, which is the birthplace of Greek Orthodoxy after all, has pursued for the last several decades. Back in 1992, a Greek pilot was killed in the Northern Aegean after Turkish F-16s violated Greek airspace. Yet, the Greeks embraced peace, even to the extent of supporting Turkish European Union aspirations just a few years later. Then again, in 2006, a Turkish reconnaissance mission over Greek territory resulted in the death of another Greek pilot, yet Greek Orthodox values prevailed and Greece embraced peace once more by opting not to confront Turkey. Even more recently, there have been numerous reports of Turkish jets violating Greek airspace, with more than 50 violations in a SINGLE day during the first few months of 2020. Still, despite all of this, the Greeks have attempted to preserve peace to this day, and the reason is not weakness or fear. In fact, the Greek military could just as easily do the same to Turkey and not expect serious consequences from the international community. Simply put, what separates the Greek government from the Turkish government is moral superiority, as Greece's sensible and considerate policies stem from the Christian teachings that are embedded deep within Greek society, whereas it is apparent that Turkey's current regime has no regard for promoting peace.

Thus, I urge all Greek Orthodox Christians not to increase tensions in light of the unwarranted attacks against them. The Hagia Sophia being converted to a mosque is one of many insults, but the situation is out of our control. All we can do as Christians is hope that we receive judgment accordingly and are recognized for our efforts to follow the words of God, so it is my sincere hope that the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque is not a cause for heresy. Remember that there are expectations Orthodox Christians should strive to meet.

Jason Owens is the son of Charles & Mary Owens and is in the 11th grade.



St John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival continued...

The Prodigal Son

By Kaitlin Zelatis



I'm sorry. I'm sooooo sorry.

How many times do we hear people say these words? It's gotten to a point where they have almost become cliché. People today just say I'm sorry and don't really expect a response, I mean it is said so much that it has kind of lost its meaning. But when you say "Father I've sinned please forgive me" you are asking for a response.

"The Prodigal Son" is a parable said by Jesus in Luke 15. Most people know the parable of "The Prodigal Son". Even if you aren't familiar with this parable it has made an appearance in some of Hollywood's most famous movies. Including The Chronicles of Narnia, Batman, Iron Man, and even Star Wars. In the parable the youngest son of a wealthy man asks his father for his portion of the inheritance and then leaves and wastes it on useless junk. When he runs out of money he is forced to start feeding pigs and gets to such a low point that he wishes he could eat the pig slop. After he realized what he had done he went back to his father and begged to become a hired servant. His father, however, did not comply. Instead he ordered for someone to put a robe, a ring, and sandals on him and to kill a fattened calf so that they could celebrate. The oldest son becomes jealous, refuses to join the party, and then basically accuses his father of favoring his youngest son. The father however doesn't ridicule him for this but says that he appreciates his son but that his brother was lost and now has been found.

People look at this parable in a lot of different ways. Some people say it's about greed, others jealousy, but the most important lesson Jesus was trying to teach through this parable is how to ask for forgiveness. We sin all the time. We say things we shouldn't, do things we shouldn't and we know what we are doing is wrong but we do it anyway. And when we mess up we always just say I'm sorry and that's that. But the son didn't just say to his father "hey I'm sorry for wasting half your fortune" and then just walk away. He says "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son". He did not just admit his faults to his father but also to God. He said that he is no longer worthy of forgiveness but is asking for a way to earn it. Jesus is trying to tell us that in order to receive forgiveness you must first realize your wrong doings and then ask for it. In the parable the father is symbolizing God's love for us and his everlasting compassion. It teaches us that we could waste half of a fortune but if we seek his forgiveness it will be given. Jesus is telling us that he knows that we aren't perfect, but he is giving us the perfect tem-

plate to ask for his forgiveness. In Luke chapter 15 verse 7 Jesus says that "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance".

It seems to me that today's society is a constant battle and one party never stops to think about how their actions could affect the other. We scream and we fight and when it is all over we never stop and ask ourselves if maybe we have wronged someone. In the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom I can count at least five times where we seek God's forgiveness. Even Father asks for forgiveness before he receives communion, going as far as saying "I believe, Lord, and confess, that You are truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, who did come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first". Part of living is making mistakes and when we seek forgiveness for those mistakes we strengthen our bonds with others and with God. We say "I know that I've wronged you but I'm seeking your forgiveness because you matter to me". Jesus came and died for us because we matter to him, and he is telling us that if he is willing to die to forgive our sins than we should be able to ask for forgiveness and to forgive the sins of others.

Kaitlin Zelatis is the daughter of John and Denise Zelatis, and is in 9th grade.



CONGRATULATIONS to Kaitlyn Zelatis for placing 1st in the District St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Competition. She moved on to the Metropolitan Division and placed 2nd. Kaitlyn, you did an amazing job!!!

June/July 2021 Sunday School Update

Christos Anesti! Christ is Risen!



On behalf of our Sunday School Staff we would like to wish everyone a wonderful summer vacation. It has been a trying year and we look forward to a new Sunday School year starting on AUGUST 12th.

With great excitement, we are already starting to plan for a "NORMAL" Sunday School next year. We will let you know when registration will take place. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TEACH OR ASSIST IN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM and/or if you have any suggestions on how we can improve our Sunday School Program, please e-mail Vickie Peckham at vickiepeckham@gmail.com or call her at 813-758-3102.

