

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

December 2019

VISION:

Love God, Love your neighbor and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as an Orthodox Christian community.

MISSION:

The mission of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is to welcome and serve people with love, truth, joy and peace, and to create an environment that encourages all to seek salvation through Orthodox Christianity.

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Christ is Born!

Father Stavros' Message

Glorify Him!

Do We Know It's Christmas Time?

*And there won't be snow in Africa this Christmas time
The greatest gift they'll get this year is life
When nothing ever grows, no rain or rivers flow
Do they know it's Christmas time at all?*

From the Song "Do They Know It's Christmas" by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure

The song, "Do They Know It's Christmas" was written in 1984 by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure and was recorded by a group of primarily British rock artist that was named "Band Aid". The purpose of "Band Aid" was to "aid" and raise money for famine relief in Ethiopia. At the time, it was the fastest selling music single in the history of the United Kingdom.

The refrain of this song, quoted above, brings two important lessons about Christmas to my mind. The first is about gifts. Christmas is the most commercial holiday of the year. It used to be that the day after Thanksgiving, known as Black Friday (because stores and businesses seek to make gobs of money to "keep them in the black" financially) began with stores opening at dawn on that Friday morning. Then it became midnight of Thursday going into Friday. Then it became Thanksgiving evening, before many people have had a chance to even eat dinner. The commercialization of Christmas is now interfering with the opportunity for thanksgiving, fellowship and family.

Shopping has become the dominant theme of December in this country. Each day we are reminded how many

shopping days there are left until Christmas. Christmas is also the number one stressor. Finding the right gift. How to pay off the credit card. Finding a parking space. Fighting the traffic. Waiting in lines. Most gifts aren't even gifts. They are exchanges. We buy gifts for each other. It's almost kind of silly. Let's say I spend \$25 on you and you spend \$25 on me. Why not just save our \$25, and our time and aggravation and buy something we want, rather than hoping someone else does it for us. Why not spend the time we'd spend driving, parking, shopping and waiting and just write a nice, heartfelt letter to someone? Why not take the money we want to spend for a gift that someone doesn't even need and donate it to charity—there are many choices this year. Fire victims in California, hurricane victims in the Bahamas, and yes, there still won't be snow in Africa this Christmas—they have perpetual famine and hunger there and in other parts of the world.

There are other complexities to gift giving—What if I spend \$25 on you and you spend \$50 on me? You'll feel undervalued and the gifts exchange might result in ill-feelings. What about the gifts we don't like or don't want? The stress of shopping season carries over the day after Christmas as we again fight lines and traffic to return the gifts we don't want. Don't make Christmas about gifts and shopping. This frenzy about gift shopping, wrapping, spending and fighting traffic brings to mind the title of this song: "Do they (WE) know it's Christmas

time at all?”

The second lesson this song brings to my mind is when we become so busy and stressed in December, we forget the reason for the season. On December 15, our Sunday school students will have their annual Christmas program at the conclusion of the Liturgy. We'll see them acting as the angels and shepherds, the wise men and the animals. They will read the story from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, recounting the birth of Christ. However, the Scripture passage that most accurately captures the Feast of the Nativity comes from John 1:14, *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."* The Nativity marks the moment in the history of humanity, when the Creator (the Word of God, co-eternal and co-Creator with the Father and the Holy Spirit) took on flesh and became part of His own Creation. The Word of God became incarnate and lived among us. Saint Athanasios wrote in his well-known book "On the Incarnation," that at the Nativity, "God became a man, so that man could become like God."

All Creation showed up to worship the Creator in its midst. The earth offered a cave, something that God Himself had made, because there was no room at the inn, or any other place made by human hands, to hold the Creator of the human hands. The stars bowed down to the Creator as one star led the way to Him. The animals kept Him company in the cave. The poor shepherds were the first to hear the message and behold the Son of God. The angels delivered the good news to the shepherds. Magi followed a star for two years until they found the Lord as a child. Mary allowed herself to become God's handmaiden. Joseph was the loyal protector.

All of Creation showed up to worship the Creator in its midst. Will we do the same? Will you show up to worship Him?

All of the figures in the Nativity icon were blessed to be part of the miracle. Just about all had some stress about their role. Mary trusted. How could a woman give birth to a Son without knowing a man? How would she explain her pregnancy to Joseph, or anyone else? Mary had been raised in the temple from the age of two or three—was God's request setting her up to be the ultimate hypocrite? Mary couldn't possibly have understood everything that

was happening or would happen to her. But she trusted. Ever feel like you relate to Mary? I know I do. I don't understand everything that has happened in my life, or in the world around me. I have no idea how it's all going to end up. There are definitely some questions I have about our faith, and when I meet God, I'll definitely have some questions for Him. But I trust, some days more than on others, and I try to show up, like Mary did, with trust and faith.

If we are going to follow Christ, it will require trust.



Joseph also had to trust. He was betrothed to a woman much younger than him, who had been raised in the temple. How was he going to explain her pregnancy? Was he going to buy her story of getting pregnant by the Holy Spirit? Joseph is depicted in Orthodox icons of the Nativity sitting in the bottom right corner, taking the scene in. He's not sure what to make of the whole thing. To compound his questions, an older man is depicted talking to him. This old man represents the devil, who comes not in an obvious form (with horns and a pitch fork) but in an acceptable form, like a wise old sage, a grandfather figure. Joseph is the figure that is most relatable. We

might show up for church or for God often, and yet there are many times more questions than answers. Here's the thing with Joseph: He might have been a little confused, but he was confident enough to show up and to go along with God's plan.

If we want to follow Christ, there will be moments of confusion. And it will be important and necessary to keep showing up, as we try to figure it all out.

The Magi trusted. Affluent rulers and scientists, they left their homes and kingdoms for a two-year journey (and presumably a two year return) to follow a star. How many of their contemporaries must have thought they were crazy, to give up kingdoms and positions of prestige for a journey of unknown duration following a star?! What would they go back to four years later? However, they got to see Christ, and perhaps their former life didn't matter at all.

If we are going to follow Christ, it will require sacrifice.

The shepherds didn't have a life-changing experience when they saw Christ. The Gospel of Luke says that they "returned" presumably to their lives as nomads. Shep-

herds were so low on the social ladder that they weren't even being counted in the census going on in Bethlehem. Shivering in the cold, they saw the night-time sky lit up by a multitude of the heavenly host. Busy Bethlehem didn't even notice. They were the first to see the Christ. And then they had to return to their hum-drum lives. Seeing Christ didn't change their social status. However, it changed them.

If we follow Christ, it won't necessarily change our status, but it will change our hearts, it will change us.

So there is a choice to make this December, indeed every day of our lives. Will we be like Mary and follow after God? Will we be like Joseph and show up even when we don't fully understand? Will we be like the Magi and sacrifice? Will we be like the shepherds and allow God to change our hearts, even if our lives remain the same?

The common denominators for all the figures described above are two: all faced significant obstacles, but most important, all saw Christ and beheld His glory.

These are the common denominators for us as well: To be a Christian requires us to face significant obstacles—faith, trust, focus, sacrifice, perhaps even ridicule. I think it's harder to be a Christian now than it was when I was a child and getting harder all the time.

Yet the second common denominator for us is the same as it was for the figures in the Nativity story: We, too, can behold God's glory, not only for eternal life, but in this life as well.

Each of us will have a choice for what we do this December—will we focus on a spiritual journey or material acquisition? And on December 24, each of us will also have a choice to make. Will we come to worship the Creator on the day of His Nativity? There will again be a gift for

every Orthodox Christian on the altar this Christmas. Christ will again invite each of us to partake of Him in the Holy Eucharist. Will you be there to receive your gift, to receive Him?

On December 24, there will be two celebrations of the Divine Liturgy—one at 9:30 a.m. and the other at 7:00 p.m. I sincerely hope we will make the effort to come to at least one.

As a gift to you this Christmas, in this issue of the Messenger, you will find a prayer request card. Kindly fill this out and mail it back to the church with your names and needs on it. I plan to spend the majority of Christmas Eve praying for our parishioners by name and by need. This is my gift to you.

Do they know it's Christmas time at all? In Africa (and other impoverished places), they ask this question because it's hard to celebrate when you aren't sure if you'll have food to eat. This is not a problem in America. However, in America, we must ask this question—do we know it's Christmas time at all-- because we've forgotten that Christ is the reason for the season amidst the lines, traffic and sales.

No, there won't snow in Tampa this Christmas. The greatest gift we receive is the opportunity to celebrate the birth of Christ, with the faith and confidence that when the gift of life is over on this earth, the gift of eternal life can begin in heaven. Have a meaningful celebration of the birth of Christ this December!

Lisa, Nicholas and I wish all of you a Blessed Nativity and a happy and healthy New Year 2020!

With love in the Incarnate Lord,

+Fr. Stavros

Reflections on the Greek Festival

Thanks be to God, we had the best Greek Festival in the history of our community. In 2018, we set a record for income from the festival and in 2019, we beat that record, before we closed on Saturday night. On Sunday, we shattered the record. We had more people than we've ever had at a Greek Festival. We had two food lines open all day on Saturday, the line for the outside Gyros was past the bar in the middle of Saturday afternoon. People were waiting up to an hour to get loukoumades. The pastry booth sold out of EVERYTHING by mid-afternoon on Sunday.

Why did we do so well? There are a multitude of answers. We had GREAT weather all three days. There weren't a lot of competing events in Tampa. Those are two variables we can never control but which really swung in our favor. But I don't think they were the reason for our success.

We have great food. Everyone says it. And you get a lot of value for the price. I sampled all kinds of food from all the booths and everything was great. But I don't think

that is the reason for our success.

The festival is exquisitely and carefully organized. I want to thank

our festival leadership team of Alkis Crassas, Mike Xenick, Catherine Mitseas, Chris Kyrus, Steve Tsetsekas, Charlie Hambos, Sandra Pappas, Gary Ward, Theo Panopoulos and Deano Kastis for the MONTHS they spent preparing for this Festival and for essentially being at our church for an entire week before the Festival. Thank you for all those who helped with the baking in the weeks before the Festival, to those who helped with the set-up of everything the week of the Festival, for our dance instructors and dance groups who prepared so diligently to dance at the Festival, and to those who helped in all ways large and small during the festival. We couldn't have done the Festival without you. But even this was not



the reason for our success.

The festival is a fun time. Our patrons are treated to great entertainment. John Demas did his usual GREAT JOB playing all weekend. Our dance groups were fantastic. Our vendors had a lot of things for sale that you can't find just about anywhere. The church tours were well attended. The choir sang beautifully each day. The kids' area provided hours of fun for our youngest patrons. But I don't think these were the reason for our success.

We had great spirit, great "kefi" among our people. People were greeted with smiles everywhere they turned. They weren't treated like dollar signs, even as they spent lots of dollars. Everyone was treated special, like family. They were warmly welcomed at the admission table, on the food line, by the cashiers, and especially in our sanctuary. Our people worked well together. Several people told me that they took the opportunity to get to know people they didn't know before. We have a great sense of community spirit in our community. And people inside and outside our community are noticing this. This was a big reason for our success.

Each day of the Festival, we began the day by celebrating the Divine Liturgy. More people than usual came each day—Friday, Saturday and Sunday—to worship and receive Holy Communion. Before we opened our doors, before we sold anything, we asked the Holy Spirit to come "down upon us and upon these Gifts here presented." Every day, just before the Festival opened, the executive team gathered in church to pray. And in the hall, we opened each day with prayer. Before the festival started, the Parish Council at our October meeting, passed a recommended budget that was unanimously passed at our

Parish Assembly meeting, that committed 6% of our budget to charity, no matter how the festival does. We made a commitment to charity no knowing what kind of financial position we'd be in after the Festival. We trust God with the unknown and are committed to charitable giving regardless of how we do. This demonstration of faith was a big reason for our success.

