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

Covid-19 Protocols
The Messenger goes to print on the 15th of the month. The October issue went to print September 15. The Covid-19 protocols, as of September 15, include a strong encouragement to wear masks in church. If there are new protocols, the community will be informed immediately via email. As we have asked in previous months, we should not be discussing vaccine status. This is a private matter. It has caused loss of friendships in our community already. Let us be cautious and careful, but not fearful. Let us do right by our own conscience without judging. There is no manual for how to administer a church in a pandemic. Thank you to everyone for your patience during these challenging times.

Fr. Stavros’ Message
When Everyone Thinks They Are Right

In I Kings 3, we read about two women who came and stood before King Solomon.

One woman said “Oh, my lord, this woman and I dwell in the same house; and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. Then on the third day after I was delivered, this woman also gave birth; and we were alone; there was no one else with us in the house, only we two were in the house. And this woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on it. And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while your maidservant slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead son in my bosom. When I rose in the morning to nurse my child, behold, it was dead; but when I looked at it closely in the morning, behold it was not the child that I had born.” But the other woman said, “No, the dead child is hours, and the living child is mine.” Thus they spoke before the king. I Kings 3: 16-22

In the story, both women think that they are right. They are absolutely convinced of it. They won’t hear otherwise than that each one’s side of the story is correct. Had there been news agencies back then, undoubtedly one would have picked up the side of one and another with have taken the side of the other. There would have been politics debates, op-ed pieces written, a arguments on social media.

What was King Solomon to do? Whose side was he to take? Both women had made compelling arguments.

King Solomon loved the Lord, we are told in I Kings 3:3. One day the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream.

And God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” (I Kings 3:5) And Solomon said, “Give Thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern Thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to govern this Thy great people?” It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now to according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.” (I Kings 3: 9-12)

In the story, both women think that they are right. They are absolutely convinced of it. They won’t hear otherwise than that each one’s side of the story is correct. Had there been news agencies back then, undoubtedly one would have picked up the side of one and another with have taken the side of the other. There would have been politics debates, op-ed pieces written, arguments on social media.

What was King Solomon to do? Whose side was he to take? Both women had made compelling arguments.

King Solomon loved the Lord, we are told in I Kings 3:3. One day the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream.

And God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” (I Kings 3:5) And Solomon said, “Give Thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern Thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to govern this Thy great people?” It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now to according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.” (I Kings 3: 9-12)

Continued...
In 2020, the Parish Council fixed the date of September 1, as the “go/no-go” day on the Greek Festival. If there was a “clear path” to a safe Festival in November, the Parish Council would approve one. If there was not a “clear path”, the Festival would be cancelled. And obviously that was the case in 2020. The Parish Council took the same approach this year, in 2021. Because the delta-variant of the coronavirus has made many people in our own parish sick, in addition to the many in the Tampa Bay community, even those who have received the Covid-19 shot, scheduling a festival in November would come with too much uncertainty. What will everything look like on November 1? Because we have no way of knowing, the Parish Council has decided to cancel the Greek Festival in 2021.

God blessed Solomon with wisdom, more wisdom than anyone has ever had before or since his time. And because Solomon had God’s wisdom, not merely his own, he was able to figure out how to solve the impossible. Reading on in I Kings 3,

Then the king said, “The one says, ‘This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead; and the other says, ‘No, but your son is dead, and my son is the living one.’” And the king said, “Bring me a sword.” So a sword was brought before the king. And the king said, “Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.” Then the woman who son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, “Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means slay it.” But the other said, “It shall be neither mine nor hers; divide it.” Then the king answered and said, “Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means slay it; she is its mother.” And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to render justice. (I Kings 3: 23-28)

This is why they call it “The wisdom of Solomon,” when someone is presented with a tricky problem or a sticky situation to get out of. Actually, to call it “the wisdom of Solomon” is a misnomer. Rather it was the “wisdom of God” given to Solomon by God.

There are multiple angles and narratives going on in our world right now regarding the coronavirus, the situation in Afghanistan, the economy, politics, etc. Everyone is sidling up to whichever person or cause or side most agrees with them. We’re following the wisdom of whichever news outlet or whichever politician whose view we like the most. And in the midst of all of this, we have forgotten about the “wisdom of God.” We never hear God’s name invoked in this mess. We’ve heard certain people spoken of as if they were God, but certainly not enough people are calling for the wisdom of God.

In Proverbs 3:5, we read Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. Have we asked God for His insight and His wisdom in helping us discern what is right? I will say personally that I don’t do this enough. There are many times when I decide what I feel is right and don’t ask God for wisdom at all, thinking that my wisdom is sufficient. This is certainly an area in which I can improve. And truthfully, when I ask God for wisdom, I tend to make better decisions. When I surrender my thoughts to His will, that’s when I seem to have the most success, or feel the best about what I’m doing.

Saint James writes in James 1:5, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without re-

proaching, and it will be given him.

Psalm 111:10 reads The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who practice it.

The Book of Proverbs begins with the words The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7) Isn’t that the truth? The writer goes so far as to call those who do not acquire the wisdom of God “fools”. Certainly there is lots of foolishness in the world today!

Proverbs 15:33 says The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility goes before honor. And Proverbs 21:30 says No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord.

There are dozens of examples connecting true wisdom as something that comes from the Lord, through us. Each of us has to make many choices each day, not only regarding the coronavirus but dozens of other challenges that come our way. To whom are we going to insight, if not to the Lord? FOX? CNN? Facebook?

King Solomon faced two women who were sure that they were right, and through God’s wisdom given to him, he was able to discern what to do. If there is anything we need in this world right now, it is wisdom and discernment. Because everyone has something to say and everyone thinks that what they are saying is the truth.

How does one discern truth? There are several ways. First, one has to have an open mind. This is not the politically correct notion of “have an open mind that things you once thought were true are no longer not true.” It means to leave room in our minds for God’s wisdom, so that we are not solely relying on our own understanding but leaving room for God to speak into our minds His wisdom.

Continued...
Second, we must communicate with God. We must read Scripture. We must pray. We must slow down and listen to God’s voice. If I pray to the Lord, “speak your wisdom into my heart,” that doesn’t mean it is going to happen immediately. God’s wisdom may come immediately, or it may come after a time. It may come through another person or another situation. If I have asked for God’s wisdom, am I open to hearing it through someone else? If I’ve asked for God’s wisdom, do I have the patience to wait for an answer?

Each of us has to make many decisions each day. About our marriages, our children, our jobs, difficult conversations, work/life balance, diet, rest, the list is endless. How much of the day goes, like King Solomon did, to asking God to give us a wise and discerning mind? We ALL have an opinion on the coronavirus, and the longer this crisis drags on, the more deeply we get set in our opinions. How much time have we each spent praying for wisdom in how to deal with this crisis? We’ve all prayed for it to go away, but how many of us have prayed for wisdom in how to cope with it? Depending on which news source one listens to, this crisis is either just about over, or its going to be continuing for years. The truth is somewhere in between. And the fact is that no one knows what is going to happen, only God.

The truth is that the longer this virus continues, the more anxious we are all becoming. I work very hard to keep politics out of the church and out of my messages. In my humanity, sometimes I make mistakes in what I write or how I write. And so this message is not taking sides on anything, only stating that there are times when everyone is going to think their side is right, and in these times, the only “right” thing to do is to be like Solomon, and ask God for His discernment and wisdom. At some point, the pandemic of the coronavirus will end. What will be left in the wake will be a society that does not trust in the Lord but leans on its own understanding. The covid-19 crisis is not the last crisis we will face in our lives. There is no vaccine to stamp out crisis, strife and disaster, save for one—the wisdom of God. Solomon had this, because he slowed down and asked for it. And God answered Solomon’s prayer for wisdom specifically because he hadn’t asked for material things, or for victories over adversaries. His prayer was simply for the wisdom to know what was right and the discernment to do the right thing.

So what do we do when everyone says that they are right? We ask God for wisdom and we listen for His response.

**When Someone Thinks They Can’t Do Anything Right**

Not only do we have people in the world who think that everything they say is right. We have people at the other end of the spectrum who think that nothing they do is right. We’ve all had bad streaks where we wonder if anything we say is going to be right, where we are almost convinced that anything we are going to do is going to be wrong. I know I’ve felt like that. And the pandemic, combined with the increased anxiety it has given to just about everyone, has led us all down the rabbit hole of wondering if we have suddenly become incapable of doing anything right.

This lack of confidence leads us to some dark places. Sometimes lack of confidence causes us to make poor decisions which zap our confidence even more. None of us is immune from self-medicating—popular choices include ice cream in large amounts (my favorite), over-eating overindulging in alcohol, drugs, binge-watching something, etc. Self- destruction is also something none of us is immune from. Most people, when they think self-destruction, think of suicide. Yes, that is a temptation for far too many. And if not actually committing suicide, many people have suicidal ideations. More commonplace is the day that we feel toxic, when nothing is going right, when we open our mouths and say something we shouldn’t. Depending on the circumstance, toxicity can cost us a job or a friendship. If we are honest, we all have days when we feel toxic.

Wherever you are with anxiety, whether it’s on a level you can handle or a level that is spiraling out of control, we all have anxiety of some kind and the best way to combat anxiety is also with the wisdom of God. The Bible says very clearly that each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. (Genesis 1:27) There is no one who has been made in the image and likeness of the devil. If we are all in the image and likeness of God, then God has put His wisdom into each of us. The Bible also says very clearly in Matthew 25: 14-30, the Parable of the Talents, that God has given to each of us at least one talent—some have five, some have two, and some have one. No one has no talent. Now there are people who think that they aren’t in God’s image and likeness and others who think they have no talent. If you are in any of these categories, you are wrong. God has put Himself into each of us, and each of us has been given a talent by which to honor God and to serve others. Something we can all do is help each other see that each of us has value, to encourage one another, and to pick up one another when one feels down.

In I Kings 19, we encounter Elijah. Elijah was among the greatest of the prophets, Elijah was taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot, a prefiguring of the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. Believe it or not, Elijah had moments when he was afraid. He fled into the wilderness one day and asked the Lord that he might die, saying “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers.” (I Kings 19:4) Imagine even the great prophet Isaiah had a moment when he didn’t think he could do anything right, a moment when he begged God to die. God’s response was sending him an angel who provided food for Elijah to eat.
Elijah stayed in a cave, so that he could listen to the voice of the Lord. And God said “Go forth, and stand upon the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.” (I Kings 19:11-12) God’s wisdom to Elijah was found in that still, small voice. It’s important for us to remember this. God’s voice most likely isn’t found on the 24-hour news cycle. It’s probably not found at a political rally. It’s probably not found in the latest medical briefing. God’s wisdom is found in the small, still voice, that comes to us when we are quiet and still.