Our last day of Sunday School was on May 23rd. Our topics for May

were St. Thomas, The Three Maidens, Saints of the Orthodox Church, and The Paralytic. We would like to thank Jenivieve Elly for creating our virtual lessons every week for over a year. Let's pray that we will never have to do that again. Thank you to our teachers who taught in person, wearing a mask, every week.

They are:

Alexis Scarfogliero and Denise Panos - Toddler 2's, Pre K3 and Pre K4
Debbie Nicklow and her daughters, Emily and Maria - Kindergarten through 2nd grade
Vickie Peckham - 3rd grade - 6th grade

We pray that you had a blessed Holy Week and a spiritually uplifting Pascha experience. Thank you to Zackie Ameres, who organized our Good Friday Retreat, and all of the people who helped to make it a huge success. Over 30 students participated and it was great to see them guiding the Epitaphio while it was going over their heads during the Apokathelosis Service - The Unnailing/Burial of Christ. A special thank you to the Nenos family for sharing the Crown of Thorns that they got from Jerusalem during their travels to the Holy Land.

We would like to thank our Altar Boys and our Maidens for the Bridegroom Services. The following young ladies did a fabulous job. They are... Phoebe Sengsouvana, Maggie Trakas, Sophia Calamunci, Penelope Calamunci, Julie Konstas, Aspasia Panos, Zoe Kataras, Katerina Kataras, and Carlee Calamunci.

We would also like to thank our Myrrh Bearers for the Lamentation Service. They are... Emily Nicklow, Maria Nicklow, Maria Palios, Elisa Mitsas, Gaetana Koutouzi, Calliope Kafantaris, and Katerina Kataras. A special thank you goes out to Amy Kafantaris for updating the flowers on the girls candles and baskets.



Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 3000 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 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!**

Community Outreach

Saturday, June 19 & July 17

We Want You to Serve with Us!

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

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

Place: First Presbyterian Church @ 412 Zack Street East, downtown Tampa. The entrance for volunteers is on the Polk Street side of building.

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

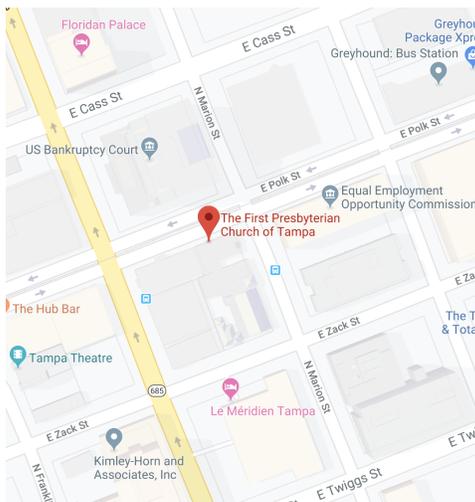
Volunteer Check-In Process:

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

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



Scan with your
Smartphone to
Sign-Up Today



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



All food items offered are accepted. Thank you for supporting those who need it the most. Please contact our new volunteer, Sheila Vukmer, for any questions (412-719-1005).

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

MEETING DATE AND TIME:

We will be going out for dinner on Friday instead of the 1st Thursday of the month.

DATE: Friday June 4th at 5:30 PM

LOCATION: Epiphany City AHEPA House of Tarpon Springs

20 W Tarpon Avenue, Tarpon Springs, FL

(Just west of N Pinellas Ave)

Dinner is \$12.00

We welcome people of all ages to join us as a member or a friend of YAH. Please RSVP.

We want to thank our YAH members for attending our May Saturday IN-PERSON Church Liturgy and YAH meetings

We had over 17 people in attendance on May 8th

We followed the Hillsborough County's socially distance and mask wearing directives.

We continue to reach out to those who are homebound during the pandemic as part of our Church's Core Values: **LOVE, COMMUNITY & SERVICE**

Dora Morgan reported the total number of people contacted:

	Mar	April	June
Phoned	15	27	20
Left Messages	8	5	1
Visited In-Person	1	4	1
Sent Cards	2	1	4
Left Text Messages	3	3	1

Thank you to Mary Nenos and her helpers for arranging the coffee and snacks.

OUR COMING EVENTS

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.

Greek Orthodox Monasteries of Ocala

Future holiday specialty Food shopping in Tarpon Springs trips every year.

PASSED ACTIVITIES

We traveled to Tarpon Springs to St Michael Shrine, lunch and Easter Specialty Food Shopping on April 22nd

We attended **Pre-Sanctified Liturgy** on April 7th as a group.

We visited Tarpon Springs for our **Easter Specialty Food Shopping** at Greek Boys on April 22.

We held **socially distant IN PERSON and Zoom** meeting in the Kourmolis Center

May 8th 2021, April 3rd 2020, Mar. 6th 2021, Dec. 5th 2020, Nov. 7th 2020

Our discussions were on the **CHURCHES THAT TOUCHED OUR LIVES** were on.

Feb 6th, Jan. 9th, Aug. 5th, Sept. 3rd & Oct 1st.

July 2nd, 2020 – Revisited 60 years ago in the years 1960 to 1969

March 5th, 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

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

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

Θαλασσαιμία/Cooley's Anemia

ST JOHN GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH and AHEPA's Tampa Chapter #12

Cooley's anemia or **Θαλασσαιμία/Thalassemia** is an inherited blood disorder in which the body makes an abnormal form of hemoglobin. Hemoglobin is the protein molecule in red blood cells that carries oxygen. The disorder results in excessive destruction of red blood cells, which leads to anemia.

It mostly **affects people of Mediterranean descent**. People with severe thalassemia depend on blood transfusions to give them working red blood cells. A type of bone marrow transplant has been used to try to cure thalassemia, but it's hard to find compatible donors. And even if a donor can be found, there's still a risk that the patient's body will reject the transplant.