When we combine our spirit of community with the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves blessed. That doesn't guarantee financial success each time out, just like praying and going to church regularly doesn't guarantee anyone will be rich. But when we combine His Spirit with our spirit, something amazing can happen. And that's what happened at the festival. We called on His Spirit, and combined it with our community and we were blessed, this year especially, in a financial way.

A big thank you to all those who worked at our festival. Thank you to our leadership team that spent the better part of three months preparing our festival. A big thank you for our area heads. Thank you to our sponsors and vendors. Thank you to all of our workers. Thank you to all of our patrons. And most of all, thank You God, for blessing our festival in a way that it has never been blessed before. In our services, we often offer this petition: "For to You belong all glory, honor and worship, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen." Indeed, the greatest glory belongs to Him. Thank You God for blessing our Festival this year, and thank you to everyone, who worked so hard to combine our spirit with His Spirit.

+Fr. Stavros

Father Stavros has a new book in print!

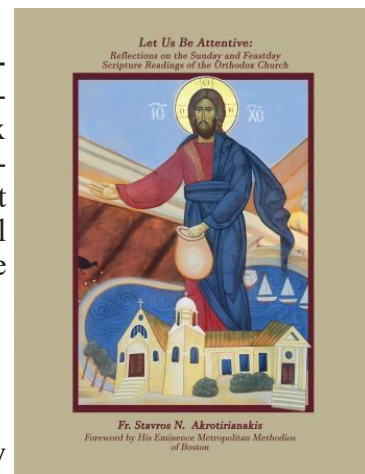
"Let Us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feast Day Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church" was released on November 8. This book offers reflections on the Scripture Readings for each Sunday and Feast Day of the Orthodox liturgical year. It will be an invaluable aid in helping to understand the most well-known and most often heard passages from the New Testament. The Bible is the most magnificent book ever written. Yet, it is intimidating to many people. This book will help us feel more at ease in reading Scripture. The book should be available in the bookstore by early December but is available now at www.xulonpress.com.

Let all Creation Rejoice: Reflections for Advent the Nativity and Epiphany

This book is a series of short daily reflections on the scripture readings of Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany, to be read between November 15 and January 7. Order your book today at www.xulonpress.com/

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 2110 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 4 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Charlie at charlie.hambos@gmail.com and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Charlie or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the "forward to a friend" option. Also, make sure frstav@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.



Liturgical Schedule for December 2019

Sunday, December 1 **14th Sunday of Luke**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve **Ushers:** Tammy Christou; Jim Armstrong; Tom Georgas
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Michael & Bessie Palios Ambassador: Marenca Patrascoiu Caller: Vickie Peckham
Getting Acquainted: Mike & Maria Xenick **Coffee Hour:** HIJ Families **Bookstore:** MaryAnn Rose & Rita Bedran

Wednesday, December 4 **St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, December 6 **St. Nicholas**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 8 **10th Sunday of Luke**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains & St. Mark **Ushers:** Brett Mourer; John Alexander; Amin Hanhan
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Tanya Robinson; Katherine Sakkis Ambassador: Despina Sibley Caller: Christine Worley
Coffee Hour: AHEPA/DOP **Bookstore:** John and Anetta Alexander

Monday, December 9 **Conception of the Theotokos by Sts. Joachim and Anna**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, December 12 **St. Spyridon**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 15 **11th Sunday of Luke & St. Eleftherios**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains & St. Luke **Ushers:** John Christ; George Mitseas; Tom Georgas
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Cindy Xenick; Lisa Alsina Ambassador: Genie Carter Caller: Helen Cauthorn
Coffee Hour: Philoptochos' Season of Necessities **Bookstore:** David Voykin & Elaine Daniels

Monday, December 16 **Service of Preparation for the Nativity 6:30 p.m..**

Sunday, December 22 **Sunday before the Nativity of Christ**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve **Ushers:** Skip Higdon; George Trimikliniotis; Peter Theophanous
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Donna Trakas; Vickie Peckham Ambassador: Kalliope Chagaris Caller: Elaine Daniels
Coffee Hour: KLM Families **Bookstore:** Zhana Temelkova

SERVICES FOR THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

Monday, December 23 Royal Hours of the Nativity
9:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Tuesday, December 24 **Nativity of Christ**
Great Vespers of the Nativity 8:45 a.m.
Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Father will read a Christmas story to the children on the solea at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy.

Church open for silent prayer 5:00 p.m.
Orthros 5:30 p.m.
Great Doxology 6:45 p.m.
Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom 7:00 p.m.

Wakes to be held temporarily at St. John - Many parishioners choose to use Blount Curry Funeral home on MacDill/Swann for their funeral needs. The chapel at that location is being renovated and currently unavailable for use. During this time, anyone utilizing Blount/ Curry on MacDill is welcome to hold the wake for their loved ones in our church sanctuary. Once the chapel is completed, the wakes will once again be held in the funeral home chapel. A reminder that it is the policy of the Metropolis of Atlanta that laypersons are not allowed to speak in the church without written permission from the Metropolitan. This policy will remain in effect for wakes held at the church.

Sunday, December 29 Sunday after the Nativity of Christ
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Anyone attending may serve **Ushers:** David Voykin; Ed Gerecke; Pete Trakas
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Axl David; Carole Fotopoulos Ambassador: Ewana Forde Caller: Elaine Halkias
Coffee Hour: NOP Families **Bookstore:** Andrew and Kathy Bouzinekis

Monday, December 30 St. Anyisia
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Liturgical Notes for January 2020

Wednesday, January 1 Circumcision of Christ/St. Basil/New Year's Day
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, January 4 Royal Hours of Theophany 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Sunday, January 5 Forefeast of Theophany
Orthros 8:15 a.m. Hierarchical Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.
His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America will officiate

Altar Boys: Captains only **Ushers:** TBD
Welcoming Ministry: Greeters: Mike and Maria Xenick Ambassador: TBD
Getting Acquainted: TBD **Coffee Hour:** Luncheon in honor of Archbishop Elpidophoros **Bookstore:** Bill Manikas

Monday, January 6 Divine Liturgy in Tarpon Springs 9:30 a.m.
Great Vespers for the feast of St. John the Baptist 6:30 p.m.

Tuesday, January 7 St. John the Baptist
Orthros 8:30 a.m. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m.

Hierarchical Visits in Early January

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America will visit our Parish on Sunday, January 5. His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros has served as Archbishop of America for six months. He is making his first pastoral visit to the Tampa Bay area. In fact, on January 5, His Eminence will celebrate his first ever Divine Liturgy in Florida, and he has chosen our parish to celebrate in. This is truly a special honor for us. Please make plans to worship on Sunday, January 5. Orthros will begin at 8:15 a.m., with Divine Liturgy at 9:30 a.m. We will hold a luncheon in His Eminence's honor after Divine Liturgy, so that we can greet and get to know our new Archbishop.

Either His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios or His Grace Bishop Sevastianos will visit our Parish on January 6-7 for the Feastday of our Parish. It was not known at press time which Hierarch of ours will visit, only that one of them for sure will be with us for Vespers of St. John the Baptist on the evening of January 6 beginning at 6:30 p.m. and on the morning of January 7 for Divine Liturgy at 9:30 a.m. Please reserve January 5-7 for three days of special services in our parish.

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

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

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

Liturgical Notes for December 2019

Wednesday, December 4 - Feast of St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus

We celebrate the feastday of St. Barbara, a martyr for Christ who was martyred by her own father. On the same day, we celebrate the feastday of St. John of Damascus, a hymnographer of the church who also was a strong defender of iconography.



Friday, December 6 - Feast of St. Nicholas

We celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of travelers. The tradition of Santa Claus is derived from St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, who was giving gifts to those less fortunate.



Monday, December 9 - Feast of St. Anna

This feastday commemorates the mother of the Theotokos, and also the conception of the Theotokos, as it falls 9 months before the feast of her Nativity (September 8).

Thursday, December 12 - Feast of St. Spyridon

St. Spyridon was Bishop of Trimythous. Tradition is that each year, the remains of St. Spyridon are opened to reveal that his shoes have been worn out. They are changed each year. St. Spyridon continues to intercede for the souls of the faithful, wandering over the earth to do so.



Sunday, December 15 - Feast of St. Eleftherios

St. Eleftherios was a priest-martyr in the 2nd century of the church.

Monday, December 16—Candlelight Service in Preparation for the Nativity 6:30-7:30 p.m.

There is a “canon” (a set of hymns) in preparation for the Nativity. It is very similar in order to the Paraklesis Service that we celebrate in August, except that the hymns are dedicated to the Feast of the Nativity and not to the Virgin Mary, though she is still mentioned prominently in many of them. The service includes the opportunity to pray for people by name, so bring your names and the names of anyone you know who needs prayer to this service. Also, included in this service will be an opportunity to pray for those who have passed away this year. At the end of the service, a Trisagion service will be chanted for all those who have passed away this year. If you know someone who can use some prayer this Nativity, or someone who has lost a loved one, or someone who is sad, please invite them to this service. Allow us to pray for them and their loved ones. The service will be done entirely in English. It will last an hour. It will be done only by candlelight. There will be no Communion at the service. So the challenges of a normal Sunday liturgy—length, no intercommunion, use of Greek—that challenge non-Orthodox visitors to our church will not be present. This is a wonderful opportunity there is in the year to invite non-Orthodox friends to our church.

Monday, December 23 - Royal Hours of Christmas 9:30-11:00 a.m.

The service of the Royal Hours consists of Prayers, Hymns, Psalms and Old Testament prophecies that foretell the coming of Christ on Christmas. Also read are the Gospel passages of the feast of Christmas. There is no Holy Communion at this service. Rather, it is a service of quiet meditation in anticipation of the Nativity. We will hold this service from 9:30-11:00 a.m. on Monday, December 23. We will celebrate the entire service by candlelight. This will be a wonderful and peaceful way to usher in the Feast of the Nativity. The service will be conducted in English.

Services for the Nativity - December 24

There are traditionally two Divine Liturgies celebrated in connection with the feasts of Christmas, Epiphany and Pascha. On December 24, in the morning, we will celebrate the Great Vespers of Christmas followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. The Vespers of Christmas includes Old Testament Prophecy Readings. It is hoped that those with young children and those who do not drive at night will take advantage of this morning Liturgy, which will be celebrated on December 24 with Vespers at 8:45 a.m. and Divine Liturgy from 9:30-11:00 a.m. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy Father Stavros will read a Christmas story to our children on the solea.

On the evening of the 24th, the Church will be open for a time of silent prayer beginning at 5:00 p.m. Orthros will be celebrated at 5:30 p.m., followed by the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom at 7:00 p.m. From 5:00-6:45 p.m., the church will be illumined only by candlelight. The Feast of the Nativity marks the only time in human history that the night became brighter than day with the appearance of the multitude of angels. If you wish, come to church at 5:00 p.m. and you'll be here for sunset, when day becomes night. However, be here at 6:45 p.m., to hear the Doxology, the hymn the angels sang that first Christmas, as night becomes day. Many of you have made a tradition of coming to church for this vigil of prayer and the Orthros and Liturgy and many people who have done so have commented to me how powerful the celebration of Christmas was for them.



Monday, December 30 - Feast of St. Anyisia

St. Anyisia was martyred in Thessaloniki in the year 304. Her relics are interred in the altar table of our church.

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

By Fr. Stavros

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

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

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

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

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

December 1-7

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.