So if you think you can’t do anything right, or if nothing is going right for you at the moment, spend some time alone with God, and ask Him for wisdom. That wisdom might be to help reveal a talent to you, it might be to build self-confidence, it might be to send people around you to support and encourage you and it might be the strength to come at a challenge with only God’s help (because no one truly ever comes at a challenge alone).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the only way I’ve survived this pandemic is to ask God for wisdom, patience and discernment. That’s the only way I’ve been able to make it through ministry for these past 23 years, the only way I’ve made it at St. John for 17. On the days that I want to give up (and yes, I have those days), I ask God for wisdom and strength to get through. On the days when I’m not sure what is the right thing to do, I ask God for wisdom and discernment to make the right decision. On the days when the whole world seems like it is against me, I ask for wisdom to know that I am not alone. On days when it feels like I’ve screwed everything up, I ask for God’s wisdom to reassure me that He still loves me and that all hope is not lost. And on the days when I know what to do but the challenge is hard, I ask for wisdom and perseverance to get through the tasks at hand.

There is no one who does everything right. There is no one who is always right. There is no one who doesn’t do anything right. And there is no one who is always wrong. The key in figuring out right and wrong is not following the science, the talking heads, or the politicians. It is following the wisdom of God and continually asking for it.

Because right now, life for many of us resembles the dilemma of King Solomon—everyone in front of us thinks they are right. And Solomon solved his dilemma through God’s wisdom.

And for many of us, life resembles Elijah—we have withdrawn because nothing seems right. And Elijah solved his dilemma through God’s still voice.

Solomon and Elijah are considered righteous figures of the Old Testament. And yet in many ways they were like we are today. So don’t despair. Ask for God’s wisdom, listen for His still, soft voice, and we can all find righteousness in the eyes of God. Because even an end to the pandemic is not going to extend life forever. Being righteous in the eyes of God is what gets us to everlasting life, and God’s wisdom is what will keep us on the righteous path. For as we read in Proverbs 9:9-11:

> Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. For by Me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life.

And in Job 28:28, we read

> Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

Let us work to acquire the wisdom and understanding that come from the Lord, to seek His wisdom, and to depart from evil.

There is no one who is always right. There is no one who is always wrong. It is the wisdom of God that will help us understand both of these truths.

> God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen. (Serenity Prayer)
Who Is the Loudest Voice in Your Life?

There is a Cherokee Indian legend entitled “Two Wolves.” The story goes like this:

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. “A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy. “It is a terrible fight and it is in between two wolves. One is evil—he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good—he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The same fight is going on inside you—and inside every other person too.” The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?” The old Cherokee replied, “The one you feed.”

There are lots of voices that compete for our attention. They might be voices of positive encouragement or negative encouragement. They might be voices of joy or anger, of optimism or pessimism. They might come from other people or they might come from within ourselves. The question to ponder is this: Which voices do you listening to? Which voices do you feed into?

The voices change someone throughout our lives. When we are babies, the only voice we hear is the voice of our parents, maybe our grandparents. Whatever is happening in our home sets the tone. I remember when our son went to pre-school for the first time and I mentioned to someone how nervous I was—not about him enjoying the experience or being safe, but the fact that up until that point in his life, the only voices he heard were those of his parents—we controlled the tone of voice and the content of what was being said, and now someone else was going to have an influence and a voice in his life.

In childhood, we hear the voices of parent, teachers and friends primarily. Hopefully children also hear the voice of God, through parents reading the Bible to them, to praying with them, and through taking them to church. This is an important warning to parents—PARENTS are responsible for making sure that God’s voice is present in the lives of their children. A young child is not going to drive to church on his or her own. And even if a parent gets a child to church and Sunday school each week, if there is no praying in the home, and if the Bible is not being read in the home, then the voice of God will be drowned out by the other voices on the other six days of the week.

As children become teenagers, the voices of friends and the media start to become the loudest voices they hear. Many times in working with teens, when I ask them which voice is loudest for them in their lives, they will rank friends and media first and second, then parents, teachers and God. The influence of friends and media dominate the other voices. One problem with this becomes the fact that the ideas of the friends and the media change constantly, and so listening to these voices while ignoring the stable voices of parents and most especially the voice of God leaves teenagers without a sense of stability. Everything seems to be constantly shifting.

Teens become adults and the voices shift again. The voice of a boyfriend or girlfriend, or the voice of a spouse becomes the loudest voice. The voice of parents becomes one of friend or consultant, rather than director. At some point in adult life, the voice of parents stops as they pass on. The voices of their own children become significant, but these are not voices of advice. Friends continue to have a voice. And it’s probably safe to say in the world today that the media has perhaps the most influential voice in shaping our thoughts and opinions. The loudest voices in life, for many years, have been angry voices. It has become virtuous to be angry (not even passionate because it goes beyond healthy passion) about something. And we go continually to sources to feed our anger, which becomes primarily the news outlets. Sadly, the voice of the media used to be for information. Now it is for influence. And because anger is seen now as a “virtue,” if one isn’t outraged about something, it seems as if one is lacking something.

The only voice that can be consistent throughout life is the voice of God. My parents have both passed away. I hear their voices only in my memories. I thankfully have a few mentors but I no longer am a student who hears the voice of a teacher every day. I have a few very close friends, but they are not full time in ministry. I hear the voice of my spouse every day, but not while at work. I have some close friends who are priests but they don’t live in my city so I don’t see or hear from them every day. The competing voices in my life, the ones that are present everywhere and at all times in my life, are the media and God. Family, friends and co-workers are not always in my office. However, the media is always a click away on the computer and God is always available through prayer and Scripture reading. So, I have to soberly ask myself, do I spend more time clicking away on the computer or on my knees in prayer? Which voice in my life gets fed the most? And which voice feeds me the most? Is it the voice of the wolf (the media) or the voice of the Lamb (Jesus)?

Voices of optimism or pessimism affect us. So do voices of encouragement or discouragement. It is much harder to feel optimistic or encouraged when the voices around us are pessimistic or discouraging. It is important to ask ourselves what kind of voices we are surrounded with, and what kind of voices we choose to surround ourselves with.

Our voices can also be influential—as parents, as co-workers, and as friends. Are our voices ones of encouragement or discouragement, do they bring peace or anger, do they reflect God? These are all sobering questions.

Which is the loudest voice in your life—parents, teachers, friends, spouse, media, God? The one you feed the most become the loudest voice in your life. And what kind of voice do you bring into the world? Will people hear God in your voice?

It is crucial for our salvation that God’s voice is the leading voice in our lives. It is critically important to not let God’s voice be drowned out by the other voices in our lives. And that only happens when we spend time with God, so that we can hear His voice of love and hope, in a world that has somehow tried to silence both.

With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros
My favorite sermon delivered by Fr. Stavros was on the topic of “my child is _______.”

In the sermon, Fr. Stavros invited us all to fill in the blank, to invite all parents to consider what hopes, assumptions, and expectations they have for their children. Father exampled some common answers we might have to this inquiry. My child is “mine,” or “an honor student,” or “an all-star athlete,” or “a proud Greek American.” The list goes on. By the end of the sermon, Father invited us all to consider the following as an answer: “my child is CONSECRATED UNTO THE LORD.”

Woah.

I heard this sermon in my first year as a parishioner at St. John the Baptist, before Aleksandra and I were parents. This sermon should not have been aimed at me because I wasn’t yet a parent, and yet I held this homily in my heart until Aleksandra and I found out we were going to be parents. There could be no way of knowing exactly if we were actually going to become parents, and yet the words stayed with me. But when Aleksandra and I received the awesome news that we would be parents, we took to Father’s sermon seriously. To that day, each night, we’d pray that God help grant us wisdom and patience to consecrate our child unto the Lord.

But what does “consecrated unto the Lord” exactly mean?

Last month, we celebrated the nativity of the Theotokos, and this month we celebrate the feast of St. James, brother of the Lord. What does this have to do with consecration? According to our Orthodox tradition, the Virgin Mary was consecrated to God even before she was born. The story goes that Joachim and Anna had been praying ceaselessly for a child, and Anna had made it up in her mind that she would consecrate her child-to-be to God. Joachim and Anna are eventually blessed with a daughter, name her Mary, and both of them take seriously their commitment of “consecrating their child to God.” As the story goes, Joachim and Anna bring some grand sacrifices to the temple for the temple’s priests and for the people—to the tune of 10 lambs, 12 cows, and 100 goats. The next step of consecration is when Mary takes her first steps at 6 months old; just as she takes her 7th step—a holy number—Anna her mother says her next steps must be taken in the temple in Jerusalem. Lastly, at the age of 3, both parents bring Mary to the temple to be raised by the stewards and priests of the temple, wherein she lived and worked there until the age of 12.

Now I can imagine what some of you are thinking. “How do we know this all happened” and “woah, that is some extreme consecration!” Let’s talk about the word “canon” and St. James brother of the Lord to address the first question.

Putting together the canon of Scripture—our Bible we use today—required much study and debate by our Church’s early scholars, priests, and bishops. We take our Bibles for granted today as though they fell out of the sky without any debate of what would make it inside of them. But the truth is there were many epistles, gospels, and texts floating around the ancient world that had questionable authorship and/or questionable theology. Among these texts were “Gnostic Gospels” that asserted some pretty wayward things about Jesus (i.e., asserting Jesus being married to Mary Magdalene) while also happening to have dubious authorship. The “canon texts” which we read in church to this day were carefully scrutinized for being trusted to have come from the author we claim them to be from as well as having “agreement” with the overall arching Gospel of Christ’s salvation of mankind.

Continued...
There is some dispute as to whether the “Gospel of James” was really written by James the brother of the Lord, or if this gospel was the product of an oral tradition that wound down much later. Nonetheless, the Orthodox Church today leans on this text. We can see James’ Gospel’s influence when we look in our iconography, such as at the icon of the Annunciation wherein Mary is knitting a new curtain for the temple, and the presence of the two midwives in the Nativity icon (both only found in James’ Gospel). Our assumptions of Mary given to Joseph a widower to be a protector, our tradition of Mary serving in the temple as a child, even our knowledge of Mary’s parents’ names all come from James’ Gospel.

But enough history for now, let’s address the other question of this story: isn’t this a pretty intense form of consecration? The answer is, of course it is, but perhaps no more intense than St. Nektarios leaving his parents as a child in order to find work and make a life for himself, or even today’s Afghan parents handing their children over barbed wire with the hope of a safe and better life for their kids.

Though these examples aren’t necessarily acts of “consecration” there is a “giving over” with the intention of seeing the best for one’s children. In the case of Joachim and Anna, they wanted the best for their child, and their child did get the best: she is God-bearer (Θεοτόκος), All-Holy (Παναγια), Victorious Champion (Τη Υπέρμαχο), Most Spacious / Queen of Heaven (Πλατυτερα/Βασιλισσα των ουρανων), just to name a few titles. In short, Joachim & Anna’s act of consecration was extreme, and the Virgin Mary’s role in our lives as Christians is equally extreme!

