

# ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

# *THE MESSENGER*

“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

## April 2015

### **Mission Statement:**

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is dedicated to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

### **Vision:**

The church shall seek to fulfill its mission by:

1. Embracing the Spiritual Life of the Orthodox Church through regular prayer, worship, and frequent participation in the sacraments.
2. Supporting the Church through stewardship of time and talent and sacrificial giving.
3. Providing a welcoming, caring loving environment
4. Having its members exemplify Orthodox Christian character and morals.
5. Supporting ministries that facilitate the overall mission of the Church.
6. Exemplifying commitment to community service and charitable outreach.
7. Creating an environment which encourages member to grow in their faith.

### **Father Stavros' Message**

#### **Holy Week, What is Your Plan for Commemorating God's Plan?**

If you took a hard-boiled egg and a marker, how many dots do you think you could make on the egg with your marker? 500 maybe? On every egg, there are 10,000 pores (or small holes) that allow a baby chick to breathe during its 19 days of gestation until it is ready to hatch. There is also an air pocket at one end of the egg that allows the air to collect so that as the chick grows and fills the egg, there is still air for the chick to breathe. Ten thousand holes on the surface of an egg that can't be seen with the naked eye but they are there! Is this a random accident? Or an intelligent design?

Getting a cut and bleeding is a fairly common occurrence. We get paper cuts, cut ourselves shaving, get cuts playing sports and working in the yard. Sometimes we bleed when we floss our teeth. Anytime our bodies start bleeding, there is a complex process that happens to make the blood clot so that we don't bleed to death. Hundreds of things have to happen, and do happen, in our bodies, so that our blood clots. If one of these processes fails, we could bleed to death from a simple cut. Is our blood clotting system that random? Or an intelligent design?

There are so many complex systems of things in our bodies—not only clotting blood, but digestion of food, circulation of oxygen, and the beating of the heart, not to mention the mil-

lions of cells that die and are replenished in our bodies EVERY day. No way is this random.

The first step in being a Christian to accept that there is a power at work that is greater than us. That is the Lord. The Lord made heaven and earth, things that are seen and unseen, things that are known and things that are as yet unknown. The Lord made them all. The Lord made the human being as the crowning jewel in His creation. At every stage of creation, God looked at the earth and “saw that it was good.” (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25)

*26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” 29 And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed*

*which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. Genesis 1:26-31*

So important and unique was the human being in God’s creation that THREE times the Bible tells us that WE are made in the IMAGE of God. We were also given authority over all of the creation. And we were given that authority by God. And when God finished all of his work, AFTER the creation of the human being, then God FINALLY used the description “Very good” in relation to the rest of the creation.

*15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” Genesis 2:15-17*

God’s plan for the human race was also very specific. He placed us in Paradise, and gave us dominion of everything in Paradise, except for one tree. The human being, rather than being grateful with EVERYTHING that God has given him, rather than being grateful that God had given him just about EVERYTHING, the human being was greedy. He wanted the forbidden tree also. This was the first sin—ingratitude. The second sin was the disobedient act of eating from the tree. And the third sin was that man lied about what he did.

The result of these three sins was the FALL of mankind, the entering into the state of sin and imperfection that gets us to where we are today. This was NOT part of God’s plan when He created us. God created us for perfection, not to be fallen beings in a fallen world.

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and His ministry, death and Resurrection, became God’s plan to help the human race overcome the Fall. There had to be a way for man to be redeemed, for the human race to again attain Paradise. The first Paradise was a Gift from God to the human being. It came with one stipulation—that man stay away from the tree of the union between good and evil. God obviously did not stop us from partaking of the tree. He gave us a choice. We chose wrong.

Paradise today is also a choice—those who freely follow Jesus Christ, who keep His commandments, who embrace His example of obedience to the will of God for our lives, these are the ones that will attain Paradise at the end of their lives. While our eternal destination ultimately rests in the hands of the Lord, who will meet us as our Judge at the end of our lives, how we prepare for our Judgment is a choice we are each free to make. Again, the Judgment is not a choice—that is a trial we will all endure. The records of our lives that we will present to our Judge, that is our choice whether they are marked with good things or bad things.

So let us come now to the present day—We are about to mark Holy Week and Pascha in 2015! You are here. I am here. God has a special plan for each of our lives that we are each at a different stage of realizing. Some of us are married, some have children, some have jobs, others have homes. These things are all part of God’s plan for us. Each of us has a talent, another part of God’s plan, that each person be blessed with something that is unique and special about them, that allows each of us to pass life in a meaningful way. If you take your talents and resort to a life of crime, so you are locked up in jail and contribute nothing to society, this was not God’s plan for your life. It means that you have to repent and get back to contributing something to society, getting back to God’s plan for your life.

God doesn’t plan for people to fail either. We might be failing at something, but that is not part of God’s plan either. God may allow bad things to happen to us, either to test us, or to strengthen us in some way, or He may even allow bad people to do bad things to us (He won’t take away another person’s free will, even to save an innocent person from death and suffering.) But failure is not part of God’s plan for us. If you are failing in any important aspects of your life, this is not God’s plan for you.

Last month I wrote to you about evaluating your lives, evaluating where you are in relationship to God, as well as to other people. In a few days, we will again begin our Holy Week journey for 2015. Many Protestant churches offer what is called a “revival”, several days in a row held at a random time during the calendar year, when people come to the church in droves, over many nights, to “revive” their faith, or “revive” their spirits, or their hope, or their dedication., etc. They generally do not utilize a rich anthology of services during their revivals. Rather, they use guest speakers, and different media to convey their message. A revival is done with the expressed purpose of “reviving” the faith of the membership through a short-duration intense spiritual experience. This is done to catapult a person’s faith to a new height and also provide direction or redirection for the rest of the year.

The Orthodox Holy Week experience is a cross between a revival, and, as one hierarch of the church once put it to me, “a spiritual glendi.” Just as we put a lot of emphasis once a year on our Greek festival, celebrating our community, coming together and also raising money that carries us through the lean financial portions of the year, this “spiritual glendi” is supposed to bring our community together, to strengthen our individual expressions of faith, and give us, individually and collectively, something to carry us through the spiritually lean portions of our lives.

Let me go back to the word “plan” and speak of this word in three ways as pertains to Holy Week. First, this is a great opportunity for us to review God’s plan for our lives, individually and collectively. Collectively, we will again “review” the theology of our church about God’s plan. The slow journey through the Holy Week book is akin to “continuing education,” a refresher course of what we believe as Orthodox Christians. Most of us participate in continuing education as part of our professions. We embrace the opportunity to hone our crafts, to

get better at what we are doing. Holy Week provides the same opportunity.

If I were on a deserted island and could only bring three books, they would be “The Bible,” my Holy Week Book, and a book on how to survive on a deserted island. The reason for the Holy Week book is that it contains all of our theology—About Creation, the fall, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Holy Trinity and God’s plan for our lives. All of this is contained in the Holy Week Book. And because most of us don’t have the discipline to slowly read through and digest this, the church provides an ambitious week of services to help us relearn.

The second way I will use the word “plan” is for a look at our individual lives as related to God’s plan for them. We will hear scripture passages and hymns about our talents, our relationships with God and with one another, we will receive prayers of healing and strength, have the opportunity to unburden ourselves of sorrows, and get an opportunity for a new start. It’s a great time to evaluate how you are doing in your life—at the end of each calendar year, we evaluate our lives and make new year’s resolutions. But we are not given such a great opportunity to evaluate ourselves the way we do in Holy Week, over the course of 18 services in 9 days. This is a great time to think about where we’ve come from, and where we are going, and then make a plan for after Pascha for positive changes in our lives. It’s a great time to reconcile with people, to offer forgiveness, to ask for forgiveness. It’s a great time to renew friendships, marriages, and overall energy we bring to the things we do in our lives. We will sing on Pascha “Let all things begin anew in the Light of the Resurrected Christ.” In order to begin anew, we have to necessarily cast off the old and allow ourselves to be open to renewal in all aspects of our lives.

And the last use of the word “plan” is to tell you that you should make a “Holy Week Plan” for yourselves. I could write a book on Holy Week but until you come and experience this for yourselves, in its entirety, you won’t get the full measure of what this beautiful week can do for your life.

## What’s a good Holy Week Plan?

1. Attend as many services as possible
2. Buy a Holy Week Book, so you can follow along and read and reread the hymns and scriptures.
3. Try to attend at least one of each service from each act of Holy Week. I have written before that Holy Week is like a play in six acts. Please choose at least one scene from each act

### a. ACT 1 Jesus as Lord and King

- i. Saturday of Lazarus
- ii. Palm Sunday morning

### b. ACT 2 Watchfulness

- i. Bridegroom Service of Palm Sunday Night, Holy Monday Night or Holy Tuesday Night
- ii. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy of Holy Monday morning, Holy Tuesday morning or Holy Wednesday morning

### c. ACT 3 Healing

- i. Holy Unction on Holy Wednesday afternoon or evening
- ii. Divine Liturgy on Holy Thursday morning

### d. ACT 4 The Passion of Christ

- i. Holy Thursday evening
- ii. Good Friday morning
- iii. Good Friday afternoon

### e. ACT 5 The funeral of Christ -

Great Friday night which I dare say is almost optional, compared to the other themes of the week, even though this service is well attended. Of all the acts of the week, this, in my opinion, is the least important.

### f. ACT 6 The Resurrection

- i. Holy Saturday morning
- ii. Holy Saturday at midnight
- iii. Pascha-Agape Vespers

Holy Week isn’t merely a bunch of rituals—“getting the oil,” or a flower or an egg or a palm. If we come into the services with a ritualistic mentality, we will not take much away from the experience either. Rather Holy Week is a series of events, each designed to touch one aspect of our spirituality. We come on Holy Wednesday, not merely to “get the oil” but for the spiritual healing of our souls and bodies. In order for this service to be meaningful, you have to come with a heart that says “I need healing because I am wounded.” What is the service on Holy Thursday night all about? A marathon of Gospels? A colorful procession? Holy Thursday night is about His LOVE and our GRATITUDE. This is what we are doing. Friday night is again now about a color procession where we get to go outside—it is an opportunity to again express our thanks and in our procession, to witness to the world who we are. Holy Saturday morning is my son’s favorite service because we litter the church with leaves. But the point of this service is the joyful proclamation that Christ is rising from the tomb, and those who are entering the state of death, as He did, are about to experience the ultimate victory, not the ultimate defeat.