Luke 2:14

This verse, the hymn of the angels at the Nativity, is most often mistranslated as “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill to men.” As if to say, peace is a gift from God to all people, no matter what. The correct translation, quoted here, is that peace is a gift from God that is accessible to all people, but offered to those with whom God is pleased. It takes work on our part to be a person of good will. The reward for the work is the peace that comes from God. Work at being a peacemaker and not a peace-taker. In your reflection on this verse, ask yourself, in what ways am I a peacemaker and in what ways am I a peace-taker?

December 8-14

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceeding with great joy.

Matthew 2:10

This verse, the hymn of the angels at the Nativity, is most often mistranslated as “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill to men.” As if to say, peace is a gift from God to all people, no matter what. The correct translation, quoted here, is that peace is a gift from God that is accessible to all people, but offered to those with whom God is pleased. It takes work on our part to be a person of good will. The reward for the work is the peace that comes from God. Work at being a peacemaker and not a peace-taker. In your reflection on this verse, ask yourself, in what ways am I a peacemaker and in what ways am I a peace-taker?

December 15-21

Then, opening their treasures, they offer Him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

The Magi brought treasures that were fit for Christ. Gold was for His Kingship. Frankincense for His Lordship. And Myrrh in anticipation of His sacrifice. Every day, when we open our eyes and take a breath, we are receiving from the Lord the gift of life. Every time something good happens to us, we are receiving a blessing from the Lord. Every time we use a talent to help someone, or to make money that allows us to provide for ourselves and our families, we are enjoying a blessing from God. What gift will we bring to God to recognize His gifts to us? Will we bring a gift this Christmas? Or will we stay home? Will we offer gifts only at Christmas, or throughout the year? Because God doesn’t save His gifts for us only for special occasions. He provides them every day. How much of ourselves will we see fit to give back to Him?

December 22-28

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

John 1:14

During this week, we will celebrate Christmas. We will open presents, enjoy family, and probably eat too much. Will we pause to really reflect on the miracle of Christmas, how the Creator came to be part of His creation, how Mary carried in her womb, the Son of God? I love this song by Joy Williams, called “Here with us.” They read, in part, “It’s still a mystery to me, that the hands of God could be so small, how tiny finger reaching in the night, were the very hands that measured the sky. Hallelujah, hallelujah, Heaven’s love reaching down to save the world. Hallelujah, hallelujah, Son of God, servant King, Here with us. You’re here with us.” In many ways, the Nativity of Christ is a mystery, a miracle beyond comprehension, because God is beyond comprehension. Take

some time and reflect on the miracle of Christmas—it's more than presents, food and even family. It's the day the Creator came to be part of the creation, it's the day that God became man, so that man could become like God.

December 29-January 4

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.
Luke 2:20

Of all the verses in the Nativity story, this is probably the one that is missed the most. This week, we begin a new year, and probably most of us take down our Christmas decorations. Hint: You should leave them up until January 7. We celebrate Christmas for 12 days, concluding with the feast of Theophany on January 6. In America, we throw up the Christmas decorations before Thanksgiv-

ing and are tired and ready to be rid of them the day after Christmas, it seems. In any case, eventually the decorations come down and Christmas seems to be a quick afterthought. The shepherds, outcasts in the social scene two thousand years ago were the first to see the Christ. It didn't change their social status. They were still outcasts. It didn't change their employment status—they still have a dangerous job and nomadic existence. It didn't change their economic status—they were still poor. But it changed them. It changed their hearts. As we move past Christmas and into the new year, what is going to change in you? How can your heart become more committed to God, more Christ-centered? If we are not open to be transformed, another year will end, another will begin, and then end, and the cycle will continue without any spiritual growth. Spiritual growth occurs when our hearts are open to growing towards Christ.

Some Christmas encouragement

From the website of St. Nicholas in Flushing, NY

It's that time of year when life is in full swing. We certainly feel it here in our parish. A community like ours has a multitude of programs to keep us active and interactive. But a parish community's strength and boast has nothing to do with the number of programs in play or the number of people involved. Rather it is how focused it is on the one who makes our community possible in the first place: our Lord Jesus Christ. We can run and run and run and spend a good portion of our week on the premises of the church. But we can also very easily overlook the reason for it all. Being physically close to the church does not guarantee that we are close to Christ in spirit. Being busy does not guarantee we are doing anything.

In this most active of seasons, take time to stop, to close your eyes, or to appreciate a flower, or to send a note to someone you've neglected for a while. Make the sign of the Cross over your God-given body. Bring your family to church. Don't let sports win every Sunday. Make an appointment for Confession. Increase your stewardship offering by five percent this year. Pray and give thanks to God or ask for his help or glorify him or just sigh to him. Take a moment each day to remember Christ. If we can all do this, little by little our community will continue to be abundantly active, and it will radiate the light and love and truth of Christ.

God bless you all.



Policy for Letters of Recommendation

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

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

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

St. John the Baptist Community News

Parish Registry

Baptism-Nikolas Dale Lindiakos, son of Richard and Lauren Lindiakos, was baptized on Saturday, October 26. Angela Lindiakos and Christopher Gates were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Wedding-Emmanuel Arias and Katryna Demetriou were married on Saturday, November 2. Kassiana Politis was the Sponsor. Congratulations!

Wedding-Alek Aranyos and Styliana Resvanis were married on Sunday, November 3. Angelique Mamalakes was the Sponsor. Congratulations!

Condolences to Wendy Koutouzi, on the passing of her sister, Lynda Viale. May her memory be eternal!

Get Acquainted Sunday, December 1

In an effort to get to know one another better, we are going to continue our "Get Acquainted Sundays" one Sunday of each month. We will have nametags and markers in the entry way of the Kourmolis Center and will ask that each person put one on during coffee hour and introduce yourself to at least one person that you do not know.

GOYA - The GOYA Meeting for December will be Sunday, December 8, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

10th-12th Grade GOYAns hold successful lock-in

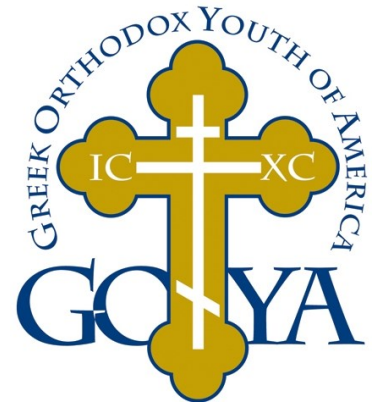
Father Stavros led a retreat/lock-in for our 10th-12th grade GOYAns on Saturday, November 2 and Sunday, November 3. Sixteen of our oldest GOYAns participated in a lengthy discussion that didn't end until 3:30 a.m. Thanks to Michael and Bessie Palios for chaperoning this event, and to all the GOYAns who shared some very thought-provoking discussion.

St. John the Baptist 2019 Community Christmas Card

It's that time again for our annual Saint John the Baptist Community Christmas Card, sponsored by our GOYA. The suggested contribution of \$25.00 will go to assist our GOYA Ministry. This is a lovely way to join in the spirit of love and good will during the Christmas season. GOYA will have a table set up in the community center for you to come sign up and make your donations. Please make checks out to St. John the Baptist GOYA. Our GOYA family is truly thankful to you all for the support you continue to show us through the years. Thank you and God Bless!

Sign-ups for the Christmas Card will be after church Sunday, December 1, December 8, and December 15 in the Kourmolis Center. If you have any questions, please contact Mike Palios at 813-831-1294.

Thank you GOYA—On Saturday, October 26, our GOYAns spend the morning at church getting things ready for the festival. They worked on the landscape, cleaning the church (polishing the pews and all wooden things) and went to local business to pass out festival flyers. Nice job GOYAns!



A gift to our Christmas visitors

We are used to a full church each Sunday and there will be a full church at both services on December 24. However, the largest attendance during the Christmas season will likely be **Sunday, December 22**, the Sunday before the Nativity. Many people will visit our church who normally don't attend—people visiting family, former parishioners coming home, student returning from school, infrequent worshippers and people who are looking for a place to worship this Christmas. As a gift to our visitors, please consider parking on the soccer field on Sunday, **December 22**, and giving your parking place to someone else for a day.

MEN'S
GROUP

Men's Group - Our men's group meeting for December will be Sunday, December 15, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. We will meet at church at 5:00 p.m., walk to a nearby restaurant for dinner and fellowship and then return to the church for discussion. All men of our parish are welcome and you can bring your non-Orthodox friends as well. Our January meeting will be Sunday, January 12.

Bible Studies are Continuing

Monday Night Bible Study (for everyone)

Location: Administration Building meeting room

Studying: The Book of Revelation

Group Leader: Charlie Hambos

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

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

Meeting Dates: December 2 and 9.

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

Location: At the church

Group Leader: Rotates between members and Father Stavros

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

Meeting Dates: December 3, 10, and 17.

South Tampa Mixed Group (for any adults)

Anyone can attend this group but obviously this will be most convenient for those who live in South Tampa

Location: At the Church in the Library

Studying: Ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church

Group Leader: John Kokenis

jkokenis@stjohnstpa.org; 630-306-7716

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

Meeting Dates: December 3, 10, and 17.

GriefShare Ministry Continues on Thursdays

It may be hard for you to feel optimistic about the future right now. If you've lost a spouse, child, family member, or friend, you've probably found there are not many people who understand the deep hurt you feel.

This can be a confusing time when you feel isolated and have many questions. "Going to GriefShare feels like having warm arms wrapped around you when you're shivering." GriefShare groups meet weekly to help you face these challenges and move toward rebuilding your life. Each GriefShare session has three distinct elements: Video seminar with experts, support group discussion with focus and personal study and reflection. We will meet from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in the Administration Building Meeting Room on Thursdays. For more information please contact Donna Hambos at 813-843-8412 or dhambos@msn.com. Books for the program will be provided. Donation for the book suggested but not required. Open to all family and friends. **December meetings will be held the 5th, and 12th. Griefshare remains open enrollment with support towards healing and hope.**



PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS

DECEMBER 8, 2019

Parish Council Elections will be held on Sunday, December 8, following Divine Liturgy.

College Student Christmas Event

On Thursday, December 19, Fr. Stavros will be hosting a dinner and discussion for all of our college students returning home for the holidays and any other interested college students from the Tampa Bay area. The event will be from 6:30-9:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. There is no charge. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com by December 15 if you plan to attend.



Community Outreach - Holiday Tent

Metropolitan Ministries is looking forward to having St. John Greek Orthodox Church volunteer on the following day and time at 2609 N. Rome Avenue, Tampa, FL 33607.

Sunday, December 22, 4 p.m - 6:15 p.m.
(50 volunteers needed)

Below is the link that each person should use to register for this volunteer opportunity:

<https://metromin.volunteerhub.com/lp/stjohnsgreekorthodox/>

It is imperative that each person pre-registers for this opportunity as unfilled slots will be filled 1 week before your scheduled date.

Thank you for being HOPE this holiday season!

Philoptochos News

Christmas Brunch Sunday, December 1 at Maggiano's



Season of Necessities Luncheon on December 15 and Donation Drive to Benefit The Spring Of Tampa Bay
On December 15 the Philoptochos will host a luncheon to benefit The Spring Of Tampa Bay. All proceeds from the luncheon will go to benefit The Spring Of Tampa Bay whose mission is to prevent domestic violence, protect victims and promote change in lives, families and communities. We will also be collecting the items below for our Seasons of Necessities donation drive for The Spring.

