

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

*"Behold I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.
The voice of one crying in the wilderness; Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight." Mark 1:2-3*

January 2022

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

Fr. Stavros' Message

I Want To Be 1-0 Today

I was listening to a sports-talk show where the host was interviewing a football coach whose team needed to win all of its remaining 6 games in order to possibly make the playoffs. When he asked the coach how much pressure he felt because his team had to win six games in a row, he said "we're just going to focus on going 1-0 (for those who won't know sports, this is one win-zero losses) each Sunday for the next six Sundays."

This spawned a thought in my head. 2021 wasn't the best year for me, or for many of us. There were many areas of my life where I did not do a very good job—namely my relationship with God, healthy eating, efficiency, kindness and laughing. Yes, you read that correct, I didn't laugh as much in 2021 as I have in previous years. In fact, I spent a lot of the year sad and frustrated, which was only exacerbated by the pandemic.

In order to find itself needing to win six games to make the playoffs, that means the football team had some losing streaks, and perhaps didn't have a great season. The idea of winning six games in a row is a very tall order. Going 1-0 on a Sunday is not as daunting. Practically any team can do that on any given Sunday. The only way to overcome a losing streak and make the playoffs is for a team to have a 1-0 attitude. Because you can't win all five games on one day. You can only win the game of that day.

Every year for the past several years, I have chosen one



word that guides my year. I can remember one word. Making a long list of New Year's resolutions is a failing proposition for most people. But one word is easy to remember. My word for 2022 is going to be "win." This does not mean my goal is to defeat other people, but rather to "win each day" based on five things I need to improve on. The word "win" is going to shape my motto for 2022, "I want to be 1-0 today." I'm going to base this on five metrics:

1. Did I connect with God today?
2. Was I healthy today?
3. Was I unkind today?
4. Was I efficient today?
5. Did I laugh today?

Let me break down each of these metrics, both to explain how I came up with them, and also to hold myself accountable to them.

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Did I connect with God today?

Prayer, believe it or not, has always been a challenge for me. It's not something that has ever come easily to me. Because we celebrate so many services at St. John, there is a tendency at times to celebrate almost robotically, without really giving thought to what I'm saying. I've actually worshipped and not made a connection. So I want to focus more during the times I worship. Praying with others has become something I really have grown to enjoy over the past many years. I enjoy praying for parishioners who come in for confession, or counseling or just to say hello. The other struggle I have always had is private prayer. My mind wanders many times, and I don't get anything out of it. Also, I've been disappointed that God hasn't answered certain prayers that I have offered, even prayers I have offered for years. And I confess there are times I've taken a break from prayer, perhaps frustrated with God, or frustrated with myself. Putting down "connecting with God" as the first metric by which to grade a day a win or a loss is crucial. I can't really think I got a win on a particular day if I didn't connect with Him.

If connecting with God is something you want to use as a metric, it should include the following aspects:

1. Daily prayer
2. Daily reading of Scripture
3. Weekly worship
4. Frequent receiving of Holy Communion
5. Going to confession at least once during the year



Was I healthy today?

Another area I struggle with is my overall health. I like to eat, unfortunately, all the wrong things. I don't like to exercise. I don't get enough sleep. And I don't drink enough water. I can make vast improvements in all of these areas. I need to cut down on food in general, especially the bad foods. I need to ramp up exercise. I need to sleep more and go to bed at a decent hour. And I need to be conscious of how much water I drink. Focusing on health is definitely part of a winning day, and something I need to do in order to win the day. It's also something I can control.

If staying healthy is something you want to use as a metric, it might include the following aspects:

1. Regular exercise
2. Healthy diet
3. Getting enough sleep
4. Staying hydrated
5. Visiting the doctor for an annual checkup at least once a year
6. Getting a colonoscopy if you are over 50 (many of you are not doing this and you really need to)
7. Taking a day (or part of a day) off each week. Working for a healthy work-family balance



Was I unkind today?

The original metric here was "was I kind today?" And in thinking about this, I decided to change it to the negative, "was I unkind today?" Why? Because on any given day, I am kind to SOMEONE. I am kind in doing SOMETHING. However, I might be kind to one person and unkind to ten and still be able to check the box and say I was kind. I think the more challenging way to some at this is to ask myself, "was I unkind today?" Not only did I show kindness, but did I refrain from showing an unkind side of me. Did I get angry or impatient unnecessarily? Did I use bad language? Was I judgmental? Did I gossip? Was I toxic? Yes, that's a harsh word, but there are a few days each year when I feel "toxic," and on these days, I have to work hard to not implode, but just stay quiet and away from people, in order to avoid being unkind. There are many instances where we make a big deal about something that isn't a big deal, where we say something unkind that really isn't necessary. We criticize something that was a nothing. In 2022, I will try to keep my criticisms to a minimum, and even when I have to correct someone or something, I will do it with kindness.

If striving to not be unkind is something you want to use as a metric, it might include the following aspects:

1. Being patient
2. Not criticizing unnecessarily
3. If there is a need to correct someone, do it gently
4. Do not use bad language
5. Don't be judgmental
6. Avoid gossip

Continued...

Was I efficient today?

We are living at a time when most of us are addicted to our phones, myself included. I read too many articles, spend too much time on social media, and look at the phone promising myself that “it will only be two minutes” and then it easily becomes twenty. Sound familiar? This is cutting into being efficient. I’d probably be in much better shape if I spent the time I waste on exercising. I’d get more sleep too. So, efficiency is part of my winning formula, because it will affect health which is another part of a winning day.

If striving to be efficient is something you want to use as a metric, it might include the following aspects:

1. Limiting time on the phone
2. Limiting time on social media
3. Building some reasonable breaks in the day, but not letting them get out of hand
4. Budgeting time in realistic chunks
5. Pick a task and do it, rather than staring at the list of tasks and getting intimidated

Did I laugh today?



This metric is somewhat silly and somewhat serious. There is nothing wrong with laughing. In fact, laughter is a good thing. One of the fruits of the Spirit is joy, and laughter and joy oftentimes go hand in hand. Laughter is affected by our outlook. Optimistic people laugh more. Laughter happens usually around others. Healthy friendships

and healthy conversation spawn laughter. Laughter also makes us more approachable, it helps strengthen friendships, it helps bring about more encouragement and optimism. So this metric is not just something silly, about laughing. It’s actually somewhat serious. Was I optimistic? Do I have healthy friendships? And do I engage in healthy conversations? All of these affect laughter.

If striving to laugh today is something you want to use as a metric, it might include the following aspects:

1. Have an optimistic outlook
2. Look for opportunities to encourage others
3. Work on being approachable.
4. Have healthy conversations
5. Seek healthy relationships

Now, notice something about all five of these metrics—they are things that I can control. None of them need to be affected by the pandemic, bad economy, inflation or political rancor. None of them need to be affected by even the challenges of work or life. After all, what can stop me from connecting with God, being healthy, being

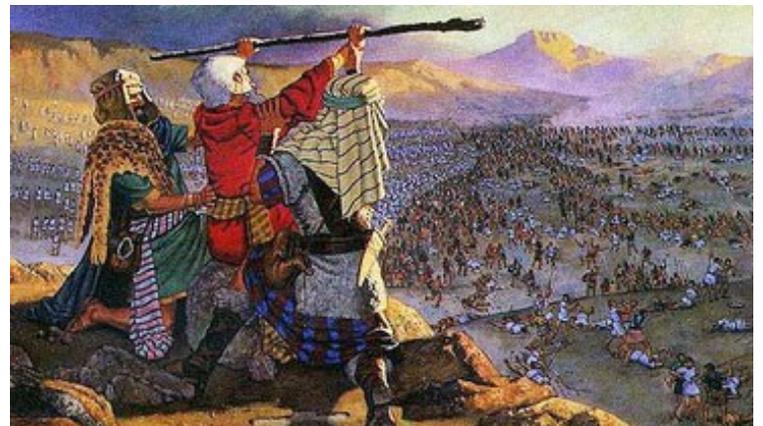
kind, working efficiently or laughing? The answer is **ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!!!** That’s how it is possible, according to these metrics, to get a win on any given day, regardless of what things may be going on around me.

Of course, your top five areas for improvement, your top five metrics for going 1-0 on a given day may be different than mine. I encourage you to think of no more than five areas to improve on next year. The reason for no more than five is that we can remember five or less. We are not likely to remember more than five. I’m even going to make little cards for each day to grade myself. No one will ever see these cards so there will be no need to be less than honest with myself on them. I hope that the satisfaction of marking down a win, or the sadness at marking down a loss will inspire me to go for a win every day. I’m sure I won’t win every day, but I feel confident in breaking the year down into daily units, with the goal of winning most days.

Scriptural Support for being 1-0

It is always a good thing to go to Scripture for Biblical support and encouragement for our spiritual goals. I’ve found five particular passages of Scripture to go to for encouragement on this idea of going 1-0 each day. While the word “win” doesn’t appear often in the Bible, the word “victory” does, so I am going with that. Here is a set of rules for battle, at the time when the Children of Israel were about to enter the land of Canaan, knowing that there would be battles and challenges as they tried to settle into a new life in a new land. These verses provide encouragement for the challenges that the coming year is sure to bring:

*When you go forth to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you, Who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people, and shall say to them, “Hear, O Israel, you draw near this day to battle against your enemies: Let not your heart faint; do not fear, or tremble, or be in dread of them; for the Lord your God is He that goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the **victory**.” Deuteronomy 20: 1-4*



Continued...

The prophets wrote to God's people, assuring them of God's presence even as they were in exile. They promised God's help even when times were tough and promised that a Messiah would come to deliver the people. Isaiah wrote:

*You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off; fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you. I will uphold you with my **victorious** right hand. Isaiah 41:9-10*

These words assure us that God is always with us, that He will strengthen and help us, and uphold us through whatever trials come our way.

And Zephaniah wrote, also several centuries before Christ:

The Lord your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will renew you in His love. Zephaniah 3:17

Saint Paul wrote to the early fledgling Christian church, which immediately ran into opposition, confusion and persecution:

*But thanks be to God, who give us the **victory** through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. I Corinthians 15: 57-58*

And the Apostle and Evangelist John wrote these words that we can apply to our stressful world even today:

*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the **victory** that overcomes the world, our faith. I John 5:4*

We can't control many things in our world. But we can certainly go 1-0 today based on metrics of connecting with God, being healthy, not being unkind, being efficient and being optimistic/laughing. When we seek to strengthen our relationship with God, this overcomes the stresses of the world, and strengthens our faith.



Our Parish Word of the Year—Stewards

Every year, we choose a word for our parish. And for 2022 this word is “stewards.” It is based on I Peter 4: 10: *As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.*

A steward is a temporary caretaker. Life is temporary. Every day of life is temporary—it has an ending. So, each of us has a life to take care of and each day of life is a gift to take care of, as well as a responsibility to take care of. We are stewards of each day, in fact each moment of our lives. Rather than look at life in total, or even the year in total, let us focus on being stewards of each day, to go 1-0 each day.

I love this verse from I Peter 4:10. It reminds us that each of us has received a gift from God, a grace that varies from person to person. I'm a priest who enjoys writing, so I spend my days working in ministry and one of the things I enjoy bringing to ministry is writing. Others are better at reading, others are better at speaking, others are more nurturing. Some work as doctors, others as teachers, others focus on parenting, some do volunteer work. Some are passionate about baking, others about yard work, others about giving encouragement, and others about worship. Each of us has a difference grace from God. Yet, there is no one who doesn't have some of God's varied grace. Therefore, we have to be stewards, good caretakers, of whatever God has given us.

We also need to be good stewards of our parish. The pandemic caused all of us to be away from church for a few months of 2020. It caused many of us to be skittish about coming back. It caused some of us to turn the page and stop coming. It frustrated some of us, why the church did as it did. There are lots of people, lots of people, who were active in our church at the new year of 2020 who are either less involved or not involved in our church anymore. We want you back.

Continued...

We need to come back. Your stewardship is vital to the ministry of our church. And I'm not talking only about your stewardship pledge. That being said, our pledge is important, because through your stewardship, we not only pay for salaries and utilities, we support our ministries and we generously support charities—both local and international, both Orthodoxy and outside of Orthodoxy. In the metric of “did I connect with God” needs to be the thought, not only did I connect with God on a given day, but did I connect with God through worship each Sunday, did I physically connect with God in the sacrament of Holy Communion? This is what “stewards of God’s varied grace” means as connected to our church community.

Every month there will be a short article on our parish word and on an aspect of being a steward in our lives and in the life of our church.

I saw this interesting short article on the internet that is meant particularly for those who are no longer attending our church, or attending in person. It is intended for each of us each time we are tempted to stay away. It reads:

As church attendance numbers fade across the nation and online services become very convenient, it's important to remember why church attendance for you and your family matters so much. You can't serve from your sofa. You can't have community of faith on your sofa. You can't experience the power of a room full of believers worshipping together from your sofa. Christians aren't consumers. We are contributors. We don't watch. We engage. We give. We sacrifice. We encourage. We pray by laying hands on the hurting. We do life together. The church needs you. And you need the church.