But I concede that as a parent I might not be able to live to this extreme level of consecrating my child unto the Lord. That being said, my wife and I still pray daily to have wisdom and patience to consecrate our children unto Lord—however that ends up looking. I might not have stopped Ana from taking her eighth step without it being in church, but I have taken her to church, I have sung hymns to her before bed, and have read Biblical stories to her—but she prefers the ones with pictures. My personal appeal to all parents is to keep my accountable and honest that I may never shirk on these holy acts of consecration, and I in turn challenge you—no matter how old your child(ren) is/are—to do these holy acts!

But even before I was a parent, I knew my life—and the things in it—could be consecrated in other ways that could please to God. When I heard this sermon as a husband, as a chaplain, and as a Christian, I found I could apply this “consecration” in unique ways. I could consecrate my marriage through daily prayers with my wife, reading Scripture together, and through martyrlic love for my spouse. I could consecrate my home through praying during my chores, through placing icons in each room in order to remind me of God’s ever-presence, by conducting myself in my home the same way I would in the sanctuary—prayerfully and honorably. I could consecrate my work by asking God to bless each task, to be with me that He may bless every staff member and patient I spoke with. As a Christian, I could decide to turn off my music and podcast in order to sing hymns or enjoy God’s presence in silent prayer. The list goes on if we only get curious, creative, and remain open to God.

Consecration is not just something we do to our worship spaces with a bishop, and not merely something that two parents long ago did for their daughter. Consecration is for clergy AND laity, for married and unmarried, for all of us. God has given each of us unique blessings, treasures, and gifts, and like Joachim and Anna it’s our job to see how those things (be it your job, your home, your family, your relationships) can be “God-bearers” like the Virgin Mary that can bring forth Christ into our broken world. Our challenge is to not merely be stewards of these things and “take care of them”, but to ask the Father of lights to bless them and make them to be bearers of His Son and our Lord, Jesus Christ.
Putting On Christ

James D. Harritos II

When walking into a church, you are taken into a heavenly place, far different from the rest of the world we live in. Each of your senses is being reminded of the holy. Immediately, your ears are filled with the melodic sounds of praises to God. Your sense of smell takes in the fragrant frankincense and myrrh burning in the censer. In making the sign of the Cross, you use your sense of touch to imprint the seal of the Cross on yourself. In breaking a long fast with Communion and antidoron after a morning of prayer, you physically as well as spiritually “taste and see how good is the Lord.” And most noticeably affected is the sense of sight — taking in the beautiful iconography, serving as a window to heaven; the unique architecture; and all the way at the solea and altar are a number of people in vibrant garments never really seen elsewhere.

These people are our clergy, both of the minor (like altar boys) and major (deacon, priest, bishop) orders. The Orthodox Christian clergy adorn vestments, providing witness that they are sons of God by adoption, taking on the garments of honor and majesty. This allows the faithful congregation to be aware of the presence of God, as well as the love and mercy of Christ. As Metropolitan Kallistos Ware puts it, “It is the human vocation to manifest the spiritual in and through the material.” Christ, being both God and man, took on earthly matter for our salvation. With this understanding, we recognize that vestments are “images,” which Krista West, an Orthodox seamstress, says, “are not mere physical adornments meant to please the senses but have as their ultimate purpose the manifestation of grace as a means to salvation.” Vestments are manmade items which specifically provide meaning and have a role leading to the salvation of humankind.

Though these clergy wear different garments which differentiate their rank, each order wears the sticharion, a long tunic-like garment, which, if unbuttoned at the sides, would open up into the shape of a cross. This garment has its roots in the sticharion of Byzantium, and the long length of the historic sticharion was a pre-Christian symbol of high rank. The Church’s usage came to symbolize joining the highest human rank through adoption into the family of God. While we might assume this highest rank is that of the role of the deacon, priest, or bishop; that rank is shared amongst all who have been baptized in Christ.

When clergy begin vesting, they first put on their sticharion, reading the following vesting prayer, reminding them of our salvation through baptism:

My soul will rejoice in the Lord, for he has clothed me with a garment of salvation and wrapped me in a robe of gladness; he has placed a crown on my head as on a bridegroom, and adorned me with beauty as a bride.

The sticharion we all put on is our baptismal robe, the garment put on us immediately upon being baptized into Christ. In many traditions, the baptismal robe is worn to the Divine Liturgy after baptism for forty days, three consecutive Sundays, or another length of time based on custom. The baptismal robe is a long white tunic, as a symbol of purity and new life. The cross-shape and the cross sewn between the shoulder blades (adjacent to the spiritual center of man) is identical to that of the sticharion worn on the altar.

As Galatians 3:27 tells us, “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” When we become Orthodox Christians, we receive the garments of salvation, both literally and metaphorically. When we are infants, our godparents put on the baptismal robe for us, as they take on the role to help raise and guide us in the faith. As we get older, we put on our own clothes, and the same goes for our spiritual lives. We need to put on these “garments of salvation” every day when we wake up by choosing to live a life in Christ. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:9:

“…you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

We are all part of a royal priesthood; from the moment we were baptized. Even if we are not ordained clergymen, we have taken on the role of the priest. Just as Christ did and our clergy do, it is also tasked upon us to be comforting who suffer, feeding the hungry, helping the sick, donating to the poor, visiting in captivity, and praying for each other. As we have been chosen by Him, we need to make the choice to live a life in Christ. As we put on our clothes every morning, let’s do our Cross and be sure to put on Christ before we start our day.
At the time of Christ, the area of the world where He lived was under military control of the Romans. It was under the religious control of the Jews. The Jews delivered Jesus to the Romans because the Jews were not allowed to condemn and kill people, but the Romans were. Pontius Pilate, the local governor or Jerusalem, presided over the hasty trial of Jesus and sentenced Him to death by crucifixion. The sentence was carried out the same day. Crucifixion was a painful and humiliating way to die. In fact it was the most painful and most humiliating way to die. Those who died from crucifixion died from a variety of causes all lining up at once to snuff the life out of the condemned—exposure, dehydration, animals coming and tearing up a body, and asphyxiation ultimately. The person in charge of a crucifixion was a centurion, an officer in the Roman army who was in charge of one hundred soldiers. (Remember the word “century” means one hundred years, so a centurion was in charge of one hundred soldiers). The centurion was a man who was very powerful and who struck fear into people. And it was a centurion who presided over the execution of Christ.

His name was not known in the Bible, though he has been given the name “Longinus.” The “Longi” was the word for “spear”. We don’t know if this was his real name, a nickname, or a name attached to him after the crucifixion. We know that after Christ died on the cross, a soldier, possibly the centurion himself, pierced His side with a spear and out flowed blood and water. We also know that a number of “cosmic” events took place at the time of the crucifixion. The whole sky became dark for three hours. An earthquake took place. The curtain of the temple was torn in two. And dead people came out of their tombs alive.

In Matthew’s account, we read that the centurion and those who were with him said that “truly this was the Son of God.” (Matthew 27:54) In other words, the centurion agreed with those around him, that Jesus was the Son of God. In Luke’s account, we read that “when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, ‘certainly this man was innocent!’” (Luke 23:47) As a Roman, who was obviously neither Jewish nor Christian, this was noteworthy itself. What he had witness caused him to praise God. In Mark’s account, his confession is the most powerful. In Mark 15:39, we read that “when the centurion, who stood facing Him, saw that He thus breathed His last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’” In Mark’s account, he took the lead in confession Jesus as the Son of God.

We read in Matthew 28 that after the Resurrection, the Jews bribed the Roman soldiers to tell people that the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus. Longinus, who had possibly also been involved with guarding the tomb, did not go along with this plan and instead preached about the Resurrection of Christ. He stopped being a centurion, was baptized and became a Christian. The Romans heard about the former centurion, now a devout disciple, and wanted to kill him. Longinus went to the Romans willfully and disclosed that he was the centurion they were looking for. Eventually he was beheaded.

The lesson of St. Longinus is a profound one. We know of many saints who started out as sinners. Saint Peter denied Christ and he is the rock on which Christ founded the Church. Saint Paul was persecuting Christians, as well as killing them, and he is regarded, along with Saint Peter, as the greatest of the Apostles. Saint Longinus presided over the death of the Son of God—He helped kill Christ! What could be more of an egregious sin than that?! And yet he repented and became a saint. The lesson of Saint Longinus is that we can all become saints, no matter what we’ve done, when we repent of our sins and believe in Christ. If St. Longinus can be a saint, than anyone can. If God can forgive him, anyone who comes to God in repentance can be forgiven. If there was salvation for him, then there is certainly hope for you and me.

*Your martyr, O Lord, was worthyly awarded by You the crown of incorruption, in that he contended for You our Immortal God. Since he possessed Your power, he defeated the tyrants, dashing the demons’ powerless displays of defiance. O Christ God, at his fervent entreaties, save our souls. (Apoloptykion of St. Longinus, trans. by Fr. Saraphim Dodes)*

Don’t give up and don’t despair, salvation is still on the table for any of us, no matter who we are and what we’ve done. Saint Longinus is proof of that!
Liturgical Schedule for October 2021

Sunday, October 3  Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, October 6  Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, October 10  Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
A Prayer for Medical Professionals will be offered at the end of Liturgy

Sunday, October 17  Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, October 18  St. Luke the Evangelist
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, October 22  Evening Liturgy for the Feast of St. James
Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy of St. James 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, October 24  Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Tuesday, October 26  St. Demetrios
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, October 28  Protection of the Virgin Mary/Oxi Day
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Divine Liturgy on this day will be celebrated primarily in Greek

Sunday, October 31  Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, November 1  Sts. Cosmas and Damian
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, November 3  Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.
Liturgical Notes for October 2021

Sunday, October 3 - St. Dionysios the Areopagite - St. Dionysios converted to Christianity after hearing St. Paul preach in Athens, becoming one of the first Athenians to convert. He later became the first bishop of Athens, who was later martyred for his faith.

Wednesday, October 6 – Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary – We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. We will alternate some in the evening and some in the morning. For October, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday morning, October 6, from 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Sunday, October 17 - Special Prayer for Medical Personnel - St. Luke, Apostle, Evangelist and also Physician, has his feastday celebrated on October 18. In conjunction with this, as he is the patron saint of doctors, we are going to offer a prayer for everyone in the medical field on Sunday, October 17, at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. All doctors, nurses, dentists, researchers, students, and anyone connected to the medical field is encouraged to attend.

Sunday, October 18 - Feast of St. Luke - St. Luke was one of the Four Evangelists, along with Sts. Matthew, Mark and John. He was an artist, writer, and doctor, and is probably one of the most intelligent of all the saints in the history of our church.