I encourage you to make a plan and get the most out of this once a year “revival” experience. At a time where people are rewriting history as suits them it seems, it is necessary for us, I believe, to relearn our history, as God’s people, about God’s plan for our salvation. Our faith doesn’t change, God’s plan doesn’t change, and our services don’t change. In a world where so many things are changing, and not necessarily for the better, it is important and necessary that we relive, relearn and reaffirm what it is we believe and where it is we believe we are going and recommit to going there. You’ll only get out of this what you put into it. I encourage you to put in a lot, so that you can take out a lot from this experience.

I look forward to making my 11th Holy Week journey in Tampa. Kali Anastasi!

With love in the Lord,  
+Fr. Stavros

# The Bridegroom and the Church are a Match Made in Heaven

By Charlie Hambos

God loves weddings. He loves a good party too. After all, it was the first sacrament established by Jesus Christ at the Wedding of Cana. There He turned many jugs of water into wine because they had run out and if there wasn't enough wine then there wasn't going to be much of a party. Actually, Christ was just listening to His mother. She must like a good party too.

Planning weddings seem to be a lot of fun and a lot of stress. Thousands and thousands of dollars are spent picking out the perfect dress, renting the perfect hall for the reception, paying for the food, and renting the limos and so much more. God also loves to plan weddings. He planned a great wedding and it took Him several thousand years before the time finally came for the big party. The marriage being spoken about here is the one between His Son, Jesus Christ and the Church. This is also known as our salvation.

God didn't spend a lot of money but he spent a lot of time making sure that he found the perfect match for the Bride, that is the church. He had to find the right group of people and the right woman to give birth to the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. He prepared humanity by giving them the Law in the Old Testament to show us that we needed something more. We needed to be married to someone and that someone is Jesus Christ in order to reunite creation with the Creator.

The only problem is that He didn't come as we expected. He didn't come in the most expensive limo. He came riding a donkey. He didn't come to a Bride who was ready. She was not prepared. She had an idea He was coming but didn't know when and was expecting something greater. She was expecting a Great King, not the King of Glory. She was expecting a Prince of the Armies, not the Prince of Peace. She was expecting Him to be born from royalty, not the son of a carpenter in the smallest most insignificant town called Bethlehem. We know the story but are we prepared?

The Church gives us an opportunity to prepare every year during the period of Great Lent. The Church even prescribes a time to prepare for the preparation during the three weeks prior to the beginning of Great Lent. We learn about forgiveness, repentance and humility. We fast from food and from the bodily passions to give our souls the opportunity to move closer to Christ. To give us the opportunity to yearn for Him. It is a constant struggle..

The first few nights of Holy Week help us reflect on the big party, that is the big wedding. The Bridegroom has finally arrived and is ready to meet His Bride on the cross. With this, let us reflect on the icon of the Bridegroom. Are we ready for Him?

In the icon, we see Jesus Christ. It is much different than what we are used to. He is not in Glory. He is not standing over death after conquering it. In the icon, we see Christ as the Bridegroom. We can see the marks of his suffering but this is what He had to do to prepare for the marriage. The scene of the

icon itself specifically comes from His passion when he was mocked and tortured by the Roman soldiers. The scene comes from the Gospel of Matthew 27:27-31, "Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium and collected the whole cohort round him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet cloak round him, and having twisted some thorns into a crown they put this on his head and placed a reed in his right hand. To make fun of him they knelt to him saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' And they spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head with it. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the cloak and dressed him in his own clothes and led him away to crucifixion."

The Roman soldiers thought they were making fun of Jesus Christ by putting on the purple cloak, the crown of thorns and the reed in His hands. Purple is a sign of royalty. In the icon of Christ as Bishop, He wears purple vestments. The crown of thorns represent His marriage to the church, which required a great deal of suffering. To this day, the crowning in marriage is a sign of martyrdom a sign of sacrifice. The same reed they beat Christ with is the same one they gave Him to hold. He does not carry a great staff adorned with gold and precious gems as a great king would. He rules through humility. His throne is not a great seat where He will rule from but a tomb where He will be buried. Archbishop Stylianos of Australia said on the topic, "the more the love of God empties itself the more the grandeur of that love is revealed in a manner that is more jubilant and becoming of God. That is why the crown of the "Bridegroom of the Church" is "of thorns", rather than a royal diadem "of precious stones". Only utter humility could embrace the furthest reaches of human adventure and sin. It is at this very point that the ultimate dimensions of the love of God are revealed: 'greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends' (John 15:13)." The Bridegroom icon, is Christ as King. It wasn't the King we were expecting but the King of Glory through humility.

The people acted like they didn't know about the "king" that would come and we continue to deny Him. However, God in his infinite plan of goodness and mercy did tell us about a certain servant who would come to save us all. The image of Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant exactly like the one we see in the Bridegroom Icon was given to us by the Prophet Isaiah nearly 700 years before the birth of Christ. On Good Friday in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition, we read from Isaiah 52 and 53. It is here we see the Suffering Servant of God being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 52:13-15 God says through Isaiah, "Look, my servant will prosper, will grow great, will rise to great heights. As many people were aghast at him -- he was so inhumanly disfigured that he no longer looked like a man--so many nations will be astonished and kings will stay tight-lipped before him, seeing what had never been told them, learning what they had not heard before." They beat him up so bad that he couldn't have been a King. They did not even want to look at Him.

The Prophet Isaiah continues in 53:2-7, "He had no form or

charm to attract us, no beauty to win our hearts; he was despised, the lowest of men, a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering, one from whom, as it were, we averted our gaze, despised, for whom we had no regard. Yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing, ours the sorrows he was carrying, while we thought of him as someone being punished and struck with affliction by God; whereas he was being wounded for our rebellions, crushed because of our guilt; the punishment reconciling us fell on him, and we have been healed by his bruises. We had all gone astray like sheep, each taking his own way, and Yahweh brought the acts of rebellion of all of us to bear on him. Ill-treated and afflicted, he never opened his mouth, like a lamb led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep dumb before its shearers he never opened his mouth."

Jesus Christ suffered to be married to us, the Church. The sufferings he suffered were ours. He was being wounded for our rebellions. He was crushed because of our guilt. We had all gone astray like sheep, each taking his own way, and God

brought the acts of rebellion of all of us and placed them on Christ. He was like a lamb led to the slaughterhouse.

The beauty of the Orthodox Christian Faith is this, Sober Joy. These things: the iconography of our church, the usage of Old Testament prophecies, the services of Holy Week and the preparation of Great Lent are not for us to suffer like Christ. He suffered for us already. He wanted to marry us. They are tools to help us remember what Christ did for us. Now, it's time for us to do our part in this marriage. It is time for us to prepare. The time is now. Archbishop Stylianos of Australia doesn't use Sober Joy but instead speaks of the equalling out of "humility" and "glory" by quoting Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:8-10), "He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth."

**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 as 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 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.* If you are interested in being a "Friend of St. John the Baptist", please fill out and return the form below. Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

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You can read it on your computer, tablet, phone everywhere you go! All you have to do is email the office at **office@stjohnsgoetampa@gmail.com** and let us know you want to be emailed the Messenger!

In the Subject Line just type: **Please Email Me the Messenger** and you will be emailed and not mailed the May Messenger!

# Liturgical Schedule for April 2015

**Wednesday, April 1**      **9th Hour 5:30 p.m.**      **Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 6:00 p.m.**

**Saturday, April 4**      **Saturday of Lazarus**  
Orthros: 8:30 a.m.    Proskomide 9:30 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. Luke (Christos Nenos, Dean Mitseas, Nicholas Katzaras, James Katzaras, Nicholas Yotis, Genaro Scarfogliero, Andrew Thatcher, Chris Cojita)

**Sunday, April 5**      **Palm Sunday**  
Orthros 8:30 a.m.      Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

**Altar Boys:** Captains only (Aris Rogers, Nicholas Kavouklis, Yonathan Alem, Mihail Kaburis, Val Courialis, George Hambos, Peter Hanhan, Savas Ferekides, Karter Lenardos, Christopher Scarfogliero)

**Ushers:** Nick Kavouklis, Perry Katsamakis, Peter Theophanous

**Coffee Hour:** Philoptochos Palm Sunday Luncheon

**Welcoming Committee:** Greeters: Debbie Kavouklis, Julie Palios, Maria Xenick, & Vickie Peckham;

**Bridegroom 6:30 pm**

**Altar Boys:** St. John (Nicholas Alsina, Antonio Bavaro, Jonah Blankenbaker, Yanni Trimikliniotis, Gabriel Fallon)

**Usher:** Mike Trimis

**Holy Monday, April 6**      **9th Hour 9:00 a.m.**      **Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30 a.m.**  
**Bridegroom Service 6:30 p.m.**

**Altar Boys:** St. Matthew (John Palios, Brigham Sibley, Benny Hidrmichel, James Kavouklis, Andrew Patrasciou, Frankie Giallourakis)

**Usher:** Florin Patrasciou

**Holy Tuesday, April 7**      **9th Hour 9:00 a.m.**      **Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30 a.m.**  
**Bridegroom Service 6:30 p.m.**  
His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will be presiding over the Service

**Altar Boys:** St. Mark (John Karamitsanis, Lukas Karamitsanis, Andrew Mellon-Lynn, Dominic Garcia, Demetri Karounos, Grayson Borgeas, Peter Chandler)

**Ushers:** Tom Georgas

**Holy Wednesday, April 8**      **9th Hour 9:00 a.m.**      **Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30 a.m.**  
**Holy Unction 3:00 p.m.**

**Altar Boys:** Anyone attending may serve

**Ushers:** George Mitseas, Tom Georgas

**Bridegroom Service 5:45 p.m.**      **Holy Unction 6:30 p.m.**

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. Luke (Christos Nenos, Dean Mitseas, Nicholas Katzaras, James Katzaras, Nicholas Yotis, Genaro Scarfogliero, Andrew Thatcher, Chris Cojita)

**Ushers:** Tom Georges, Amin Hanhan, John Christ, Kevin Fentress

**Holy Thursday, April 9**      **Vespertal Liturgy 9:30 a.m.**  
**Service of the Passion 6:30 p.m.** (All Night Vigil to follow)