Finally, I want to close this message with a quote from Henri Nouwen, a renown Catholic priest and writer, who posed these questions, similar to the five metrics I used in my explanation of being 1-0. Perhaps these are metrics you'd like to consider.

*Did I offer peace today?
 Did I bring a smile to someone's face?
 Did I say words of healing?
 Did I let go of my anger and resentment?
 Did I forgive?
 Did I love?
 These are the real questions.
 ~Henri Nouwen*

Conclusion

My word for 2022 is “win.”
 My motto for 2022 is “I want to be 1-0 today.”
 My mantra for 2022 is:
*Connect with God
 Be healthy
 Do not be unkind
 Be efficient
 Laugh*
 The word for our parish is “stewards.”

Choose a word, a motto, a mantra, or a combination, but choose something to connect with this year, something that is easy to remember. Because what we don't want to do is remain as we are. Life is a journey to salvation, that calls us to continual change, correction, repentance and joy. Suffering is part of life. Shame need not be part of life. The purpose of a word, a motto, a mantra or a combination of these things is to grow in a positive way, to avoid shame and to find joy.

It doesn't matter if 2021 was a winning year or a losing one, if you've gotten a lot of wins or are on a long losing streak. Don't focus on needing to win six games in a row, because there aren't six games to be played today. Focus on winning today. If today was a win, celebrate that. If today ends up being a loss, go for 1-0 tomorrow. If 2021 was a great year, keep striving to pile up wins in 2022. And if 2021 was a bad year, well January provides us a new year. Each Sunday provides a new week. And each day we week up provides us a new chance.

I encourage you to be 1-0 today. This can be based on my five metrics or on five that you choose for yourself. Be 1-0 today. Focus on winning today, this week and this month, and if you do that for 12 months, you will have a winning year. Remember to choose metrics that are not dependent on other people, the pandemic, the economy or the political climate.

I want to go 1-0 today. And I hope you do as well!

Have a happy, healthy, and God-centered New Year 2022!

With love in the Lord,
 +Fr. Stavros



Thou Shalt Know Thy Neighbor & Stranger – What I learned from Our Day of Service With Christ the King & Metropolitan Ministries

By Alex Limberatos

Our Community of St. John the Baptist has had an annual tradition of coming together with our Catholic brothers and sisters at Christ the King Catholic Church for service, worship, and fellowship.

Saturday December 4, we were able to come together again to reinvigorate this partnership after a temporary pause last year due to COVID.

Our churches paired together, beginning our Saturday morning at Metropolitan Ministries at their main campus and at their food warehouse. Both our churches provided twenty-five volunteers, and enjoyed the opportunity of having fellowship and comradery as our volunteers inter-mingled. We then convened at Christ the King's chapel for a short prayer service led by Fr. Len, joined by Fr. Stavros whom also delivered a homily on service and co-operation. Our day concluded with an outdoor barbeque in which we sat and shared a meal together with the parishioners of Christ the King.

Personally, I gained quite a bit from this experience of service and fellowship.

Although I'm aware of our parish's support for Metropolitan Ministries and have assisted with bringing food to their campus, up until December 4 I hadn't known all the facets that this awesome organization provides and orchestrates. Before serving, we were given a tour of the campus and able to see where Metropolitan Ministries houses over 150 families on their campus, providing affordable shelter, meals, and infrastructure to train their residents for finding work. I was amazed seeing how orderly and structured this organization is in their food preparation, and felt so welcomed and integrated by the staff while serving alongside them. Above all, I gained a better perspective of Metropolitan Ministries, not thinking of it in abstract terms as "the people we support who support those in need," but to meet the people who are served and the people regularly serving. To give to an organization that is committed to service is a blessing and a virtue, but to serve alongside that organization is a rich experience that can only be described as "eye-opening". I'd like to invite you who are reading this to consider giving some time to an organization you are passionate about, to give some time and labor to those you support.

The other rich blessing in this partnership was the fellowship we were able to join in with our brothers and sisters at Christ the King. It's easy for us Orthodox to live in a bubble, to categorize others as just that: "other." There's a temptation to view our world in a homogenous or parochial manner and lose sight of what we have in common with our neighbor. While I was helping work/clean Metropolitan Ministry's thrift store, I was able to work alongside another young adult by the name of Will from Christ the King. Within just fifteen minutes of work-

ing and chatting with him I discovered we listened to virtually the same podcasts and both had an interest in hagiography (lives of saints, despite us both coming from a tradition of having different modern saints).

We often gravitate towards "the known" especially when it comes to choosing who we affiliate with. Being able to labor with and break bread with members of a different community and faith tradition was a reminder to me that we often live in a small world by choice, and that we are called to step out of our own safety bubble and network. There's a blessed art to making acquaintances with a stranger, and in being bold and curious towards the other, awesome connections and incredible kinship can be found.

To summarize what this event provided in total is God's calling of us to slow down and consider it a priority to get to know and serve the other. We are each called to become Good Samaritans, to not pass by those who are beaten and in need, but to say, "let me take some time from my own busy life and give it to someone else." The time is a precious gift we can give to our neighbor and to God, and I often find that a conversation and face-to-face interaction goes a long ways that money alone cannot provide. This giving of our time and attention is also a bold thing. It takes forcing ourselves to step out of our comforts and knowns and become curious about the other, to unfold the living human document in front of us whereas it would be easier for us to merely read that book by its cover.

After such a tumultuous year of ideological dividing lines, let us be intentional in 2022 to categorize our neighbor and our fellow stranger not on the superficials, but to be bold and curious to dig deep into one another's stories and see what we share in common. And even if after getting to know our fellow neighbor and stranger we find not much in common, we can rest assure that the most important things shared between us is the image and likeness of our God who created us and saved us.



St. John the Baptist & Christ the King Day of Service, Worship, and Fellowship

Testimonials from Our Volunteers!

My experience volunteering at Metropolitan Ministries on December 4th is one that I will never forget. What a joy it was to serve with my fellow Christians from Christ the King Church and my friends from St. John's. I participated with these wonderful people at this ministry's warehouse, where we filled over 400 BOXES OF HOPE. We worked together in an assembly line fashion and my job was to add 3 cans of green vegetables and 2 cans of yellow vegetables to each box. After handling 2000 cans, I may have dreamt about vegetables that night. Metropolitan Ministries is a staple of Tampa Bay and we should all support their work. Their execution of serving the less fortunate is one that many cities could model.



After serving at Metropolitan Ministries, we all headed to Christ the King Church for prayer and fellowship. We met in their chapel for a beautiful prayer service led by Fr. Len and Fr. Stavros. The parishioners of Christ the King provided all of us with a delicious outdoor luncheon afterwards. It was great to meet new friends from their congregation. One friend that I would like to mention is Dan. I worked next to him on the Boxes of Hope assembly line. We discussed Orthodoxy and Catholicism and he had a true interest in our faith. Of course I invited him to our service and he did participate in our Divine Liturgy the next day. I was honored and proud to share Orthodoxy with him and he truly appreciated the experience. Our faiths are very similar.

-Vickie Peckham



This year at Metropolitan Ministries was the most different, yet very productive. I volunteered at the warehouse and 7 of us loaded and packed almost 500 boxes of Hope, during our 4 hours.

What I appreciated was working with a small group, focused on the task at hand, and functioning as a single unit. If anyone was out of their product the whole process came to a halt and the focus was to help the person in need. Then we could continue as our unit. Our goal was to do as many full boxes for as many people possible.

One man not connected with St John's or CTK worked with us. He said he volunteered every Saturday at the warehouse. He was very quiet and almost invisible, yet very productive whenever something was needed. Kind of like an angel.

-Mary Maas

For me this annual event brings together my two faith communities and allows me to share time with friends from both communities.

-Aristotle Pantelis



Spread something good.

SpreadHope



METROPOLITAN
MINISTRIES

“ The scope of the need is unprecedented. We've been so fortunate to have the communities' support, and I have faith that we'll rally together once again to meet this challenge.

— Tim Marks, Metropolitan Ministries' president & CEO

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 December. 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.

January 2-8

I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

II Timothy 4:7

This is the ultimate epitaph to a life lived for Christ. Fighting a good fight doesn't necessarily mean "winning", however we define winning. It doesn't necessarily mean we have to live a long time, or achieve fame or fortune. It means that we have to fight well, that we have to make a good effort. The effort is what God is looking for. The "race" is your particular course. Not everyone runs the same course of life. Some courses are longer, some shorter, some have more valleys, some more peaks. Fighting the good fight means finishing YOUR race, the particular course that your life takes. And keeping the faith is what is most important. Wherever life takes us, however, difficult the fight is, however unique the race is, the number one goal for each life is to keep the faith, and to grow in faith. If we've fought a good fight, finished the race and kept the faith, that's a good life.

January 9-15

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned.

Matthew 4:16

This verse fulfills a prophecy, now come to fruition in the person of Jesus Christ. Light has dawned on the Jewish nation that had been in exile, who hadn't heard the voice of a prophet in almost 400 years. Now the light of Christ had dawned on them. There was no longer a need to feel like they were sitting in darkness. Many times, in summer, we retreat to shade in order to not be in the sun. On a cold day, however, we leave the shade to come out into the sun in order to feel warm. In many ways, the world is like a cold day. There isn't a lot of warmth, or love, or kindness or caring. Yet, we don't have to remain in the shady world of these things. Christ's light has come into the world. Therefore, we should step out of the shade of cruelty and coldness of heart, and step out into the light and into the sun. Indeed, there is a great light that we are all invited to experience, even though who voluntarily sit in darkness. All are called to the light of Christ.

January 16-22

You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.

Matthew 4:10

This verse occurs during the story of the temptation of Christ in the desert by Satan. Jesus was in the desert for forty days after His baptism, praying, fasting and preparing Himself for His earthly ministry. The devil came to tempt Jesus on three occasions. "On one occasion, the devil took Jesus up a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to Him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him 'be gone Satan! For it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and only Him shall you serve.'" (Matthew 4:7-10) Imagine if the devil did this to you or me, told us we could have all the kingdoms of the world if we just fell down and worshipped him. That would be so tempting. Of course, I'm saying "no way would I fall for that." However, the truth is, I am falling for it, we all are. Each time we become obsessed with what we have, to the point where we serve ourselves and our things more than we serve God, we are falling to this temptation. Indeed, to worship God and serve only Him is a tall task. This is what we are called to do. As we begin the new year, it is a good time to take stock of how we are faring against this temptation—serving God versus serving ourselves. This is an area where can probably all stand to make at least some adjustment.

7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; 9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written,

January 23-29

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 4:17

The first words of Jesus' public ministry were these: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." These words represent a call to action. To repent means to change direction. In Greek, the word repent is "metanoia". This word "metanoia" is also the name given to the liturgical action when a bishop, priest, deacon or even lay person bends at the waist and touches the floor with one or both hands. This "metanoia" or change of direction allows the person to look within themselves. So many times we look at others with judgment. Jesus tells us not to look at ourselves in comparison with others, but for us to turn towards Jesus in our own personal repentance. And why? Because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The Kingdom of heaven is present in the person of Jesus Christ, it is present in the Divine Liturgy as we receive Christ. The Kingdom of heaven is not just a far off reality to be experienced at the end of life. To the contrary, we experience small tastes of the Kingdom in this life. The first step toward encountering God is to turn towards Him, which is what it means to repent.



Continued...

January 30-February 5

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden underfoot by men.

Matthew 5:13

Salt has two qualities when it comes to food. It adds taste and it is also a preservative. When salt is added to food, it adds taste. And in the days of exploration, salt was added to food aboard ships to keep it from going bad on long voyages. Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the earth. And like salt, we are to have the same two qualities. We are to preserve the Christian faith, make sure we safeguard teachings and traditions and not allow them to be corrupted or fundamentally changed at any time in history. We are to use our faith like salt, to add “taste” to the world. Where the world is “bland”, faith is supposed to provide depth, purpose, and hope, things that bring “taste” to the world. If we lose our “saltiness” we cannot do either role well. We cannot bring hope to the world, nor can we preserve what we had if we have squandered it. So add depth to our society, while helping to preserve our faith for generations to come—this is what it means to be the “salt of the earth.”

Welcome Vasili Panagopoulos!

Fr. Stavros, Parish Council,
and members of St. John the Baptist Church,

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

My name is Vasilios Panagopoulos.

I was born in July of 1998 in Brookfield, Wisconsin, and grew up in Hartland, Wisconsin. I spent my childhood and teenage years enjoying the outdoors, playing and watching sports, and spending time with family. At the age of sixteen, I felt called to serve the Church and it's people. On the feast day of Sts. Constantine and Helen in 2017, I was tonsured a Church Reader. After high school and one year of community college, I transferred to Hellenic College and spent the next four years in Boston studying Religious Studies. While at seminary, I met my wife Moriah who was also studying at the school. In January of 2021, my wife and I got married at my home parish in Wisconsin. We were blessed with our first child, Anthony, in late September 2021.