Friday, October 22 - Liturgy of St. James - Evening Liturgy - The Orthodox Church celebrates four different Divine Liturgies throughout the liturgical year. The most prominent is the Divine Liturgy written by St. John Chrysostom, which is celebrated almost every Sunday and on most feast days. The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is celebrated 10 times a year—on the eve of Christmas, the eve of Epiphany, on the five Sundays of Lent, Holy Thursday morning, Holy Saturday morning, and on the feast of St. Basil, which is January 1. The Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is celebrated on Wednesday and Fridays of Great Lent and the mornings of Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, and Holy Wednesday. The Divine Liturgy of St. James is celebrated only once a year, on his feastday, which is October 23. The Divine Liturgy of St. James is the oldest of the Divine Liturgies and is also the longest. It was written around 70 A.D. making it the oldest Eucharistic service in the entire Christian world. Among the interesting things about this service is that by the end of the first century, the structure of the Liturgy we celebrate today was already loosely in place. The Divine Liturgy begins not in the altar, but in the Narthex of the church, as was the custom of the early church. The priest and faithful enter the church together from the narthex, and the next part of the service is conducted on the solea, with the priest facing the people. The priestly prayers, while very long in the liturgy, reveal a beauty and completeness which would later be shortened by St. Basil and even more by St. John Chrysostom. The most unique part of this service comes at the reception of Holy Communion. This the only Divine Liturgy that has become the custom for the faithful to receive Holy Communion in separate elements, in similar fashion with how the clergy commune. The communicants first receive the Holy Body of Christ in their hands and consume it, and then drink from the Holy Chalice. This is a special beautiful tradition which will be continued at St. John the Baptist, and it is encouraged that all who attend this service fast beforehand and prepare to receive Holy Communion at this Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy of St. James will be held on Friday, October 22 at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros at 5:15 p.m.)

Tuesday, October 26 - Feast of St. Demetrios St. Demetrios was born into a wealthy and distinguished Christian family in the Greek City of Thessaloniki in the late 3rd century. Demetrios was noted for his wisdom, and was a good speaker and polished orator. St. Demetrios was also a distinguished soldier. Thessaloniki was known for popular gladiatorial games which attracted the local pagans. Travelling with the Emperor Galerius after a military victory, Demetrios stopped in Thessaloniki, where many pagans, who were jealous of his successful life, denounced him as a Christian before the emperor, who ordered Demetrios be put in prison. A man named Nestor befriended Demetrios in prison. The Emperor went to the arena to see his favorite gladiator, Lyaios and offered a reward to whomever could defeat him. Nestor accepted the challenge, and through the prayers of St. Demetrios, defeated the giant. When Nestor refused to kill Lyaios, because he had been helped by the “God of Demetrios,” the Emperor ordered that both be killed. This occurred in the year 306. We commemorate St. Demetrios on October 26 and St. Nestor on October 27. We will celebrate Divine Liturgy for St. Demetrios on Tuesday, October 26, at 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, October 28 – Feast of the Holy Protection of the Virgin Mary (Oxi Day) - (Mostly) GREEK Liturgy October 1 has been celebrated for many centuries as the feastday of the Holy Protection of the Virgin Mary. October 28, 1940, is observed in Greece as Oxi Day, the day the Greeks said “no” to the Axis powers who were trying to invade Greece. Since 1940, the church of Greece moved the feast of the Holy Protection of the Virgin Mary (Agia Skepi) to October 28, to coincide with Oxi Day. In other jurisdictions, it is still celebrated on October 1. Because many of us have roots in Greece, celebrating the Holy Protection of the Virgin Mary on October is something that has great meaning. In trying to serve the many and diverse needs of our parish, we get requests periodically to do more Greek in the services. Our use of Greek in worship reflects a congregation that by and large does not speak Greek. Making an effort to accommodate these requests, occasionally a weekday Divine Liturgy will be scheduled that will be celebrated mostly in Greek. October 28 will be one of these. Based on the turnout, we can schedule more in the months to come.

Monday, November 1 – Feast of Sts. Cosmas and Damian, the Unmercenary Healers Sts. Cosmas and Damian are the Patron Saints of the Philoptochos, as they went from place to place healing people and not taking any money for their services. Sts. Cosmas and Damian (called the Agii Anargyri) are also saints we pray to for intercession when we are sick, and are also patron saints of doctors (in addition to St. Luke).
Do you have a heart for Service, Prayer, and Fellowship?
Then you won’t want to miss this special day!

On Saturday December 4th, 2021, St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is teaming up with Christ the King Catholic Church for a day of Service, Prayer, and Fellowship.

The day will begin with serving at Metropolitan Ministries, assisting in preparing food and assembling food items in their warehouse. We are in need of at least 25 volunteers to serve alongside Christ The King’s 25 volunteers.

Afterwards both of our communities will meet at Christ the King for prayer led by parish leaders and followed by fellowship, with a cookout sponsored by Christ the King!

This is a great opportunity to grow in communion with one another and demonstrate Christian service to those in need around our community. All are welcome!

MAKE SURE TO SIGN UP HERE: http://stjohngreekorthodox.metromin.volunteerhub.com

Please refer any questions to Greg Melton (813-967-2074 or gmelt12@gmail.com).

October 1
ANANIAS (Hanaiah, Nino), ROMANOS (Romana, Romani), THIRESIA (Theressa)

October 2
CYPRIANOS (Kiprianos), IOUSTA (Iousta), JUSTINE (Ioustini)

October 3
DIONISIS (Dionysius, Dionysia, Dioni, Dione, Denys, Dennis, Denise, Dusky)

October 4
IEROTHEOS (Hierothus), KALLISTHENIS, VERINA (Verina, Vera)

October 5
HARITINI (Haritine, Tina, Hara, Chariti)

October 6
EROTIIS (Erotais), THOMAS (Thomas, Tom)

October 7
BAKHOS, POLYCHRONIS (Polychronios), SERGIOS (Sergio)

October 8
PELAGIA

October 9
LOT

October 10
EVLAIROS (Evlambros)

October 11
Phillip (St. Phillip of the Seventy)

October 12
ANDROMAHI (Andromahi), ANDROMAHOS (Andromahos), VALANTI-OS (Valantis)

October 13
AGATHONIKI, CHRYSI, FLORENTIA (Florentia, Florence, Dia), FLORENTIOS, KARPOS

October 14
GERVASIOS, IGNATIOS, NAZARIOS

October 15
LOUKIANOS (Lucian)

October 16
ANTIGONOS (Antigonus), EFPREPIOS, HOSEA

October 17
LUKE (Lukas, Loska, Loskas, Lucas, Luke), MARINOS

October 18
CLEOPATRA (2) (Cleopatra, Kleopatra, Patra, Patrada, Cleo), FELIX, Varys, JOEL

October 19
ARTEMIOS, ARTEMIS, DIANA, GERASIMOS, HENOE (Hnoe), KERI-

October 20
SIA, MATRONA

October 21
CHRISTODOULOS, EFKRATIS, HIRLARION, ORSALIA (Orsalia, Orsi-

October 22
AVERKIOS (Abericus)

October 23
JACOB (Iakovos, Jacob, Jakob), JAMES

October 24
SEVASTIANI (Sebastian, Sevasti, Sevi)

October 25
CHRYSANTHI (Hrisanthi, Hrysanthi), HRYSAPHIS (Chrisaphis)

October 26
DIMITRIA (Dimitria, Dimitria, Dimi), DIMITRIO (Demetris, Dimitris,

October 27
LOUPOIS, NESTOR (Nestoras)

October 28
EVNIKI, VILI (Villi, Vilia), ABRAMIOS (Abrahamios, Avramia)

Celebrating the Wins

We like to share good news from our parishioners. When you or someone in your family does something interesting, please let us know. We like to celebrate the wins in our community.

Artemis Xenick is a sophomore at FSU, majoring in music therapy. She belongs to a music group called the AcaBelles. It is an all-female, student-led a cappella group. They just released an EP entitled, “Phases.” All the song are covers that were arranged for a cappella singing just for this EP. Artemis solos on one of the songs, entitled “Paper Hearts.” People can listen to the EP on any streaming platform—Spotify, Apple Music, etc.

Congratulations Artemis!

Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

Parish Registry

Baptism—Alexios Jorge Santos, son of Alexander and Constance Santos, was baptized on Sunday, September 5. Thomas Kontos was the Godfather. Na Sas Zisti!

Funeral—Ann Sakellaris passed away on August 23. Her funeral was held on September 2. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to Carole Fotopoulos and family on the passing of her sister, Connie Singleton, and of her uncle, Leon Ross. May their memories be eternal!
GOYA — There are several GOYA events in October.

~ Saturday, October 2 — Lock-in for 10th-12th grade GOYAns. This event will begin at 5:00 p.m. It is for any of our GOYAns in 10-12th grade. We will focus on faith, goal-setting, and challenges as one gets towards the end of high school and plans the next steps in life.

~ Saturday, October 9 — Volleyball Tournament hosted by St. Stephanos in St. Petersburg. This event was cancelled in 2020 and is returning this year. Any GOYAns who are interested in attending should contact Michael and Bessie Paliios, GOYA Advisors.

~ Sunday, October 24 — GOYA Meeting for October — the October GOYA meeting will be held on Sunday, October 24, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. Dinner, as always, will be served.

Fr. Stavros will be out of town October 12-16. For pastoral emergencies please contact Fr. John Stefero.

HOPE/JOY Fall Festival October 17 — The HOPE/JOY Fall Festival is for all of our children in 6th grade and under. It will be from 4:00-6:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 17.

Men’s Group — The Men’s Group will meet on Sunday, October 10, at 5:00 p.m. We will walk to a nearby restaurant and have dinner and then come back to church for a discussion, concluding by 7:30 p.m. All men of the community are welcome to participate.

Women’s Bible Study has begun. We have both an in-person and zoom option. Women’s Bible study will meet on Tuesdays (if a liturgical day falls on a Tuesday it will move to a different day for that week) from 10:00-11:30 a.m. Fr. Stavros leads this group. In October, our meeting will be on Tuesday, October 5; Monday, October 11; Tuesday, October 19 and Monday, October 25. We are studying St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians

Monday Night Bible Study — Fr. John will continue to lead a study focused on "The Beatitudes" (Matthew 5:1-16) Monday evenings at 6:30 pm. The sessions will focus on how and why Jesus gave us these beautiful verses, the background meaning of each verse, and how they relate to our everyday lives. A handout in a question-and-answer format will be provided to each participant as the study unfolds. Join us in person or on zoom!

Tuesday Night Book Study — Starting Tuesday October 26, our new pastoral assistant James Harritos will be leading a book study on The Mountain of Silence: A Search for Orthodox Spirituality by Kyriacos Markides, in which an acclaimed expert in Christian mysticism travels to a monastery high in the Mountains of Cyprus and offers a fascinating look at the Greek Orthodox approach to spirituality. Join us weekly for a guided group reading!

Fr. Stavros on OCN — Father Stavros will be interviewed on the Orthodox Christian Network (OCN) several times this fall. He will be speaking on the topic of “Called to Be Disciples: What it Means to be a Christian.” In October, he will be featured on programs scheduled for Thursday, October 7 and Thursday, October 21, from 7:00-8:00 p.m. each time.