**Altar Boys:** Captains Only

**Ushers:** David Voykin, Brett Mourer, Ed Gerecke, Perry Katsamakis

**Great Friday, April 10**      **Royal Hours 9:00 a.m.**

**Altar Boys:** Anyone attending may serve

**Apolkathelosis 3:00 p.m.**

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. John (Nicholas Alsina, Antonio Bavaro, Jonah Blankenbaker, Yanni Trimikliniotis, Gabriel Fallon)

**Ushers:** George Mitseas, Wayne Blankenship

**Lamentations 7:00 p.m.**

**Altar Boys:** Captains Only (Be there by 6:30 p.m.)

**Ushers:** John Christ, Peter Theophanous, John Tsibris, George Trimikliniotis, Pete Trakas, Mike Trimis, John Nenos, Nick Kavouklis and the entire Parish Council

**Holy Saturday, April 11**      **Vespertal Liturgy 8:45 a.m.**

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. Matthew (John Palios, Brigham Sibley, Benny Hidrmichel, James Kavouklis, Andrew Patrasciou, Frankie Giallourakis)

**Ushers:** Gregory Tisdale, George Mitseas

**Great Canon 11:00 p.m.**      **Resurrection Service 11:45 p.m.**      **Paschal Liturgy 12:30 a.m.**

**Altar Boys:** Captains Only

**Ushers:** Kevin Fentress, Jason Pill, Peter Thorphanous, Bret Mourer, Perry Katsamakis, Chris Kavouklis, Demetrios Halkias, John Nenos and the entire Parish Council

**Sunday, April 12**

**Great and Holy Pascha**

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

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. Mark (John Karamitsanis, Lukas Karamitsanis, Andrew Mellon-Lynn, Dominic Garcia, Demetri Karounos, Grayson Borgeas, Peter Chandler)

**Ushers:** Gregory Tsidale, George Mitseas

**Coffee Hour:** Parish Council Pascha Reception

**Friday, April 17**

**Feast of the Life-Giving Fountain of the Virgin Mary-Zodochos Peghe**

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

**Sunday, April 19**

**Sunday of Thomas**

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

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. Mark (John Karamitsanis, Lukas Karamitsanis, Andrew Mellon-Lynn, Dominic Garcia, Demetri Karounos, Grayson Borgeas, Peter Chandler)

**Ushers:** Gregory Tisdale, John Tsibris, George Trimikliniotis

**Coffee Hour:** Parish Picnic

**Welcoming Committee:** Greeters: Irene Kostaris, Jeanie Nenos; Ambassador: Lisa Alsina; Caller: Christine Worley

**Thursday, April 23**

**St. George the Great Martyr**

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

**Sunday, April 26**

**Sunday of the Myrrh Bearers**

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

**Altar Boys:** Captains and St. Luke (Christos Nenos, Dean Mitseas, Nicholas Katzaras, James Katzaras, Nicholas Yotis, Genaro Scarfogliero, Andrew Thatcher, Chris Cojita)

**Ushers:** Brett Mourer, Jason Pill, Amin Hanhan

**Coffee Hour:** Community Outreach

**Welcoming Committee:** Greeters: Perry, Betty Katherine Kastamakis; Ambassador: Carole Fotopoulos; Caller: Peggy Bradshaw

## Guidelines for the Holy Week

**Doing it all**—The experience of attending all the Holy Week services is rare indeed. But if you are able to do it, this is a beautiful experience everyone should try at least once in their life. How often do you have the opportunity to receive Holy Communion 8 times in 9 days, to be within 12 hours of having received or receiving again for a week! How often do you have the opportunity to attend two services a day for a week! For a very uplifting and unique experience, if your schedule allows, please consider coming to all the services. I know the effort, the fatigue, the pain, but also the joy that only comes when you “do them all.”

**Holy Week Books are available for sale in the church bookstore.** The Holy Week Book contains the words and hymns of all the Holy Week services and will serve not only as an aid to worship but as a complete theology book, for the services of Holy Week contain all the theology of the Orthodox Church. These books are well made and will last forever, so get yours today and get more out of your Holy Week experience.

**Holy Communion to be given only in context of the Divine Liturgy** -There are eight opportunities to receive Holy Communion during Holy Week. Please plan to receive Holy Communion through prayer and fasting at as many of these services as possible. Incidentally, a person may receive Holy Communion each time it is offered. For instance, you can receive Holy Communion on both Holy Saturday morning and at the Anastasis. For those who have kept the entire Lenten fast, you can receive Holy Communion conceivably, all eight times during Holy Week. Since there are so many opportunities to receive Holy Communion during the Divine Liturgies of Holy Week, Holy Communion will only be given in the context of the Divine Liturgy, not before or after. (no drive through Communion) Also, even if we receive Holy Communion on Holy Thursday or Holy Saturday, we should not break the fast until the conclusion of the Easter Liturgy. When receiving Holy Communion, it is important and necessary to have celebrated the entire Liturgy. **Please no phone calls about what time is Communion, so you can duck in and out quickly.** Come for the entire service. Be there for the invitation to enter the Kingdom, be there for the reading of the Gospel, the reciting of the Creed. And after Communion, don't just take your Communion and run, as many people will do on Holy Saturday morning, stay the remaining minutes of the services and pray the prayers of Thanksgiving in the back of the Liturgy book.

## **Saturday, April 4 - Saturday of Lazarus/Service of the Proskomide**

Father Stavros has received the blessing of Metropolitan Alexios to celebrate the service of the Proskomide on the solea once a year, on the Saturday of Lazarus. The Proskomide is the service where the bread and wine are prepared to be offered at the Divine Liturgy. On Saturday, April 4, Father Stavros will celebrate this service at 9:30 a.m., on the solea at St. John the Baptist and will explain the service to those who are in attendance. He will also pray for everyone in attendance and offer a piece of bread on each person's behalf in the preparation of the Holy Communion. Please plan to come to this service to see this important aspect of the Liturgy which is not usually witnessed by the congregation. If you've never seen this service, it is really something you should do at least once in your lifetime.

**Making Palm Crosses** - Following Divine Liturgy, we will be preparing the palm crosses for Palm Sunday. Please plan to stay for a while to decorate our church and make the palms as we do every year. No experience necessary. Come and we'll be happy to teach you. Breakfast will also be served.

## **Holy Tuesday, April 7 - His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios will be joining us.**

His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios visits a different area of the Metropolis each year for Holy Week. Several years ago, he visited us for Good Friday evening. This year, he will be presiding over the Service of the Bridegroom on Holy Tuesday evening. It is always a great honor to have our Metropolitan praying with us and I hope we can all come on Holy Tuesday night to greet our Spiritual Father.

## **Holy Wednesday, April 8 - Holy Unction**

The Mystery of Holy Unction is established upon the words and actions of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a sacrament of healing and transformation from a bruised and hurt world to the deliverance from sin and corruption. It is a sacrament of the church. All sacraments of the church are administered by the priests of the church. In fact, the primary role and identity of the priests is to be the celebrant of the sacraments. **Because of this, Holy Unction may not be taken home.** Father Stavros will anoint people who are unable to attend services on Holy Wednesday evening on Holy Thursday and Good Friday after each service, and will make such announcements at each of these services. For those unable to come to church, Father will be happy to come to your home and anoint those who are home-bound. Holy Unction is kept in the church year-round. If there is ever a time when you would like to be anointed, or have a loved one anointed, all you have to do is ask.

**Bridegroom Service for Last Supper** - There is actually a Bridegroom Service which is traditionally celebrated on Holy Wednesday evening. However, this service has been suppressed in most parishes because of the Sacrament of Holy Unction. This service, however, is important because it contains the Gospel Lesson of the Last Supper. So, if you are not going to attend church on Holy Thursday morning, and would like to have a complete narrative of Holy Week, please plan to attend this brief service at 5:45 p.m. on Holy Wednesday, which will be celebrated before the evening's Holy Unction Service.

## **Holy Thursday, April 9 - The Service of the Passion**

The service of the 12 Gospels and procession of the crucified Lord is the longest service of the Church year. On Holy Thursday, light and darkness, joy and sorrow are mixed. At the "upper room" and in Gethsemane the light of the kingdom and the darkness of hell come together. The way of life and the way of death converge. In many parishes this service is not very well attended. However, one cannot truly celebrate the Resurrection if he/she has not stood at the foot of the cross of Christ. As one prayer of the Sunday Orthros states, "Through the Cross, joy has come to all the world." Without the Crucifixion, there could be no Resurrection. Thus, after the Resurrection Service on Holy Saturday Night, one could argue that Holy Thursday evening is the next most-important service of Holy Week. If you are unable to attend the entire service, then please come from 7:30-8:30 p.m., witness the Procession of the Crucified Lord, venerate His precious Body on the Cross and leave early. But please do not abandon the Lord as He hangs on the Cross. **HOLY THURSDAY EVENING, AS YOU EXPERIENCED LAST YEAR FOR THOSE WHO ATTENDED IS THE MOST POWERFUL SERVICE OF THE ENTIRE HOLY WEEK, AND OF THE ENTIRE CHURCH YEAR.**

**An All-Night Vigil at the Cross of Christ** - For the past two years, we have done an All-Night Vigil at the Cross of Christ. Those who participated found it VERY inspiring. I have included their comments from last year again with this issue of the Messenger so we can be inspired by their reflections as we prepare for this year's vigil. The vigil will begin following the service of the 12 Gospels and will continue until the service of the Royal Hours, so it will last from approximately 10:30 p.m. on Holy Thursday evening until 9:00 a.m. on Good Friday morning. We will have a sign up sheet for people to sign up for an hour or two to stand at the Cross and read from the book of Psalms as well as other prayer books. Charlie Hambos will again be coordinating this for us. If you are interested in participating at the All-Night Vigil on Holy Thursday, please contact Charlie Hambos (Charlie.Hambos@gmail.com). A sign-up sheet will also be made available towards the end of Lent for this purpose as well.



## Great Friday, April 10

**Decoration of the Epitaphios** will be done in church following the Royal Hours on Good Friday. All are invited to come and help decorate the tomb of Christ. Please, however, work quietly this job is meant to be solemn not social.

The **Service of Apokathelosis** (literally, the Un-Nailing) re-enacts the narrative of Christ descending from the Cross. The figure of Christ is removed from the cross and wrapped in a new linen cloth, carried into the sanctuary and placed on the altar table. In the same service, a procession with the Epitaphios (embroidery of the dead Christ) is made around the interior of the church, and the Epitaphios is placed in the Kouvouklion (tomb of Christ).