Some small things about me is that I love spending time with my wife and son, as well as my family and friends. I am a huge fan of sports, and of course I root for the Packers, Brewers, and Bucks. I enjoy playing basketball and football, taking long walks, reading books, and listening to podcasts. I also really enjoy talking, and meeting new people therefore I cannot wait to get to know all of you!

My wife and I are so blessed to be welcomed by such an incredible parish family and we look forward to the future!

In Christ,
Vasili

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).

Liturgical Schedule for January 2022

Saturday, January 1 **St. Basil**

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, January 2 **Sunday Before Theophany**

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Tuesday, January 4 **Royal Hours of Theophany**

9:30-11:00 a.m.

Wednesday, January 5 **Eve of Theophany**

Vespertal Liturgy 9:00 a.m.

Blessing of the Waters 10:15 a.m.

Thursday, January 6 **Theophany**

Divine Liturgy at St. Nicholas Cathedral, Tarpon Springs 9:30 a.m.

Great Vespers for St. John the Baptist

6:30 p.m. (at St. John)

(His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will preside)

Friday, January 7 **St. John the Baptist**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.

(His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros will preside)

Sunday, January 9 **Sunday After Theophany**

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, January 16 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, January 17 **St. Anthony**

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

Tuesday, January 18 **St. Athanasios**

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

Thursday, January 20 Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, January 23 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Tuesday, January 25 **St. Gregory the Theologian**

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

Sunday, January 30 **Three Hierarchs**

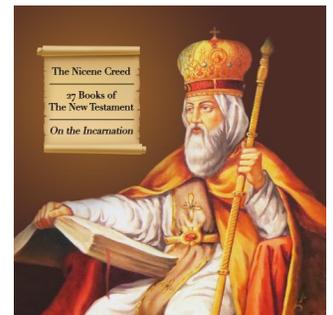
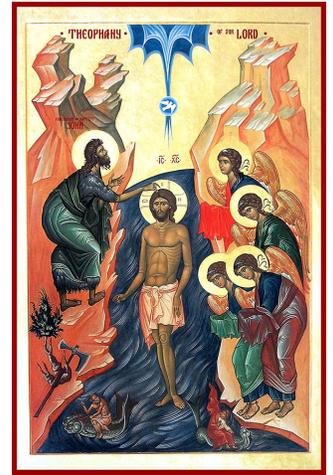
Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, February 2 **Presentation of Christ in the Temple**

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, February 6 **St. Photios**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.



Liturgical Notes for January 2022

Saturday, January 1 - The Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil - New Year's Day Three things are commemorated on the first day of each year. First, the circumcision of Christ, which occurred historically 8 days after His Nativity. He was circumcised according to the rites of the Jewish law and given the name Jesus. Secondly, we commemorate the feast of St. Basil the Great, one of the Great Hierarchs of our church. St. Basil authored one of the Divine Liturgies used in our church, which is celebrated on his feastday. He also helped found monasticism. St. Basil was a friend to the poor, often baking bread with money in it and throwing it through the windows of widows and the poor. Hence the tradition of the Vasilopita, the bread with the coin baked inside, which we cut at the New Year. Finally, we are supposed to pray every day and commemorate all of life's milestones with prayer. So, we open a new year, 2022, with prayer and the Divine Liturgy.

Tuesday, January 4 - Royal Hours of Theophany 9:30 - 11:00 a.m. Like Nativity and Pascha, there is a service of the Royal Hours which is celebrated in anticipation of Theophany. This service consists of prayers, Psalms, hymns and Gospel readings which both foretell and recount this Great Feast of the church year.

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

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

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

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

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

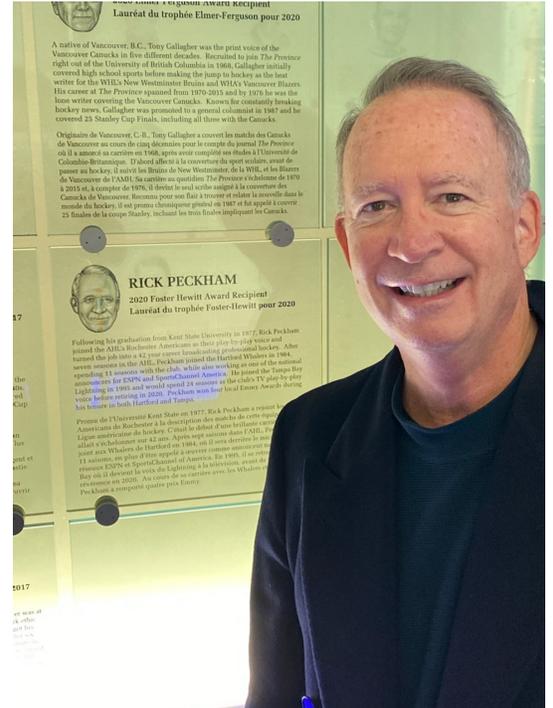
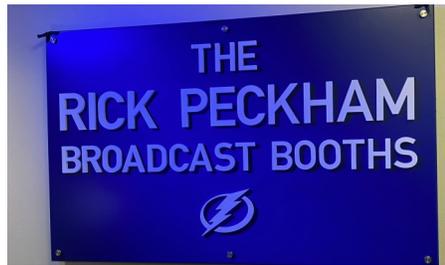
Thursday, January 20 – Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary - We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. We will alternate some in the evening and some in the morning. For January, the Paraklesis will be offered on Thursday evening, January 20, from 6:00-7:00 p.m.

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

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

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

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



Rick Peckham, husband of Vickie Peckham, was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame for his career in broadcasting. The Foster Hewitt Memorial Award was presented to him at the Hockey Hall of Fame ceremony in Toronto on November 15th.

Rick retired from hockey broadcasting at the end of 2020 after a 42 year career announcing play by play for the Tampa Bay Lightning (24), Hartford Whalers (11) and the Rochester Americans (7). The Tampa Bay Lightning honored him at a home game soon after the Induction in Toronto. Vickie and their son Alex were on the ice with him for the ceremony. Their other son Matthew couldn’t be there, but his taped tribute from Las Vegas, which was viewed on the video board, was well received by the crowd. One of the many gifts the Tampa Bay Lightning gave Rick was naming all of the Broadcast Booths in his honor. Congratulations to Rick Peckham and his family.

Parish Registry

Parish Registry Statistics for 2021

Baptism-Thomas Michael Urie, son of Travis and Anna Marie Urie, was baptized on Wednesday, November 24. Dimitra Maria Tsingelis was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Arianna Angeliki Cores, daughter of Aris and Antonia Cores, was baptized on Sunday, November 28. Ekaterini Mangarides was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Natalie Ryan Guzman, daughter of Steven and Alexandria Guzman, was baptized on Sunday, November 28. Maritsa Holtzman was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Chrismation-Michael Ruhl was Chrismated Orthodox on Sunday, December 12. David Stefanescu was the Sponsor. Congratulations!

Wedding-Emon John Anthousis and Alexandra Adele Goucher were married on Saturday, December 4. Paul Guarino was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Weddings	11	8	7	8	9
Baptisms	19	13	20	27	20
Funerals	9	12	10	9	9
Chrismations	4	5	5	6	7

St. John the Baptist Community News

Philoptochos Vasilopita Sunday January 9 – We will again resume our tradition of Vasilopita Sunday for 2022. We will cut the Vasilopita for our various ministries at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, January 9. The Philoptochos will also be offering pieces of Vasilopita as part of coffee hour. Any proceeds from this day will be going to St. Basil's Academy in New York.

Meeting of Ministry Heads, Tuesday, January 11 - On Tuesday, January 11, there will be a meeting of ministry heads via zoom from 6:30-7:30 p.m. Each ministry head is requested to attend and other members of each ministry are invited to attend. If the ministry head cannot attend, please ask someone else in your ministry to attend, so that all ministries are represented.

Sunday School Teachers' Seminar, January 15 - On Saturday, January 15, from 9:00-12:00, there will be a seminar for all Sunday school teachers.

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

Hope & Joy's Boxes of Hope - We had an incredible turnout for our Hope & Joy Christmas Party & Pageant Rehearsal. Our kids put together 28 boxes for Boxes of Hope of items we have been collecting for Metropolitan Ministries, and we were able to donate \$45 in gift cards and \$325 total donation (cash & check) to Metropolitan Ministries. Thank you to George & Zackie Ameres for organizing our drive and our Christmas party, to Vickie Peckham for orchestrating our pageant and its rehearsal, and to all families who contributed to this awesome endeavor!

GriefShare Starting Back Up 2022 - If you are struggling with a loss in your life, GriefShare is open to you to be vulnerable with this hurt. GriefShare is a Christian-based bereavement program open to those inside and outside our community. GriefShare groups meet weekly and has three distinct elements: Video seminar with experts, support group discussion with focus and personal study and reflection. This thirteen session program will begin on January 13 and weekly will be held from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. on Thursdays. If you are interested or have any questions about GriefShare, please contact Donna Hambos at 813-843-8412 or the church office.

The Chosen - On Wednesday, December 1, 130 of us went to the movie theater to see "The Chosen: Christmas Special." What an amazing night! First of all, the movie was great! Second, how inspiring that on a school night, we were able to have 130 people rent out an entire theater for just our group.

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

GOYA Lock-In - GOYA will have a Lock-In on Saturday, January 22, beginning at 5:00 p.m.

Men's Group January 23 - Our men's group will meet on Sunday, January 23, at 5:00 p.m. We meet once a month, go to a restaurant for fellowship and discussion. We finish by 7:30 p.m. All men of our parish are welcome to join. New people are welcome, and bring your non-Orthodox friends, they are welcome also.

Women's Bible Study meets on Tuesdays from 10:00-11:30 a.m. (if a liturgical day falls on a Tuesday it will move to a different day for that week) with both in-person and zoom options. Fr. Stavros leads this group. In January, our meetings will be Tuesday, January 11, Wednesday, January 19, Monday, and Monday, January 24. We are studying St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

Monday Night Bible Study - Will continue meeting at 6:30 pm Monday evenings. Join us in person or via zoom for some very informative, lively, and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical principles in our everyday lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics beginning in January of the New Year. Looking forward to your participation!

Young Adult Dinner on Thursday, January 20 - We will be having a young adult "Paraklesis and Parea" on Thursday, January 20. We will gather for Paraklesis at 6:00 p.m., followed by a dinner/discussion at 7:00 p.m. If you are a young adult, age 18-40, and would like to attend, please email Fr. Stavros so that we have enough food. You can email Father at frstav@gmail.com.

Parish Council Elections-Thank you George Chagaris & Jimmy Konstas for your service in Parish Council as you conclude your terms. Congratulations to Jim Armstrong, Nick Katzaras, Suzanne Pileggi, Marcelle Triantafilou, Gary Ward, & Mike Xenick who were elected to the Parish Council for 2022-2023. They join Euripides Panos, John Zelatis, Joanne Dalaklis, Amin Hanhan, and Marilyn Sandborn to comprise this year's Parish Council. Thank you to our election committee of George Mitseas & Marianne Paras.

Gasparilla Parking Volunteers Needed - After 15 years, John Kokkas is retiring from chairing our Gasparilla Parking fundraiser. For those who do not know, we sell parking spaces in our parking lots for the two Saturdays of the Gasparilla parades— January 22 (children's) and January 29 (adults). John will be there to assist whoever the new chairperson is this year. If you are interested in chairing the Gasparilla Parking fundraiser, please see Fr. Stavros.

Men's Group - November 28



Christmas With The Chosen - December 1



Boxes of Love & Christmas Pageant Rehearsal - December 11



January 2022 Sunday School Update

The Sunday School Staff and children would like to wish everyone in our parish many blessing in the New Year and we hope that you all had a wonderful Christmas with your family. **WHAT DID YOU THINK OF OUR CHRISTMAS PAGEANT THIS YEAR?** It was wonderful to watch this pageant in our church after last year's Zoom production. It was such a joy to see so many smiling faces from our parishioners and children. We are so proud of all of our students who participated. A special thank you to our 7th grade boys who stepped up when we didn't have enough boy actors. We would like to thank all the people involved in this pageant: The teachers, the clergy, the parents, and the amazing cast of The Gifts of Christmas.

Narrators - Kris Christopher and Maggie Trakas
Archangel Gabriel – Aspasia Panos
Mary – Victoria Magos
Joseph – Constantine Ameres
Innkeeper – Zachary George
Angel of the Lord: Phoebe Sengsouvanna
Angel 1: Elaina Edquid
Angel 2: Julie Konstas
King Herod – Vasilios Panos
Bible Scholar – Gabriel Gonzales
Shepherd 1: Leo Sengsouvanna
Shepherd 2: Teddy Kafantaris
King Galthazar – Nathan Moran
King Melchior – Michael Galin
King Gaspar – Prometheus Kourtouz
Donkey - Peter Konstas



A special thank you goes out to Zackie Ameres and all the parents who helped with the Christmas pageant rehearsal and the Hope & Joy/Sunday School Christmas party on December 11th. Our children prepared many **BOXES OF HOPE** and made blankets for the needy. They also created a few crafts and played some games. A good time was had by all. In addition to our Pageant, our Sunday School topics covered in December were **STEWARDSHIP** and **THE NATIVITY**.