12 Disciples Program — In August 2020, we started a program called “The 12 Disciples.” There are twelve pages of names that comprise all the members of our parish. Father Stavros prays for all twelve pages of names at Paraklesis. The idea for this program is for each “disciple” to take one page of names and pray for that group of people every day. For every twelve “disciples” who sign up, every page of people will be prayed for. We currently have 38 “disciples” meaning that each person in this community is being prayed for by at least three people every day. If you’d like to join this program and receive a page of people to pray for, please contact Matthew Balasis (mathewbalasis@verizon.net).

Order for Holy Communion — With Sunday School back in session the order for Holy Communion will be as follows:

1. Choir
2. Altar boys
3. Sunday school teachers (who will line up in middle aisle before Communion)
4. Sunday school students (who will line up in the middle aisle before Communion behind the teachers)
5. Then the rest of the congregation

Monastery Trip, Sat Nov 13 — Mike Trimis & the YAH are leading a parish wide trip to the monasteries in Ocala. This is not limited to YAH members, all are welcome provided you give notice. Departure time will be 10:00 a.m. with a tentative return of 7:00 p.m. A cost will be forthcoming but Mike Trimis requires a headcount first. Please email Mike Trimis if you are interested (trimism@gmail.com)!
Fr. Stavros has authored four books that are available both in the bookstore and on-line. They are entitled:

- Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany
- The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection
- Blessed is the Kingdom, Now and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy
- Let us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church

Fr. Stavros recommends:
Renewing You – A Priest, A Psychologist, and a Plan
by Rev. Dr. Nicholas G. Louh and Dr. Roxanne K. Louh

Fr. Stavros states: “The human body is composed of mind, body, and spirit. The spirit is tied more closely to the mind because our faith is a rational faith. This book intertwines spirituality and psychology in a way that will benefit marriages and relationships in general, as well as our overall sense of ourselves, our strengths, our weakness, our triumphs, and our challenges. Fr. Nick Louh is a classmate and friend, and he, along with his Presbytera Roxanne are passionate about their faith and their marriage. In this book, they eagerly and honestly examine both in ways that are beneficial for all of us.”

Alex Limberatos recommends:
The Religion of the Apostles – Orthodox Christianity in the First Century
by Rev. Fr. Stephen De Young

Alex comments: “In my ministry, I’ve found that there are many unasked questions in regard to angels and saints. “The Religion of the Apostles” is a thorough book that not only answers our holy curiosities but also commends us towards conducting our lives in a holy way. Fr. Stephen reminds us of the “vacancy” in heaven (through the fall of angels) which invites us into co-rulership with our God over His creation.

An excerpt from the book: “Saint Luke records Christ describing the destiny of humanity, that those who are sons of the resurrection ‘equal to the angels and sons of God.’ God is perfectly capable of existing without His creation...Yet out of love, He has created all things and has shared in the governance of His creation with His angelic creatures. Despite humanity’s repeated falling away into sin, through the salvation found in Jesus Christ, human beings are brought into God’s divine council and given, by grace, a share in His rule over creation.”

Look for these and other titles in our Bookstore.
Presbytera Denise
Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 3,200 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Alex at alex@stjohntpa.org and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Alex or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the “forward to a friend” option. Also, make sure prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

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

Fr. Stavros’ New Book, Available October 4!
ENGAGED: The Call To Be Disciples

As most of you know, I’ve been writing a daily reflection called “The Prayer Team” since February 2015. Many parishioners receive these daily messages. If you’d like to be added to the list, visit the church website and subscribe. By God’s grace, these writings have resulted in five books. This new book is called “Engaged: The Call to Be Disciples: Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian.” It contains a lot of the basics of Christianity. If you’ve forgotten some of them, or want to feel renewed in your Christian walk, this is definitely a book you’d benefit from. The book contains 130 short reflections offering practical instruction on what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. It begins by reflecting on the simple question: Who is Jesus Christ? Other topics include the costs and benefits of being a disciple. There are reflections on prayer and stewardship which build to the final section on rallying and sustaining confidence in our Christian walk. Every Orthodox Christian, at baptism, has the Gospel passage of the Great Commission read over them. This “commission” calls us to make disciples of all nations, to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Before we can be an Apostle (one who spreads the Word of God), we need to be a “Disciple,” a student of the Gospel. This book will help us understand how to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to be more committed disciples and to be more prepared to be apostles.

One drawback of the Orthodox faith is that there isn’t a required class one has to take, or one required declaration of faith one has to make in order to belong. Consequently, many people go through life never learning what it is we believe and never dedicating our lives to Jesus Christ. This lack of understanding and commitment leads many to drop out of Orthodoxy, either going to another Christian denomination or more likely, dropping out all together. This book seeks to help us understand what we believe as Christians, so that we will be more committed to our own personal spirituality as well as more involved in the life of the Church.

“There is no better way to live than as a disciple of the Lord Jesus. But how do I actually do that? Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis offers a simple but not simplistic path for those who desire to embark on the greatest adventure of this life.”
— Fr. John Riccardo, Executive Director of ACTS XXIX
Most of us don’t spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don’t spend any time. Each week since January 2019, we provide in The Messenger and then repeated weekly in the bulletin, a verse or two. I choose verses that are meaningful to me, or well known or ones that have meaning in contemporary times. You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have. If you want a challenge, do the following:

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

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

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

October 3-9
For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.
Ecclesiastes 3:1
While it may not feel like it in Florida, fall has begun. In many areas of the country, leaves on the trees are changing colors and the temperatures are slowly dropping. Even in Florida, the endless heat of summer will give way to more pleasant temperatures. The changing season reminds us that no season lasts forever. Every season comes to an end, even bad seasons. Life has seasons—there is a season when we go to school, a season when we work, a season when we retire, and a season when we pass on from this life. There are many other seasons. Some friendships last for a “season” and then fade away, to be replaced by other seasons. We may spend a “season” in a home or a town or a job before moving to a different one. We are in a season of great anxiety in our world right now. We don’t know when or how it will end. And even if this season lasts for years, it will not follow us once life is over. Therefore, despite the anxiousness of this “Season” of our lives, we have to keep our eyes on the prize, which is eternal life. That is the season which will never end. Therefore, in every season of our life on earth, even this one, we need to be preparing for the eternal season. And of course, we continually pray that the season of the pandemic will end soon as well.

October 10-16
O Lord, open Thou my lips and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.
Psalm 51:15
Anger is the predominant emotion in the world today. It’s not just the pandemic that has brought this on. It’s actually been going on for years. Anger has become almost virtuous. It’s become virtuous to argue for or against a cause or an issue. One of the dangers in life is that we only have one mouth. The same mouth that praises and encourages people can also tear people down. The saying goes “we have one mouth and two ears.” So we all need to focus on talking less and listening more. And when we talk, may it be words that build people up and encourage them. Psalm 51:15 reminds us to praise God with our lips. Let’s make it a goal that we offer more words of praise to God and to other people rather than words of anger and destruction.

October 17-23
Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2
It is never wrong to show love to someone. It is never wrong to help someone who is overburdened. The law of Christ tells us there is only one thing we need to do, and that is to love—to love God and to love one another. When we help someone else carry their burden, we are fulfilling Christ’s law to love one another. Make it a goal every day to help someone with a burden. That might be a burden then need to talk out, or a burden of guilt or anxiety they need help to have lifted off of them. And it might be a real burden, like carrying something for them. Many of us put burdens on others by the way we behave. Let’s work to not pile burdens on others and instead to lift burdens off others, or at least be empathetic in helping others to carry their burdens.
October 24-30

The Lord your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will renew you in His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.

Zephaniah 3:17

This verse reminds us that God is on our side. He is not our opponent. He wishes the best for us. He is in our midst, always. He is a warrior to go into battle alongside us each day. He rejoices over us, especially in our victories. He helps to renew us when we are down. He exults in our successes and is merciful and forgiving in our failures. God is surrounded by angels, who rejoice over us and sing their prayers over us constantly. This verse also calls us to reflect on how we treat others. Are we warriors who fight alongside others, instead of against others? We are to rejoice over one another’s successes. We are supposed to be merciful and forgiving when others fail us. And we are to praise and encourage others, exulting over them with loud cries of positivity and encouragement.

October 31-November 6

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

I Corinthians 13:11

Halloween begins this week. Many children enjoy dressing up for Halloween, in fact even adults still get into this. St. Paul, in I Corinthians 13:11 reminds us to give up childish ways. We can be child-like but not childish. And there is a difference. Wearing a mask and pretending to be someone or something you aren’t is apropos on Halloween. It doesn’t fit the rest of the year. In other words, it is childish to put on a false front, or consistently lie, or pretend to be someone or something you aren’t. God made us to be honest, truthful and trustworthy. We are supposed to value others but we are also supposed to value ourselves. It is childish to hold grudges against other people. Adults are supposed to work through differences. Children actually do this better than adults in many ways. Children get in fights, and fifteen minutes later are back to being friends. Adults hire attorneys or make permanent fractures in relationships. On the subject of Halloween, many people wear masks that day for entertainment. We are praying that the days of wearing masks because of the pandemic will soon come to an end. However, the real pandemic is the fact that so many people wear masks of dishonesty, either because they are ashamed of who they are, anxious and fearful to let other people know their struggles, or because it is easier just to go along to get along and it’s not safe to be honest. This “pandemic” has been around for a long time and will be around long after covid-19 is in the rearview mirror. Let’s work hard to make sure that Halloween is the only day we need to wear masks to cover ourselves. On other days, let’s create environments where we quickly forgive like children, and where we and others around us are safe to be honest, where we appreciate people who their gifts and we don’t constantly point out their shortcomings.

Orthodoxy 101 Concludes, Orthodoxy 201 Begins!

Father Stavros’ popular Orthodox 101 class will conclude with session four on Monday, October 4, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. The topic of the final class is “Tradition and Spirituality, and why YiaYia wasn’t always right.”

Welcome to Orthodoxy 201!

Ever wonder about the icons here at St. John? Or what role angels, demons, and saints have in the world?

What’s the deal with bowing & prayer ropes?
And where do our thoughts come from?

Orthodoxy 201 is a new four session class offered to anyone who has taken the Orthodoxy 101 class, and will dive into the rich treasure of Orthodox Christianity’s art, literature, and theology.

The topics are as follows:
October 11: Iconography & Symbols (A Tour of St. John’s Icons)
October 18: Metaphysics (Angels, Demons, Saints)
October 25: Prayer & Ritual (Jesus Prayer and Forms of Prayer)
November 8: The Human Person (Mind, Body, Soul)

If you are interested in Orthodoxy 201, please e-mail Alex Limberatos directly at alex@stjohntpa.org.
Community Outreach At A NEW Location
Saturday, October 16
We Want You to Serve with Us!