Bath towels
Washcloths
Twin Blankets, flat & fitted sheets
Pillows & Pillow cases (standard)
Laundry Detergent
Sanitary Pads & tampons
Hair care products

Deodorant
Bar Soap & body wash
Toothbrushes & Toothpaste
Baby Powder
Baby Shampoo
Baby Wipes
Baby Bottles

Sippy Cups
Diapers (sizes 4, 5 & 6) & Pull Ups
Diaper rash ointment
Baby Food
Formula
Pedialyte
Gift Cards (Walmart, Target, Etc.)

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Spanakopita & Tiropita Sale: December 8 & 15

Spanakopita or tiropita 48 piece tray: \$30.00

Spanakopita 2 pound tray: \$20.00

Vasilopita Sale: December 22 & 29

Each Vasilopita will be sold for \$10.00

Thank you everyone for making our Military and 1st Responders Day a huge success we could not have done it with YOU!!!. We honored 18 of our parishioners that day. They were given a beautiful Icon of St. Theodore and flowers to take home. **Our donation barrel was over following with supplies!!!** We will be working with the "Boodle Brigade" to package and ship all of your donations. This is a nationwide organization which sends donations to our troops overseas. Nationwide last year, they packaged and sent over 3,000 boxes. Our Tampa location will be packaging at least 50 of these boxes and will be sent to each of the Military branches. We will also be placing the Thank You Cards our children in Sunday School made inside of these boxes. The boxes will be received by our Troops just in time for the holiday. What a great way to thank our troops for keeping us safe!

"Thank you for a great job on Sunday. However, the best part of your effort was not the organization, or the icons, or the flowers: It was that you thought of the veterans and first responders, and made it a special day."



"I would like to thank you and the Philoptochos for honoring all active, retired military & first responders at church yesterday. Also, thank you for the nice icon of St. Theodore and the beautiful red, white and blue flower vase."

GOD'S HARVEST

Our National Philoptochos' mission this year is to adopt a school or class and assist with feeding children. We are very excited to announce on Saturday, December 14, Philoptochos along with our Sunday School children we will be putting together bags of food for 66 children who attend Ruskin Elementary. These children are 5 and 6 years who are from low income families how to read. During the school year these children are provided with free or low cost breakfast and lunch meals however, over the weekend they may not little or no food. Philoptochos will be donating all the food for this event.

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

Open to everyone

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

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

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

Everyone is welcome. We have added 4 new members this month for a total 29.

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

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

OUR ACTIVITIES INCLUDE

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

OUR TRIPS INCLUDE

- Ybor City State Museum (October 2019)
- Show Palace Dinner Theatre featuring **Elf the Musical** (December 7th)



The YAH Ministry is guided by our Church's CORE VALUES of Love, Worship, Community, Learning, and Service.

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

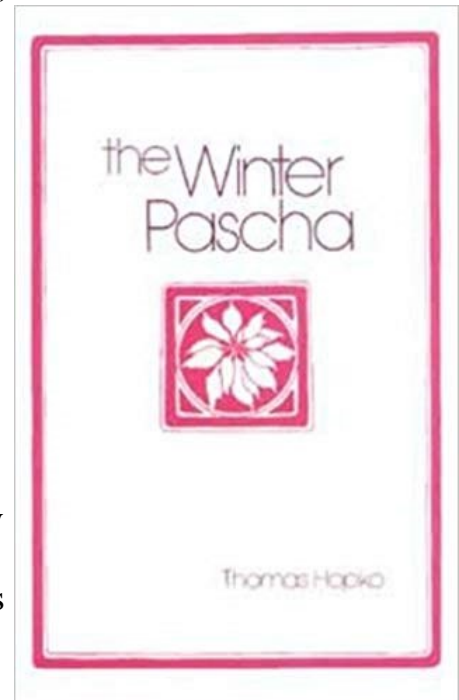
**Featured Book of the St. John the Baptist
Greek Orthodox Church Bookstore:**

**The Winter Pascha: Reading for the Christmas-
Epiphany Season by Fr. Thomas Hopko**

W

hen the winter begins to make way into the Northern World, the Church of

Christ begins to celebrate a ‘splendid three-day Pascha.’” Thus, Father Thomas Hopko begins the first of forty meditations for the seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, ending with the feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple on the fortieth day after Christ’s birth. Father Hopko of blessed memory was the Dean and Professor of Dogmatic Theology at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, New York. He draws on Biblical reading and liturgical hymns and verses of the season to illumine the way for believers to follow the Church’s days of preparation and celebration for the Coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in human flesh. Many references are made to the writing of the saints and Church Fathers as well as to contemporary Christian teachers and spiritual guides. All those who love the Lord’s Coming will find comfort and strength as well as enlightenment and instruction for having passed through the Winter Pascha with this book as their companion.



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

P.S. If there is an Orthodox Christian religious item that you would like the bookstore to order, please contact us. We are often able to get a discount as a bookstore.

Brett and Ana Mourer

DECEMBER 2019 SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

Our Greek Festival was a HUGE success. It was beautiful to see our students involved in helping our church. What a perfect example of Stewardship!!! Giving of their TIME; washing trays, serving food, cleaning tables, etc. And of course of their TALENTS...Greek Dancing! To see our children dressed in costume and dancing with pride, was pure joy and always a highlight of our Festival.

Our topics for November were ST. COSMAS & ST. DAMIAN - SERVING WITH LOVE, CHARITY-THANKFULNESS, and STEWARDSHIP. Our 5th and 6th Graders made Prosfhora under the direction of Melissa Krinos. Cindy Xenick taught our 3rd and 4th Graders all about memorials and how to make Kolyva. John Kokenis visited our Toddler 2's, 4th Grade, and 7th - 8th graders this month.

November 17 was our YOUTH SUNDAY SERVICE. Our children sang beautifully throughout this service. We would like to thank them and our High School Student who did a great job reading the Epistle. The parishioners of St. John's are truly blessed to have such wonderful young stewards.

Our SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PAGEANT will take place on December 15. The SUNDAY SCHOOL/ HOPE AND JOY Christmas Party starts after the Divine Liturgy on Saturday, Dec. 14. We hope everyone attends the Liturgy. The Mandatory Pageant rehearsal begins promptly at 1:30.



December 2019 Sunday School Calendar

Sunday, December 1
No Sunday School Classes

Sunday, December 8
Topic: Nativity
GOYA Meeting 5:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 14
Sunday School Christmas Retreat and
Program Rehearsal

Sunday, December 15
Sunday School Christmas Program

Sunday, December 22
No Sunday School Classes

Sunday, December 29
No Sunday School Classes

~ December 2019 Stewardship Message ~

What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? I Corinthians 4:7

We wish everyone a blessed Nativity Fast as we enter this joyous season and prepare for a New Year. We thank you for your gifts this past year and the sacrificial giving that helps sustain our church Vision & Mission. Fr. Stavros, provides more detail about our 2020 Stewardship Campaign in this Messenger.

Stewardship of Time and Talent was on full display at our Annual Greek Festival in November. We experienced a record-breaking pace yet the feedback from Volunteers and Guests was overwhelmingly positive and everyone spoke of the 'happy and loving atmosphere' throughout the weekend. The weekend showcased ALL of our core values ~ Love, Worship, Community, Learning and Service! The light of Christ shined bright on our hundreds of Volunteers and we thank each and every one of you!

May our Heavenly Father continue to shine a bright light and provide grace to each and every one of us for many years to come. May we continue to connect, love one another, be kind to one another and keep our eyes turned to God and the reasons we give of our Time, Talents and Treasure!

~ Stewardship Housekeeping ~

Please complete your 2019 pledge by year-end as we prepare for our new Stewardship Year! Tax Letters will be compiled in January 2020 to reflect donations received in the 2019 calendar year. We can address any questions you may have regarding your remaining commitment.

YES - Stewardship Pledge Forms really are required and can be completed on-line. Look for our new and improved online format rolled out for the new Stewardship Year. Pledge Forms not only provide family information on areas of interest and talents but also help us determine how much income the Church can expect to support our operations.

Pledge Forms and current contributions are required to meet the Uniform Parish Regulations (UPR) of our Archdiocese as well as our local by-laws, which enable participation at Parish General Assembly Meetings, Nominations and Voting for Parish Council in December.

Please feel free to share your thoughts to the office email - officestjohnngoctampa@gmail.com or speak directly with Fr. Stavros, Sandra Pappas or Pete Trakas -Stewardship Co-Chairs. We are here for YOU!

Year to Year Comparison ~	2019*	2018*
Pledged Year to Date	\$518,556	\$436,512
Received Year to Date	\$427,092	\$410,175
Average Pledge	\$1,438	\$1,412
Median Pledge	\$800	\$800
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	372	350

**YTD as of 11/12/19 & 11/14/18*

Save the Date!

Stewardship Sunday, December 8

Start praying today about how your family will support our growing community and help us share the Love of Christ with our neighbors.

Stewardship and the Joy of Giving

We've all had the experience of trying to shop for the perfect gift. After we've searched the stores, fought the traffic, spent the money and wrapped the gift, seeing the look on the face of a friend or family member after they've opened our gift is priceless. We don't think of the time or the money we spent. We focus on the joy someone has received from us through our gift. We rejoice in their joy.

The greatest gift we have ever received is the gift of Christ, the gift of salvation, the gift of hope in everlasting life, the gift of repentance, and all the other associated gifts that come from knowing Christ. The greatest gift we can ever give to someone else is Christ. The gift of Christ is what brings peace in the midst of conflict, what brings hope in the midst of sorrow, what brings forgiveness despite our shortcomings, what brings direction in the midst of confusion, what brings joy in the midst of pain, and what brings purpose in the midst of life. If you've ever felt the gift of Christ in any of these circumstances, you know what I'm talking about.



When we support the work of the church through our stewardship, we help to give the gift of Christ to others. It may be to a fellow parishioner. It may be to a total stranger. It may be to someone we know well. It may be to someone we'll never meet.

During our recent Greek Festival, I saw a lot of joy. I don't think that joy was from the credit cards we were swiping through square on our ipads. I think that joy was because we were serving our church for the weekend. We were doing something that wasn't for ourselves, but for some greater good, in this case, the good of our parish. We were also working in order to give away some of our proceeds to local charities. As our income built, I kept thinking about how much good this was going to enable our community to do for others and this filled me with joy.

I saw joy as people interacted with one another, people getting to know one another, people talking who maybe hadn't ever said a word to each other. I saw joy as we enthusiastically greeted our guests. I saw joy in the faces of our patrons, people who come looking for something—good food, a good time, etc. And I saw their faces as they got their food and saw how delicious it looked. I saw their faces when our dancers were performing. I saw their faces in our sanctuary as they gazed with interest at the beauty of our church. At the Festival, thankfully we made a lot of income for our church. More important, we gave a lot of joy to others at our Festival and that's worth a lot.

I have always admired the men and women who wear a uniform—police officers, fire fighters and the military. On all the days of our Festival, I asked the uniformed officers of the Tam-

pa Police Department, who we had hired as security, to pray with each in the church. The last one I asked to pray with said he wasn't really religious at all. But he eagerly accepted the offer to pray, and when I was done, he told me how good he felt. That wasn't me that made him feel good. That was Christ. As a result of a stewardship of prayer, this man felt good, whole and hopeful. And I did as well. Christ did that for us. I don't know if I'll ever see that man again, I don't know if he'll join a church or grow closer to Christ because of the experience. And that's not what is important here. What is important was that Christ was shared, and for a beautiful moment, someone who didn't know Christ felt that joy. And I felt joy sharing Christ.

When we give Christ, we enable others to feel goodness, fullness, hope and joy. And we also receive these things back on ourselves. We will mark Stewardship Sunday on December 8. Stewardship materials will be in the mail well before you receive this issue of the Messenger. Everyone is asked to bring their card to church on Sunday, December 8. And everyone is asked to prayerfully consider their pledge for 2020. The more we give, the more we can share the joy of Christ with others. The more we give, the more we can put the joy of Christ out into our community, the more we can share Him with those who don't know Him, the more of a positive impact we can make in Tampa.