January Calendar:

Sunday, January 2nd: No Sunday School Classes (New Year)

Sunday, January 9th: Sunday School Resumes

Topic: Epiphany/St. John

Saturday, January 15th: Sunday School Teacher Retreat 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Sunday, January 16th: Topic: Vasilopita/St. Basil

Prospora: Grades 7-8

Sunday, January 23rd: Youth Sunday - (7th-12th Grade Music at 11:40 a.m)

Topic: Making Moral Choices

Prospora: Grades 2 - 4

Sunday, January 30th: Topic: Saints of the Orthodox Church (The Three Hierarchs)



TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

St. John the Baptist's *Twelve Disciples Project* will continue, vibrant and vigorous during the new year, 2022, as dozens of your fellow Orthodox Christians, Prayer Warriors, set aside a few minutes each day to pray for "mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, protection and pardon and remission of the sins for servants of God" all members of the St. John's congregation.

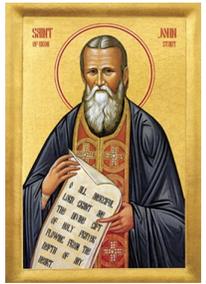
The Twelve Disciples Project is as guided by Saint John of Kronstadt, a Russian Orthodox Church Archpriest, born October 31, 1829, when he said:

"Do not let pass any opportunity to pray for anyone, either at his request or at the request of his relatives, friends, of those who esteem him, or of his acquaintances. The Lord looks favorably upon the prayer of our love, and upon our boldness before Him. Besides this, prayer for others is very beneficial to the one himself who prays for others; it purifies the heart, strengthens faith and hope in God, and enkindles our love for God and our neighbor. When praying, say thus: 'Lord, it is possible for Thee to do this or that to this servant of Thine; do this for him, for Thy name is the Merciful Love of Men and the Almighty.'"

+ St. John of Kronstadt, My Life in Christ

(Now in its fourth printing, was originally published in 1894)

St. John reposed peaceably in 1908. On December 20, we commemorated his memory.



Beginning last year in March of 2020, Fr. Stavros conducted weekly Paraklesis services when he prayed for, and today continues to pray for, each individual within our community to be protected from the COVID-19 pandemic. He also prays for this protection during each Liturgical Service held at St. John. Beginning in August of 2020, Fr. engaged the assistance of the St. John the Baptist Prayer Warriors to assist his effort.



Are you interested? Participating requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow members of the St. John the Baptist congregation. There are no restrictions. You may choose a time when most of you can spend a quiet moment with God each day.

If you'd like to participate (to enjoy the presence of God as you develop your prayer rule) and receive the prayer and at least one page of names to pray for, please contact Mathew Balasis, 727-345-4855 (mathewbalasis@verizon.net). It will warm your spiritual heart.

"O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."
The Jesus Prayer

Prayer List: Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our Souls and Bodies, visit and heal your servants: Mary & Peter Nenos; Tony Ekonomou; Keith Lynn & Patrick Carroll; Daniel Hoss; Ourania Tziotis, Irina, Marina, Yuri, and Christophoros; Ashley Snyder; Evangelos & Caroline Critkas; Constantinos & Kalotina Klimis; Christine Alex, June, Lillian Thomas; Scotty; Desi Serriera; Ashley Klidakis; Dora Kallas, Kathy & Andrew Bouzinekis; Anastasia; 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, Christina Noel Kouzes Houck, Evangeline Xeroteris, 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, Debbie Phelps, Mary Voykin, David Voykin, Denise Badrane, Don Payne, and all victims of war, terrorism, crime, natural disaster, and all of whom we are unaware.

Orthodoxy 101 Class will Begin in January

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

Who should attend the Orthodoxy 101 class?

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

The four sessions will be done as follows:

Monday, January 17 A Tour of the Orthodox Church: What we see in the Church and what it means

Monday, January 24 Orthodox Spirituality—Introduction to the Sacraments

Monday, January 31 The Divine Liturgy—This will actually be a "teaching" Liturgy on the solea of the church. If you have taken the class, or if you wish to only attend THIS session, please feel free to do so.

Monday, February 7 Orthodox Traditions—fasting, icons, prayer, and separating Theology from "yiyalyogy." Classes will be held on these three Mondays from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and will be held in the CHURCH Sanctuary.

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

St. John Stewardship Report 2020-2022

Year to Year Comparison ~	2022*	2021*	2020*
Pledged Year to Date	\$282,539	\$477,753	\$519,060
Received Year to Date	\$11,444	\$475,206	\$528,748
Average Pledge	2,156	\$1,301	\$1,417
Median Pledge	\$1,000	\$600	\$700
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	131	367	398
*YTD as of 12/20/22, 12/20/21, 12/15/20			

St. John's Bookstore



What are your resolutions for the New Year? Do they center on prayer, Scripture reading, and learning more about your Orthodox faith? If so, our bookstore is a great place to begin. From Orthodox study Bibles, Scripture commentaries, books on prayer and spirituality etc., we have what you need to fulfill that resolution. Stop in any Sunday following Divine Liturgy and make this New Year a Christ-centered one!

Donation of a Censer

We are need of a new censer as some of our older ones are getting brittle. If interested in donating, please see Fr. Stavros for details. There are occasionally other things we need for the altar, again, if interested in donating, please see Fr. Stavros.



Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 3,310 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 Alex or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the "forward to a friend" option. Also, make sure prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

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

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

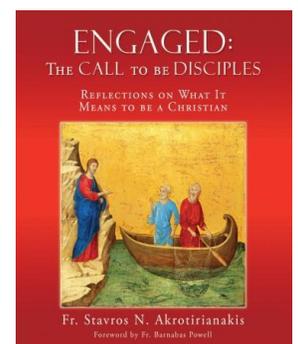
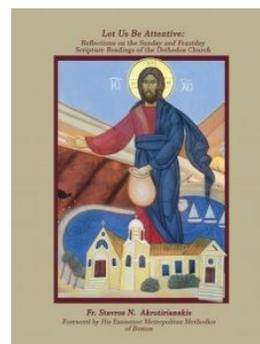
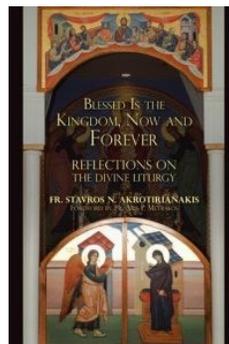
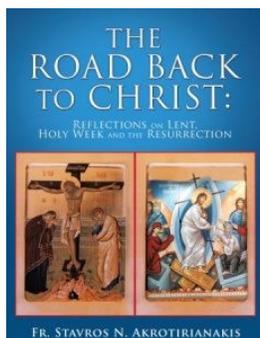
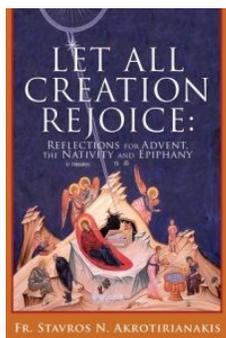
Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany

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

ENGAGED: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian





**Our word for our parish for 2021 is “Stewards.”
It’s not too late to submit your word for this year’s wordle!
Submit your word to Fr. Stavros by January 15**

For the past two years, we’ve encouraged parishioners to identify one word that will shape their year. With 2022 now a month away, it’s time to start thinking of the word that will define you in 2022.

Write to Fr. Stavros your word to be added to our parish wordle!

We Need Your Help With The Kitchen!

A message from the President,

Dear fellow stewards of St John the Baptist Church, we have a wonderful kitchen which is a very valuable asset to our church. Unfortunately, its current condition is very poor. Before spending a substantial amount of our precious funds, I would like to put together a “Kitchen Committee” to survey what we have, its condition and recommendations for the future. I know we are presently in need of replacing our two freezers, but I’m looking for some experienced eyes to help with these updates as well as suggestions for substantial cleaning. We have been ok for the last two years, since we have not had our usual festival, but 2022 is looking much better, and we are planning for a great year. So, let’s plan ahead to be ready for the future. If you have some experience and would be willing to help us make our improvements, please contact me directly or send a message to the church to my attention.

Jim Armstrong
Parish Council President



Youth Protection Program Reminder:

At this time, many of our Youth Workers' background checks are coming up for renewal, which is done every two years. On or about your two-year mark, Praesidium will automatically send an email to you from backgroundcheck@praesidiuminc.com when a new background check is needed. Please be on the lookout for these emails, as the link for a background check expires after two weeks. Also, the Youth Protection Program administrator will notify you via email when it's time to renew your online training by completing the 2-part/2-quiz Youth Safety module and the 1-part/1-quiz Youth Worker Regulations module.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact
Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi@gmail.com or
(813) 244-5855.



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

January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

A PSA from St. John's Nursing Ministry



Editor's Note: The nursing ministry is an important part of our overall ministries at St. John Greek Orthodox Church. There are certain subjects in medicine that may make us uncomfortable from time to time, but need to be said, as we encourage overall good health. I read every article that ends up in the Messenger, and I approved this article because HPV is running rampant in our society and I know several people who have it. The terms in this article are not terms you will see often in the Messenger. However, in the interest of both the physical and spiritual health of our community and its members, this information is helpful. +Fr. Stavros

Cervical cancer is a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the cervix — the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina.

Various strains of the human papillomavirus (HPV), a sexually transmitted infection, play a role in causing most cervical cancer.

When exposed to HPV, the body's immune system typically prevents the virus from doing harm. In a small percentage of people, however, the virus survives for years, contributing to the process that causes some cervical cells to become cancer cells.

You can reduce your risk of developing cervical cancer by having screening tests and receiving a vaccine that protects against HPV infection.

Causes

Cervical cancer begins when healthy cells in the cervix develop changes (mutations) in their DNA. A cell's DNA contains the instructions that tell a cell what to do.

Healthy cells grow and multiply at a set rate, eventually dying at a set time. The mutations tell the cells to grow and multiply out of control, and they don't die. The accumulating abnormal cells form a mass (tumor). Cancer cells invade nearby tissues and can break off from a tumor to spread (metastasize) elsewhere in the body.

It isn't clear what causes cervical cancer, but it's certain that HPV plays a role. HPV is very common, and most people with the virus never develop cancer. This means other factors — such as your environment or your lifestyle choices — also determine whether you'll develop cervical cancer.

Symptoms

Early-stage cervical cancer generally produces no signs or symptoms.

Signs and symptoms of more-advanced cervical cancer include: vaginal bleeding after intercourse, between periods or after menopause; watery, bloody vaginal discharge that may be heavy and have a foul odor; pelvic pain or pain during intercourse.

Risk factors for cervical cancer include:

- Many sexual partners. The greater your number of sexual partners, and the greater your partner's number of sexual partners, the greater your chance of acquiring HPV.
- Early sexual activity. Having sex at an early age increases your risk of HPV.
- Other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Having other STIs, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis and HIV/AIDS, increases your risk of HPV.
- A weakened immune system. You may be more likely to develop cervical cancer if your immune system is weakened by another health condition and you have HPV.
- Smoking. Smoking is associated with squamous cell cervical cancer.
- Exposure to miscarriage prevention drug. If your mother took a drug called diethylstilbestrol (DES) while pregnant in the 1950s, you may have an increased risk of a certain type of cervical cancer called clear cell adenocarcinoma.

Prevention

- Ask your doctor about the HPV vaccine. Receiving a vaccination to prevent HPV infection may reduce your risk of cervical cancer and other HPV-related cancers. Ask your doctor whether an HPV vaccine is appropriate for you.
 - Have routine Pap smears. Pap smears can detect precancerous conditions of the cervix, so they can be monitored or treated in order to prevent cervical cancer. Most medical organizations suggest beginning routine Pap tests at age 21 and repeating them every few years.
 - Practice safe sex. Reduce your risk of cervical cancer by taking measures to prevent sexually transmitted infections, such as using a condom every time you have sex and limiting the number of sexual partners you have.
- Editors note: Restrict sexual activity to the confines of marriage. Not only is this what God calls us to do, it leads to better overall health.*
- Don't smoke. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, talk to your doctor about strategies to help you quit.
- When cervical cancer is found early, it is highly treatable and associated with long survival and good quality of life.