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

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

Place: Beulah Baptist Church - 1006 W. Cypress St. Tampa, FL 33606
Parking: Available in Lot across street from church on Cypress St.
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

Our Food Pantry is very active helping people near and far in the Tampa Community.
Here are some special requests we have:
- Pasta
- Spaghetti Sauce
- Tomato sauce/chopped tomatoes etc.
- All kinds of white flour
- Canned Tuna
- Canned Chicken
- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Body Wash
- Gluten Free Foods and Flours
- Cereal
- Whole wheat rice and pasta
- Men's and Women's razors and shaving cream (travel size)
- Toothbrushes
- Gift cards in any amount for Publix, Walmart or Save-a-lot

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

Parish Assembly Meeting – October 17

On October 17, we will have our fall Parish Assembly Meeting. It will be offered both in person and via zoom. Instructions will follow. There are two things that we will do that are critical to our parish for the coming year. The first is to pass a budget. For most of the items on the budget, there is not much to discuss. We are not going to debate whether to pay the electric bill or the sewer bill. These are fixed costs to our church regardless of how many people attend here or how much we spend or save. There are a couple of areas of the budget where there is something to discuss. These include personnel and charitable giving. The kind of budget that we pass says a lot about the kind of parish we want to have. And our financial support of our parish through stewardship says a lot about how important spreading the message of Christ is to us individually. While the budget will reflect a certain amount for stewardship, we don’t offer stewardship in order to achieve some goal—rather we offer stewardship in a prayerful and personal way which reflects our love for Christ.

Parish Council Elections

There was no Parish Council Election in the fall of 2020. This was because of the pandemic. The Metropolis of Atlanta said that everyone serving on the Parish Council would have one year added to their term. This means that everyone on the Parish Council at present is either in the added year to their original term, or will have one year added. Those who were elected in 2018 are up for re-election, and those elected in 2019 will serve an additional year. Additionally, everyone on the Parish Council is able to serve three consecutive terms, which for those who are currently serving may amount to 7 years, since one of those terms is a three-year term.

Even though it is October, it will be time to start thinking about Parish Council Elections. On October 17, we will hold our fall Parish Assembly and open up nominations for the Parish Council. This year, there are six (6) positions coming up for election for a two-year term. According to the Parish By-laws, nominations for the Parish Council will be closed following the Parish Assembly Meeting on Sunday, October 17. If you wish to be nominated for the Parish Council, please plan to attend the meeting on Sunday, October 17 and have someone nominate you, or send a letter to Fr. Stavros prior to the commencement of the meeting, stating your wish to be nominated for the Parish Council and he will read it at the meeting and have someone nominate you. Parish Council Elections will be held on Sunday, December 5, following the Divine Liturgy. A mailing to all eligible voters will occur following the close of the nominations period which will have the names of the candidates, a picture of each candidate and a statement by each candidate.

In preparation for nominations and elections, please keep in mind the following:

Regarding eligibility to be a candidate for the Parish Council: Uniform Parish Regulations (UPR) Article 18, Section 1:

PARISHIONERS

Section 1: Every person who is baptized and chrismated according to the rites of the Orthodox Church is a parishioner. The religious, moral and social duties of a parishioner are to apply the tenets of the Orthodox Faith to his/her life and to: adhere to and live according to the tenets of the Orthodox faith; faithfully attend the Divine Liturgy and other worship services; participate regularly in the holy sacraments; respect all ecclesiastical authority and all governing bodies of the Church; be obedient in matters of the Faith, practice and ecclesiastical order; contribute towards the progress of the Church's sacred mission; and be an effective witness and example of the Orthodox Faith and Traditions to all people.

A parishioner in good standing practices all the religious and moral duties as described in this Section 1. At a minimum, a parishioner in good standing must: be eighteen years of age or over; be current in his or her stewardship and other financial obligations to the Parish, abide by all the regulations herein stated and the Parish Bylaws; and cooperate in every way towards the welfare and well being of the Parish. (Stewardship is recommended to be ten percent (10%) of one’s annual income as stated in Holy Scripture to help meet the financial obligations of the Parish, the Metropolis and the Archdiocese.)

2. Regarding Election of Parish Council: UPR Article 25, Section Two

Continued...
Section 2: A candidate for the Parish Council must be a parishioner in good standing of the Parish for at least one (1) year immediately preceding the date of the election and must live his or her life in accordance with the Faith and canons of the Church. The Priest determines whether the Parishioners are in canonical and financial good standing as specified in Article 18, Sections 1 through 3.

Section 3: Candidates for election to the Parish Council shall be nominated in accordance with the provisions of the Parish Bylaws.

All candidates shall attend a seminar conducted by the Priest prior to the election at which the Priest shall discuss and explain to the candidates the Uniform Parish Regulations, and the significance of the affirmation of office.

At the discretion of the respective Hierarch, such seminar may be held locally or regionally, provided that candidates are given appropriate advance notice and more than one reasonable opportunity to attend the seminar in a location within close proximity to the applicable Parish.

In the event that an otherwise eligible candidate(s) cannot attend the scheduled seminar(s) for justifiable cause, the Priest shall meet privately with such individual(s) to provide the seminar.

At the conclusion of the seminar all candidates must sign a statement acknowledging that they understand the Regulations and will abide by them and the affirmation of office. If a candidate for the Parish Council does not attend a seminar and sign the statement, his/her name shall be deleted from the list of candidates.

Each candidate is expected to be active in the sacramental life of the church. This is covered in Article 18, section one, above. This includes the sacrament of confession. If a candidate has not been to confession in the past year, they are not eligible to run for the Parish Council. If the event your spiritual father is serving another parish, he can send a one line email to Fr. Stavros indicating your participation in this sacrament in the past year.

All candidates for the Parish Council will be subject to a background check. Any background check that reveals a felony conviction will make a candidate ineligible to serve for ten years. Any background check revealing a conviction for financial misconduct—embezzlement, fraud, etc., will make a candidate permanently ineligible to serve on the Parish Council.

Each candidate is asked to write a half a page on why they want to run for the Parish Council and to supply a recent photograph that is able to be photocopied well. The statement and photo need to be to the church office no later than November 15.

Thank you for your interest in being a Parish Council candidate. If you have any questions on any of the above, please feel free to contact me at any time.

+FR. STAVROS

Parish Council Nominations

At the conclusion of the Parish Assembly Meeting in October, we will again nominate people for the Parish Council for 2022. This is a critical decision each year, as it affects how our church will function in 2022 and beyond. Year after year, people decide to run for the Parish Council. Some are qualified and some are not. Some come in to speak with me about running, even asking a blessing to run. And many do not come into speak with me, they certainly don’t seek any kind of blessing to run. As I have mentioned in previous writings and sermons, getting a blessing from the bishop in a Liturgy when multiple priests are serving creates a good sense of order, which in turn, leads to a good sense of Christ. Running without any input or blessing from the priest can create disorder and disharmony in the Parish Council and in the parish. I’m asking then, if you are thinking about running for the Parish Council, please make an appointment and come see me before October 17, and let’s talk about it.
Ministry Highlights!

GOYA Splash Day & Lock In—We celebrated the start of a new year in GOYA first with a Lock-In on August 21, and then with food, fellowship, and a fun destresser involving lots of water balloons on September 12.

Thank you to all parents who made both events possible!

Blessing Our Ministry Heads - On September 12, we prayed for each of our ministry heads after Divine Liturgy. May God Bless Us All with a fruitful year!
Hope & Joy Fall Harvest Celebration

Sunday, October 17th
4:00 – 6:00 PM      The Kourmolis Center

All children Pre-K through 6th grade are invited to join us for an afternoon of Games, Dinner, Crafts and Fellowship!

Come in Costume
(no witches or devils please)

Please bring an item to stock our St Johns Food Pantry which supports those most in need. Items most in need are: Socks, Hats and Single Serve food Items (Cereal Bars, Individual Tuna, Granola bars, Nuts or Trail mix)

Kindly R.S.V.P. by October 10th
Zackie text 813-245-3813 or zackiec@yahoo.com

Please let us know if you would like to volunteer during event. Goyans, parents, grandparents are all welcomed.
We are so glad to have the 2021-2022 Sunday School year off to a great start. Thank you to all the teachers, parents, and children who are committed to our program. We have expanded our program with 22 dedicated teachers. We are very excited about our Weekly Topics that each classroom will include into their program. The topics for the month of SEPTEMBER were THE LORD’S PRAYER, THE SIGN OF THE CROSS, and THE CREED.

WELCOME James Harritos, our new Pastoral Assistant to St. John’s. We are looking forward to you visiting our Sunday School classes soon.

We understand that it is very difficult to attend church every week, but PARENTS, please make an effort. Your children’s understanding of our faith is essential. It is also important to make it a “habit” of going to church on Sunday morning. When students come to church on a regular basis they feel CONNECTED to our church, to their teachers, and especially to their classmates. What better peers to have, than their Orthodox friends! These friendships could also last a lifetime. Students who do not come regularly may feel uncomfortable and miss so much of our valuable instruction.

Our HALL of FAITH program will continue again this year! We have a number of students who will be added to our Hall of Faith for the Lord’s Prayer. They are:

- Julianne Katsamakis
- Peter Konstas
- Michael Kwasny
- Victoria Magos
- Zack Zaharis

This program is to encourage our children to memorize and understand The Lord’s Prayer and The Creed. Our Pre-K through 4th Graders will be focusing on The Lord’s Prayer and our 5th graders through High School will focus on The Creed. Look for our HALL of FAITH poster on our Sunday School bulletin board.

Will your child’s name be on it?

Please feel free to contact us with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John’s Sunday School Program. Parents: If you do not receive our weekly e-mails about our Sunday School Program, please contact Vickie Peckham at 813-758-3102 or e-mail her at vickiepeckham@gmail.com

OCTOBER CALENDAR:

Sunday, October 3rd: Topic: The Bible
Sunday, October 10th: Topic: The Church Building and the Sacred Vessels
Sunday, October 17th: Topic: The Ten Commandments
Sunday, October 24th: Topic: Liturgy/Holy Communion
Sunday, October 31st: Topic Saints Cosmas & Damian – Serving with Love
It’s not an overstatement to say kids are distracted by their phones. We all are. But what does this do to their ability to take care of themselves? In terms of personal safety, it creates a perfect opportunity for them to stumble into very dangerous situations.

Why? Because they’re not paying attention to their immediate surroundings. Teaching your teens the fundamentals of situational awareness can undisputedly save their lives.

**What is situational awareness?**

It is a tactic used by professionals whose jobs involve controlling dangerous, dynamic environments, to keep themselves and others as safe as possible. Developing good situational analysis capabilities allows your child to become completely engaged in their own safety. It is far different than just “paying attention.”