The more we give, the more joy we can share. And the more we give, the more joy we will receive. Do you want a Church that makes a difference in the community? Do you want to be a part of a community that radiates Christ's joy? The more we give, the more our community will become this. The more we give, the more joyful we will become.

As you know, at St. John we do not state stewardship goals, or put up big thermometers that we fill in as our stewardship numbers climb. That's because we don't pledge towards goals or thermometers, but instead we pledge to Christ. And we don't base our stewardship on a number, or an average, or even a comparison to what others are giving. Stewardship, when it all gets boiled down, is about sharing Christ's joy with others. The more we give, the more we can share. The more we give, the more our church is able to share through ministry and outreach. Because the more we give, the more people we will be able to engage to do this work, the more we will have to support our ministries, the more we will have to support various charities, the more we will have to help others. However, that's not the greatest thing that our stewardship does. Being a steward will bring happiness right back on us. This is why we give—to spread the joy of Christ and to share that joy ourselves.

In John 17:13, Christ prays for His disciples "that they may have My (His) joy fulfilled in themselves." Indeed, our stewardship is what brings that joy to others, and it's how we have His joy fulfilled in ourselves. Christ is the greatest joy. Sharing Christ with others brings the greatest joy. Stewardship is the means by which we share Christ's joy.

Please prayerfully consider your stewardship for 2020 and bring your Stewardship form to church on Sunday, December 8.

+Fr. Stavros

CORE VALUE: LEARNING

PREVENTING DISEASE WITH GOOD HAND WASHING PRACTICES:

The recommended washing time is 15 seconds. The ideal washing time is 30 seconds.

Washing hands is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading infections to others. Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing hands with soap and clean, running water. Frequent hand washing is important because people frequently touch their eyes, nose, and mouth without even realizing it and germs can get into the body through the eyes, nose and mouth and make us sick.

Facts:

Handwashing can prevent about 30% of diarrhea-related sicknesses

Reduces respiratory illnesses, like colds, and Flu in the general population by 16-21%

Reduces absenteeism due to gastrointestinal illness in schoolchildren by 29-57%



Handwashing also helps battle the rise in antibiotic resistance

Preventing sickness reduces the amount of antibiotics people use and the likelihood that antibiotic resistance will develop. Handwashing can prevent diarrhea-related sicknesses and respiratory infections. Antibiotics are often prescribed unnecessarily for these health issues. Reducing the number of these infections by washing hands frequently helps prevent the overuse of antibiotics—the single

most important factor leading to antibiotic resistance around the world. Handwashing can also prevent people from getting sick with germs that are already resistant to antibiotics and that can be difficult to treat.



Washing hands with **soap and water** is the best way to get rid of germs in most situations. If soap and water are not available, you can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. You can tell if the sanitizer contains at least 60% alcohol by looking at the product label.

Keep washing your hands and help prevent the spread of disease.

Marcelle Triantafilou, RN-BC, BSN

Opt-in on Messenger

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

Hope/Joy Fall Food Drive

"HOPE starts with a MEAL. HOPE starts with YOU!"

"During the Holiday Season, a box of food turns into a Box of Hope. Your family can be part of that hope by providing a family of four with food for the holidays. One family reaching out to another."

Please join St. John's Hope/Joy children's ministry in providing a meal to families in need through Metropolitan Ministries. Make this your family project for the month of November and help us put together 60 Boxes of Hope filled with the items needed for a Christmas holiday dinner. There are many ways you can help provide a Box of Hope:

Shop for the items below and bring to church Nov 1- Dec 14

Donate \$25 (cash or gift card) for a Box of Hope.

BOX OF HOPE contains:

Gift certificate for a turkey or ham	2 cans of black beans
1 box of cereal (hot or cold)	2 cans of cranberry sauce
2 cans of fruit	1 bag of dried beans
1 jar of peanut butter	1 box or bag of rice
2 cans of vegetables	1 can or packet of gravy
2 cans of yams	1 box dessert mix
1 bag or box of stuffing	1 package cookies or pastries
1 box of potatoes	1 family box of Jell-O/Pudding

There will be a collection bin in the hall for the food **November through Saturday, December 15**. Please only non-perishable food donations. Assembly of boxes will be Sat, Dec 14 during our Christmas Party.

"He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward him for what he has done." Proverbs 19:17



SAINT JOHN'S YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY



**Saturday, December 14
11 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Kourmolis Hall**

****Christmas program rehearsal at 1:30-3:00 p.m. in the church****

***Rehearsal for all speaking parts starts promptly at 1:30* p.m.**

Lunch will be served...Kindly r.s.v.p. so all can be plentiful!

Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813 or zackiec@yahoo.com

3 Service Projects to Participate in:

Assembly of Boxes of Hope- Metropolitan Ministries Holiday Dinners

Assembly of fleece blankets for local teens in hospital

Gift the joy of a new book for the benefit of the students of Ruskin Elementary

Bring a new or gently used book grades K-5th. We will also package some meals for the students sponsored by Philoptochos.



AHEPA FAMILY NEWS – DECEMBER 2019

AHEPA Family of Tampa Annual Christmas Scholarship Dinner **SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

The *AHEPA FAMILY Scholarship* is intended to promote, encourage, and advance education at the high school, college, university and graduate school level. Scholarships in the amount of \$500 or higher each will be awarded, based on the funds available in the AHEPA/DOP Scholarship funds in the current year.

AHEPA Chapter 12 / Daughters of Penelope Chapter 167
Sons of Pericles Chapter 154 / Maids of Athena Chapter 39

Open to Everyone

Saturday, December 21, 2019, 6:30 PM

Floridan Palace Hotel, 905 N Florida Ave., Tampa, FL 33602

\$50.00 per Adult or Ahepans/Daughters in Advance

\$25.00 per Student or Sons/Maids in Advance

Join today – Become a member of AHEPA or the Daughters of Penelope
Or if you are 14- 18 years old become a member of the
Sons of Pericles or the Maids of Athena

"Hear Me with Fire: The Life of Prophet Elijah"

New video from Trisagion Films!

Trisagion Film's most recent video is about the life and significance of the fiery prophet Elijah, the solitary and ascetic figure from the Old Testament who worked wonders like a second Moses and also pre-figured events and people later seen in the New Testament. He battled false prophets on Mount Carmel, encountered God in a gentle breeze on Mount Sinai, ascended into heaven in a fiery chariot, and later spoke with Christ (along with Moses) at the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. And just as Elijah went from mountain to mountain on his journey, hopefully you too will be inspired by his story as you struggle along the upward path to eternal life.



This video and many more may be found on their youtube channel at www.youtube.com/channel/UCuJkOr3hIxWuMeyl4G4SQ1g

Dear Parishioners,

I have had the privilege of being involved in marketing for the Tampa Greek Festival since 2012. Since 2017, I’ve also run the festival raffle. For the last five years, I’ve worked under Marketing Chair Theo Panopoulos, who handles marketing’s technical side, sponsorships, and more.



Promoting TGF is a big endeavor and starts months before doors open. Much of what I do is on a computer and from my home. Each year, with few exceptions, I’ve handled multiple areas of marketing and **although, I am proud of my efforts with TGF, it is more than should be expected of a single volunteer. I will not handle all of the following responsibilities again in 2020.**

As such, I’m appealing to the community to help fill the following positions long before the next festival. If we can break the responsibilities into smaller duties, then no one must shoulder the entire burden.

Promotions: Posters, handbills, yard signs, banners, table signage—development & distribution responsibilities. Best done by delegating tasks throughout the community.

Public Relations: Press Release distribution to online, print, & television media. Requires follow up of media and management of television shots. Excellent opportunity for a college student.

Online Press Relations: Works with the PR person to ensure online sites such as Yelp are up to date and expands reach by sending releases to relevant online site.

Raffle: Entry Ticket & Raffle ticket production & distribution. Management and oversight of sales to parishioners, online purchases, team development, and festival

Advertising: Work with Charlie/administration to decide on effective outreach to targeted media. Much of this is online now and handled by a specialty firm but as we understand the festival better each year, we continue to find targeted, inexpensive outlets. Advertising works closely with PR.

All these positions can be shared by partners or a team of two or more. The office is fully staffed and supports these duties at a very high level. You won’t be alone! Please consider stepping up and choosing one of these five jobs. If we start now, we can guide you through this transition phase and help make 2020 TGF stress-free and awesome for all of us!

Please contact either Charlie at the office or myself at 813-571-0658.

Yours,

Catherine S. Mitseas

CUT OUT THE BELOW CHRISTMAS PRAYER REQUEST AND RETURN IT TO FR. STAVROS.

Christmas Prayer Request

Please write down below names of people you’d like Fr. Stavros to pray for, and any specific needs that these people or you have. Fr. Stavros will pray over these names and needs on December 24. Please place this card in the basket by the baptismal font.

Website & Email Update

Our new web domain is STJOHNTPA.ORG

New email addresses:

Debbie: debbie@stjohntpa.org

Charlie: chambos@stjohntpa.org

John: jkokenis@stjohntpa.org

Confidential Request for Counselors from Fr. Stavros

We've all asked for and been asked for references for different kinds of people. I.e. Do you know a good plumber or a reliable lawn care service? I would like to put together a resource manual of mental health professionals in this area to help people from our parish who need certain kinds of services. I'm looking specifically for the following:

1. Therapists/counselors who can counsel
 - a. People in grief
 - b. Teenagers
 - c. Marriage counseling
 - d. Other general counselors/therapists who you've had a good experience with.
2. Anyone good programs for people who are struggling with addictions (Drugs, alcohol, etc.)

While I do a lot of pastoral work that involves counseling, there are certain areas that either I'm not qualified to offer assistance in, or more likely, unable to engage in long term counseling/therapy. However, without first-hand knowledge of these kinds of counselors in our area, I am at a loss as for where to direct people to go. If you have some recommendations, please know they will be kept in confidence. If you are really concerned about anonymity, please send an unsigned note to my attention (this is the only time I will read an anonymous note). I really want to put together a list of resources to be able to recommend to our parishioners. Thank you.

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

Connect Through Christ

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

There are four major types of special needs children:

- Physical – muscular dystrophy, chronic asthma, epilepsy, etc.
- Developmental – down syndrome, autism, dyslexia, speech delays, processing disorders
- Behavioral/Emotional – ADD, bi-polar, oppositional defiance disorder, etc.
- Sensory Impaired – Blind, visually impaired, deaf, limited hearing

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

Youth Protection Update

Please be aware that the youth protection enrollment for ecclesiastical year 2019–2020 has begun and will continue this month. Prior to this starting date, you will receive email communication regarding what steps to take if you are volunteer who works with children or leads our Church. We ask that you keep an eye out for these emails and read the Messenger for updates as our methodology may change due to the new requirements. Thank you for serving so faithfully at St. John's.

Yours in Christ,

Catherine S. Mitseas, ministry head
Nick Katzaras, Parish Council Liaison



Community Outreach

Saturday, December 21

We Want You to Serve with Us!

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

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

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



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

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

Volunteer Check-In Process:

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

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

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

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

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



Scan with your
Smartphone to
Sign-Up Today

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

Here are some special requests we have:

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



All food items offered are accepted. Thank you for supporting those who need it the most. For more info and questions about our Food Pantry please contact Anetta Alexander at 813-758-2689 or exchange2861@yahoo.com.