In 1990, after the son of one of our AHEPA chapter members was in need of this surgery, it quickly became obvious that an even greater need existed, thus the AHEPA Bone Marrow Donor Registry was incorporated.

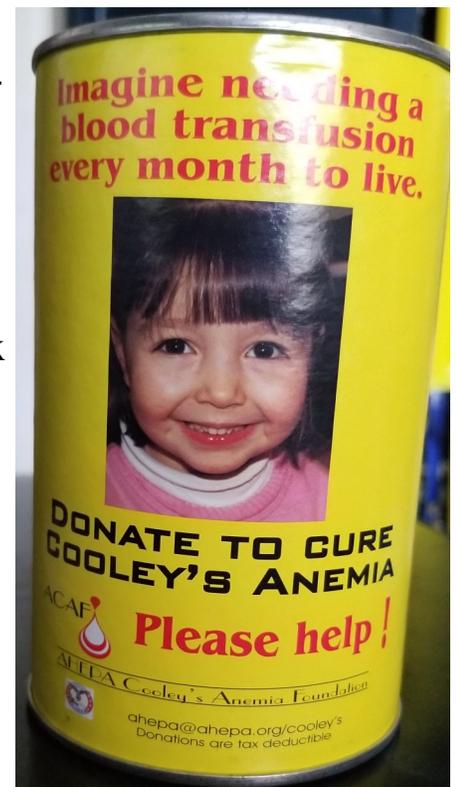
Today, there have been incredible breakthroughs in gene editing that may allow for children to live Thalassemia-free!

AHEPA Bone Marrow Registry

The mission of the Ahepa Marrow Donor Registry is to add persons of Mediterranean descent into our database of prospective donors. The best chance for a leukemia patient is from a family member, Secondly, from relatives, and then from their ethnic group.

The chances of finding an unrelated (allogeneic) match are **20,000 to 1**. We must add to our database so that any **Greek** patient has a realistic chance of finding a match.

Some **35,000 children and adults** with life-threatening diseases could have benefited from a **marrow, blood stem cell or cord blood transplant**. Some found a donor within their families, but **70 percent** were put in the unthinkable position of desperately searching among strangers for a match.



Continued...

How can you help?

Get tested

- 1) **Educate others.** Understand the need that exists to provide financial support for research and to enhance the number of prospective marrow donors of Greek descent.
- 2) **Register** with the AHEPA Bone Marrow Registry to be a possible donor
 - A) **AHEPA Marrow Donor Registry** – There was more than \$180,000 a year in expenses to test prospective marrow donors around the country. Each person is tested at a cost of \$50 to the AHEPA Marrow Donor Registry.
 - B) **Get tested.** It's not enough to spread the word. We also must test ourselves as potential marrow donors. Anyone of us might hold the cure for cancer—not in the form of a vaccine or pill, but in the blood-forming cells inside our bodies. A simple mouth swab is all it takes to find out

3) Make Donations

- A) Please make checks payable to **AHEPA Cooley's Anemia Foundation** with "**Cooley's Anemia**" in the "Note" section of the check.
- B) Send your check or Credit Card Information to Tom Georgas
506 Lantern Circle, Tampa, FL 33617 or call 0 (813) 985-0236
- C) May 2021 is Cooley's Anemia Month.

(Donations are Tax Exempt under IRA Section 170 (c) (4))

Since April 2006, AHEPA has added **3,000 donors** to the Registry. And we're already doing good things. More than **4,000 patients** around the world have searched our database since then, and three of our donors have been asked to "be at the ready" for a donation (cancer patients have to be "healthy" enough to receive the transplant).

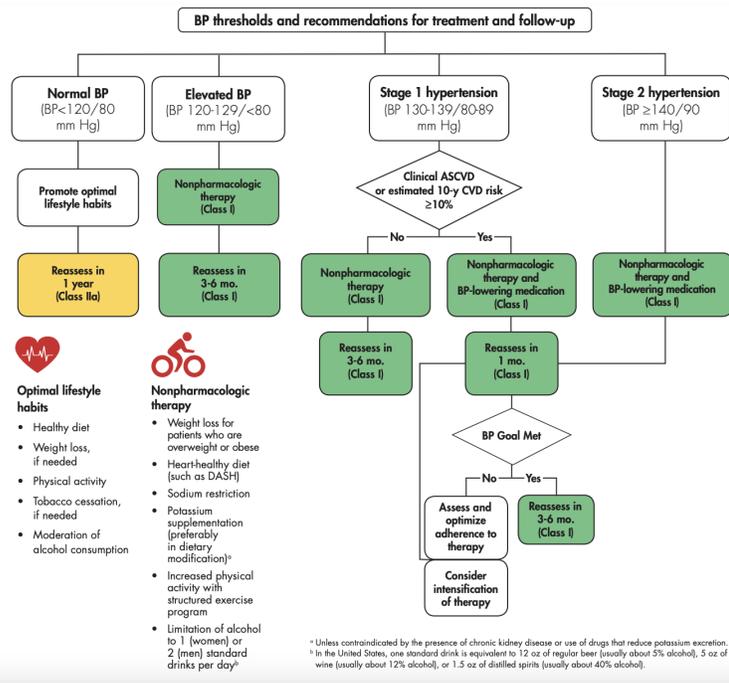
AHEPA has partnered with Team Be The Match as a way to more easily raise funds for specific children in need of bone marrow matches. <http://www.ahepamarrow.org/>

<https://ahepa.org/programs/publichealth/>

Stroke Risk Factors You Can Control, Treat and Improve

From St. John's Nursing Ministry & Faith Community Nursing

Stroke is dangerous and deadly, but you can control and treat several risk factors for it.