Situational awareness is a complex interplay of the following three concepts:

- Active perception of our environments
- A full comprehension of our situation
- A projection of what might occur next

For example, if your kid is walking in an empty parking garage, first he or she needs to know where they are in space. Are they near an elevator or next to the stairs, and on which floor? Secondly, they need to pay attention to what is happening around them and how it is different from normal. Empty should mean quiet. Is there noise — a door opening, or footsteps nearby? That’s not normal. Third, they need to establish a plan for what could happen next. This might include pulling out their phone and calling a friend to notify them of their location, thereby possibly spooking the predator or remotely opening their car door, and moving quickly to the vehicle.

That’s why putting away the phone is so important. They need to think on their feet. Encourage your son or daughter to walk with their head held up, eyes scanning the environment and a mindset dialed into the present. Dangerous people target individuals who are easy prey — distracted, unaware, lost — and vulnerable.

**How do personal safety skills fit in to this training?**

In the simplest terms, practicing basic personal safety is the foundation to building excellent situational awareness. In our new digital age, it’s easy for kids to rely so much on their phones, they don’t prepare ahead of time. Basic personal safety steps include:

- Study your environment before visiting a new city or part of town. Know where you’re going and what the safety issues are.
- Blend into the surroundings so you don’t become a target.
- Pay attention to the possibility of being followed by one or more persons.

**It’s possible to teach your kids how to figure out who’s the bad guy.**

According to Tim Kennedy, former Green Beret and founder of “Sheepdog Response,” if you see someone who is a possible threat, there are four parts of a person’s body to watch:

- Look at:
  - Their hands to see what they are holding.
  - Their eyes to understand intent. Are they staring at you?
  - Their waist as this where hands are held, as well as weapons.
  - Their body’s direction. Which way is this person moving? If it’s a straight line, it might be at you, as this the shortest distance between each of you.

**If you’re targeted and alone**

Personal defense is a whole world of training, but the bottom line is by staying alert, you can think ahead and mitigate a dangerous situation by adjusting and responding. Common defensive tactics include manipulating your keys to serve as a weapon, being prepared to yell or call for help, switching directions, or crossing the street. These simple maneuvers can change the dynamics of the situation and project an air of confidence and awareness.
Journey to a New Life
informational seminar

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
Choir Room

October 10th
Immediately Following Divine Liturgy

Topics of Estate Planning,
Wills,
Trusts,
Asset Protection
and Planning for the Future!
Special Guest Speaker:
Elder Law Attorney

Complementary refreshments will be served

sponsored by
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH
BLOUNT AND CURRY FUNERAL HOME

please RSVP to 813-586-4241
Our word for our parish for 2021 is “Renew.” Here are the words that our parishioners chose to mark their year.

Verses of the Year—Psalm 50/51:10-12

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

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Matthew 6:21

We appreciate the gifts of our loyal parishioners and wish to acknowledge each and every one! Our pledges for the 2021 Stewardship year are $471,918 with $374,778 collected from 352 loyal stewards of St. John. We are very grateful for your gifts.

We remain in unprecedented times but look for the silver linings like the reopening of our church doors and the ability to see one another and worship together. We pray that you have found moments of peace and reflection that bring you closer to God amidst the chaos. Prayer is our foundation during these difficult days. I think we can all agree the world needs our prayers & gifts more than ever right now. We all have something to share and it’s the sharing that can make a difference. Big and small gestures everyday! To quote a much-overserved phrase ‘We are all in this together’ to celebrate that every gift truly comes from God. We remain humbled by your giving to our beloved church, it is needed and appreciated!

We lovingly remind you to recommit to our church if your name is missing from this list. We understand circumstances may have changed and will be happy to make any adjustments, as needed, to your Stewardship Gifts. Contact our church office or a member of the Stewardship committee with any questions on your commitment or renewal. Pledge forms are also available on line at http://stjohnpta.org/2021-stewardship/

* Indicates receipt of a Stewardship Check without a completed pledge form. Our office will be happy to forward a pledge pack-

"We are all in this together’ to celebrate that every gift truly comes from God. We remain humbled by your giving to our beloved church, it is needed and appreciated!

We lovingly remind you to recommit to our church if your name is missing from this list. We understand circumstances may have changed and will be happy to make any adjustments, as needed, to your Stewardship Gifts. Contact our church office or a member of the Stewardship committee with any questions on your commitment or renewal. Pledge forms are also available on line at http://stjohnpta.org/2021-stewardship/

* Indicates receipt of a Stewardship Check without a completed pledge form. Our office will be happy to forward a pledge pack-
Melton, Stephanie, Ms.  Melendez, Noah (Sara), M/M  Michos, Sylvia, Ms.  Milonas, Alyssa, Ms. *  Milonas, Taso (Thay), Mr. & Mrs.  Mitsissi, Dina, Ms.  Miteas, George (Catherine), Mr. & Mrs.  Moran, Andrew (Stefanie), Mr. & Mrs.  Morgan, Theodora, Ms.  Moshos, Doukissa, Ms.  Mourer, Brett (Ana), Mr. & Mrs.  Mueller, Jeffrey (Melinda), Mr. & Mrs.  Mulberry, Sherry, Ms. *  Myer, Ronald (Magdalini), Mr. & Mrs.  Naoum, Deandra, Ms. & Mrs.  Nenos, Byron (Jeanie), Mr. & Mrs.  Nenos, John (Kate), M/M  Nenos, Mary, Ms.  Nenos, Peter, Mr.  Nenos, Vasilios, Mr.  Nicklow, Tom (Demetra), Mr. & Mrs.  Nicolaou, Christopher (Kristin), Mr. & Mrs.  Nolas, George S. (Cheryl), Dr. & Mrs.  Olsen, Scott (Elphida), Mr. & Mrs.  Palios, George (Julie), Mr. & Mrs. *  Palios, Michael (Bessie), Mr. & Mrs.  Paloumpis, Andreas, Mr.  Paloumpis, Laura, Ms. *  Paloumpis, Tom (Jenny), Mr. & Mrs.  Panos, Euripides (Denise), Mr. & Mrs.  Pantelides Spinelli, Sophy (Spinelli, John), Mr. & Mrs.  Pantelis, Aristotle, Mr.  Papadakis, Alex (Lauren), Mr. & Mrs.  Papadopoulos, Kyriakos (Melkumova, Lucy, Mrs.), Mr. *  Papaefthathiou, Lois (Joanna K), Mr. & Mrs.  Papakosta, Peter (Vasiliki), Mr. & Mrs.  Pappas, Paul (Georgia), Mr. & Mrs.  Paras, Marianne, Mrs.  Parker, Ryan (Kouloouri-Parker, Alexa), Mrs., Mr.  Passavanti, Robert (Debra), Mr. & Mrs.  Patides, Nicholas (Carmichael, Melinda, Ms.), Mr.  Patrascou, Florin (Marenea), Mr. & Mrs. *  Payne, Suzanne, Mrs.  Peckham, Richard (Victoria), Mr. & Mrs.  Perdicas, Ernest (Nancy), Mr. & Mrs.  Perry, Christian (Athina), Mr. & Mrs.  Peters, Alexandra, Ms.  Phillips, Thomas (Georgia), Mr. & Mrs.  Phillips, Thomas, Mr.  Pileggi, Suzanne, Ms.  Plakas, Theodore (Kyriakoula), Mr. & Mrs.  Pliego, Michelle, Ms. *  Preston, Joshua (Marian Hanhan), Mr. & Mrs.  Price, Bradley (Gerri), Mr. & Mrs.  Prodomitis, Theo, Ms. *  Prokos, Fran, Ms.  Quinn, Toula, Mrs.  Reader, Jimmy (Helen Bennett), Mr. & Mrs.  Rogers, Mary, Ms.  Rose, Maryann, Ms.  Roussos, Archie (Eleftheria), Mr. & Mrs.  Roussos, Nicholas, Mr. *  Sakaris, James (Lorraine), M/M  Sakaris, Thomas (Barbara), Mr. & Mrs.  Sakkis, John (Katherine), Mr. & Mrs.  Saliba, Matthew (Julie), Mr. & Mrs.  Salmon, Suzanne, Ms.  Samuel, Calvin (Vivian), Mrs.  Sandborn, Marilyn (Steve), Mrs.  Santos, Alexander (Constance), Mr. & Mrs.  Sarantos, Peter (Ann), Mr. & Mrs.  Savidakis, Jaclyn, Ms.  Scarfogliero, Alexis, Mr.  Scopelianos, Angelo (Margaret), Dr. & Mrs.  Scourtes, Christine, Mrs. *  Sengouvannna, Say (Sarah), Mr. & Mrs.  Serbanos, Michael (Patricia), Mr. & Mrs.  Sibley, Russell (Despina), Mr. & Mrs.  Skjus, Steven (Ellen), Mr. & Mrs.  Skouroullas, Dante (Lindsey), Mr. & Mrs.  Smith, Brad (Nicolette), Mr. & Mrs.  Soteriou, George (Selena), Mr. & Mrs.  Sotiropoulos, John (Denise), Mr. & Mrs.  Sotiropoulos, Paul (Terri), Mr. & Mrs.  Spanos, Peter, Mr.  Speegle, Maria (Gary), Mrs.  Spencer, Wayne (Pauline), Mr. & Mrs.  Spirides, Frances, Ms.  Stamatis, Nicholas (Taylor), M/M  Stavropoulos, Jane, Ms.  Steele, Elliott (Dianne), Mr. & Mrs.  Steffen, George (Mickey), Mr. & Mrs.  Stephanides, Christos, Mr.  Stephanides, Marios (Ourania), Dr. & Mrs.  Stephanides, Mihalis, Mr. *  Stilian, Douglas (Bridget), Mr. & Mrs.  Stratigakos, Helen (Sleet, Daniel, Judge), Ms.  Stratigakos, Louis (Georgia), Mr. & Mrs.  Theophanous, Peter, Mr.  Thomas, Larry (Tina), Dr. & Mrs.  Tisdale, Greg, Mr.  Touliatos, Markissa, Ms.  Trakas, Andrew (Adrieenne), Mr. & Mrs.  Trakas, Peter (Donna), Mr. & Mrs.  Triantafilou, Marcelle, Ms.  Triantafyllopoulos, George (Maria), Mr. & Mrs. *  Trimmis, Michael (Diane), Mr. & Mrs.  Tsampas, Maria, Ms.  Tsampouris, Christos (Sara), M/M  Tsavoussis, Christopher (Georgette), Mr. & Mrs.  Tsibris, John, Dr.  Tziotis, Mischele (Andreas), Dr.  Valaes, Demetrios (Lynn A.), Mr. & Mrs.  Vasilopoulos, Angela, Ms.  Voisey, Richard (Katherin), Mr. & Mrs.  Voulgaris, George (Jackie), M/M  Vourlouis, Joanna, Mrs.  Voykin, David (Any), Mr. & Mrs.  Vojkin, Mary H, Mrs.  Vukmer, Daniel (Sheila), Mr. & Mrs.  Walling, Jacklyn, Ms.  Ward, Gary (Pappas, Sandra, Ms.), Mr.  Wernke, Matthew (Kasey), Mr. & Mrs.  Westmoreland, Jim (Joanne), Mr. & Mrs.  Whaley-Oster, Susan (Oster, Stephen), Mr., Mrs.  Whallen, Petrina, Ms.  Wiel, Nick, Mr.  Williams, John (Alexandra), Mr. & Mrs. *  Worley, Christene, Ms.  Xanthopoulos, Joe (Margaret), Mr. & Mrs.  Xenick, Artemis, Ms.  Xenick, Emanuel (Maria), Mr. & Mrs.  Xenick, George (Cindy), Mr. & Mrs.  Xeroteres, Evangeline, Ms.  Zabakoukas, Maria, Ms.  Zebarth, Peter, Jr., Mr. & Mrs. Jr.  Zelatis, John P. (Denise M.), Mr. & Mrs.  Zessis, Roger, Mr.  Zotos, Drew, Mr.  Zoumberos, Stavros (Kathy), Mr. & Mrs.
We’re Resuming the Pre-Pandemic Kolyva Protocol