As we make our way through 2019, anyone who has chosen a word for this year is welcome to submit a testimonial for the Messenger each month. If you'd like to share your word and how it's shaping your year, please email Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com This month's testimonial is from Myra Armstrong.

My One Word for 2019: Redemption

By Myra Armstrong

My choice for one word for the year 2019 was Redemption. I'm looking for redemption for a member of my family that was unjustly accused of a situation not committed. I found this very disturbing and disappointing to think that someone could cause such harm to someone who has been an exemplary example of a good Christian and over all good person. I came to the conclusion my only recourse was to turn to the Lord in prayer. I prayed constantly for redemption so that their honor was restored. As time has passed, I've found comfort that the Lord has helped me to overcome this hatred and has sent me on the right path. "Forgive them for they know not what they do". Redemption has come to my family member by the Grace of God, power of prayer and Love.

Myra Armstrong is married to Jim, is part of our stewardship committee and is in church every Sunday, volunteering often for whatever is needed



Be Givers, Not Takers

by Fr. Steve Dalber

"Jesus answered, 'My Kingdom is not of this world.'" (John 18:36)

Often we Christians are reminded that even though we are in this world, we are not of this world. In fact, if we truly are what we say we are, then our king is Jesus Christ and we have accepted to be of His Kingdom. To be of His Kingdom means that we must necessarily reject the ways of this world. Just as we cannot serve two kings, we cannot be "of" two worlds simultaneously. This world rejected Jesus because it was incompatible with His teachings and unwilling to change. If we choose to belong to Jesus then we must be willing to change, in order to become compatible with our Lord's Kingdom. We cannot enter into the Kingdom unless we are of the Kingdom.

This world is a world that "takes." The Kingdom is one that "gives." If we are of this world we are "takers", and if we are of the Kingdom we are "givers." Since the beginning of creation God has shown us the ways of His Kingdom in His every action. Never in the history of creation has God taken away from His creatures, in fact He has never stopped giving to us. God's primary relationship to us is as a provider, one who continually gives. This is His example to us, an example that we can accept or reject as a model for our own lives. By accepting it and becoming "like" God, that is to save "givers," we become compatible with God's Kingdom, we become of His Kingdom. If we reject His example as givers and simply become takers and accumulators then we are of this world and not compatible with the Kingdom. Simply stated, the very nature of takers is not compatible with that of givers. Like oil and water they cannot mix. Takers cannot enter

the kingdom because their very nature prohibits it, while givers are drawn to the Kingdom by the nature.

Once again the month of December is upon us, a month during which we remember our Lord's birth, a great and wonderful gift to His creation, Himself, Our God became man so that men might become gods. The King came into this world as a subject to serve, not to be served. His nature is that of primary giver. Those who chose the ways of this world, the takers, did not know Him and rejected Him. Those who accept Him take His nature upon themselves by becoming givers and by their acceptance of Christ also become children of the Kingdom.

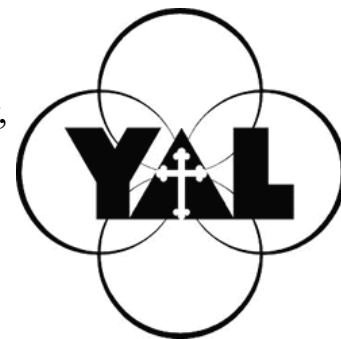
The Kingdom of God is the gift of Christmas. A gift which is offered freely to all people, a gift that's nature is such that it must be shared in order to be accepted. We cannot accept the gift of the Kingdom unless we also offer it to others. If we do not offer it to others then we reject it ourselves. We are willing to take but not willing to give.

My prayer for all of us during this season of remembrance and gift-giving is that we will remember the true gift which is offered to us and to remember that we also must offer it to others. We have been shown the doorway to the Kingdom. But in order to go through it we in turn must show it to others. We do this not because we are forced to but because it is in our nature as true Christians. We are givers, not takers. We are of the Kingdom and not of this world. May the Light His Nativity shine upon us and may we be the reflectors of this Light to all Creation. God bless all of you and grant you a blessed Christmas Season! Fr. Steve Dalber is the Proistamenos of St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church in Charlotte, NC.



Young Adult Ministry Sunday, December 15

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



St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

Do you Like our Facebook page? Like our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are posted frequently so you are up to date with everything going on at St. John the Baptist. You can find our page at StJohnGOCTampa.

Live Streaming

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

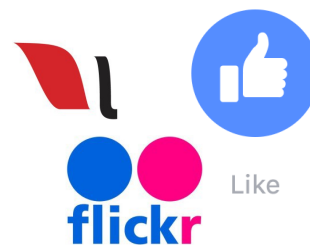
To access this page

1. Go to our Church's website: greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com,
2. Scroll the mouse over the "Multimedia" tab on the menu bar,
3. Click "View Liturgy,"
4. Then click on the link where it says, "Check out our live stream of the Divine Liturgy here <http://new.livestream.com/accounts/2454446>.

All of the services are available to watch at anytime.

Pictures

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

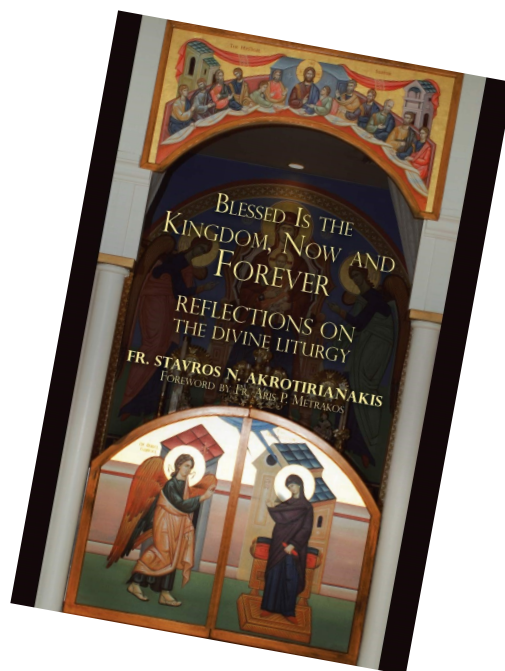


"Blessed is the Kingdom, Now and Forever" On Sale Now in the Bookstore

"Understanding" and "Application" are two of the challenges we face as Christians. First, we have to understand what it is we believe and what it is we are to do. And second, we have to go out and do what we've learned. We can't go do something if we don't know what we are doing or why we are doing it. This is one of the things that motivates me to write. Since February 2015, I've written a daily reflection, called "The Prayer Team".

From the Prayer Team, has come a third book, called "Blessed is the Kingdom, NOW and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy." It is now on sale in the bookstore. The purpose of this book is to give us something to think about during the Divine Liturgy. There are distinct thoughts we can and should have on each line of the Liturgy. While it would be virtually impossible to have big thoughts on every line every time (there are so many lines and we do not pause in between them to give us time to reflect), this book will give you plenty of things to think about and pray over during the Liturgy for a long time to come.

"Blessed is the Kingdom, NOW and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy" is now on sale! It is a series of reflections on the Divine Liturgy. Pick up your copy today! This book costs \$19.00 at the church bookstore.



Want to Learn Modern Greek?

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church Adult Greek School

- Speak Greek
- Read Greek
- Write Greek



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

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

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

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

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL
Barbara Akrotirianakis - Whittier, CA
William J Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Gabriel & Irene Hurst - Tampa, FL
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
John & Cathie Koch - Tarpon Springs, FL
Perry & Fay Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
Wesley & Melissa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
Demitrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH
Mary Spanos - St. Augustine, FL

Bessie Bliziotes - Palm Cost, FL
Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
William & Kane Chapman - Palmetto, FL
Lillian Thomas - Highland, IN
Kathleen Mendez - Ponte Vedra, FL
Theodora Poletis - Baltimore, MD
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
Nicholas & Vaso Anton - Dunedin, FL
Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL

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

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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

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

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

Christmas at a Gas Station

Author Unknown

The old man sat in his gas station on a cold Christmas

Eve. He hadn't been anywhere in years since his wife had passed away. It was just another day to him. He didn't hate Christmas, just couldn't find a reason to celebrate.

He was sitting there looking at the snow that had been falling for the last hour, and wondering what it was all about, when the door opened and a homeless man stepped through. Instead of throwing the man out, Old George - as he was known by his customers - told the man to come and sit by the heater and warm up. "Thank you, but I don't mean to intrude," said the stranger. "I see you're busy, I'll just go." "Not without something hot in your belly." George said. He turned and opened a wide mouth Thermos and handed it to the stranger. "It ain't much, but it's hot and tasty. Stew... Made it myself. When you're done, there's coffee and it's fresh. Just at that moment, he heard the "ding" of the driveway bell.

"Excuse me, be right back," George said. There in the driveway was an old '53 Chevy. Steam was rolling out of the front. The driver was panicked. "Mister can you help me!" said the driver, with a deep Spanish accent. "My wife is with child and my car is broken." George opened the hood. It was bad. The block looked cracked from the cold, the car was dead. "You ain't going in this thing," George said as he turned away. "But Mister, please help..."



The door of the office closed behind George, as he went inside. He went to the office wall and got the keys to his old truck, and went back outside. He walked around the building, opened the garage, started the truck and drove it around to where the couple was waiting. "Here, take my truck," he said. "She ain't the best thing you ever looked at, but she runs real good." George helped put the woman in the truck and watched as it sped off into the night. He turned and walked back inside the office. "Glad I gave 'em the truck, their tires were shot too. That 'ol truck has brand new ones." George thought he was talking to the stranger, but the man had gone. The Thermos was on the desk, empty, with a used coffee cup beside it. "Well, at least he got something in his belly," George thought.

George went back outside to see if the old Chevy would start. It cranked slowly, but it started. He pulled it into the garage where the truck had been. He thought he would tinker with it for something to do. Christmas Eve meant no customers. He discovered that the block hadn't cracked, it was just the bottom hose on the radiator. "Well, shoot, I can fix this," he said to himself. So he put a new one on. "Those tires ain't gonna get 'em through the winter either." He took the snow treads off of his wife's old Lincoln. They were like new, and he wasn't going to drive the car anyway.

As he was working, he heard shots being fired. He ran outside, and - beside a police car - an officer lay on the cold ground. Bleeding from the left shoulder, the officer moaned, "Please help me." George helped the officer inside, as he remembered the training he had received in the Army as a medic. He knew the wound needed attention. "Pressure to stop the bleeding," he thought. The uniform company had been there that morning and had left clean shop towels. He used those and duct tape to bind the wound. "Hey, they say duct tape can fix anythin'," he said, trying to make the policeman feel at ease. "Something for pain," George thought. All he had was the pills he used for his back. "These ought to work." He put some water in a cup and gave the policeman the pills. "You hang in there, I'm going to get you an ambulance." The phone was dead. "Maybe I can get one of your buddies on that there talk box out in your car." He went out only to find that a bullet had gone into the dashboard --- destroying the two way radio. He went back in to find the policeman sitting up. "Thanks," said the officer. "You could have left me there. The guy that shot me is still in the area." George sat down beside him, "I would never leave an injured man in the Army and I ain't gonna leave you." George pulled back the bandage to check for bleeding. "Looks worse than what it is. Bullet passed right through 'ya. Good thing it missed the important stuff though. I think with time you're gonna be right as rain."

George got up and poured a cup of coffee. "How do you take it?" he asked. "None for me," said the officer. "Oh, yer gonna drink this. Best in the city. Too bad I ain't got no donuts." The officer laughed and winced at the same time.