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

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

MEETING DATE AND TIME:

- Our meetings are on Saturdays due to some physical limitations starting at 11:30 am. Look for meeting announcements.
- Our November event was a bus trip to Ocala's Greek Orthodox Monasteries on Nov. 13. It was open to anyone from our Church. We had over 35 people attending.
- We wished birthday to Ann Demas, Skip Higdon, Alexandra Ferarolis and Voula Athan.
- We continue to reach out to those who are homebound during the pandemic as part of our Church's Core Values: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, & Service

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
Phoned	20	40	20	32	38 88	37	15	14
Left Messages	1	3	1	6	9	2	8	7
Visited	1	3	1	7	1	3	2	2
Sent Cards	4	2	4	2	0	6	2	1
Left Text Messages	1	3	1	4	2	8	2	3

PASSED ACTIVITIES

- Dec. 19, 2021 – We enjoyed a Lenten pot-luck luncheon and holiday gift exchange at the St John Kourmolis Center.
- Nov. 13, 2021 – We had a bus trip to Ocala's Greek Orthodox Monasteries
- Oct. 2, 2021 – We enjoyed a game of Bible Trivia lead by Fr. John and Pres. Denise
- Sept. 4, 2021 – We had a social luncheon at Byblos Mediterranean Restaurant
- Aug 7, 2021 – We had a wonderful time at ABC Pizza.
- July 1, 2021 – We played a game of Bingo and it was catered by Acropolis Restaurant
- June 4, 2021 - We attended a dinner social at the AHEPA House in Tarpon Springs.
- April 22, 2021 – Visited St Michael Shrine in Tarpon Springs, lunch and Easter Specialty Food Shopping.
- April 7, 2021 - We attended Pre-Sanctified Liturgy as a group.
- April 22, 2021 - We visited Tarpon Springs for our Easter Specialty Food Shopping at Greek Boys Inc.
- 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



How the Zaharias Room Got Its Name

By Dr. Bill Manikas

Not too long ago two people were just standing inside the doorway of the Zaharias room and saw a picture of a wrestler above the doorway. They saw that was odd. One of them said an icon should be there. The person in the picture is George Zaharias. He and his two brothers were wrestlers who frequently wrestled as a team and in single matches at the armory on Howard Avenue. George was a famous wrestler and was in many matches throughout the United States.

George and his wife lived in the Forest Hills neighborhood of Tampa in the 1950s before St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church was built. Upon its completion he was asked for a contribution. That was when he donated the money and dedicated the big stain window over the church entrance to his wife, Babe Zaharias. The Zaharias Room is named after him.

George's wife, Babe, who was of Norwegian descent, was the most outstanding woman athlete in the world. She excelled in basketball, baseball and in throwing the javelin. She was better known as an excellent golfer. They met in California at a golf tournament in Los Angeles in 1938. After they settled in Tampa, they donated money to redo the Forest Hills Golf Course which is named after them. The first nine holes are named "the Babe" and the second nine holes are named "George."

Because the Zaharias couple was well known throughout the country, their love story was taped in Tampa for television. An ex-Detroit Lions football player, Alex Karres (a Greek) played the role of George Zaharias, and the actress, Susan Clark, played the role of Babe.

Memorial & Kolyva Protocol

1. Memorial Services **MUST** be scheduled through the church office at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service.
2. Memorial services for 40 days and one year will be done on the Sunday closest to the appropriate date. All other memorials will be done on the designated Memorial Sunday each month.
3. Please let the office know when you call or email whether you will be providing your own kolyva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If a family chooses to make their own Kolyva(es), the family will be responsible for scooping the Kolyva(es) in the kitchen after the Memorial Service to share with the entire community.
4. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a \$100 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to "St. John Philoptochos."
5. Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.

Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

January 1

EMMELEIA, TELEMAHOS,
VASILIKI, VASILIS

January 2

SERAPHIM, SILVESTROS,
SYLVESTER

January 3

GENOVEFA, SYGLITIKI

January 5

THEONI, THEOPEMPTOS

January 6

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

January 7

CEDD, GIANNA, GIANNIS,
JEANNETTE, JOHN, PRODRAMOS

January 8

AGATHON, DOMINIKI, KELSIOS,
PARTHENA, VASILISSA

January 9

EFSTRATIOS

January 11

THEODOSIOS

January 12

MERTIOS, TATIANI

January 13

ERMILOS

January 14

NINA

January 17

ANTHONY, THEODOSIOS

January 18

ATHANASIOS, CYRILLOS, THE-
ODOULA, EFRASIA

January 19

MAKARIOS

January 20

EFTHIMIOS, FABIANOS, THYRSI

January 21

AGNES, EVGENIOS, MAXIMOS, NE-
OPHYTOS, PATROKLOS

January 22

ANASTASIOS, TIMOTHY

January 23

AGATHANGELOS, DIONYSIUS

January 24

FILON, XENI, ZOSIMAS

January 25

GREGORY, MARGARET

January 26

XENOFON, HARIS, PALLADIOS

January 29

VARSAMIA

January 30

AVRA, CHRYSI, MAVROS, TRION
IERARHON

January 31

EVDOXIA, KYROS

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 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



Alex
262-370-0586



Fr. John
678-637-4425

Matthew 25 Temporarily On Hiatus

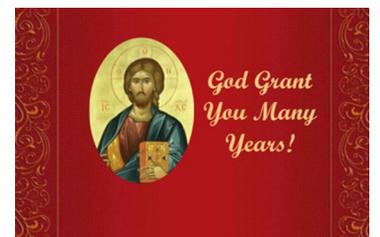
Our Community Outreach Ministry, Matthew 25, is temporarily on hiatus until further notice. Matthew 25 is waiting for approval to change its base of operations and hopefully will resume in springtime 2022. We appreciate your patience and will disseminate details once this ministry reorganizes and relocates.

Happy Birthday!

John Alexander - Jan 1
Eugene Freeman - Jan 1
Annelisa Anghelescu - Jan 3
Emmaline Luciu - Jan 3
Chloe Eleni Portier - Jan 4
Rosalie Apostoleres - Jan 5
Kathryn Bouznekis - Jan 5
Peter Dimas - Jan 5
Frankie Giallourakis - Jan 5
Andrea Anastassiades - Jan 6
Guilianna Roussos - Jan 6
David Colado - Jan 9
Andreas Paloumpis - Jan 9
Kris Christopher - Jan 10
Anthony Heilman - Jan 10
Alexandra Demas - Jan 11
Nicholas Demas - Jan 11
Axl David - Jan 12

Helen Katzaras - Jan 13
Eleni Stilian - Jan 13
Sophia Calamunci - Jan 14
Matthew Demetriou - Jan 14
Angela Johnston - Jan 14
Aristi Patellis - Jan 15
Bill Sotiropoulos - Jan 15
Elizabeth Xenick - Jan 16
William Yotis - Jan 17
Dean Arnaoutakis - Jan 18
Michael Kwasny - Jan 18
Niko Bavaro - Jan 19
Aris Rogers - Jan 19
Zeina Fellios - Jan 20
Maria Speegle - Jan 20
Maggie Trakas - Jan 20
Sophia Garcia - Jan 21
Olive Dumphy - Jan 22

Hunter Perry - Jan 23
Jaxon Horack - Jan 24
Arty Giallourakis - Jan 25
Niko Koulianos - Jan 25
Madeline Moran - Jan 25
Ana Mourer - Jan 25
Ellie Kate Papataros - Jan 25
Taytum Parker - Jan 25
Michael Mellon Lynn - Jan 26
Vasiana Christopoulos - Jan 27
Alec Papadakis - Jan 27
Aphroditi Johnson - Jan 29
Ana Lakic - Jan 31



Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Demet & Eleni Anagnostiadis - Bethesda, MD
Nicholas & Doris Andreadakis - Lititz, PA
Andy Apostolopoulos—Ashville, NC
George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL
Nicholas Anton - Dunedin, FL
Gaby & Alicia Atik - Treasure Island, FL
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Richard & Mickie Bass
Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL
Christopher & Jaime Brewer - Tampa, FL
Pete & Carol Caldwell - Ringgold, GA
William Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
William & Kanella Jane Chapman - Ellenton, FL
Nicholas & Sondra Chronis - Mt. Pleasant, SC
Emmanuel Chrysakis - Palm Harbor, FL
Victor & Cynthia Cucuz - Tampa, FL
Fr Stratton & Pres. Denise Dorozenski - Sterling Heights, MI
Eric & Artemis Mellen - Longwood, FL
Peter George - Tampa, FL
Ron & Maria Gregory - St. Petersburg, FL
Charlie & Eleftheria Hambos - Orlando, FL
Gabriel Hurst - Largo, FL
Michael Ibrahim - E. Brunswick, NJ

Judith Jogerst
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
Demetrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH
John & Cathie Koch - New Port Richey, FL
Tommy Kolouris - Tampa, FL
Sharon Kush - Tallahassee, FL
Evangelos & Helen Liras - Tampa, FL
Fr Michael & Pres Virginia Massouh - Seminole, FL
Kathleen Spanos Mendez - Ponte Verda, FL
Charles Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
John & Deanna Palmer - Greenville, SC
Theodora Pappas Poletis - Nottingham, MD
Luke & Arianna Quinn - Arlington, MA
Nadine Raheb
Pericles & Fotini Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
Lillian Thomas - Dyer, IN
Wesley & Melisa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
Christopher & Georgette Tsavoussis - Dunedin, FL
William Yotis - La Grange, IL

Friends of St. John the Baptist - Some of you who receive *The Messenger* do not live in the Tampa Bay area or are members of other Greek Orthodox parishes. We would like to ask for your support of our parish by being a "Friend of St. John the Baptist." Your contribution as a "Friend" will help offset the cost of mailing *The Messenger*, among other things. Being a "friend" does not make one a steward of St. John the Baptist or afford membership rights and responsibilities, but gives one who is a member elsewhere, an opportunity to make a gesture of financial support to our parish.

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

I wish to become a Friend of St. John the Baptist. I am enclosing a contribution in the amount of:

_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$200 _____ Other

**Please mail this form and check to: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
2418 W. Swann Ave Tampa, FL 33609.**

On the Lighter Side

Me: Jesus, should I buy this new book?
Jesus: Show me the latest new books you read.
Me: I have no new books I've read.
Jesus: You are right in saying "I have no new books I've read," for you have twenty-six new books, and the ones you now own you have not read.



With the rise of self-driving vehicles, it's only a matter of time until there's a country song where the guy's truck leaves him.

Chocolate comes from cocoa, which comes out of a tree. That makes it a plant. Therefore, chocolate counts as salad. The end.

In Star Wars anyone can hop in any spaceship and knows how to fly it. I just spent twenty minutes trying to find the headlights in a rental car.



Big lie you heard was eat all your food so you can be big and strong. . .Now look at you, just big.

My piano teacher is very religious. She kept closing her eyes and saying "Good Lord!"

A group of engineering students and their teacher were given free airplane tickets to go on a holiday. Once on the plane, the captain announced that they were on the plane the students had built. Everyone freaked out and rushed out of the plane, except for the teacher, who stayed there with calm. When the flight attendant asked why he hadn't left, he responded: "I know the abilities of my students. This plane won't even start."

I put my scale in the bathroom corner and that's where the little liar will stay until she apologizes.

Say what you will about the south but no one retires and moves up north.



For those of you "up north" who think we have it so easy in Florida, I want to tell you that it was only 62 degrees this morning. And drizzling. I had to get a jacket. I had to decide between my Tampa Bay Lightning Stanley Cup Champions jacket, and my Tampa Bay Buccaneers Super Bowl Champions jacket. By the time I made my decision, it had warmed up to 74 and I didn't need the jacket anymore. Too much stress, I'm headed to the beach.

UPS tracking: Your package is in X City, USA on a truck being driving by Bob and will be at your door at 2:37 p.m.

FedEx: Your package is coming, you'll get it when we give it to you.

USPS: You ordered something?

Amazon: We're inside your apartment.

FaceBook: We know you were just thinking about getting a toaster over. Here are 15 ads for toaster ovens.

Maybe if we tell people the brain is an app, they'll start using it.



On the Serious Side

Worship gets you through the hardest times in your life because it shifts your focus from the problem to the problem solver.

Sometimes when you're in a dark place, you think you've been buried, but you've actually been planted.

It takes nothing to join the crowd. It takes everything to stand alone. ~Hans F. Hansen

Google CEO Sundar Pichai gave a speech in only 60 seconds. He said:

Imagine life is a game of five balls that you manipulate in the air trying not to fall these balls. One of them is rubber, and the rest are glass. The five balls are: work, family, health, friends, soul. It will not be long before you realize that work is the rubber ball. Whenever you fall, you will jump again, while the other balls are made of glass. If one of them falls, it will not return to its previous form.

There are two gifts we should give our children: One is roots, and the other is wings.

Think for yourself, or others will think for you without thinking of you.

Top Five Regrets of the Dying, by Bronnie Ware, Australian nurse/hospice

Phenomenal clarity of vision people gain at the end of their lives (some top 5 regrets people expressed in the last 12 weeks of life)

1. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life other's expected of me.
2. I wish I hadn't worked so hard. (every male patient) Felt they missed their children's youth and partner's companionship
3. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.
4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
5. I wish I had let myself be happier. Realized happiness was a choice.



It is not happy people who are thankful; It is thankful people who are happy.

Younger Americans will have trouble believing this, but there was once this guy named Walter Cronkite, who would read the news on television every week night. He didn't seem to have an agenda, or try to make anyone look bad, or good. He would just read the news, and then, get this. . .WE WOULD ALL JUST MAKE UP OUR OWN MINDS ABOUT WHAT WE THOUGHT. He didn't interview smarmy opinionated talking heads, he just read the news, matter of factly, and then he would just sign off and shut up.