High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a leading cause of stroke and the most significant controllable risk factor.

Smoking

The nicotine and carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke damage the cardiovascular system and pave the way for a stroke. The use of birth control pills combined with cigarette smoking can greatly increase the risk of stroke. More information for quitting smoking - <https://www.stroke.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/quit-smoking-tobacco>

Diabetes

If you have Type 1 or 2 diabetes, control your blood sugar. Diabetes mellitus is an independent risk factor for stroke. Many people with diabetes also have high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and are overweight — increasing their risk even more. While diabetes is treatable, the presence of the disease still increases your risk of stroke.

Diet

Diets high in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol can raise blood cholesterol levels. Those high in sodium (salt) can increase blood pressure. And those with high calories can lead to obesity. But a diet containing five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day may reduce the risk of stroke.

Diabetes afflicts one-quarter of Americans 65 and older. An estimated 68% of these patients will die of heart disease, and 16% will die of stroke. Eating patterns similar to the Mediterranean diet and the blood pressure-lowering DASH may help with Type 2 diabetes ward

off heart attacks, strokes and related problems.

Physical Inactivity

Physical inactivity can increase your risk of stroke, heart disease, overweight/obesity, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and diabetes. Aim for being active at least 150 minutes a week, but if you don't want to sweat the numbers, just move more and sit less.

Obesity

Excess body weight and obesity are linked with an increased risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Losing as little as 5 to 10 pounds can make a significant difference in your risks. If weight control has been a lifelong challenge, start by taking small steps today to manage your weight and lower risks.

High Blood Cholesterol

Large amounts of cholesterol in the blood can build up and cause blood clots — leading to a stroke. Also, it appears that low HDL ("good") cholesterol is a risk factor for stroke in men, but more data is needed to verify if this is true for women as well.

Carotid Artery Disease

The carotid arteries in your neck supply blood to your brain. A carotid artery narrowed by fatty deposits from atherosclerosis, plaque buildup in the arteries, may become blocked by a blood clot, causing a stroke.

Peripheral Artery Disease

Peripheral artery disease, PAD, is the narrowing of blood vessels carrying blood to leg and arm muscles. It's caused by fatty buildup of plaque in artery walls. People with PAD have a higher risk of carotid artery disease, which raises their risk of stroke.

Atrial Fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation, Afib, a heart rhythm disorder may cause clots that can travel to the brain and cause a stroke. If you have Afib, know your stroke risks and get treatment to keep your risks low. Also, sleep apnea can be linked to Afib and is associated with increased stroke risks.

Other Heart Disease

People who have coronary heart disease or heart failure are at a higher risk of stroke than people who have healthy hearts. Also, dilated cardiomyopathy, heart valve disease and some congenital heart defects can also increase the risk of stroke. Check with your health care provider to address these related conditions.

Heart Disease and Stroke

The link between heart disease and stroke is significant. Several types of heart disease are risk factors for stroke. Likewise, stroke is a risk factor for coronary heart disease. People with coronary heart disease, angina or who have had a heart attack due to atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) have more than twice the risk of stroke.

For more information check out www.stroke.org or talk to your healthcare provider.

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 or Text

Messages 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

Fr. John
678-637-4425

Charlie
813-843-8471

Alex
262-370-0586



Happy Birthday!