The front door of the office flew open. In burst a young man with a gun. "Give me all your cash! Do it now!" the young man yelled. His hand was shaking and George could tell that he had never done anything like this before. "That's the guy that shot me!" exclaimed the officer. "Son, why are you doing this?" asked George, "You need to put the cannon away. Somebody else might get hurt." The young man was confused. "Shut up old man, or I'll shoot you, too. Now give me the cash!" The cop was reaching for his gun. "Put that thing away," George said to the cop, "we got one too many in here now." He turned his attention to the young man. "Son, it's Christmas Eve. If you need money, well then, here. It ain't much but it's all I got. Now put that pea shooter away."

George pulled \$150 out of his pocket and handed it to the young man, reaching for the barrel of the gun at the same time. The young man released his grip on the gun, fell to his knees and began to cry. "I'm not very good at this am I? All I wanted was to buy something for my wife and son," he went on.. "I've lost my job, my rent is due, my car got repossessed last

week." George handed the gun to the cop. "Son, we all get in a bit of squeeze now and then. The road gets hard sometimes, but we make it through the best we can."

He got the young man to his feet, and sat him down on a chair across from the cop. "Sometimes we do stupid things." George handed the young man a cup of coffee. "Bein' stupid is one of the things that makes us human. Comin' in here with a gun ain't the answer. Now sit there and get warm and we'll sort this thing out."

The young man had stopped crying. He looked over to the cop. "Sorry I shot you. It just went off. I'm sorry officer." "Shut up and drink your coffee." the cop said.

George could hear the sounds of sirens outside. A police car and an ambulance skidded to a halt. Two cops came through the door, guns drawn. "Chuck! You ok?" one of the cops asked the wounded officer. "Not bad for a guy who took a bullet. How did you find me?" "GPS locator in the car. Best thing since sliced bread. Who did this?" the other cop asked as he approached the young man. Chuck answered him, "I don't know. The guy ran off into the dark. Just dropped his gun and ran."

George and the young man both looked puzzled at each other. "That guy work here?" the wounded cop continued. "Yep," George said, "just hired him this morning. Boy lost his job." The paramedics came in and loaded Chuck onto the stretcher. The young man leaned over the wounded cop and whispered, "Why?" Chuck just said, "Merry Christmas boy... and you too, George, and thanks for everything."

"Well, looks like you got one doozy of a break there. That ought to solve some of your problems," George said.

George went into the back room and came out with a box. He pulled out a ring box. "Here you go, something for the little woman. I don't think Martha would mind. She said it would come in handy some day." The young man looked inside to see the biggest diamond ring he ever saw. "I can't take this," said the young man. "It means something to you." "And now it means something to you," replied George. "I got my memories. That's all I need."

George reached into the box again. An airplane, a car and a truck appeared next. They were toys that the oil company had left for him to sell. "Here's something for that little man of yours." The young man began to cry again, as he handed back the \$150 that the old man had handed him earlier. "And what are you supposed to buy Christmas dinner with? You keep that too," George said. "Now git home to your family." The young man turned with tears streaming down his face. "I'll be here in the morning for work, if that job offer is still good." "Nope. I'm closed Christmas day," George said. "See ya the day after."

George turned around to find that the stranger had returned. "Where'd you come from? I thought you left?" "I have been here. I have always been here," said the stranger. "You say you don't celebrate Christmas. Why?" "Well, after my wife passed away, I just couldn't see what all the bother was. Puttin' up a tree and all seemed a waste of a good pine tree. Bakin' cookies like I used to with Martha just wasn't the same by myself. And besides I was gettin' a little chubby." The stranger put his hand on George's shoulder. "But you do celebrate the holiday, George. You gave me food and drink and warmed me when I was cold and hungry. The woman with child will bear a son and he will become a great doctor. The policeman you helped will go on to save 19 people from being killed by terrorists. The young man who tried to rob you will make you a rich man and not take any for himself. That is the spirit of the season and you keep it as good as any man."

George was taken aback by all this stranger had said.. "And how do you know all this?" asked the old man. "Trust me, George. I have the inside track on this sort of thing. And when your days are done, you will be with Martha again." The stranger moved toward the door. "If you will excuse me, George, I have to go now. I have to go home where there is a big celebration planned."

George watched as the old leather jacket and the torn pants that the stranger was wearing turned into a white robe. A golden light began to fill the room. "You see, George... it's My birthday. Merry Christmas." George fell to his knees and replied, "Happy Birthday, Lord Jesus!"

Merry Christmas!

On the Lighter Side-A Greek Christmas Joke

The Greek father calls his son a couple of days before Christmas and says, "Niko, I hate to ruin your day, but I must tell you that your mother and I are divorcing— forty-five years of misery is enough." "Mba mba, what are you talking about?" Niko screams. His father replies "We can't stand the sight of each other any longer, we're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister Toula and let her know."

Frantic, the son calls Toula, who explodes on the phone. "No way are my loving parents getting divorced!" she shouts. She calls Dad immediately and screams, "Patera, you are not getting divorced! Don't do anything until we get there. I'm calling Niko back and we'll be there tomorrow. Do you hear me?" and hangs up.

The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. "Endaxi," he says, "they're coming home for Christmas and paying their own way."



The Nativity Sermon of St. John Chrysostom

I behold a new and wondrous mystery!

My ears resound to the shepherd's song, piping no soft melody but loudly chanting a heavenly hymn!

The angels sing! The archangels blend their voices in harmony! The cherubim resound their joyful praise! The Seraphim exalt His glory! All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead herein. . on earth and man in heaven. He who is above now, for our salvation, dwells here below; and we, who were lowly, are exalted by divine mercy!

Today Bethlehem resembles heaven, hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices and, in place of the sun, witnessing the rising of the Sun of Justice!

Ask no how this is accomplished, for where God wills, the order of nature is overturned. For He willed. He had the powers. He descended. He saved. All things move in obedience to God.

Today He Who Is, is born! And He Who Is become what HE was not! For when He was God, He became man—while not relinquishing the Godhead that is His.

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him angels, nor archangels, nor thrones, nor dominions, nor powers, nor principalities, but treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Yet He has not forsaken His angels, nor left them deprived of His care, nor because of His Incarnation has He ceased being God. And behold

~Kings have come, that they might serve the Leader of the Hosts of Heaven;

~Women, that they might adore Him who was born of a woman so that He might change the pains of childbirth into joy;

~Virgins, to the Son of the Virgin;

~Infants, that they may adore Him who became a little

child, so that out of the mouths of infants He might perfect praise;

~Children, to the Child who raised up martyrs through the rage of Herod;

~Men, to Him who became man that He might heal the miseries of His servants;

~Shepherds, to the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep;

~Priests, to Him who has become a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek;

~Servants, to Him who took upon Himself the form of a servant, that He might bless our stewardship with the reward of freedom (Philippians 2:7);

~Fishermen, to the Fisher of humanity;

~Publicans, to Him who from among them named a chosen evangelist;

~Sinful women, to Him who exposed His feet to the tears of the repentant woman;

~And that I may embrace them all together, all sinners have come, that they may look upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

Since, therefore, all rejoice, I too desire to rejoice! I too wish to share the choral dance, to celebrate the festival! But I take my part, not plucking the harp nor with the music of the pipes nor holding a torch, but holding in my arms the cradle of Christ!

For this is all my hope! This is my life! This is my salvation! This is my pipe, my harp!

And bearing it I come, and having from its power received the gift of speech, I too, with the angels and shepherds sing:

Glory to God in the Highest! And on earth peace to men of good will..

MY WORD 2020

For the past two years, we've encouraged parishioners to identify one word that will shape their year. With 2020 now a month away, it's time to start thinking of the word that will define you in 2020. It is also time to start thinking of a word that will define our parish for 2020. If you have an idea for a word for our parish for 2020, please send it to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com. Towards the end of December, he will send out a request for individual words to define you for 2020.



The Gift of Christmas

By Theo Nickolakis

The Christmas season is such a beautiful time of the year. Lights, candles, and cutout snowflakes begin to decorate our city's streets. People begin to adorn their homes with the colors of red and green, wreaths, candles, and dazzling arrays of lights. These decorations even spill into our schools and businesses. That's the Christmas season! That is the Christmas season?



This past week, as I was speaking with one of my staff members, we began to discuss putting up Christmas decorations in the office. As we were talking about Christmas decorations, she told me that at her son's school, her son's class had to write an essay on what Christmas meant to them. When her son showed her the essay he had written, she did not see any

mention whatsoever about Jesus or His Birth. So she asked her son why he didn't mention anything about Jesus. He responded to her and said, "Well mom, Christmas isn't about Christ anymore"; that's not what it is about anymore? Then what is Christmas about? "It's about presents," he said. It's about presents.

When I first heard this story, I was shocked and disturbed, but the more I thought about it, the more I began to realize that he's right. Christmas really is about presents. But what kind of presents?

It's about a father who punished his three-year-old daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Since money was tight, he became furious when his little daughter tried to decorate a box with gold wrapping paper and put it under the Christmas tree. Yet, on Christmas day, the little girl brought the gift wrapped in gold paper to her father and said, "This is for you, Daddy." When he saw the gift, he was embarrassed by his earlier reaction, but his anger flared up again when he unwrapped the gift, opened the box, and found it to be empty.

"Don't you know that when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside of it?" he shouted. With tears in her eyes, the little girl looked up at him and said, "Daddy, it's not empty. I blew kisses into the box and put them in there for you." Her father then smiled, put his arms around his little girl, and begged her forgiveness and kept that gold box by his bed for years so that whenever he was discouraged he

would take out a kiss and remember the love of his little daughter who put it there. — The gift of love.

It's about presents. Christmas really is about presents.

It's about a contest held to find the most caring child. The winner was a four-year-old boy whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked the little boy what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "Nothing, I just helped him cry." — The gift of consolation.

It's about presents. Christmas really is about presents.

It's about a four-year-old who went to the pediatrician for a check up. As the doctor looked down her ears with an otoscope, he asked, "Do you think I'll find Big Bird in here?" The little girl stayed silent. Next, the doctor took a tongue depressor and looked down her throat. He asked, "Do you think I'll find the Cookie Monster down there?" Again, the little girl was silent. Then the doctor put a stethoscope to her chest. As he listened to her heartbeat, he asked, "Do you think I'll hear Barney in here?" Oh no," the little girl replied, "Jesus is in my heart." — The gift of faith.

It's about presents. Christmas really is about presents.

It's about God, who loved each one of us so much that he gave us his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. — The ultimate gift.

It's about presents. Christmas really is about presents; but it's not about the presents we give that we bought at the local Toys – R – Us, or the local department store. It's not about the giving of money; Christmas is not about a holiday season.

Rather, Christmas is about the gift of giving of ourselves. Giving of our time and talents so that we might touch the life of another. And the reason why we give of ourselves is because we commemorate the gift God gave us — His Son.

So what gift we will give this Christmas, and not only this Christmas, but also every day of the year? Will it be the gift of love by telling our family and friends how special they are to us? The gift of consolation by remembering those who have no one else to remember them? By visiting those who have no one to visit them? Bringing the gift of laughter to those who are in sorrow? Imparting the gift of faith, by keeping Jesus Christ as the focus of our Christmas?

The prayer of St. Francis of Assisi perhaps summarizes best what we can give of ourselves this Christmas and always. O Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love. Where there is injury, pardon, Where there is doubt, faith, Where there is despair, hope, Where there is darkness, light, And where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; To be understood, as to understand; To be loved, as to love; For it is in giving that we receive—It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Theo Nicolakis is a graduate of Holy Cross Seminary and is the Archdiocese director of Internet Ministries.