THINK

T Is it true?

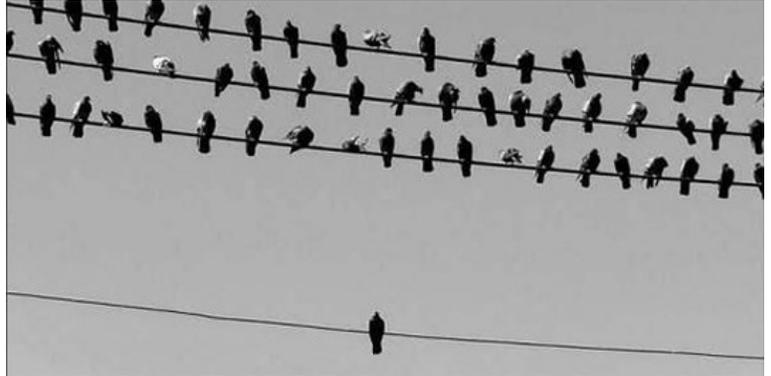
H Is it helpful?

I Is it inspiring?

N Is it necessary?

K Is it kind?

It's better to walk alone than with a crowd going in the wrong direction.

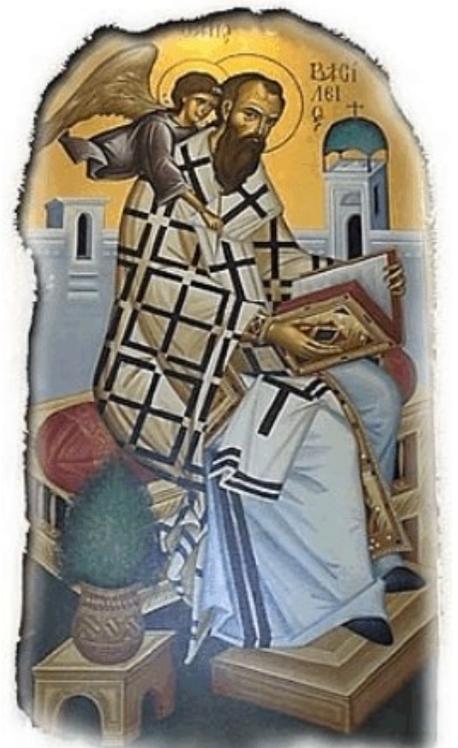


Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching. ~C.S. Lewis

Legendary football coach Lou Holtz was asked to describe the difference between football players today and those 50 years ago. He answered, "Simple. Today's athletes talk about rights and privileges and the players 50 years ago talked about obligations and responsibilities." Enough said.

8 Facts from the life of St. Basil the Great

1. He comes from a family that gave the world seven saints.
2. He donated his fortune to build hospitals, orphanages and schools for girls
3. He established monasteries and set up rules for monastic life
4. He is known as the "revealer of heavenly mysteries" because he explained the Holy Trinity dogma
5. He was a good friend of St. Gregory the Theologian
6. The philanthropic institutions he founded were known as "Vasiliada"
7. He is the author of a version of the Divine Liturgy.
8. He reposed in the Lord at age 49.



New Year's Resolutions

By Fr. Athanasios Haros

This week is the week that everyone focuses on improving something about life in the New Year. As clocks hit midnight all across the globe last week, good intentioned men and women rushed to confirm New Year resolutions. Of course many if not most if not all New Year resolutions end up in the garbage pail by the end of the first week of the New Year, but that didn't stop millions across the globe for faithfully committing to improving their life this year. By no means am I against New Year resolutions. It is just that we waste so much time making resolutions about things that ultimately don't matter. Some common resolutions are:

1. Exercise more
2. Lose weight
3. Get organized
4. Learn a new skill or hobby
5. Live life to the fullest
6. Save more money / spend less money
7. Quit smoking
8. Spend more time with family and friends
9. Travel more
10. Read more

It isn't that these issues are necessarily bad for us. In fact there is most definitely a spiritual side to every issue listed, but I'm not sure most people want to "get out of

debt" for the sake of their soul. I could be wrong. I'll be the first to admit people surprise me every day with better intentions that I would have presumed. That being said however, in the constant drive to build bigger economies and own more things, I suspect people are trying to get out of debt in order to "eventually" own more, or at least have more to spend later. Especially having just completed a "Corona Year" when so much of our everyday routines became privileges, looking deeper than the typical resolutions is not only preferable, maybe it is now more understandable. How about considering this list for 2021?

1. Read the Bible more
2. Fast more
3. Pray more
4. Serve the poor more
5. Receive Holy Communion more
6. Go to Holy Confession more
7. Attend Divine Liturgy more
8. Attend other Church services more
9. Incorporate the Cathedral schedule into my family calendar
10. Consider the needs of the Cathedral when I plan my finances

May 2022 be blessed for you and your family!

Fr. Athanasios Haros is the Dean of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Tarpon Springs, FL.

Knocking Down Walls to Build a Palace

By Niko Birbilis

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."

This is how CS Lewis describes the difference between God's great big plan for us, and our tiny, narrow view of it. We're cobbling together a cottage - but He's building a palace out of us.

And as Lewis observes, it's not always so easy! We're okay with God fixing the leaky roof. "Hey, thanks a lot." But when He starts knocking down walls and tearing up the foundations, we just want out. "I'm happy with my little shack God, please just let me be." It's tempting to say that. But He's got bigger plans for us than we can see.

We've just welcomed the new year, so now is a good time to reflect on those bigger plans. After all, who knows what the new year will bring? Surely many happy and beautiful moments; and many difficult ones as well. The challenge for us, when those difficult moments arise, is to remember that God is using them to knock down some old walls and build a beautiful palace.

Not too long ago, we read on the Sunday following Christmas an example of how God knocks down some walls and tears up some foundations. Immediately after Christ is born, the world is already out to get Him, and His life is in danger. Joseph, the Virgin Mary, and Christ all flee to Egypt as refugees. There they remain, while Herod seeks out and kills all of the young, male children in the region of Bethlehem. When Herod finally dies, Joseph brings Christ and the Virgin Mary to the city of Nazareth, where Christ grows up.

This is a pretty harsh story - especially right after Christmas, and the beginning of the new year. If this tragic series of events is God knocking down walls for His big plan, I'm not so sure I can see the palace coming together. BUT... Matthew includes something else in this story. Something easy to gloss over and miss - yet, it is essential to the text.

Continued...



The story is punctuated by references to the Old Testament prophets. Three times - at the beginning, middle, and end of the passage - Matthew repeats: "So that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled." He says this almost as though to console the reader, and reorient us back towards the big picture. "Yes, this is a tragedy," he's telling us. "But from it, is wrought the salvation of the world. That is the big picture."

Of the three times Matthew references the prophets here, the second one always stood out to me. Matthew says: "Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more.'"

Again - this sounds awfully dark for a passage read during the Christmas season. But if we flip back to this quote in the book of Jeremiah and read what comes next, we can see that this quote is actually one of hope!

In response to Rachel's weeping, God says this: "Stop your lamenting, dry your eyes, for your labour will have a reward... and they will return from the enemy's country. There is hope for your future after all, Yahweh declares, your children will return to their homeland." After this, God establishes a new covenant with His people, foretells the creation of the New Jerusalem, and promises that it will last unto eternity.

When we see these tragedies taking place, we are reminded that they are part of a bigger picture of salvation. When we see Rachel weeping, we are reminded of God drying her tears. And when we see how many fell victim to these tragedies, we are reminded that God has returned them to their homeland. This hope is the foundation of God's new covenant. Having been reminded of this hope, we can now look forward to the new year and all it has in store for us.

As we look forward to the new year and make our resolutions, it feels a bit like standing at the top of a mountain, plotting our course with a bird's eye view. But as we get down there to the thickets and the forests, will we be able to maintain that course? When the most difficult times strike, will we be able to look back and remember this big picture in the moment? It's not easy, but fortunately the Church has this way of continually forcing us back to the big picture. We are constantly urged to go further, onward and upward, towards that big picture.

Matthew does this within the text, with his quotations of the Old Testament prophets. The Church does this by surrounding

the birth of Christ with hymns foreshadowing His crucifixion and resurrection. We see not only where we are, but where we are going. And as tragic as the situation surrounding Christ's early life is, it looks familiar - because the same exact thing happened to Moses. The pharaoh tried to have all of the young boys killed as well, but the baby Moses narrowly escaped.

And if Moses would go on to save his people, this parallel gives us the hope that Christ might go on to do the same. As we know, Christ indeed does do the same. By the blood of the Lamb, He too breaks His people out of slavery. But Christ's people is the whole Church, and the slavery he frees us from is death. All of this is already called to mind, as soon as we come together to celebrate Christmas.

There is one final piece, however, that we need to take from all this. We see how Matthew brings us back to the big picture in the midst of suffering. We see how the Church brings us back to the big picture as well. But how can we make sure that we ourselves will be able to come back to this big picture, when crisis strikes in our own lives over the course of the year?

For this answer, we can go right back to that Jeremiah quote that Matthew uses. After drying Rachel's tears, God makes a new covenant with His people. He declares that He shall plant his Law within them, writing it on their hearts. Writing it on their hearts. This is the purpose of Scripture, and this is the purpose of reading, studying, and singing Scripture when we come together as a Church - to write His Law on our hearts. Father Stephen Freeman takes this a step further. *He says: "In Church, we write the words of the Gospel on our hearts; so that when our hearts break, the words fall in."*

"In Church, we write the words of the Gospel on our hearts; so that when our hearts break, the words fall in."

Yes, we will make many resolutions for the new year - some we'll keep, and some we won't. And the new year surely has many blessings and many challenges in store for us. But through all the blessings and all the challenges, we must keep that fundamental Christian orientation towards where we're going: the Kingdom of God.

When we're blessed by a promotion or a new relationship - we remember that it's to unify us with God. And when we're martyred by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune - we remember that it's to humble and strengthen us; to unify us with God. We may think we are being made into decent little cottages: but He is building palaces. He intends to come and live in them Himself.

Facing life in this way does not necessarily come naturally in this fallen world, and so we need constant upkeep to sustain it. That's what we get by coming to church regularly, maintaining a prayer life, and receiving the sacraments. So if we're going to make any new year's resolution, it should be this one: to come to church regularly, maintain a prayer life, and receive the sacraments. By doing those things, we're writing the words of the Gospel on our hearts; *so that when our hearts break, the words fall in.*

Niko Birbilis is the Marketing Coordinator at Orthodox Christian Mission Center in St. Augustine, FL. He is a graduate of Holy Cross Seminary and koumbaro to Alexander and Aleksandra Limberatos.

“What do you mean by this service?”

By Father Mark Sietsema, PhD

This was the question that little Israelite children were taught to ask at the Passover seder ritual (Exodus 12:26). This same question we too should ask in the month of January as we celebrate the Baptism of Christ. Through the liturgies of Epiphany and the blessings of homes, we also re-celebrate our own Baptisms, which are simply reenactments of His Baptism.

In the early Church the feast of Epiphany (also called Theophany) was THE big holy day apart from Pascha: Christmas as we know it was not celebrated at first. But the commemoration of Christ's Baptism was observed, and with grand festivities. Nowadays we hang up our lights for December 25, but in the early centuries January 6 was the Feast of Lights, when candles and lamps were hung aloft in joyous remembrance. Christ's Baptism was a theological goldmine, and one of the few events that all four Gospels recount (whereas the birth of Christ is found in only two, Matthew and Luke).

The Gospels paint a fairly simple picture of the scene: Jesus Christ enters the Jordan River with John the Baptist; He is immersed in its flow; as He comes out of the waters, the heavens open, a dove descends, and a voice of approval resounds from the skies. The significance of these details is not apparent at first reading. It might seem perhaps like just another extraordinary day in an extraordinary life.

But to comprehend the deeper meaning, you must cast your mind back to the book of Genesis. There we read of how God made all things, drawing forth the Creation from a dark and watery Chaos. We read then of how the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters. Here the verb in Hebrew connotes the behavior of a mother bird brooding over her nest, protecting and nurturing her offspring. The Spirit of God at the Creation was caring for the young world like a hen over her chicks.

Day by day the Lord shaped and developed His world, forming the light, the heavens, the oceans, and the dry land, as homes respectively for the stars, the birds, the fish, and the animals. And finally, as the crown of His creation, He formed man. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” speaks the Triune Godhead. And resting from His work, the Lord pronounces His approval on the brand-new heaven and earth: “And behold, it was very good.”

But this world fell into brokenness and disharmony through the sin of our first parents. The Lord could have destroyed humanity and all His creation with them—He could have let it all slip back into the dark watery chaos from which it came back in the time of Noah's flood.

But this was not His will. His desire is to redeem His world, to transform this universe into a new heaven and a new earth. And this He would do by joining His imperishable nature to our broken and perishable nature, so that we might live with Him in harmony forever.