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Nicholas Carter - June 1 | Kyra Christopher - June 16 | Say Sengsouvanha - June 30 | Simon Anderson - July 17 |
| John Carter - June 2 | Elphida Olsen - June 17 | Gryphon Borgeas-Beach - July 3 | Lauren Falliereas - July 17 |
| Thomas Katsifis - June 3 | Lex Capitano - June 18 | Maddox Gregory - July 4 | Julia Pierrousakos - July 17 |
| Steven Lenardos - June 3 | Georgia Diamantakes - June 19 | Rick Garcia - July 5 | Elizabeth Serbanos - July 18 |
| Alexa Westmoreland - June 3 | Gregory Koutroumanis - June 19 | John Palios - July 5 | Theresa Heilman - July 19 |
| Sophia DeJesus - June 4 | Melissa Lenardos - June 19 | Harry G. Spirides - July 5 | Elizabeth Xanthopoulos - July 19 |
| Sevi Frantsvog - June 4 | Luca Portier - June 19 | Eleni Markoutsas - July 6 | Alexander Zaharis - July 19 |
| Emmerson Hampton - June 4 | Christina Apockotos - June 20 | Dean Mitseas - July 6 | Jeanie Nenos - July 20 |
| Thalia Letobarone - June 4 | Remy Boomgarden - June 20 | Kristin Nicolaou - July 6 | Margaret Xanthopoulos - July 20 |
| Byron Nenos Jr. - June 4 | Jax Melton - June 20 | Madeline Schad - July 8 | Jenny Sotiropoulos - July 21 |
| Joe Xanthopoulos - June 4 | Jaxon Nicolaou - June 20 | Sheila Vukmer - July 8 | Raissa Jewtushenko - July 22 |
| Zachary Zaharis - June 4 | Mary Guirguis - June 21 | Gennaro Scarfogliero - July 9 | Evangelia Karounos - July 22 |
| Anastasia Stonestreet - June 5 | Gianni Bavaro - June 22 | Dr. Nicholas Fallieras - July 10 | Sarah Sengsouvanha - July 22 |
| Leia Findlay - June 7 | Denise Panos - June 23 | William Jernigan - July 10 | Xavier Anderson - July 23 |
| Caroline Kickish - June 7 | George Xenick - June 23 | Milia Koumi - July 10 | Niko Kyros - July 23 |
| Avelyn Krajacic - June 7 | Debra Gavalas - June 24 | Nathaniel Molina - July 10 | Marilyn Sandborn - July 23 |
| Julianna Syros - June 7 | Isabel Berdos - June 25 | Eldina Pierrousakos - July 10 | Roger Zessis - July 23 |
| Vasiliki Copulos - June 8 | Mary Ann Christodoulou - June 25 | John Tsiabasis - July 10 | Gabrielle Malatin - July 24 |
| Katherine Hakim - June 8 | Fady Hakim - June 25 | Thomas Cardy - July 11 | Christopher Scarfogliero - July 25 |
| Jacqueline Ioannidis - June 8 | James Magos - June 25 | Andrew Mellen - July 11 | Anthony Catrone - July 26 |
| Stella Walling - June 8 | Sandra Naum - June 25 | Alexandra Peters - July 11 | Maria Cauthorn - July 29 |
| Michael Malatin - June 9 | John Katsifis - June 26 | Nicholas Apostoleres - July 13 | Jackson James - July 29 |
| Alyssa Milonas - June 9 | Selinda Smith - June 26 | Frances Bedan - July 13 | Peter Konstas - July 29 |
| Melinda Mueller - June 9 | Deme Capitano - June 27 | Nicole Leontsinis - July 13 | Michelle Clipp - July 30 |
| Zoe Katzaras - June 11 | Clipper Salmon - June 27 | Dimitri Ameres - July 14 | Dean Hampers - July 30 |
| Stephanie Melton Stacy - June 11 | Sophia Blankenbaker - June 29 | George T. Apostolos - July 14 | Nikolas Lindiakos - July 30 |
| Penelope Kladis - June 13 | Robert Passavanti - June 29 | Emma Nicolaou - July 14 | Deanna Milonas - July 30 |
| Leonidas Sengsouvanha - June 13 | Adriana Catrone - June 30 | Ellen Skijus - July 14 | Andrea Stingulescu - July 30 |
| Zoe Sengsouvanha - June 13 | Valerie Hampers - June 30 | Cara Findlay - July 15 | Margaret Comminos - July 31 |
| Ashley Makris - June 14 | Michael James - June 30 | Dora Koudouna - July 15 | |
| Alexandra Stroud - June 15 | John Krinos - June 30 | Dimitrios Langas - July 15 | |
| George Zabetakis - June 15 | Carmen Pliego - June 30 | Imad Hanhan - July 16 | |

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
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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



BayCare
Behavioral Health

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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.

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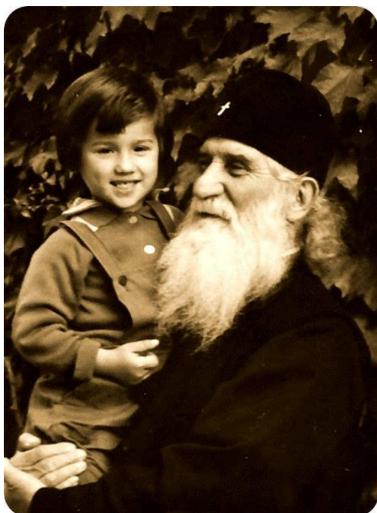
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“If Christ is not risen from the dead, then why believe in Him? To be honest, I would never have believed in Him had He not risen and not, therefore, vanquished death. Our greatest enemy was killed, and we were given immortality. Without this, our world is a noisy display of revolting stupidity and despair. For neither in Heaven nor under Heaven is their greater stupidity than this world without resurrection. And there is not a greater despair than this life without immortality. There is no being in this world more miserable than a man who does not believe in the resurrection of the dead. It would have better for such a man never to have been born.”



(St. Justin Popovic of Serbia)

Balloons

A professor gave a balloon to every student, who had to inflate it, write their name on it and throw it in the hallway. The professor then mixed all the balloons. The students were then given 5 minutes to find their own balloon. Despite a hectic search, no one found their balloon.

At that point, the professor told the students to take the first balloon that they found and hand it to the person whose name was written on it. Within 5 minutes, everyone had their own balloon.

The professor said to the students: "These balloons are like happiness. We will never find it if everyone is looking for their own. But if we care about other people's happiness, we'll find ours too."



GOD vs SATAN

God

Stills you,
Reassures you,
Leads you,
Encourages you,
Forgives you,
Calms you,
Empowers you,
Comforts you.



Satan

Rushes you,
Frightens you,
Pushes you,
Confuses you,
Condemns you,
Stresses you,
Discourages you,
Worries you.

Value

A father said to his daughter “You have graduated with honors, here is a car I bought many years ago. It is pretty old now. But before I give it to you, take it to the used car lot downtown and tell them I want to sell it and see how much they offer you for it.”

The daughter went to the used car lot, returned to her father and said, “They offered me \$1,000 because the said it looks pretty worn out.”

The father said, now “Take it to the pawn shop.” The daughter went to the pawn shop, returned to her father and said, "The pawn shop offered only \$100 because it is an old car.”

The father asked his daughter to go to a car club now and show them the car. The daughter then took the car to the club, returned and told her father, “Some people in the club offered \$100,000 for it because “it's an iconic car and sought by many collectors.”