The **Lamentations and the Epitaphios Procession** - The Lamentations are short, poetic verses lamenting the Passion, Death and Burial of Christ. Interspersed with the Lamentations are Psalm verses from Psalm 119, the same verses we sing at a funeral service, which is appropriate, as the Lamentations are the funeral service for the Lord. The service starts with the Canon, and after the Canon is complete, the priest opens the Royal Doors, the lights are turned up, and the Lamentations begin. Everyone is invited to sing together. Books will be provided for your use. The outdoor procession of the tomb of our Lord will take place, weather permitting, at the Service of the Lamentations. We invite all the faithful to participate in this procession by proceeding in an order, quiet and dignified manner befitting the solemnity of this occasion. Please, refrain from conversing with others or acting in a way which will bring attention to you instead of the dead Lord. Please sing along with the choir—don't check your cell phone for messages. This is a time to pray, not to text message! Everyone will pass under the Epitaphios, symbolizing the passing from death to life, re-enter the church quietly and await the resumption of the service. Finally, everyone will be given a flower from the Epitaphios as a blessing at the end of the service.

## Holy Saturday, April 11

**Anastasis Service** - The service of the Anastasis will begin at 11:00 p.m. on Holy Saturday evening, with the chanting of the Canon. Shortly before midnight, the light of the Resurrected Christ will be given to all the faithful. We will then go outside, weather permitting, to read the Easter Gospel and sing the Christos Anesti for the first time. Please proceed outside in an orderly manner so that we can complete this service in a timely manner. We will then proceed back into the church for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Please plan to stay for the entirety of the Divine Liturgy on Easter. **Please don't leave early.** Plan from now to stay for the entire Liturgy, the most joyous Liturgy of the year, and to receive Holy Communion. After all, we don't break our fast with meatballs and cheese, but with Holy Communion. There will be a reception following the Divine Liturgy for all in attendance, in the Kourmolis Center. After making the journey through Holy Week together, what better way to continue our celebration than to sit down as a family and break bread together on the greatest feast day of the church year.

**Blessing of Baskets of Food** - It is the Orthodox Tradition on Easter that we do not only bless eggs but other types of food that will go on the table for the Easter Banquet. Though this practice has become sort of dormant in the Greek Orthodox Church, it is very much alive in other Orthodox jurisdictions. Therefore, if anyone wishes to bring a basket of food to be blessed on Easter night, they may come and place it beneath or around the table on the Solea where the basket of Easter eggs will be.

## Pascha Sunday, April 12

**Reading of the Resurrection Gospel at the Agape Vespers** - Those interested in participating in the beautiful Easter Vespers of Agape on Easter Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m. by reading the Gospel of the Resurrection in a foreign language are encouraged to see Father Stavros or call the church office, **PRIOR TO HOLY WEEK. DON'T JUST SHOW UP EXPECTING TO READ. WE NEED TO CAREFULLY PLAN THE SERVICES SO THEY ARE DONE PROPERLY.** Please come to the Agape service by 10:45 a.m. to find out where you will stand for the reading of the Gospel. The reading is from the Gospel of St. John 20: 19-25. **You may read it in any language you wish, the more the better.**

~No Kneeling until Pentecost ~ Fast Free the week after Pascha~

## Friday, April 17 - The Feast of the Life-Giving Fountain

Friday, after Pascha, Commemorates the consecration of a Chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which was built over a spring in Constantinople, that emitted water with healing powers. Hundreds of miracles and healings have occurred at this spring. This feast day of "Zodochos Peghe", the Feast of the life-giving Fountain, is always celebrated on the Friday of Bright (Renewal) week, the week after Pascha, April 17, this year.

## Thursday, April 23 -The Feast of St. George

St. George the "Trophy Bearer" is one of the most famous saints of our church. He lived in the third century. He was a soldier, famously memorialized in icons as slaying a dragon. Symbolically, he "slayed" the "dragons" that opposed Christianity and was martyred for his faith. His relics were placed in the altar of our church when it was consecrated in 1986. St. George's feast day is celebrated on April 23 (or the Monday after Pascha if Pascha falls on or after April 23). Thus, this year, we will celebrate his feastday on its correct liturgical date, which will be Thursday, April 23.

# Thoughts on the Vigil at the Holy Cross\*

The vigil will begin following the service of the 12 Gospels and will continue until the service of the Royal Hours, so it will last from approximately 10:30 p.m. on Holy Thursday evening until 9:00 a.m. on Good Friday morning.

*"I was wondering how I would feel this year, the second time I stood at the foot of the cross, on the Vigil for Holy Thursday. This year I found myself reading the Psalms and looking directly at Jesus on the cross during my readings. My heart was saying, 'soon you will be free of pain and suffering and we will rejoice in your resurrection Lord! Thank you and I will try harder this year to walk the walk...' Found myself in direct union, for that hour....amazing feeling. This will always be a part of my journey... Thank you Charlie for the experience again! So comforting to know now that many parishioners are finding joy in the Vigil and keeping watch over our Lord!" -Victoria Melton*

*"I have never read from the book of Psalms or the Bible before so when you asked for those who would take the time and come during the wee hours of that Thursday evening I was not sure if this task was for me. I attended service Wednesday evening and as you were speaking you had stated, 'today was the day to receive, so tomorrow is the day to give.' At that point I decided to give," regardless of being uncomfortable. The following evening I arrived at the church around 1am and completed a total of about 20 minutes of reading which was at times difficult, but ultimately satisfying. I woke up the next morning full of energy and accomplishment, although a very challenging week I had an open mind and inner support to make it successful. We all find ourselves at times receiving, receiving, and receiving, this was a great opportunity to give and I look forward to next year". -Dan Bavaro*

*"We had a unique experience since our whole family participated together. When we all bended down on our knees in front of the cross as a family, we were never closer together than any other point throughout the last 40 days or so. The experience made us wonder if we would have been brave and strong enough to have actually stood by His cross during His crucifixion. Would our children have been willing more so than us? Being able to read prayers during such a quiet moment in the church really brought us peace, especially hearing the voices of our children read as well. We were honored to be able to participate and hope to do it again." -Stefan and Kara Katzaras, Nicholas, James and Eleni*

*"I had the opportunity to participate in the vigil again this year. I came away from it thinking that God is trying to teach me something about time. His timing is perfect and, when we are truly seeking Him, then our worship of Him is timeless. Last year, I meant to set my alarm but somehow didn't yet I was awakened in just enough time to rush to the church for the vigil. This year, after reading from the Psalms and after admiring Christ's condescension to the cross which was directly under the Pantokrator, apparently I read for an extended period of time (while our leader, Charlie, took a well-deserved nap). I have no idea how long I read, but someone eventually relieved me. I can only imagine that Heaven is like that with us worshipping Christ sans timekeeping for eternity. I imagined myself keeping vigil while Christ hung on the cross almost 2000 years ago and I look forward to re-enacting this event again next year." -Brett Mourer*

*"I was once again so happy to be able to participate in this year's Vigil at the Cross. I arrived early in the morning, and the church was dark, quiet, and peaceful. I was there at the same time as a few family members and friends, and all of us were focused on one thing – Christ hanging on the cross in the middle of the night. We took turns reading from the book of Psalms. Reading the Psalms out loud is an awesome way to pray selflessly – rather than praying for something for yourself, these words speak of God's promises, of His mercy, and of praise and of glory. It is most humbling to say them to our Lord and Savior as he hung on the cross, abandoned by his friends. I was once again inspired by the fact that we at St. John did not leave Him alone through the night. Spending this time in our beautiful church in prayer is one of the most moving experiences I have had. Thank you to Charlie Hambos for sharing his time so generously with our community to lead this effort. I look forward to continuing this tradition as part of my Holy Week each year." -Maria Xenick*

\*If you are interested in participating at the All-Night Vigil on Holy Thursday, please contact Charlie Hambos at [Charlie.Hambos@gmail.com](mailto:Charlie.Hambos@gmail.com).

## SOME NOTES ON CHURCH ETIQUETTE

As we are in the Lenten and Easter seasons, many people will be attending church services. It's always helpful to be reminded of a few basic points of etiquette for church services.

1. Please remember that the church is a place of worship.
2. Be respectful; you are a guest in the House of God.
3. Come on time at the beginning of the services.
4. Please refrain from talking; rather, everyone is encouraged to sing along with the Choir or the Chanters.
5. There should be no movement in the church, including entering and leaving a pew or walking down the side aisles, whenever the Priest is:
  - 1) Out on the Solea during the Small Entrance with the Gospel.
  - 2) During the Great Entrance with the Holy Gifts.
  - 3) During the readings of the Epistle or Gospel Lessons.
  - 4) During any procession.
  - 5) At the Consecration
  - 6) During the Sermon
6. During Holy Communion, all those who are prepared are asked to come forth quietly with respect and the anticipation that they will be receiving the very Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Cross yourself, take the cloth and hold it under your chin, state your baptismal name clearly, open your mouth, close your mouth on the spoon to insure that the spoon is empty when it comes out of your mouth, then cross yourself, and take Antidoron, being careful not to let the crumbs fall on the floor.
7. Those who bring up infants, please hold them in your left arm (because Fr. Stavros is left-handed), and make sure their arms and legs are as secure as possible.
8. Please do not cross your legs in church—too casual. When sitting, sit up straight “at attention,” since we are in God’s house.
9. On the same note, don’t put your hands in your pockets, or behind your back, again, too casual. And please tell your children as well.
10. A note about lipstick—For a long time, large lipstick stains have been left on the icons in the narthex or on the special icons that our on the solea. We come to church to worship. The emphasis should not be on appearance. We dress nicely in church as a sign of respect, not fashion. Therefore, please be careful that you do not leave lipstick marks on the icons. You should not wear lipstick on Holy Thursday or Good Friday. These are days of extreme humility and sadness. Do not leave lipstick marks on the body of Christ as it hangs on the Cross. Please refrain from wearing lipstick if you plan to receive Holy Communion.
11. Please dress appropriately for church. Short skirts, strapless dresses and exposed cleavage are not appropriate in church. And outside of church, we should consider what kind of statement our clothing makes about us and the Christian values of modesty that we claim to hold.
12. The Narthex is part of the church and all of the above apply. Please do not linger in the narthex after you arrive. The only people that should be in the narthex are the ushers for the day, and mothers who have fussy babies that want to stand with them in the narthex, that is fine as well. The narthex is the place we light our candles, the pews in the nave are the place we are to worship.
13. Please turn off cell phones!
14. As the Holy Week services are long and run late, for those who bring small children to the services, please sit near either the side door or in the back and if your child becomes fussy, please take them outside for a few minutes.
15. Please don’t chew gum—this is church, not a baseball game.