What we see on Epiphany, then, is a re-staging of the Creation: the Spirit hovering like a mother bird, in the form of a dove; the approval of the Father thundering from the open heavens; and out of the dark waters emerges the new creation—but this time God starts from the end and works backward! The first being to

emerge from the waters is a man—the incarnate God, Jesus Christ. And so it begins—the healing of our nature, the re-harmonization of all creatures, the reconciliation of all living things to God. In time the New Creation will embrace the whole Universe (or the whole Multi-verse, if your physics so dictate). “For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His Cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

This is the meaning of the Baptism of Christ. And this is the meaning of our baptisms as well. For God chooses to populate His New World one person at a time, by drawing us out of the waters together with Christ, and citizens of the new creation with Him. But just as Baptism is first step and not the last in God's plan of re-creation, so to for our spiritual lives.

Think of your parents or grandparents on Ellis Island. They were people betwixt and between. They were in America—but not yet Americans. They had a choice—they could press on through hardship to win their citizenship in the New World, or they could turn around and get back on the ship that brought them.

Baptism is our Ellis Island. It brings us into the Kingdom of God, but much, much is required for us to become real citizens there. In the wake of the feast of Epiphany, when you receive the waters of Agiasmo, the waters of chaos turned into the waters of life, the waters of the new creation—when you bring it into your houses and businesses and offices, for drinking and for sprinkling, you declare your intention to become a part of the new creation yourself, and to bring your family and your home and your work into the Kingdom of God, which makes all things new. It is an ongoing commitment that is to be renewed yearly, and even daily.

When you receive the spray of divine presence that comes from the River Jordan upon you through the Holy Water, you declare your intention to live no longer as a citizen of this world, according to its customs and habits, according to the laws of survival and self-advancement and pride. You declare your desire to live as a citizen of the New World, according to the rule of love, of mercy and justice and humility before God and man.

This is the meaning of the service we do at Epiphany and in the house blessings of January. It is our Christian Fourth of July, our Declaration of Independence, our acceptance of Christ as our way of life and our commitment to following our leader and king into the new creation of God.

Fr. Mark Sietsema is the Proistamenos of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Lansing, Michigan.



Losing our religion — and replacing it with the church of social media

By Mitch Albom, Detroit Free Press



Earlier this year, a Gallup Poll showed that, for the first time in eight decades, fewer than half of U.S. adults belong to a church, synagogue or mosque. The phrase “losing our religion” has become an American mantra.

Coincidentally, I’ve spent the last week traveling the country promoting a new novel that imagines what would happen if a lifeboat full of castaways found a man in the ocean who claimed to be God. Even though they’ve been crying out for help, with no food or water, the passengers are still skeptical — sometimes even mocking — when the stranger says he can save them if they all believe he’s telling the truth.

There’s a cynicism toward faith that has been growing for decades. Most priests, pastors, rabbis and imams will tell you drawing congregants is an increasing struggle.

But a closer look at the Gallup results is illuminating. Between 1937 (when they started taking the poll) and 1999, the number of Americans belonging to a house of worship only fluctuated slightly, from 73% to 70%.

Yet since the turn of this century, the number has dropped to 47%.

So what’s happened in the last 20 years to cut religious attendance so dramatically? It should be obvious. The internet. Social media. People living, breathing — and expressing their belief systems — in the digital world.

Who needs a church? You can tweet out an opinion and instantly get an amen chorus. You don’t even have to change out of your pajamas, much less put on your Sunday best.

Preaching our own sermons

Scientists have already noted this trend. A study from the Olin College of Engineering found the rise of the internet has correlated with the drop in religious affiliation. A 2017 Scientific American article predicted that “Nones” — people who identify with no religion — were growing steadily and would surpass Catholics in the U.S. by 2020.

Some now predict that within 10 years, the Nones will be larger than any religious affiliation in this country.

Yet despite this continuing drop in belief, there has been no matching drop in opinion. On the contrary. It feels like *everybody has a point of view, everybody has a finger to point. Everybody has blame to assign.*

Calling out the devil used to be the work of fiery clergymen. But today, behind our keyboards and our two-thumbed iPhone typing, we own a pulpit to attack those with different values. We deliver our own sermons. Politics have become our religion. Identity has become our dogma.

We haven’t stopped believing in things. Oh, no. We believe in things more fervently than ever. So much so, that we demonize those who differ with us. We shame people for the slightest mistake. We cancel people the way churches once excommunicated sinners. We howl with indignation at anyone who disagrees on race, gender, vaccines or how we educate our kids.

Most of this is done through social media or TV. We preach. We scold.

We are shedding religion, yet we are acting more righteous than ever.

What happens when the power goes out?

But there’s a big difference between self-righteous and righteous. The latter is doing the right thing when no one is looking. The former is saying you’re right when everyone is looking.

The seduction — and danger — of the internet is the power it offers our self-righteousness. You virtue-posture, you get immediate gratification. You put someone down for not being enlightened, you get a thousand “likes.” You offer “thoughts and prayers” with a few keystrokes, and little hearts appear, confirming your goodness.

But note: All of these things are self-oriented. They’re all about us. A higher power never comes into the equation. But the concept of something bigger than us is central to most faiths. A divine force that governs the universe.

In the religion of social media, the internet IS the universe. And the goal is to get as large a presence as possible within it.

It’s not an accident that the largest percentage of those claiming no religious affiliation today are young. Or that their heroes, the technology icons, give little credit to a higher power. These folks exist in a community of flat screens. Attendance is virtual. There are no prayers or hymns, no shaking hands at the end of a service or wishing peace to a neighbor.

God doesn’t fit inside an iPhone. But I can attest, being much closer to the end of my life than the beginning, and having seen so many people leave this earth, that in our most dire moments, in the operating rooms, the burning buildings or the echoes of flying bullets, the digital community offers no comfort, and our politics offer no protection. Who do we cry out to for help then? Twitter?

At some point, we all must decide if the search for answers stops with us or goes beyond us. I called the book I wrote “The Stranger in the Lifeboat” because for many of the passengers, the idea of a divine power is strange and hard to accept. By the end, some of them change their minds.

That’s in a novel. In the real world, I wonder how long it will even be a question.



The Power of the Tongue

By Mark Batterson

*"Like apples of gold in settings of silver, so is a word skillfully spoken."
—Proverbs 25:11*

When I was in seminary, I spoke to a gathering of men at a drug-rehabilitation program. I met a man who had made some mistakes that contributed to his addictions. He had gotten out from under the umbrella of blessing and paid the price in rehab. But I felt tremendous empathy for him when he shared his back-story. He told me what his dad had told him every time he made a mistake as a child: "What the hell—you stupid?"

Imagine those words ringing in your ears. It was obvious by the tears in his eyes how deeply those words cut into his soul. They echoed loud and long. I'm not blaming the father for this man's mistakes, but they were more than careless words. They were a curse that left an open wound. Is it any wonder his son made some stupid decisions? He was simply living up to, or down to, his father's words.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

We all know the old adage, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me." And we all know that's not true! Our words don't just carry weight—they have the power to rewrite narratives. A curse can turn a comedy into a tragedy, but a blessing can flip the script the other way.

During a fragile time in my teenage years, I was given the gift of life-giving words. I was kneeling at an altar when a missionary put a hand on my shoulder and started praying over me. Then his prayer turned prophetic: "God is going to use you in a great way." It was only one sentence, but I've held on to those words through thick and thin. And I've tried to flip that blessing by speaking life-giving words to others.

One of the most powerful blessings you can bestow on another person is well-timed words. Remember the woman who broke open her alabaster jar of perfume and anointed Jesus? Remember the way the Pharisees and the disciples criticized her? Jesus counteracted their criticism with the gift of life-giving words:

"Wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Can you imagine the way those words buoyed her spirit the rest of her life? Those are the kinds of words you have tattooed on your body or inscribed on your tombstone!

Jesus blessed her with prophetic words, and they were fulfilled one more time with your reading of them!

As children of God and followers of Christ, we assume the mantle of the Old Testament priests who administered the blessing. You are part of that royal priesthood. So that lot falls to us! It's our job to declare God's praises and pronounce God's blessings!

Let's fulfill our priestly duty, but let's not overspiritualize blessing and cursing. These are not compartmentalized biblical concepts. Blessing and cursing are two very different ways of life, two very different ways of treating people.

If the transcript of your life were read aloud, what would your words reveal? How do you talk about people when they aren't present? Do you berate them or brag about them behind their backs? How do you talk to people when they're present? Do you put them down, or do you look them in the eye and compliment them to their faces?

I have a three-inch-thick file that is filled with kind notes and thoughtful letters that I've received from readers of my books and from people I have the privilege of pastoring. Why do I keep them? Because every word of encouragement is a keepsake! Life-giving words are to the spirit what oxygen is to the lungs!

Whose words are in your file? And whose files will you fill?

*"Like apples of gold in settings of silver, so is a word skillfully spoken."
—Proverbs 25:11*

The right words at the right time can change the game. They can even change a life!

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The Day I Realized My 'Ideal Child' Wasn't Real

By Christy Mobley

I thought the world would come to a standstill the day I discovered my ideal wasn't real.

It was a Sunday afternoon after church, December 2004, when my oldest son, a freshman in college at the time, walked in the front door, through the kitchen, into the family room and emptied his pockets of his most prized possessions, laying them gently on his daddy's chest.

The weight of my son's wallet, checkbook and car keys woke my napping husband. As if innately ready for turbulent air, he pulled his "dad" recliner to its upright position.

"What's this?" he inquired, looking at the bundle of goodies on his chest.

My husband who we refer to as Big David when lil David is around (I told him having the same name would be confusing one day), always told the boys if they blew it, (meaning if they weren't responsible with what had been given them) their car, and their money would go back to the original owner. Him. With a sheepish chuckle lil David humbly mumbled, "I got my grades."

I'm not sure what Big David was feeling, but for me, call me a pessimist, but I knew in the pit of stomach what was coming next was not good.

Lil David had just finished his first semester at Auburn University. I talked to him on a weekly basis and every time I asked him how it was going, he answered.

"Everything's good mom."

"You're sure?" I'd say.

"Yes ma'am." he'd answer.

And like a big dummy, I believed him. This day would prove to crush my naive reality.

His dad went on to ask him, "So what did you make son?" With another uncomfortable chuckle Lil David snorted, "Uh, .5."

His Dad responds, "You mean a 1.5?"

"No sir, you heard me right, a point five."

I thought, Jesus was a commin' any minute because this was surely the end of life as we knew it!

Everything was pretty much a blur after that. I was in full-on panic mode. Thoughts went racing through my mind.

Surely this cannot be happening.
This is not what I expected
This was not what I imagined.
This is not what I had planned.
What will he do?

What will we tell people?
What will they think?
This is not ideal.
This was not one bit of MY ideal.
And it wasn't.

I had made big plans as to how my son's life would run or should run and this wasn't it.

Nope, it was more like:

He would go to Auburn, get his degree and pilots license. Meet some nice Christian girl (who would just happen to adore me) with a degree and a good job. They would get married. He would secure a job with an airline and we would forever fly anywhere and everywhere for free. Package deal with a big whopping bow on top.

Yep, that about sums it up.

How often do our realities get crushed because we make plans without considering the plans God has for us and those closest to us?

We often have ideals that simply aren't real.

And when we think this way we set ourselves up for disappointment with our kids, with our spouses, careers and life.

Sure it's good to set goals—for ourselves that is. But making goals for our children or spouses sets us up and them for failure.

It's okay to tell God our ideas and ideals as long as we finish with, Lord, but Your will and plans are perfect. May it be done as you think best.

And then stand back baby and watch Him work!

I finally did.

My son didn't take what I thought should be the traditional path. He took a better path with a detour...or two in between. But those redirects took him exactly where God wanted him to be.

An Air Force career and two degrees later, he has his dream wife and a new dream job. And a whole bunch of learned wisdom he might have not garnered otherwise.

Which was probably God's ideal for him. Much better than mine I might add.

"In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps." Proverbs 16:9

This Teen's Obituary Is Going Viral—and We All Need to Read It to Our Kids

By Jenny Rapson

I'm not in the habit of reading obituaries, and I pretty much NEVER discuss death notices with my children. But when I saw several of my friends share the obituary of a young girl on Facebook, my interest was piqued. Did the child of a mutual acquaintance or friend-of-a-friend pass away and I had not heard about it?

No, I found out when I clicked to read. All of my friends were sharing the obituary of a complete and total stranger. In fact, this young girl's **obituary** is going viral, for a very powerful reason. Because in 15-year-old Sadie L. Riggs' obituary, her family took a strong stand to attempt to save other lives—and it's one we need to share with our own children.

Sadie, who you can tell from her obituary was dearly loved, **died by suicide**. And her family is feeling this devastating loss.

THIS ...

The obituary starts with a description of Sadie's short life:



Miss Sadie L. Riggs, 15, of Bedford, took her own life on Monday, June 19th, 2017.