Now the father said this to his daughter, “The right place values you the right way,” If you are not valued, do not be angry, it means you are in the wrong place. Those who know your value are those who appreciate you.....Never stay in a place where no one sees your value.

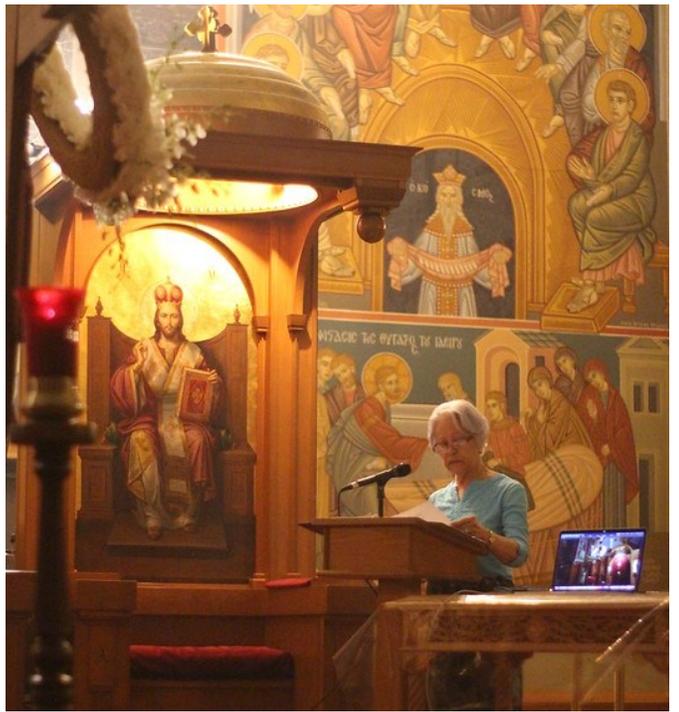


Know your worth!

Pascha 2021

The Great Return, The Great Journey









One-Sentence Summaries of Every Old Testament Book

By Kristi Walker



The Old and New Testaments of the Bible, comprised of 66 books, tell one cohesive story of redemption, climaxing in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Savior!

Genesis

God created the world, humankind rebelled against their Creator (known as “the fall of man”), and God put a plan of redemption (salvation) into motion involving calling out a people for Himself to be a light for the nations (gentiles), and entering into a covenant relationship with them (known as the Abrahamic Covenant).

“God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:4).

Exodus

God rescued his people, Israel, from slavery, gave them commandments (the Mosaic law) to live by, and promised them a land of their own.

“So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8).

Leviticus

God’s people were instructed how to live set apart (holy) lives for Him and worship Him.

“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy’” (Leviticus 19:2).

Numbers

God led His people through the wilderness and remained faithful to His covenant with them even when they strayed.

“God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Numbers 23:19).

Deuteronomy

God continued to communicate His commandments to His people, so that the law would be on their hearts as they entered the promised land.

“Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you” (Deuteronomy 4:1).

Joshua

God fulfilled His covenant by leading His people into the promised land.

“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:7-9).

Judges

God continued His deliverance of His, often rebellious, people by raising up 14 judges.

“Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders” (Judges 2:16).

Ruth

The ultimate Redeemer (Jesus Christ) is foreshadowed through the picture of Boaz, the kinsman redeemer, in the ancestral line of David.

“Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer” (Ruth 4:14).

1 Samuel

God Himself was their King, but that was not enough for the nation of Israel, resulting in them demanding an earthly king like “all the other nations”; which, like the human judges, quickly led to disappointment.

“But when they said, ‘Give us a king to lead us,’ this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king’” (1 Samuel 8:6-7).

2 Samuel

God appointed David to reign as the second king over Israel and entered into a covenant with him (known as the Davidic Covenant), a significant moment in the narrative of the Bible, as Jesus Christ (the King of Kings) would come from the earthly line of King David.

“Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16).

1 Kings

God required the kings of Israel to lead in obedience to His law but the majority of them “did evil in the eyes of the Lord,” encouraging idolatry (the worship of false gods) rather than confronting it, resulting in judgment and the division of the nation of Israel into two kingdoms (Israel and Judah).

“So the Lord said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen’” (1 Kings 11:11-13).

2 Kings

The rebellion of the kings of Israel and Judah resulted in God allowing His people to be taken captive, paved the way for the prophets, and foreshadowed the coming King (Jesus) who would live in complete obedience to the will of God.

“The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam and did not turn away from them until the Lord removed them from his presence, as he had warned through all his servants the prophets. So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria...” (2 Kings 17:22-23).

1 Chronicles

As the Jews returned to the promised land after being exiled, God wanted His people to know historically where they came from and reassure them by reminding them of the unchangeable hope of the Davidic Covenant.

“When your days are over and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever” (1 Chronicles 17:11-14).

2 Chronicles

2 Chronicles focuses on the kings who lived in Jerusalem, specifically on the line of David, highlighting kings who were both faithful and unfaithful to God in hopes that later generations would choose faithfulness to God.

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their

Continued...

sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Ezra

Roughly 50 years after the Israelites return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile, they rebuilt the city, the temple, and their lives, focusing on three key leaders who led the reconstruction.

“What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins deserved and have given us a remnant like this” (Ezra 9:13).

Nehemiah

Nehemiah, an Israelite serving as cupbearer for the king of Persia, heard about the destruction of Jerusalem’s walls and got permission to return and rebuild the walls; meanwhile though, Israel was –spiritually speaking – doing no better than before.