Thank you for your cooperation in honoring the sanctity of our Holy Church. Your cooperation will assure that our services will continue to be celebrated with the proper honor and dignity with which they should be afforded and will make our celebration of Holy Week and Easter truly memorable. These etiquette practices should be observed all year round!

# Community News

## Parish Registry

**Baptism** - Olivia Skourellos, daughter of Dante and Lindsey Skourellos, was baptized on Sunday, March 15. Perry and Betty Katherine Katsamakis are the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

**Funeral** - Bessie Kefalas passed away on Saturday, March 7. Funeral Services were held at St. John Saturday, March 14. May her memory be eternal!

**Funeral** - Sophia Kefalas passed away on Saturday, March 7. Funeral Services were held at St. John Saturday, March 14. May her memory be eternal!

## What is New at St. John the Baptist?

**Ministry of Mothers Sharing (MOMS)** - will meet in the Nursery at 11:00 a.m. on April 27th. This is a ministry for mothers to gather together to form a network of mutual spiritual support. Is it for mothers with wisdom to share and mothers who are searching for answers and meaning in the vocation of motherhood. Our mission is to provide Biblical encouragement and support to women as they begin their journey of motherhood. Please contact Lindsey Skourellos (813) 503-7845 and Mary Ann Konstas (813) 215-9862 with questions.

**Men's Basketball** - On Tuesday nights at 8:00 p.m., with the exception of Holy Tuesday, the Kourmolis Center is open for men's basketball pick up games. If you are interesting in joining the games, please contact Perry Katsamakis at perrykatsamakis@gmail.com or Jimmy Konstas at dkonstas@gmail.com or just come to the gym and join a team! No skills necessary.

**Committee for Visitation of the Sick** - The Visitation of the Sick Committee is well on its way to making this a very vibrant ministry in our church. We currently have a list of people in our community who are in the hospital, rehab facilities, nursing homes and shut-ins. Our focus is to encourage and comfort those in need. What we do? We make visits, make phone calls, send cards and provide meals on a need-to-need basis. If you are interested in joining this ministry please e-mail Charlie Hambos at charlie.hambos@gmail.com or Nancy Manikas at athana1948@yahoo.com. Also, if you have someone or know someone who could use some encouragement, we are counting on you to be our eyes and ears.



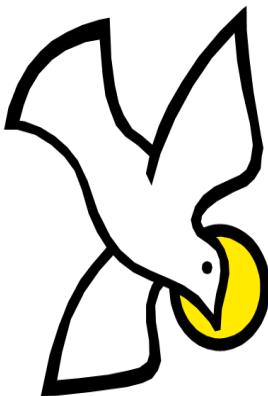
### Sermons on Youtube Channel Each Sunday

Father's sermons each Sunday are available on our youtube channel. Just go to youtube and type in "St John GOC Tampa" and you'll find them. If you miss a sermon or wish to hear a sermon again, you'll find it there!

## Hope/Joy

### Great and Holy Friday Youth Retreat

Friday, April 10, 2015 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM



\*Service of Royal Hours - 9:00 am Retreat will begin following the service at 10:45 a.m.

Please join us for a day of crafts, activities, music, reflection, and worship with your Sunday School friends.

Lunch and snacks included.

**Please register your child by Friday, April 3, 2015**

Call or email Debbie Nicklow at debbienicklow@hotmail.com or 813-690-0671.

All parents are encouraged to attend the Descent from the Cross Service at 3:00 p.m.

Students should dress appropriately for Church and also for comfort during the retreat (or bring a change of clothes.) Parent volunteers are needed for any part of the day!

**Come spend a wonderful day at Church preparing for the Triumphant Resurrection!**

## Community Outreach

Thank you to everyone who continues to support our Community Outreach ministry to serve the homeless and those in need. In addition to supporting First Presbyterian Church's breakfast for the homeless on the 3rd Saturday of each month from 8:00 a.m. -10:30 a.m. on Saturday, April 18 and Saturday, May 16.

## GOYA

**GOYA Lenten Retreat** - Our ELEVENTH Annual GOYA Lenten Retreat was held March 6-8. Over 90 GOYAns and advisors from around the area spent the weekend learning and having fellowship. A special thank you to George and Donna Hambos who handled the cooking chores for the weekend and to Elaine Halkias and other advisors and to our awesome GOYAns who were great hosts.

**Meeting** - The GOYA Meeting for April will be Sunday, April 26, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

### Luminaries for Good Friday and Easter

The GOYAns of our parish will be selling Luminaries for Great Friday and Easter. These are little bags with votive candles inside that line the way of the procession of Christ's tomb around the church on Great Friday and which are lit around the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. On each bag the names can be written of loved ones, either for their health and well-being if they are living (Easter), or in memory of someone who has passed away (Great Friday). The GOYAns will be selling the luminaries after church on Sundays, March 22, March 29 and April 5. This is a wonderful way to honor those who are living, those who passed away, to make our services even more beautiful and to help out our GOYAns.

## Sunday School

**Communion Breakfast/Palm Crosses** - All the youth of our parish are invited to attend Divine Liturgy on Saturday of Lazarus, April 4 at 10:00 a.m. We will have a breakfast after Liturgy for all in attendance and will be making the palm crosses for Palm Sunday.

**Excused Absences from School for Good Friday**-If you would like to have your child/children attend Good Friday Services at St. John the Baptist, please let Fr. Stavros know and he will write a letter to your child's school asking for an excused absence for religious holiday.

**Easter Egg Hunt**-The Annual Easter Egg Hunt will take place on Easter Sunday, April 12, following the Agape Vespers, at noon. Please plan to attend the Agape Vespers as a family beginning at 11:00 a.m. which will be followed by the Easter Egg Hunt.

### A Note from Father Stavros to Our Sunday School Teachers and Students

Over the course of several Sundays, I heard the confessions of most of our Sunday school students. I want to thank all of our Sunday School teachers for preparing our students for what was a moving experience for ME, as well as for them. The relationship with a spiritual father is something of great importance in the Orthodox Church. The relationship is akin to that of our relationship with a doctor. The doctor is the physician of the body. The priest is the physician of the soul. So, as we go to the doctor regularly for check-ups on our physical health, we should be going to the priest for a check-up on our spiritual health. We know that as we get older, our doctor's appointments get more complex. More tests are needed. More visits are needed. It's the same thing with our spiritual check-ups. As children, they are brief. What we did over the past several weeks was to get our children to understand that we go to God, through the person of our priest, to not only confess our sins but to try to form new habits in our Christian walk. With them getting used to this at a young age, when they get older, when they are teenagers and adults, the mechanisms will already be in place for them to come to their priest with the more serious issues that we all face. Thank you for supporting the Sunday school program. Thank you to our teachers for preparing our children for a wonderful experience. Thank you for our children for taking their first steps in what is a beautiful tradition in our faith. And thank God for continuing to bless our community in so many ways.

**And a note for the rest of the community, the procedure for the children works for adults too** - the students were asked to make two lists—the things I have done wrong, and the things I want to work on. The same principle works for adults - make a list of what you've done wrong, and what you want to work on—you read that in front of an icon of the Lord in the presence of a priest, have a short discussion about the lists, receive a prayer of forgiveness and absolution and go about your life, now free of guilt and shame, with a renewed sense of commitment with your faith. There is a third list that adults may also want to add, a list of questions—confession is an excellent opportunity to ask questions about fasting, receiving Communion, Orthodox theology or anything else that will aid you in your spiritual journey.

## Sunday School News

We would like to thank the parishioners of St. John's, our parents, Fr. Stavros, Charlie Hambos, our Staff, and especially our children for making our Sunday School Program a success. Our teachers are dedicated to preparing and presenting lessons that will encourage a stronger understanding of our Orthodox faith.

### **Congratulations to the following Sunday School students who had Perfect Attendance for the Month of February 2015:**

**Pre-K:** Santino Bavaro

**Kindergarten:** Teddy Kafantaris

**1st Grade:** Gianni Bavaro, Maria Nicklow

**2nd Grade:** Ariana Choundas-Thatcher, Calliope Kafantaris, Emily Nicklow, Maria Palios, and George Xenick

**3rd Grade:** Niko Bavaro, Toulia Trakas

**4th Grade:** Lola Bavaro, Andrew Choundas-Thatcher, John Palios, Gennaro Scarfogliero, and Yanni Trimikliniotis

**5th & 6th Grades:** Antonio Bavaro, and Elizabeth Xenick

**Middle School:** Artemis Xenick

**High School:** Christos Nenos, Arianna Krinos, and Katina Smith

One of the best ways to prepare for Pascha is to participate in the Sacrament of Confession. Each Sunday School student in 1st through 6th Grade had an opportunity to participate in this important Sacrament with their classmates. During the GOYAN retreat on March 6th-8th our 7th-12th graders had the opportunity to experience Confession. We would like to thank Father Stavros for hearing the confessions of over 70 of our students.

On March 1st our children did a wonderful job in the Icon Procession during the Sunday of Orthodoxy service. Prior to this procession Charlie Hambos taught our students all about the Sunday of Orthodoxy. He also worked with the 4th Graders on March 22nd and our 3rd Graders on March 29th.

We would like to thank all the families that brought a lenten dish to the PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGY DINNER Sponsored by the Sunday School on March 4th. It was a pleasure to offer this delicious meal to our parishioners after such a spiritually motivating service.

On March 22nd the first step of the 2015 Oratorical Festival took place at our church. Many of our students participated and spent months working on their presentation under the direction of Peggy Bradshaw. Participants and winners will be acknowledged in the next Messenger.

Our YOUTH SUNDAY for March took place on the 29th. The children sang beautifully and the Prospora was delicious as usual. We would like to thank our Pre-K, Kindergarten, and First Graders for making this holy bread under the guidance of Melissa Krinos. Our children are truly great stewards of St. John the Baptist.

Speaking of Lent and Holy Week, our Altar Boys, Myrrh Bearers, and Maiden for the Bridegroom Services are preparing and excited for their roles during this important time in our church. Everyone is also looking forward to our Sunday School Good Friday Retreat on April 10th.