The Golden Children's Bible

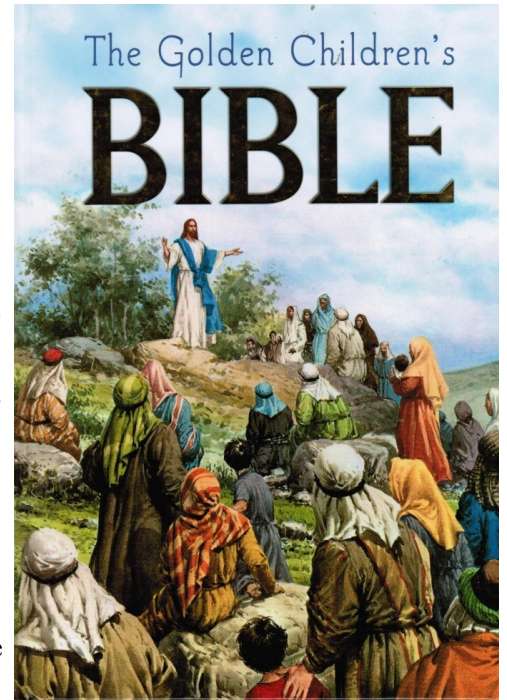
Book Review by Fr. Stavros

Most of us were not raised reading the Bible, and thus the Bible is intimidating, especially the Old Testament. The Golden Children's Bible is a great Bible, specifically recommended for children ages 8-12. It is 510 pages long. My parents read this Bible to us and I have been reading it with Nicholas. What is especially good about this Bible is how it treats the Old Testament—It goes through the main actions of the Old Testament without getting bogged down in the books of Leviticus and Numbers that generally stop people who have read that far from reading farther. The New Testament has a combining of the Gospels into one narrative. Again, this Bible should not take the place of reading the full Bible, either for children or adults, but for those who have never read the Bible, including adults, this is a great way to start.

Why do we need the Old Testament? The Old Testament is foundational to the New Testament. Without the Old Testament, we can't understand the New Testament. The Old Testament includes the Creation of the world, the fall of humanity and God's plan for redemption. God created the world perfect. The Creation was a magnificent thing—from God came everything that was created. The Fall of humanity brought chaos into the world. Sin, evil and death entered into the world through the Fall. God, in His infinite love, brought about a plan for the salvation of humanity. The Law and the Prophets were precursors which paved the way for Christ to come. Christ couldn't come right after the Fall because the people would not have recognized Him, they wouldn't have been

ready for His message of salvation. The Old Testament tells us God's plan, foretells of the coming of Christ, the purpose of Christ, how the world would recognize Christ, and how God planned, through Christ, to redeem the world.

If, however, you've never read the Bible, don't start with the Old Testament. Instead, begin by reading the Gospels, and then read the Epistles of St. Paul. After you've read through the Gospels several times and understand the message of salvation, we should go back and read the Old Testament, to understand the foundation of salvation.



Courtroom Compassion

by Max Lucado

A gesture of forgiveness. A moment of kindness. The first is stirring hearts. The second is stirring controversy.

Amber Guyger had just been convicted of murdering Botham Jean. She shot him on the evening of September 6, 2018. He was in his apartment. She was ending a shift on the Dallas Police force. He was eating ice cream, sitting on his couch. She thought he was an intruder in her apartment. She was sentenced to ten years in prison.

Brandt Jean is the victim's brother. He was given an opportunity to address Guyger in court. This moment was a tinderbox. Brandt, however, refused to light the match. He did not wish any ill will upon Guyger. To the contrary, he wished nothing but the best, and asked the presiding judge a stunning question. Holding back tears, the 18-year-old asked the judge, "I don't know if this is possible, but can I give her a hug? Please?" The judge paused, then said "Yes." Sobs could be heard in the courtroom as witness and accused embraced.

Good for Brandt. He set us an example. Forgiveness does not downplay the offense, excuse the misdeed, nor does it condone it. Forgiveness is simply the act of changing your attitude toward the offender; it's moving from a desire to harm toward an openness to be at peace. This teenager reminded us that, while justice matters, forgiveness heals. He modeled the power of forgiveness.

The judge then displayed the power of kindness. Tammy Kemp left the bench to retrieve one of her personal Bibles; then handed it to Guyger. "This is your job for the next month. It says

right here. John 3:16. And this is where you start." Then the judge quoted the verse, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Who saw this coming? We expect government officials to remain detached, to keep faith at arm's length. And yet here, in the middle of a courtroom we see a refreshing, affirming act of humanity. We see a person treating another person like, well, like a person.

The judge is under fire for her kindness. A national atheist group, the Freedom from Religion Foundation, has filed a formal complaint with the State of Texas, stating that Kemp's actions overstepped judicial authority.

Really? Can we not appreciate this gesture for what it is? A flower finding a way to bloom in this hard sidewalk of our society. We are so harsh to one another. Leaders in DC, shouting. People on the airwaves, shouting. Motorists in traffic, shouting. Anger seems to be the order of the day. Then, when a person models an act of kindness, we recoil. We accuse her of proselytizing. I, for one, welcome her compassion.

You and I indwell a lonely planet. Broken hearts populate every office building. Discouragement mummifies countless lives. The world is hungry, yes hungry for a cavalry of kindness. We cannot solve every problem in society, but we can bring hope to a few hearts. And, who knows, if you brighten your corner of the world and I do the same in mine, a quiet revolution of kindness might break out.

COMMUNITY LIFE



HOPE/JOY FALL FESTIVAL OCTOBER 20



GOYA SENIOR LOCK-IN NOVEMBER 2



GOYA CLEAN-UP DAY OCTOBER 26

GREEK FESTIVAL 2019



CHURCH TOUR (above); BOOKSTORE (right)



OPA BAR (below)



PAREA DANCE GROUP (above); H XARA MAS (below)



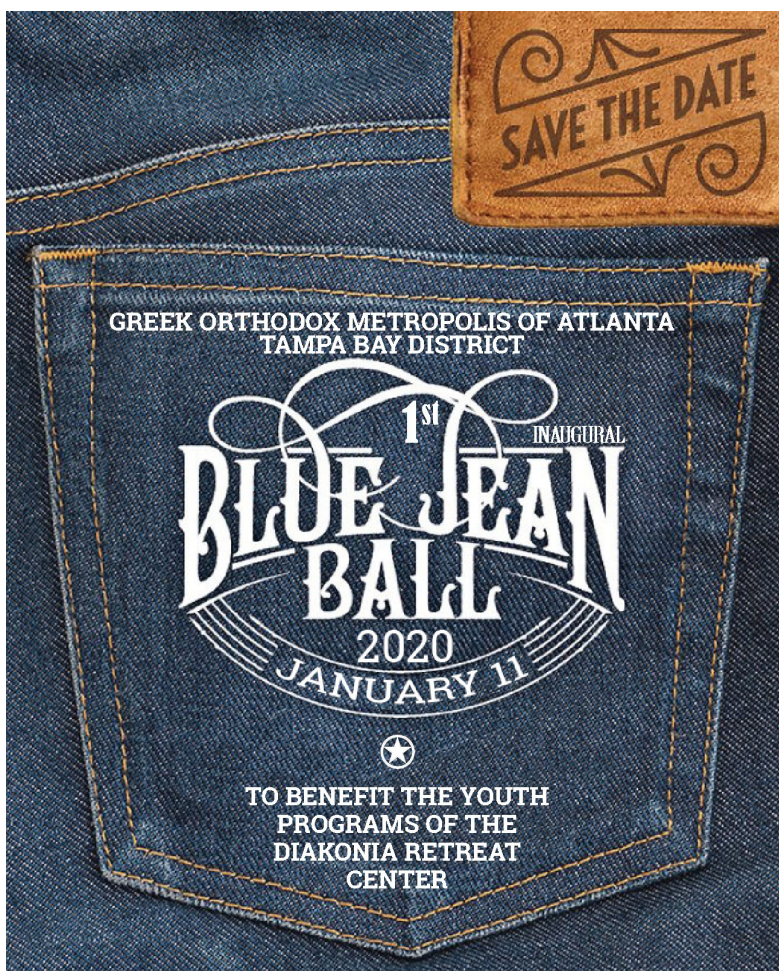


Adis Choundas (left) and Parea Dancers (right) wearing the dresses she made for them.

METROPOLIS JANUARY EVENTS

Diver Applications for Epiphany

All young men of our parish who will be age 16-18 on January 6, 2020, are welcome to apply to dive for the cross at the Epiphany celebration in Tarpon Springs. Applications are available on the website of St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs. Applications are due by 4:00 p.m. on Monday, December 9, no exceptions. They need to be signed by Fr. Stavros so please plan accordingly.



LOCATION
St. Nicholas Spanos Pappas
Community Center
348 N. Pinellas Avenue
Tarpon Springs, FL 34689


HOSTED BY
Tampa Bay District Council



DIAKONIA
RETREAT CENTER



~ December 2019 ~

~ December 2019 ~							
	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. No Sunday School GOYA Christmas Card Sale Philoptochos Christmas Luncheon	2 ** Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	3 ** WBS 10:00 a.m. SBS 7:00 p.m.	4**St. Barbara Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	5 ** Young at Heart 11:30 a.m. Grief Share 6:30 p.m. Greek School 6 – 8:30 p.m.	6** St. Nicholas Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	7 **	
8 ** Orthros 8:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Stewardship Sunday PC Elections GOYA 5:00 p.m. GOYA Christmas Card Sale Tyropita/Spanakopita Sales	9 **St. Anna Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	10 ** WBS 10:00 a.m. SBS 7:00 p.m.	11**	12 ** St. Spyridon Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Grief Share 6:30 p.m. Greek School 6 – 8:30 p.m.	13 **	14 ** Sunday School Christmas program rehearsal, retreat 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.	
15 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Christmas Program Season of Necessities Lunch for the Spring of Tampa Bay GOYA Christmas Card Tyropita/Spanakopita Sales AHEPA Family Meetings Men's group 5:00 p.m. Young Adults 5:00 p.m.	16 ** Christmas Candlelight Service 6:30 p.m.	17 ** NO BASKETBALL WBS 10:00 a.m. SBS 7:00 p.m.	18**	19 ** Greek School 6 – 8:30 p.m. College student night 6:30 p.m.	20 **	21 ** Community Outreach	
22 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Tyropita/Spanakopita Sales Holiday Tent 	23 ** Royal Hours 9:30 a.m.	24 **Nativity of Christ Vespers 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Orthros 5:30 p.m. Liturgy 7:00 p.m. NO BASKETBALL	25 ** Christmas Day Office Closed	26. No Fasting Until 1/3/20 Office Closed	27 Choir Christmas Party Office Closed	28	
29 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Vasilopita Sales	30 St Anyisia Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	31					

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

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

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

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Sandra Pappas	813-785-3747
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Sia Blankenship 813-968-8855

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Perry Katsamakias 516-403-3118
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Bookstore

Brett Mourer 813-376-9315

Chanter

Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

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

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Greg Melton 813-967-2074

Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children

Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534

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	Bessie Palios,	813-523-0347
	Maraquet Edquid	813-422-8963
Parea,	Marina Choundas	813-877-6136
	Anna Maria Bavaro	732-239-9085
Panigyri,	Alexandra De Maio	813-340-9668

Daughters of Penelope

Nicole Leontsinis, President 703-585-7490

Finance Committee

Gary Ward 813-846-3898

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Anetta Alexander 813-758-2689

GriefShare

Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

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John Kokkas 727-992-4615

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George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813

Junior Olympics

Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

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Lindsey Skourellos 813-503-7845

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Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026

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Charlie Hambos 813-843-8471

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Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

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Catherine Mitseas 813-571-0658

The Messenger of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is published on a monthly basis. Publication is the first of each month. Deadline for notices and announcements for The Messenger is the 10th of each month. You may send announcements to the church office through email.

“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.