“But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them” (Nehemiah 9:17b).

Esther

100 years after the Babylonian exile, this book focuses on the Jewish people still living in Susa, (the capital of the ancient Persian empire), and though the book never mentions God directly, it is all about God saving His people using a beautiful young Jewish woman, and later queen, named Esther.

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

Job

The only Old Testament book not about the Israelites, this book teaches us about God through the story of a righteous man named Job, whom God allowed to be afflicted by Satan to show that this world is suffering from the effects of “the fall,” God is still in control, His eyes are on every detail of the entire universe, and He can be trusted even when life hurts.

“I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth” (Job 19:25).

Psalms

Psalms is a collection of 150 Hebrew poems, songs and prayers, over 70 of which are written by King David, compiled as a prayer book for God’s people, but also used as a songbook by the choirs that sang in the temple following Israel’s return from exile in Babylon.

“Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds” (Psalm 72:18).

Proverbs

A handbook full of wisdom, linked to King Solomon (known as the wisest man who ever lived), to help God’s people learn to fear the Lord and live a moral life.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).



Ecclesiastes

Another wisdom book, Ecclesiastes is about a teacher seeking to impart the fleeting, unpredictable nature of life and the key to living it well: which is to fear God who will one day reveal the purpose of this life on earth.

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Song of Songs

A collection of Hebrew love poems, expressing the intensity of sexual love expressed by constant seeking and finding, points the reader to the wonder of knowing fully and being fully known, possibly even pointing to God’s love.

“Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave” (Song of Songs 8:6).

Isaiah

The first of the major prophets, Isaiah, a prophet to Judah during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, approximately 150 years before Judah’s exile into Babylon, warned the nation of the consequences of their rebellion and idolatry, but also declared and foretold the grace of God in prophecies about the coming Messiah.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Jeremiah

The second of the major prophets, Jeremiah, continued on the heels of Isaiah’s message, calling the nation to repent and return to God up to and beyond the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 B.C.

“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from captivity...’” (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

Lamentations

Lamentations is thought to also be written by Jeremiah, “the weeping prophet,” and this book lives up to its English name in that it’s entirely laments written about the tragedy of the Babylonian capture and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple; though through it all God was faithful.

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Ezekiel

Ezekiel, whose message focused on the glory of the Lord and ended in a promise of future restoration for Israel, was both a prophet and a priest, a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel, and one of 10,000 Jews taken captive by the Babylonians.

“Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind” (Ezekiel 39:28).

Continued...



Daniel

Daniel, a prophet throughout the 70 years of Babylonian captivity, was exiled to Babylon as a teenager and indoctrinated in the ways of the Babylonians, but God was with Daniel and used him and his faith to encourage the exiled Jews.

“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him” (Daniel 2:20-22).

Hosea

Hosea, the first of the twelve minor prophets, is well known for being instructed by the Lord to marry an unfaithful woman to show, by example, the faithfulness of the Lord in spite of the unfaithfulness of His people.

“When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, ‘Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord’” (Hosea 1:2).

Joel

Like Hosea, Joel used something physical, in this case a drought and a plague of locusts, to depict God’s judgement in “the day of the Lord.”

“Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity” (Joel 2:13).

Amos

During a time of national security, prosperity and peace under the reign of Jeroboam II, God used Amos to deliver a warning about the neglect of sincere worship and justice, promising God’s silence if the people failed to listen to the prophets.

“The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign Lord, ‘when I will send a famine through the land – not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord’” (Amos 8:11).

Obadiah

The prophet Obadiah, in the shortest book in the Old Testament (only 21 verses), prophesies judgment for and deliverance from Israel’s enemies, and promises that Israel will one day fully possess its inheritance and the true King will reign on earth.

“But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance” (Obadiah 1:17).

Jonah

This famous book and infamous prophet, who gets swallowed by a great fish, teach us great things about our patient and compassionate God, who cares deeply about even rebellious and wicked people.

“I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (Jonah 4:2b).

Micah

Micah prophesied punishment for Judah, for flaunting its riches and oppressing the poor, and for the false prophets, who led God’s people astray, all the while prophesying that a future Messiah and deliverer would come (from the town of Bethlehem) to prove His faithfulness to His people.

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times” (Micah 5:2).

Nahum

Approximately 125 years after Nineveh repented following Jonah’s warning, Nahum preached that God would again judge Nineveh, “the city of blood,” if they didn’t repent; though God is patient and merciful, He is also jealous and just.

“The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet” (Nahum 1:3).

Habakkuk

Habakkuk questioned the Lord regarding His choice to allow Judah, though rebellious and unfaithful, to be judged by the Babylonians; though in spite of his confusion regarding God’s decisions, Habakkuk still trusted the Lord.

“Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy” (Habakkuk 3:2).

Zephaniah

Zephaniah repeated the prophetic promise of judgment and destruction if Judah would not repent and turn back to the Lord, but also foretold of a remnant that would see the deliverance of God.

“But I will leave within you the meek and humble. The remnant of Israel will trust in the name of the Lord” (Zephaniah 3:12).

Haggai

The Babylonians had destroyed the temple, and upon Judah’s return from captivity, Haggai stirred God’s people to remember their covenant with the Lord, put Him first, and rebuild His temple.

“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty” (Haggai 2:9).

Zechariah

Haggai and Zechariah prophesied together, and while Haggai motivated God’s people to rebuild the temple, Zechariah, challenged them to *complete the work in view of the coming Messiah*.