++May everyone have a blessed Lenten, Holy Week, and a spiritually uplifting Pascha experience.

*Katherine Sakis, CRS*  
Fine Homes Specialist

.....

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passimia@gmail.com

# For those who don't come to church often

As there are in all churches, whether they are Orthodox or not, **there is a segment of the congregation that doesn't come often.**

- ◇ Some people come sporadically.
- ◇ Some come for the occasional wedding, baptism, funeral or memorial service.
- ◇ Some come in time of crisis.
- ◇ Some come for Christmas and Easter (in Tampa, we call them "Chreasters").

There are **different reasons why people don't come to church.**

- ◇ Some are angry at other parishioners.
- ◇ Some are angry at something that happened in the community in the past.
- ◇ Some are angry at God because their lives haven't gone well and they blame Him.
- ◇ Some work on Sundays.
- ◇ Some don't understand why it is important.
- ◇ Some have fallen out of the habit.
- ◇ Some choose to do other things.
- ◇ And some are just lazy.

**Church is important. Why?**

- ◇ It's not because God needs our praise—He is God, He doesn't need anything.
- ◇ It's not so we can brag about how many people come to church—church is about faith, not about counting bodies in the pews.
- ◇ It's not a matter of giving God His due, once in a while, or especially at Easter.
- ◇ It's not a matter of tradition or pride or culture.

**Church is important because**

- ◇ It helps us slow down the hectic pace of our life so we can reflect on what is really important—our salvation.
- ◇ It gives us the opportunity to pray for ourselves and our loved ones.
- ◇ It gives us the opportunity to receive the prayers of others.
- ◇ It gives us the opportunity to enjoy fellowship with people like us.
- ◇ It gives us the opportunity to pray in a way that is structured so well, that the Divine Liturgy is a complete prayer that touches on every aspect of our life and our World.
- ◇ It gives us an opportunity to touch God and for God to touch us, in the sacrament of Holy Communion.
- ◇ It unites us with the saints, the holy ones of God; and also with those in our family who have passed away, since we pray for the departed in our services.
- ◇ It gives us a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven. Why?
- ◇ Because heaven won't be anything like life on earth.
- ◇ Heaven will not be a secular experience but a holy, awesome and moving one
- ◇ The central activity in heaven is Communion with God and fellowship with those in God's kingdom.
- ◇ If we don't learn how to worship, we won't be ready to enter God's Kingdom, just like those who do not practice their sport don't play well on the field, just like those who don't do well in school do not graduate.

- ◆ How can you get back in the habit of coming to church? **JUST START COMING!!!**
- ◆ When is a good time to come back? **ANY TIME, BUT ESPECIALLY DURING LENT**
- ◆ But what if I'm mad at someone? **It's a great time to forgive them. After all, if we want God to forgive us, we must forgive one another.**
- ◆ What if I'm totally lost in my faith and don't know how to start over again? **Make an appointment to meet with Fr. Stavros**

## SEE YOU IN CHURCH!!! PLEASE COME BACK!

# St. John's PASCHA PICNIC

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

## 8th Annual Parish Picnic

**When:** Sunday, April 19, 2015  
Following Church Services

**Where:** Ballast Point Park  
5300 Interbay Boulevard  
Tampa, Florida 33611

**Admission is FREE!**

We will have sports, relays, and activities on the field for all ages.  
Face painting and balloons for the kids.  
Plus hamburgers, cheeseburgers, and hot dogs for all!





# JUST SAY YES!

We will continue with part nine of a monthly series to the Messenger to encourage and inspire you to continue to Just Say Yes! The following is an excerpt from the book Having a Mary Spirit: Allowing God to Change us from the Inside Out, by Joanna Weaver. The monthly excerpts will come from a chapter of the book titled *A Willing Spirit*. It is a beautiful study on both the Virgin Mary and the concept of saying Yes to God.

## **DARK DAYS—GLORIOUS BEGINNINGS**

“I can still believe that a day comes for all of us,” Arthur Christopher Bacon writes, “however far off it may be, when we shall understand; when these tragedies that now blacken and darken the very air of heaven for us will sink into their places in a scheme so august, so magnificent, so joyful, that we shall laugh for wonder and delight.”

That’s the future reality we must cling to during those times when the high cost of saying yes to God weighs heavily on our hearts.

For God always sees a bigger picture than we do. And although He loves us with tender passion, He will use whatever method is needed to make us more like His Son.

Even though it hurts.

Even though we struggle to understand.

My favorite scene in *The Passion of the Christ* comes as Jesus struggles up the road to Calvary. Though He’s bloody, beaten and nearly dead on His feet, the soldiers whip Him to make Him to go on. Trying to reach her Son, Mary fights through the crowd, but she can’t get to Him. Then, somehow, just as Jesus crumples under the weight of the cross, their paths meet, and for a moment they seem entirely alone.

As blood mixed with the sweat of exhaustion drips from His body, Jesus lifts His face and looks at His mother. Then, with an intensity that still reverberates in my heart today, He speaks these words: “Behold, I make all things new.”

“Don’t look at what you see,” Jesus tells her. “Remember what you know. Remember what the angel said. Remember the prophecies. Don’t forget that I was born to die. For I am the final sacrifice. I lay the path to eternal life upon the road to death. And because I die, you—and all who come afterward—will live. I make all things new. And that includes you.”

God’s ways rarely make sense to our finite human minds. And if we aren’t careful, we will spend most of our life arguing with God rather than embracing His ways.

Doubting His promises rather than trusting His power.

Resisting His love rather than resting in His arms.

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**Get Daily Bible Readings Sent to your Email or Phone** - One of the best ways to start each day is by reading from the Bible. There are prescribed readings for every day of the year in the Orthodox Church. You can go on the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America website at [www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org), go into the search box and type in “Receive Daily Readings,” follow the prompts and have this valuable resource sent right to your phone or email. Reading the Bible is so important and for those of us who don’t make the time or are lazy to reach for the Bible, have the readings sent in a way that is easy to remember. Spend some time this new ecclesiastical year in God’s Word, the sacred Scriptures!

**Constant Contact Emails**—Our parish utilizes Constant Contact as a way of staying in touch with parishioners, particularly on subjects that are time sensitive, i.e. funerals, special events, and last minute announcements. To keep you apprised of news in our parish, we will probably be sending out 1 (and no more than 2) message per week. This is an effort not to clog your inbox but to keep you informed of the goings on in our parish.

**Live Streaming of Divine Liturgy**—We are now live-streaming the Divine Services of the Church. If you go to our website, [www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com](http://www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com) and find on the menu bar the live streaming option, you can easily tune into the Liturgy if you are unable to attend. Please bear in mind that watching a service on your computer is not a substitute for coming to church. You should attend church in person. However, for shut-ins, people who have a hard time getting to night services, parents with babies, if you are at home on a week-day and want to hear a week-day service, if you are sick, or can’t make the service for some reason, or if you are out of town, please feel free to tune in. Contact Charlie Hambos for questions.

**Connection Cards**—We now have what are called “Connection Cards” in the pews of our church. Obviously we want everyone to be connected to our church. If someone is new to our church, we should encourage them to fill out a connection card and join our church. **If your contact information has changed, please fill out a connection card and send it to the office so we can update your address, email, etc.**

## ~Spirit of Stewardship~

For many of us, our first memories of church include time in a Sunday School Class, after receiving Holy Communion. Sunday School has been an integral part of our church for generations. This ministry has continued to thrive with the personal commitment of a volunteer staff to teach classes and a director to oversee the program. **These Loyal Stewards of our Church, past and present, clearly capture the ‘Spirit of Stewardship’ in serving our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

The goal of our Sunday School Program at St. John the Baptist mirrors our church mission ~ to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. This statement captures the power of our faith and is put into practice throughout the year with the love and care offered by our teachers through ‘age appropriate’ lesson plans and activities that reach far beyond the classroom with participation in the Children’s Choir, Oratorical Festival, Holy Week Services, Christmas Pageant, as well as our other youth ministries – GOYA and Hope/Joy!

Providing our children strategies to rely on their faith and values is no easy task in today’s modern world. This ministry allows our children to learn and grow in our Orthodox faith yet creates an environment to make faith personal and share with classmates and friends who share the same values.

Our School has blossomed through the years as our church membership has grown. We currently have over 18 teachers and 150 students! This is a testament to the future of our church and the lasting values placed upon our children. **Vickie Peckham, is our current Director and Tammy Christou serves as Administrator Director.**

Vicki has been a member of St. John the Baptist since 1997 and Sunday School teacher for over 17 years. She moved with her family (husband Rick and sons Alex and Matthew) from Rochester, New York. Vickie holds a masters degree in education and taught in New York, Connecticut and Florida. When asked to become Director Vickie agreed only if she could still teach a class. And currently teaches the 5th and 6th grades. When asked about her personal commitment as a Steward, Vickie shared the following.:

*“I love our faith, I love our children and the art of teaching. That is why I am working with this very important ministry. I also believe in the importance of building a strong Orthodox foundation in our children from a young age. After all they are the future of our faith and church. I hope and pray that I am making a difference in the religious education for the children of St. John the Baptist.”* Vickie Peckham – Current Director

**We recognize and THANK all current and past directors/teachers for their Stewardship and commitment of time and talent to this important ministry! ~And share a few additional sentiments/memories ~**

*“Our children are our future. It is my honor and pleasure to do whatever I can to help guide and support our church’s youth so that they grow up to be caring, dedicated and inspired leaders of our Orthodox Christian community.”* - Marina A. Choundas, 2nd Grade

*“Teaching the youngest of our Sunday School children to do their cross, light a candle, kiss the icon, say their name when they go to receive Communion is such a beautiful thing! To witness them grow stronger in their faith each year, what a blessing!”* Bessie Palios, Assistant Pre-K

*As a Mother and Educator, teaching The Faith of Our Fathers not only my own children but also the children and students here at St. John Church and Day School, has always been an integral part of my life: past, present, and future. It’s wonderful to see so many my former students bringing their children to church every Sunday to worship and participate in all areas of our Sunday School Program.”* Cindy Xenick, Past Director

*“Giving to St. John’s is our duty and delight - Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* Pam Irwin, Music Assistant

*“I have fond memories of going to Sunday School at St. John’s. I especially loved the year that my dad was my Sunday School teacher.”* Donna Trakas, Past Student

*Not having been born into Orthodoxy, teaching in our Sunday School helped me find a passion to educate our young children about the scriptures and our rich faith that has stood the test of time and remain unchanged.”* Jenny Paloumpis - Past Director

*“Being able to teach our teenagers about our rich, deep Orthodox faith is a blessing. Dory Passalaris, a true educator and I co-teach and have formed a class that is more than just informative. We have built a bond with the children and a trust where they are safe to ask questions. We discuss Scripture, Orthodoxy, the Liturgy, Prayer, Contemporary Issues and Crossroads that they encounter on a daily basis as a teenager. Our goal is to build a strong foundation before they enter into college or the workplace as a young adult. It is my prayer that each student carries what they learned in their last years in Sunday School so that one day, they too may give back and receive the many blessings that I have received just by being around them!”* - Peggy Bradshaw, High School Teacher / Chairman Oratorical Festival

## Thank-you...

*-Kalliope Chagaris, a past student/teacher and Loyal Steward for providing this glimpse into St. John the Baptist history with your memories from Sunday School!*

I have wonderful memories of my days at St. Johns Sunday School, a very long time ago.