Sadie was born in Bedford on December 4, 2001. She is survived by her father, Eric Riggs and step mother Alicia Smith of Bedford and her biological mother, Beverly (Dodson) Riggs of Hopewell and by her motherly aunt, Sarah Smith, with whom she resided.

Sadie was a member of

the Solid Rock Christian Fellowship Church in Bedford. She played softball and loved reading, drawing and music. Sadie was a sweet and loving girl and she will be greatly missed.

And then, it gets REALLY real. Her loved ones hold nothing back as they explain the reason Sadie took her own life:

In an effort to debunk the rumors about Sadie's death we would like to share this information. Yes, Sadie took her own life, she hung herself. It is hard to fathom that someone so young could be so troubled. Sadie was seeking help, she was in counselling and taking medication, but it was all too much for such a young soul to live with. If you take a minute and look at Sadie's family dynamics you will see that a large percent of the people in her life were not not related to her by blood but she was sent to us by

God who knew this child needed a family. Sadie had a tough life and until a recent incident at school she handled everything life served her. For a young lady so excited about going to the High School things sure went terribly wrong for her. For the bullies involved, please know you were effective in making her feel worthless. That is all between you and God now, but please know that it is not to late to change your ways. Sadie's death has taken us to dark places, we will stick together and protect one another as we try to make sense of this tragic loss. To all the bullies out there, I just want you to know that as much as we despise your actions never, ever do we wish for you to feel the paralyzing pain that engulfs our bodies, a pain so severe that it makes the simple act of breathing difficult or the guilt that leaves us wondering what we could have done differently-or that struggle to remember the last words we spoke...Our hearts are beyond broken. Sadie, it was a privilege to have you in our lives and we will always love you. May you find peace in the arms of God and may we all be kind to one another. In lieu of flowers, the family of Sadie ask that you be kind to one another.

Oh, moms and dads. My heart broke in two when I read this line: For the **bullies involved**, please know you were effective in making her feel worthless.

We have to teach our kids that their words and actions MATTER. That there's no such thing as "harmless" bullying, and that extending love and kindness instead of rejection and ridicule can make ALL the difference for a soul in need of it.

And empathy, parents, empathy. We HAVE to instill in our kids the ability to ask themselves "What would if I feel like if someone said or did that to me?"

As Sadie's obituary proves, how we teach our kids to treat (or not treat) others can be the difference between life and death.

Let's honor Sadie's family's wishes and **BE KIND**.

I pray you rest in Jesus' arms, Sadie. And I'm praying so hard for your sweet family.



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

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

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

Weddings



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

Before requesting permission from the Metropolitan to perform the marriage, a Priest must verify that: a) Neither of the parties in question are already married to other persons, either in this country or elsewhere (if a person comes to the United States after age 18, they need to provide a letter from their country of origin that they are indeed free to marry); b) the parties in question are not related to each other to a degree that would constitute an impediment; c) if either or both parties are widowed, they have presented the death certificate(s) of the deceased spouse(s); d) if either or both of the parties have been previously married in the Orthodox Church, they have obtained an ecclesiastical as well as

civil divorce. (The Ecclesiastical Divorce process is done after the civil divorce becomes final, and involves counseling with the parish priest, forms that are filled out, a review by the Metropolitan, a divorce hearing which in the Tampa Bay area is held in Clearwater, and this process usually takes several months to complete. *Fr. Stavros will not set a wedding date for anyone until an ecclesiastical divorce has been secured, so please plan accordingly, the ecclesiastical divorce process often takes several months.*) e) the party or parties who are members of a parish other than the one in which the marriage is to be performed have provided a certificate declaring them to be members in good standing with that parish for the current year; and f) a civil marriage license has been obtained from civil authorities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Days when marriage is not permitted

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

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

Prohibited Marriages

The following types of relationships constitute impediments to marriage:

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

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

A date cannot be set for marriage unless one of the parties getting married, NOT THE PARENTS, contact Fr. Stavros, who sets all the dates for weddings. In order for the date to be locked in, one person in the couple has to come and meet with Fr. Stavros to go over the wedding procedures. Pre-Marital Counseling is also required for weddings at St. John the Baptist. There is a two-fold requirement. One is that the couples need to meet with Fr. Stavros for two sessions. Second, the Metropolis of Atlanta requires couples participate in a Saturday regional premarital counseling seminar. Contact the Metropolis of Atlanta or visit the Family Life Ministry section of their website for dates in 2022. For people who wish to be married at St. John the Baptist who are not members anywhere, a substantial fee is imposed for use of the church, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing. Also, the Koumbaro/Koumbara for a wedding must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John the Baptist, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

Security Deposit & Musical Instruments

Per our parish's Wedding Guidelines, a \$300 security deposit IS required in order to finalize the scheduling of a wedding at St. John the Baptist. This deposit is refunded entirely if no damage occurs and no clean up of the church, hall, or property is needed following the ceremony. However, in the event that cleaning of the church property is required, a portion or all of the deposit will be used, depending on the extent of the cleanup required at the discretion of our parish's clergy and Parish Council.

We also feel the need to reiterate that no instruments are allowed to be played in the church at all. For weddings at St. John the Baptist it is possible to hire our church's organist for any music to be played entering and leaving. This is done strictly with the organist. Otherwise chanting for entrances and exits will be provided.

Baptisms

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



For people who wish to have a child baptized at St. John who are not members anywhere, a fee is imposed for use of the church, thereby encouraging all those who wish to have the sacraments of the church to be members in good standing. Also, the Godparent must be in good sacramental standing. If they are not members of St. John, they must bring a letter from their parish priest saying that they are in good sacramental standing. Otherwise, there will be a fee imposed as well.

Continued...

Funerals

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

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

Memorials



Memorial services may not be chanted from the Saturday or Lazarus through the Sunday of Thomas, or on any Feastday of the Lord or any Feastday of the Theotokos. We customarily do not offer memorial services on the 1st Sunday of Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy) or the 3rd Sunday of Lent (Sunday of the Holy Cross), or the Sunday after September 14. In 2022, the Sundays when NO memorial services will be offered include: March 13 (Sunday of Orthodoxy), March 27 (Sunday of the Holy Cross); April 17 (Palm Sunday); April 24 (Pascha); May 1 (Sunday of St. Thomas); June 12 (Pentecost); September 18 (Sunday after Holy Cross Day).

Memorial Services may be scheduled through the church office.

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

Organ Donation

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

Forty-Day Blessings

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

Some Guidelines Unique to our Parish

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

PROCEDURES FOR THE OFFICE:

- The deadline for submitting information for the weekly bulletin is Wednesday at 12:00 p.m. All submissions must be sent electronically to office@stjohntpa.org.
- The deadline for the Messenger shall be the 10th of the month. As a cost cutting measure we reduced the size of the Messenger, so no full page flyers will be put in. All submissions must be sent electronically via email. Simply send in your event information to officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com.
- Events may be advertised a maximum of two months prior to the event date for *The Messenger* and *four weeks prior for the bulletin*.

Continued...

· **Open Office Hours and Monday - Friday 10:00 a.m. -2:00p.m. Or By Appointment Only.** If you wish to see Fr. Stavros or the office staff, you must make an appointment. Also, when meeting with the office staff, or when meeting with Father Stavros on a non-pastoral matter, please be efficient with your time. There is lots of work that goes on in the office and constant interruptions make for little progress. Planned appointments are fine, they are not interruptions.

FUNDRAISERS/HALL USAGE:

· All fundraisers and events by ministries or church affiliated groups should be scheduled at the August calendar meeting. For those, not scheduled at this meeting; please submit your event request to the Parish Council; via the office email officestjohnhoc-tampa@gmail.com

· **Please clean up the kitchen after your event.** No food, trays, utensils, etc., should be left on the counters, sink, or drying rack. Please throw away all trash and wash all dirty dishes, trays, etc. and return to the appropriate places.

· All sales of tickets and other fundraising items, shall take place at designated tables immediately outside of the foyer and in the center of the hall. These tables will be preset for your use. Our foyer has become increasingly crowded and we need to maintain clearance per fire code.

· All contracts for caterers, bands, etc., made in the church name that obligate the church for payment shall be submitted and signed by the Parish Council.

COFFEE HOURS/FUNDRAISERS:



· Our time after Sunday Liturgy provides fellowship that we all look forward to and appreciate. This time is often a mix of simple to more elaborate coffee time and also includes fund raisers and more formal luncheons. As we begin a new year we would like to reiterate some procedures and policies. We have a calendar meeting in August to establish the schedule and luncheons that will be considered fund raisers during the year. Each Ministry is asked to give input before this schedule is finalized.

· The Parish Council discussed that each Ministry should determine what they bring to Coffee Hour without strict guidelines. With the end goal that our parishioners should not be pressured or asked to give additional money just to receive a cup of coffee and cookie. Luncheons/Fundraisers fall into a different category and will be published in the monthly calendar.

· Additionally, when a Ministry needs to setup a table for a special purpose - Information/Sales - **The ministry must call the church office to reserve a table during coffee hour.**

· Lastly any Ministry that wants to charge for a lunch (not on the original schedule) will need to get

approval from the Parish Council by sending written notice prior to the monthly Parish Council Meeting.

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

Do you Like our Facebook page? Like our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are posted frequently so you are up to date with everything going on at St. John the Baptist. You can find our page at [StJohnGOCTampa](https://www.facebook.com/StJohnGOCTampa).

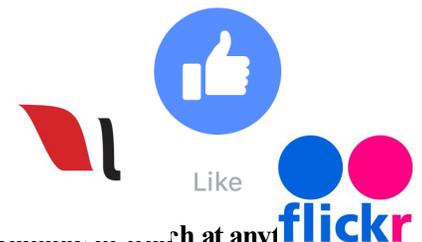
Live Streaming

All of our services are being video recorded and are available on our Livestream page.

To access this page

1. Go to our Church's website: 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 are available to watch at any**

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



January 2022

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 St. Basil Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.						
2 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	3 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	4 Royal Hours 9:30 a.m.	5** Eve of Theophany Vesperal Liturgy 9:00 a.m.	6 Great Vespers 6:30 p.m.	7** Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 09:30 a.m.	8
9 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Vasilopita Sunday- confirmed GOYA 5:00 p.m.	10 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	11 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m Meeting of Ministry Heads 6:30 p.m.	12**	13 Griefshare 6:30 p.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	14**	15 Sunday School Teachers' Retreat 9-12
16 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	17 St. Anthony Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	18 Sts. Athanasios and Cyril Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. PC Meeting	19** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m	20 Paraklesis & Parea 6:00 p.m. Griefshare 6:30 p.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	21**	22 GOYA Lock-in @ 5:00 pm Gasparilla Parking
23 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	24 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	25 St. Gregory the Theologi- an Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	26**	27 Griefshare 6:30 p.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	28**	29 Gasparilla Parking
30 Three Hierarchs Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	31 Orthodoxy 101 Teaching Liturgy 6:30 p.m.					

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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www.stjohntpa.org

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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.

Parish Priest Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis
813-876-8830 (Office) 813-394-1038 (Cell)
fstav@gmail.com

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

Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero
813-876-8830 (Office) 678-637-4425 (Cell)

Pastoral Assistant Alex Limberatos
813-876-8830 (Office) 262-370-0586 (Cell)
alex@stjohntpa.org

Parish Council
Jim Armstrong, President 954-295-6665
Euripides Panos, Vice President 813-352-3972
John Zelatis, Secretary 813-727-2271
Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898
George Chagaris 727-420-1920
Joanne Dalaklis 781-888-3329
Amin Hanhan 813-846-2957
Nick Katzaras 863-581-2430
Jimmy Konstas 813-220-7352
Marilyn Sandborn 813-855-8678
Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

Office Staff
Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper
debbie@stjohntpa.org fax: 813-443-4899

Adopt a College Student
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

Adult Greek School
Magda Myer 813-523-5771

AHEPA
Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319

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

Altar Boys
Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Bookstore
Presbytera Denise Stefero 678-464-4833

Bible Study
Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425

Buildings & Grounds
Euripides Panos 813-352-3972

Chanter
Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586

Choir
Pauline Spencer, Director 813-390-1782
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

Community Outreach
Greg Melton 813-967-2074

**Connect Through Christ -
Special Needs Ministry for Children**
Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534

Dance Groups
H XAPA MΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668

Daughters of Penelope
Diane Trimis 813-220-3389

Festival
Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

Finance Committee
Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Food Pantry
Sheila Vukmer 412-719-1005

GriefShare
Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

Gasparilla Parking
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

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

Hope/Joy
George & Zackie Amers 813-245-3813

Junior Olympics
Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

MOMS
Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

Men's Fellowship
Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Parish Nursing Ministry
Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026

Oratorical Festival
Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Photography Ministry
Karina Findlay 813-476-9632

Philoptochos
Melissa Krinos 813-716-9975

Stewardship
Chris Kyrus 757-672-1920
George Mitseas 813-748-1220

Sunday School
Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102

Usher
Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

Website / Social Media / APP
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

Welcoming Ministry
Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Women's Bible Study
Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Young Adult/OCF
Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586

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

Youth Protection
Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855

12 Disciples
Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376

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.