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

Malachi

The chronological last book of the Old Testament contains Malachi’s warning against unfaithfulness and spiritual apathy, and a prophetic message regarding the coming Messiah.

“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays” (Malachi 4:2a).



Twelve Signs You're a Positive-Attitude Church Member

By Chuck Lawless

In the past, I've written about negative people in the church (see, e.g., "[11 Characteristics of Church Pessimists](#)" and "[11 More Characteristics](#)"). I've written about them because they're often the loudest people in the church, but I don't want to miss the vast number of positive folks around us. See if your life illustrates these characteristics:

1. **You praise the work of others, even when it's not your idea.** You're a team player. You're quite willing to deflect praise to others.
2. **No matter how bad a church event might be, you always look for some area to affirm.** *You might have to look hard and long—and you don't ignore the negative—but you search for the good.*
3. **Your recollection of most previous pastors of your church begins with the positive.** A ministry may have ended poorly, yet you still choose not to focus there. You're not hung up on the past tense.
4. **When others point out, "We've tried it that way before," you choose to say, "It's a new day."** You don't let yesterday's failure become today's "no."
5. **You seldom use the word "but" when church leaders propose a new idea.** It's not that you don't recognize potential issues; it's simply that you're willing to give things a shot first.
6. **You operate in faith.** You seriously believe all things are possible with God—and you start with genuine God-given hope. Fear doesn't have much room in your life.
7. **You don't blame others for your own struggles and failures.** You know yourself well, and you take responsibility for your actions.
8. **You don't hang out with negative people.** In fact, they drain you of your energy.
9. **You're thankful for everything, including the tough times in life.** The peace of God is evident in your life no matter what you face.
10. **You serve faithfully in your church without jockeying for position or power.** You're a servant leader who doesn't worry about recognition.
11. **You take care of yourself physically and spiritually.** You spend time with God daily and exercise regularly; you don't separate those two arenas of life.
12. **Others really enjoy being around you.** That's because you bring joy into the room. In fact, we need more folks like you in our churches.

Important Relationship Advice

Anonymous

Important things to remember when you are married or in a serious relationship:

Don't ever assume your partner feels loved.

Date nights are a must.

Doesn't matter if you go out, or stay in.

Talking openly about what you want to change in your relationship is important.

Learn each others love language.

We all don't perceive love the same way.

Go to bed mad sometimes.

Don't force a resolution.

Sleeping on it does help.

When you get into a fight, don't just say "I'm sorry". Say what you are sorry for, and how you will react differently next time.

It will get boring sometimes.

Every couple goes through the "boring" stage.

It's normal.

It will fade.

This is the time in your relationship you will have to put the most effort in.

Some days you will have to pull more weight than your partner, and vice versa.

It's important to check in on each other's mental health.

It's okay to go to couples counselling.

It helps.

It doesn't mean you two are ending, or failing.

Talk about money.

Talk about your financial goals.

Let your partner know what you expect from them, and vice versa.

Turn off the phones an hour before bedtime and just talk to each other.

Ask questions like:

"What do you need to see more of from me?"

"How can we understand each other better?"

And most importantly, be kind to each other.

Love each other.

Fight for each other.

Remember, love is never easy, and it's one hell of a ride.

But damn, is it ever beautiful, and worth it.

~ June 2021 ~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 Alex's Book Study 6:30 p.m.	2**	3	4**	5
6 Sunday of the Blind Man Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA 5:00 p.m.	7 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	8 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Leave-Taking of Pascha Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	9 Paraklesis 5:00 p.m. GOYA Open Gym Night	10 Ascension Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	11** Junior Olympics Dinner/Dance	12 Junior Olympics
13 Sunday of the Holy Fathers Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	14 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	15 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Alex's Book Study 6:30 p.m.	16	17	18**	19 Saturday of Souls Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
20 Pentecost Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m. Kneeling Service 11:00 a.m.	21 Bible Study 6:30 p.m. THIS WEEK IS FAST FREE	22	23	24 Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	25	26 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
27 All Saints Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	28** Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	29 Sts. Peter and Paul Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	30** Holy Apostles Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.			

~ July 2021 ~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 Father Stavros leaving for Summer Camp (July 1 to July 10)	2 **	3
4 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	5	6 Alex's Book Study 6:30 p.m.	7 **	8	9 **	10
11 St. Euphemia Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	12	13 Alex's Book Study 6:30 p.m.	14 **	15	16 **	17
18 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	19	20 Alex's Book Study 6:30 p.m.	21 **	22	23 **	24
25 St. Anna Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	26 St. Paraskevi Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	27 Alex's Book Study 6:30 p.m.	28 **	29	30 **	31

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. **Sundays:** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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

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Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero
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Pauline Spencer, Director 813-390-1782
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

Community Outreach

Greg Melton 813-967-2074

Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children

Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534

Dance Groups

H XAPA ΜΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
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Daughters of Penelope

Nicole Leontsinis, President 703-585-7490

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Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Food Pantry

Sheila Vukmer 412-719-1005

GriefShare

Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

Gasparilla Parking

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GOYA

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Hope/Joy

George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813

Junior Olympics

Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

Men's Fellowship

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Parish Nursing Ministry

Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026

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Oratorical Festival

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

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Philoptochos

Jeanie Nenos 813-451-9116

Stewardship

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George Mitseas 813-748-1220

Sunday School

Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102

12 Disciples

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

Usher

Volunteer Needed!

Welcoming Ministry

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Young Adult

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Youth Protection

Volunteer Needed!

The Messenger of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is published on a monthly basis. Publication is the first of each month. Deadline for notices and announcements for The Messenger is the 10th of each month.

“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.