I remember the importance that my parents placed on “attendance” and making sure that we got to Sunday School on time “every” Sunday and “prepared” and received Holy Communion on the “first” Sunday of every month. My mother was one of the Sunday School teachers at the time, and my father was always either the Parish Council President and /or another officer, so our family had to set “an example”. I remember my father making multiple stops along the way to pick up other friends ‘children and neighbors to attend Sunday School, we were known as the “Halkias” bus.

One of my favorite teachers was the “late” Mrs. Fifi Russell, she was a beautiful and wonderful teacher, I learned so much from her classes. She was also our Greek School teacher for some time along with the “late” Mr. John Sevellis. I recall the importance of the Bible stories and Bible verses. One of my most vivid memories, is the Sunday School lesson on Bible verse, John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son ,that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish ,but have everlasting Life”. I constantly remember that verse and I reflect on it even today.

Another important lesson learned was the “community” of the Church and Congregation, a beautiful Family that bonded together in happiness as well as sadness at all times. We had wonderful Sunday School programs, including the Christmas Pageant of The Nativity, I remember being chosen as “Mary” one year, as well as participating in the March 25<sup>th</sup> Greek Independence Day Program, I remember having to memorize and recite “Greek” poems and wear my Greek “Queen Amalia” Costume. We were not only learning about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but also learning about our wonderful and important “Greek” heritage, traditions and culture, in Sunday School as well as Saturday Greek School.

Later on, I was also a Sunday School teacher many years ago, and I remember the challenges that the students proposed to me about different questions they had about our Faith and God. Being a Sunday school teacher was a difficult task but we had a great background and knowledge from our earlier years which assisted in the preparation and teachings of the lessons. I now see some of “my” former Sunday school students “married” with their own children and I watch them continue with the tradition of bringing “their” children to St. John’s Sunday School and participating in all the beautiful programs that St. John’s has to offer.

The teachings , knowledge and friendships of the early Sunday School days are everlasting and help “mold” us into the adults we are today. I have many many good memories of those days. That’s what is important about learning about our wonderful and beautiful Greek Orthodox faith and Greek Orthodox Heritage.

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## ~Stewardship...little of this and that~

**THANK-YOU for continued support of our Church Mission and Ministries.** If you have not made a pledge for 2015, please do so today. If you need a pledge form, please contact the church office and we’ll be happy to send one. They are also available in the Church Narthex. Setting up an auto deduct from your bank account is an easy way to manage weekly/monthly pledges.

	2015*	2014 Y/E
<b>Stewardship Goal</b>	<b>\$470,000</b>	\$400,000
Pledged	\$336,697	\$387,981
Received	\$100,213	\$370,000
Shortfall/Gain from Goal	TBD	-\$30,000
Average Pledge	\$1,451	\$1,251
Median Pledge	\$900	\$600
# of Parishioners Pledged	232	310

Please feel free to share your thoughts to the office email at [officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com](mailto:officestjohngoctampa@gmail.com) or speak directly with Fr. Stavros, Pete Trakas or Sandra Pappas -Stewardship Co-Chairs.

**We are here for YOU!**

\*Based on YTD as of 3/10/15

## Donations Needed for Holy Week

We have many special celebrations during Holy Week. We know that many of you would like to contribute to the decorating of our church and icons during this period. For your convenience, below is a list of items needed for the celebration of the Sacred Services. Please contact the church office to reserve your desired offering for the health of your loved ones or in memory of a deceased loved one. Payment may be sent to the church office. Checks should be made payable to "St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church" with "Lenten Flower Donation" on the memo line.

### All of Holy Week Pillar Candles for windows (20) \$15 each

#### Palm Sunday, April 5

Bridegroom Service Flowers for Icon of Bridegroom in Narthex \$75

Bridegroom Service Flowers for Icon of Bridegroom Tables on Solea \$75 for each (2 Needed)

#### Holy Wednesday, April 8

Holy Unction

Holy Unction Flowers for Icon of Last Supper \$75

Q-tips, Olive Oil, Flour-

2 volunteers to make Prosphora see Fr. Stavros

#### Holy Thursday, April 9

Flowers for Icon of Crucifixion \$75

Wreaths for bottom of Cross (2) \$150 each

Scattered flowers at base of cross \$50

Candles for Top of Cross (3) \$15 each

#### Great Friday, April 10

8 Bags Rose Petals for Myrrh-bearers \$50

Flowers for Epitaphios several donors needed

Candles for Top of Cross (3)-Apokathelosis \$15 each

Candles for Top of Cross (3)-Lamentations \$15 each

Icon of Extreme Humility \$75

#### Holy Pascha, April 12

Flowers for Icon of Resurrection \$75

Flowers for Icon of Empty Tomb \$75

Silk Flowers for Royal Doors \$100

Easter Lillies \$25 per plant

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### Leave the Church in Your Will

Part of our life's legacy is the inheritance we leave our children. By leaving an inheritance, a part of us lives on through them. When preparing your will, you should consider leaving money to our church—this is the church of your children and part of their future can be positively impacted by leaving some of your inheritance to the church. The ability of the church to spread the Word of God is facilitated by everyone's stewardship. By leaving a portion of your inheritance to the church in your will, you remain a steward in perpetuity, but more importantly, you help cement a solid financial future for the church for your children and your grandchildren. If you are interested in leaving the church in your will, please contact Russell Sibley (church member) at [rsibleylaw@gmail.com](mailto:rsibleylaw@gmail.com). Thank you for your consideration.

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# Small Group Bible Studies

At present we have FIVE Small Groups that are meeting each week, in addition to the Monday night Bible Study.  
If you haven't joined a group yet, you may do so at any time.

## Monday Night Bible Study (for all parishioners)

**Location:** Meets in the Parish Council Meeting room in the Administration Building of the church.

**Group Leader:** Charlie Hambos, our pastoral assistant, 813-876-8830 or email him at [Charlie.hambos@gmail.com](mailto:Charlie.hambos@gmail.com)

**Study Topic:** The Book of Isaiah

**Meeting Time:** Monday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

**April Meeting Dates:** April 20 and 27

**East Tampa Mixed Group** (for any adults) Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient to those who live on the East side of town—Riverview, Brandon, Valrico, Seffner, Lakeland

**Location:** Home of George and Donna Hambos—They live in Valrico at 2604 Herndon Street, Valrico, FL 33596. Their home number is 813-651-9226 and Donna's cell number is 813-843-8412, and Donna's email is [dhambos@msn.com](mailto:dhambos@msn.com).

**Group Leader:** Donna Hambos

**Meeting Time:** Tuesday evenings from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

**April Meeting Dates:** April 14, 21 and 28

## Men's Group (for adult men of any age)

**Location:** Meets in the Parish Council Meeting room in the Administration Building of the church.

**Group Leader:** Father Stavros for the first one but we are going to rotate this among group members. Please email Fr. Stavros at [frstav@gmail.com](mailto:frstav@gmail.com) or contact him at 813-394-1038. **We are watching and discussing the video series: The Truth Project. One week we watch on chapter and the next week discuss it.**

**Meeting time:** Wednesday mornings from 7:30-8:30 a.m.

For this early morning group, bring your own coffee or breakfast food if you wish—we will not be providing these things.

**April Meeting Dates:** April 15, 22, and 29

**South Tampa Mixed Group** (for any adults) Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient for those who live in South Tampa

**Location:** Home of Helen and Ken Cauthorn, 3922 W. Palmira Avenue, Tampa, FL 33629. Helen's Number is 813-505-1059 and her email is [hcauthorn@chubb.com](mailto:hcauthorn@chubb.com)

**Group Leader:** Bessie Palios—Her email is [bmp1126@yahoo.com](mailto:bmp1126@yahoo.com), and her cell number is 813-523-0347.

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

**April Meeting Dates:** April 14, 21 and 28

## Women's Group (for adult women of any age)

**Location:** Meets at the home of Debbie Kavouklis, 3315 Jean Circle, Tampa, FL 33629—Debbie lives in South Tampa, a mile or so from the church.

**Group Leader:** Debbie Kavouklis—you can email Debbie at [dkavouklis1@verizon.net](mailto:dkavouklis1@verizon.net), or call her at 690-0155.

**Meeting time:** Tuesday mornings from 10:00-11:00 a.m. (9:30 a.m. for coffee and refreshments)

**April Meeting Dates:** April 14, 21 and 28

## Young Adult Group (for adults ages 18-40)

**Location:** At the home of Betty Katherine and Perry Katsamakis 4301 Tacon St, Tampa, FL 33629

**Group Leader:** Mary Ann Konstas. Please contact Mary Ann at 813-215-9862 or at [mapkonstas@gmail.com](mailto:mapkonstas@gmail.com).

**Meeting Time:** Thursday Evenings at 7:30 p.m.

**April Meeting Dates:** April 16, 23 and 30

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PLEASE COMMEMORATE THE NAMES OF MY DEPARTED FAMILY MEMBERS IN  
FRONT OF THE EPITAPHIOS (TOMB OF CHRIST) ON GOOD FRIDAY EVENING

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\*\*You only need to list the first name of the person you wish to be commemorated.

You may list names of people who are Orthodox or non-Orthodox. Please mail to the office or bring to church by April 6.



## “Doubting ‘Doubting Thomas’: When is Doubt a Sin

by Fr. Mark Sietsema

**O**ur Holy Week doesn’t lack for bad guys: fickle crowds and Pharisees, centurions and Sadducees, Judas Iscariot and Pontius Pilate. What’s the point in picking on Thomas at the end of it all?

“Doubting Thomas” we call him—as if one moment of disbelief defines his life’s work. This is not the attitude of the Orthodox Church. In our hymns for Thomas Sunday Vespers we find this lovely line: Ω καλη απιστια του Θωμα, “O good unbelief of Thomas!” Through his doubt, the blessing of faith was granted to all generations after him.

What did Thomas doubt? Or more to the point, whom did he doubt? You cannot say that he doubted Christ; at least, not any more than any other disciple up to that point. No, it is clear: Thomas doubted his fellow apostles. They said they saw Jesus risen from the dead. Thomas replied that he couldn’t take their word for it.

Why should he? The apostles’ credibility was at an all-time low. At Jesus’ arrest they scattered. Peter—all his boasting notwithstanding—denied Jesus readily and rudely. John alone joined the women at the Crucifixion but played no part in the Burial. In light of these behaviors, the word “reliable” does not spring to mind.

Then the Eleven spent the next couple of days cowering in the Upper Room, doors locked, windows shuttered, heads down. If Thomas was missing when Jesus came, that could only mean that he had the courage to go outside and be seen. Isn’t that even a little bit admirable?

Now, I ask you to consider Thomas’ frame of mind when he returned to the house that night, and heard the Ten disciples tell the story of how Christ had appeared to them behind closed doors, how He had given them the sign of peace and the power to forgive sins.

If you were Thomas, wouldn’t this have raised an important question in your mind? How can it be that this happened while I was gone? I wasn’t the greatest disciple, he might say, but I certainly wasn’t the worst. I’m not Peter, James, or John, but I’m no Judas, either. So why would Jesus come just at the one moment when I wasn’t there? Could it be that He is really the Conqueror of Death and Hades, the Lord of Heaven and Earth ... but doesn’t control His own schedule?

Thomas would tell us: It doesn’t make sense that Christ would come when one of the Eleven wasn’t there. He would have to have a very good reason to leave me out after all we went through together. And so for now, until I have some personal sense of meaning in all this, I do not accept the other disciples’ experience at face value. Unless I have some tangible proof of their stories, I will not believe.

This, my friends, is not the frame of mind of a coward or a skeptic. This would be the reaction of someone who truly believed in the divine character of the Son of Man, who truly expected justice and goodness from Jesus Christ. A coward would have bent to peer pressure. A coward would have swal-

lowed all those thoughts and just gone along to get along. Thomas didn’t do that.

He suffered, I’m sure, a very uncomfortable week until Christ appeared again to the Eleven. Then Christ’s intentions became plain as day. Thomas hadn’t been left out: Thomas was given the honor of being the one who stood in for all the people of reason and courage in centuries to come, for all those who want two and two to add up to four (or, if you will, ten and one to add up to Eleven). Thomas was chosen to be the eyes of all those who would not have the chance to see the risen Jesus in person, but who, because of his seeing, could believe. This was a great honor, and a worthy disciple received it. If you want to call him “Doubting Thomas,” say it with respect.

Is doubt a sin? Often when I hear confessions at camp, the young people list doubt as one of their faults. I am careful to listen to the specifics of their doubts. Often what they struggle with is not really doubt, but simply questions: good, important, insightful questions. No young person should ever be belittled for asking a tough question. No older person, either, for that matter.

My point is that we must be careful to foster a spiritual environment where reason and facts and thinking are welcome. Our children must never have the sense that they have to make a Sophie’s Choice between their faith and their education. This is not to say that science is always right when it crosses over into philosophy. Far from it! But in the Orthodox Church there can be no inquisitions, no witch hunts, no censoring of questions or thoughts, no labeling of people as unbelievers or apostates, just because they have questions.

Doubt is different from questioning or curiosity. Doubt is wishy-washiness (James 1). Doubt is a fear of commitment (1 Kings 18). Doubt is going with the flow like a dead fish (Romans 14). Doubt is witnessing the power of God and labeling it the work of the Devil (Matthew 12). This kind of doubt is not just a sin—it’s a flaw of character.

Often what we call doubt is simply the humility of admitting: I don’t know everything; I don’t understand all that I should; I believe, help my unbelief. How can God condemn this kind of doubt? He does not.

The Holy Spirit gently leads everyone who is open to discovery and ready to learn. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him” (James 1:5). The basis of all spirituality is this thought: God rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6). Sometimes, like Thomas, we seek God with questioning. And, like Thomas, we will not be left out in the cold forever by the One we seek. If we truly seek Him, He will always find us.

Christ is Risen! Χριστός Ανέστη!

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



# April 2015

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
**Fast Day  GOYA luminaries 4/5	BSE-Bible Study East Tampa BSS-Bible Study South Tampa	WBS-Women's Bible Study	1**Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m. 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 5:30 p.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 6:00 p.m. Lenten Dinner 7:15p.m. Choir Practice 7:30 p.m.	2 ** Young at Heart 11:30 a.m.  Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m.	3 **	4 **Saturday of Lazarus Orthros 8:30 a.m. Proskomide 9:30 am Liturgy 10:00 am Breakfast/Making Palm Crosses 11:30a.m.
5 **Palm Sunday  Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 9:40 a.m. Philoptochos Palm Sunday Luncheon Bridegroom Service 6:30-8:00 p.m.	6 ** Holy Monday 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30-11:00 a.m. Bridegroom Service 6:30-8:00 p.m.	7** Holy Tuesday 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30-11:00 a.m. Bridegroom Service 6:30-8:30 p.m. Metropolitan Alexios presiding	8 **Holy Wednesday 9 <sup>th</sup> Hour 9:00 am Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30-11:00 a.m. Holy Union 3:00 p.m. Bridegroom Service 5:45 p.m. Holy Union 6:30 p.m.	9**Holy Thursday Vespertal Liturgy 9:15-11:00 a.m. 12 Gospels 6:30-10:00 p.m. All Night Vigil follows	10 **Good Friday Royal Hours 9-10:30a Sunday School Retreat Decorating Epitaphios 10:30 Apokathelosis 3:00-4:15 pm Lamentations 7:00-10:30 p.m.	11**Holy Saturday Vespertal Liturgy 8:45-11:00 a.m.  Great Canon 11:00 p.m. Resurrection Service 11:45 p.m. Paschal Liturgy 12:30 a.m. Paschal Reception
12 PASCHA  Agape Vespers 11:00 am  Easter Egg Hunt noon	13 No Fasting This Week  Bright Monday Office Closed	14 WBS 9:30 a.m. BSE 6:30 p.m. BSS 7:00 p.m.  Basketball 8:00 p.m.	15 Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m.  Choir Practice	16 Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m.  Young Adult Bible Study 7:30 p.m.	17 Life-Giving Fountain Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	18 Community Outreach
19 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  Church Picnic	20 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	21 WBS 9:30 a.m. BSE 6:30 p.m. BSS 7:00 p.m.  Parish Council 7:00 p.m. Basketball 8:00 p.m.	22**Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m.	23 St. George Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.  Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m.  Young Adult Bible Study 7:30 p.m.	24 **	25
26 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday AHEPA/DOP Mtg. Junior Olympics Organizational Meeting after church GOYA 5:00 p.m.	27 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.  MOMS 11:00 a.m.	28 WBS 9:30 a.m. BSE 6:30 p.m. BSS 7:00 p.m.  Basketball 8:00 p.m.	29**Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m.	30 Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m.  Young Adult Bible Study 7:30 p.m.		

## St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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## St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

### *Timetable of Services*

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

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

**Parish Priest:** Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis

813-876-8830 (Office) 813-394-1038 (Cell)

frstav@gmail.com

**Pastoral Assistant:** Charlie Hambos

813-876-8830 (Office) 813-843-8471 (Cell)

charlie.hambos@gmail.com

**Parish Council:**

Alkis Crassas, President 813-690-3867

Mike Xenick, Vice President 813-340-8737

Sandra Pappas, Secretary 813-785-3747

Ed Gerecke, Treasurer 813-229-4306

George Chagaris 727-420-1920

Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947

Skip Higdon 813-831-9021

Catherine Mistseas 813-571-0658

Bryon Nenos 813-789-0729

Despina Sibley 813-758-0520

Dante Skourellos 813-765-9534

**Office Staff:**

Monica Gjerde, Office Manager 813-876-8830

officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com

Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper

debstjohnntpa@gmail.com fax 813-443-4899

**Adult Greek School:**

Magda Myer 813-909-2327

**AHEPA:**

Gus Paras 813-254-6980

**Altar Angels:**

Engie Halkias 813-932-5859

Sia Blankenship

**Bible Study:**

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

**Bookstore:**

Bill Manilkas 813-716-8185

**Chanter:** Nick Andreadakis 813-516-6081

**Choir:** Artie Palios, Director 813-831-1294

Jim Leone, Organist 813-254-7844

**Community Outreach:**

Betty Katherine Katsamakis 813-468-1596

**Dance Groups:**

H XAPA ΜΑΣ Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668

Marina Coundas 813-877-6136

Glendi Jenna Mingledorff 813-610-7365

Panigyri Vanessa Anviles 813-221-2194

**Daughter of Penelope:**

Edie Kavouklis 813-758-0305

**Finance Committee:**

Gary Ward 813-846-3898

**Food Pantry:**

Mick Scharbach 813-458-1620

**Gasparilla Parking:**

John Kokkas 727-992-4165

**GOYA:**

Elaine Halkias 813-629-1843

**Hope/Joy:**

Amy Kafantaris 727-743-1297

Debbie Nicklow 813-690-0671

**Jr. Olympics:**

Byron Nenos 813-789-0729

**Oratorical Festival:**

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

**Philoptochos:**

JoAnn Hartung 727-432-0228

**REAL:**

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

**Small Groups:**

East Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

Men, Fr. Stavros 813-394-1038

South, Bessie Palios 813-523-0347

Womens, Debbie Kavouklis 813-258-5571

Young Adult, Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

**Stewardship:**

Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747

**Sunday School:**

Vickie Peckham 813-406-5626

Tammy Christou 813-957-0835

**Ushers:**

Tom Georgas 813-985-0236

**Welcoming Committee:**

Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

**Young at Heart:**

Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947

Mary Nenos 813-935-2096

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