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

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

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

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

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

Live Streaming

All of our services are being video recorded and are available on our Livestream page. To access this page:
1. Go to our Church's website: stjohnpta.org.
2. Scroll the mouse over the “Multimedia” tab on the menu bar,
3. Click "View Liturgy."
4. Then click on the link where it says, “Check out our live stream of the Divine Liturgy here http://new.livestream.com/accounts/2454446. All of the services 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

Continued...
October is Healthy Lung Month. We rarely think about breathing except when it’s hard to do. That’s why every October, many organizations join forces to educate the public about the importance of protecting our lungs against general neglect, disease, mold, air pollution, and smoking. During a normal day, we breathe nearly 25,000 times. The air we inhale is mostly oxygen and nitrogen, but small amounts of other gases, floating bacteria, and viruses are mixed in. It also contains varying amounts of pollutants from the atmosphere – tobacco smoke, automobile exhaust, industrial by-products, cleaning products, and more. Your body depends on your lungs to keep breathing and distributing oxygen-rich blood throughout your body and to get rid of the body’s gaseous waste, carbon dioxide. Bodies do have a natural defense system designed to protect the lungs, keeping dirt, germs and other irritants at bay. But there are some important things you can do on a regular basis to keep your lungs healthy and reduce the risk of disease.

Do Not Smoke or Vape
Avoid Exposure to Indoor Pollutants That Can Damage Your Lungs
Minimize Exposure to Outdoor Air Pollution
Prevent Infections
  - Wash/sanitize hands regularly
  - Practice good oral hygiene
  - Get your flu shot
  - Stay home of you are sick
Get Regular Check-ups
Exercise Regularly

Love your lungs this October and work to make any necessary changes to keep them healthy!

For more information – https://www.lung.org

October is also Breast Cancer Awareness Month and prevention is key! Breast cancer deaths continue to decline, thanks to increased awareness and early detection through regular screening. Research has shown that breast cancer screening with mammography has been found to detect cancer early, when it is most treatable. If you are a woman over 40, take this opportunity to schedule your annual mammogram.

If you're a woman of any age and are at high risk for developing breast cancer, talk to your doctor about when you should start genetic screening, mammograms and risk reducing strategies, such as medications that may reduce your risk of developing breast cancer.

Mammography has great potential to saves lives. Tell your mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends to schedule their annual mammograms today. For more information - https://www.nationalbreastcancer.org
Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

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

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

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

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

Help is available for life issues including:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family discord
- Marital problems
- Substance abuse issues
- Behavioral issues
Prayers of Protection from the Coronavirus
www.goarch.org

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

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

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

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

MEETING DATE AND TIME:
- Our meetings will NOT be on the 1st Thursday of the month and will be announced.
- Our September meeting was a social luncheon at Byblos Mediterranean Restaurant. We had 17 in attendance. We were very happy to see Mary and Pete Nenos back from rehab after their accident.
- We celebrated birthdays for Presbytera Denise and Bill Manikas but we are sorry we missed Michael Halikoytakis.
- We continue to reach out to those who are homebound during the pandemic as part of our Church’s Core Values: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, & Service
- We report the total number of homebound people contacted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Aug</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phoned</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Messages</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited In-Person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent Cards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Text Messages</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PLANNED ACTIVITIES
Saturday Meetings with potluck in the Church Hall
Saturday “White Elephant” Bingo in the Church Hall
Friday Dinners at the AHEPA House in Tarpon Springs
Visit the Ocala Orthodox Monasteries

PASSED ACTIVITIES
- Aug 7, 2021 – We had a wonderful time at ABC Pizza.
- July 1, 2021 – We played a game of Bingo and it was catered by Acropolis Restaurant
- June 4, 2021 - We attended a dinner social at the AHEPA House in Tarpon Springs.
- April 22, 2021 – Visited St Michael Shrine in Tarpon Springs, lunch and Easter Specialty Food Shopping.
- April 7, 2021 - We attended Pre-Sanctified Liturgy as a group.
- April 22, 2021 - We visited Tarpon Springs for our Easter Specialty Food Shopping at Greek Boys Inc.
- We held socially distant IN PERSON and Zoom meeting in the Kourmolis Center
  May 8th 2021, April 3rd 2021, Mar. 6th 2021, Dec. 5th 2020, Nov. 7th 2020
- Our discussions were on the CHURCHES THAT TOUCHED OUR LIVES were on.
  Feb 6th, Jan. 9th, Aug. 5th, Sept. 3rd & Oct 1st.
- July 2nd, 2020 – Revisited 60 years ago in the years 1960 to 1969
- March 5th, 2020 - Visited St Michael Greek Orthodox Shrine in Tarpon Springs
  January 2, 2020 – Lunch at the new Psomi Bakery and Restaurant
  December 7, 2019 - Trip to the Show Palace Dinner Theatre featuring Elf the Musical
  October 5, 2019 - Ybor City Museum State Park and lunch at the Soup Stone Grill

For more information, contact Michael Trimis, President, 813-784-4872 (vm/t)
TrimisM@gmail.com
Mary Nenos, Vice President 813-508-5553 MaryNenos@gmail.com
Welcome Ministry Update

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Hebrews 13:2

The Welcome Ministry has been busy at work, updating our welcome packets, greeting visitors and guests as they come to our church. Our mission is to practice hospitality to all who enter our doors. We are not just about welcoming people; we are about developing relationships – with each other and with Christ. The most important person for a visitor to talk to in order to feel at home in a new church is you. It is not the priest, or the greeter, but a regular attender. One of the most impressive gestures we can extend to first time visitors is for people with no official position to take the initiative and welcome them.

How can you do this?

- Treat first time visitors as guests of God, not strangers.
- Offer a smile or a handshake with a simple “Good Morning!”
- Rather than saying, “Are you new here?” ask “Have we met before?” and offer your name.
- Take the initiative; don’t wait for visitors to initiate conversation.
- Learn people’s names and remember them.
- Invite visitors to join you at something, anything!
- Never let new people sit alone and introduce them to others.
- Invite people to fill out our church’s connection card.
- Tell people you’re glad they are here.
- As visitors are leaving, make sure to smile and thank them for coming.
- Pray for them throughout your week.

You don’t have to travel to a foreign country, to another state, or even get in your car to do the work of a missionary. The Great Commission of Christ can be fulfilled simply by picking up the phone, speaking to a new person you don’t recognize, sitting with someone who is alone. Can you call a parish member you haven’t seen in a while? A personal invitation to attend church is a great way to reintroduce them to the wonderful things we have going on at St. John.

If you are interested in joining the exciting and rewarding work of the Welcome Ministry, please contact Maria Xenick at mpxenick@gmail.com. You can serve as a greeter as often as you like in person, or you can make calls from the comfort of your home. We would love to have some new members of our team!

We will see many new faces during the busy weeks ahead. Please make all feel welcome as they join us for worship services!

Young At Heart Is Spearheading a trip to both of the Ocala Greek Orthodox Monasteries

· Panagia Vlahernon Greek Orthodox Ladies Monastery
· Annunciation of The Theotokos Greek Men’s Orthodox Monastery

THIS IS NOT LIMITED TO THE YAH MEMBERS. ALL ARE WELCOMED PROVIDED YOU GIVE NOTICE.

Location: We will arranged for a bus to pick us up from St John Greek Orthodox Church
Time: Depart 10:00 AM Tentative Return 7:00PM on Saturday November 13
Lunch If possible, we will lunch at Panagia Vlahernon Greek Orthodox Monastery or we will make another arrangement.

Cost: The cost depends on how much can be allocated from our budget and how many people will be going. We must have a headcount.

HEADCOUNT: In order to get the right size bus and with enough room, we need to know who is coming.

PLEASE EMAIL Mike Trimis your first and last name and phone number if you are interested.

Special Consideration & Respect: Men are asked to wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts. Women are asked to wear skirts below the knees, long-sleeved shirts, and are to have their heads covered with a veil or scarf at all times. (Please: No hats, shear scarves, pants, shorts, pant-skirts, mini-skirts, sleeveless blouses, short-sleeved shirts, etc.). Everyone is asked to wear socks. (Especially when wearing sandals) A limited supply of scarves, skirts, blouses, pants and shirts are available for use while visiting the Monastery.

** Be sure to visit their gift shop to help with their fundraising.
Please respond with any questions.
**Opt-in on The Messenger** - In an effort to be more environmentally conscious, we will be mailing *The Messenger ONLY* to those who ask. If you wish to receive *The Messenger* by mail, you certainly may. We just ask that you indicate on your stewardship form, or let the office know, that you wish to receive *The Messenger* by mail. We will no longer be mailing *The Messenger* unless you ask us to.

**Happy Birthday!**

Mr. Alexios Diniaco  
10/01  
Andrew Roy  
10/01  
Penelope Kremydas  
10/02  
Victoria Mekras  
10/02  
Ms. Joanna Samuel  
10/03  
Ms. Sophia Samuel  
10/03  
Ms. Jane Stavropoulos  
10/03  
Ariadne Stonestreet  
10/03  
Declan Torres  
10/03  
Mr. Harry Koutroumanis  
10/04  
Mrs. Fatin Kwasny  
10/04  
Ms. Denise Badrane  
10/05  
Ms. Olympia Stilian  
10/05  
Mr. Alexander Sotiropoulos  
10/05  
Demetri Bannach  
10/07  
Mrs. Voula Kabougeris  
10/09  
Ester Bannach  
10/10  
Mr. George Bedran  
10/10  
Miss Allison Kent  
10/10  
Mrs. Jenny Klimis  
10/10  
Mr. Alexandros Korakis  
10/10  
Mr. Justin Papadakis  
10/10  
Mr. Mason Horack  
10/11  
Mrs. Sheena Karoutsos  
10/11  
Ms. Emily Nicklow  
10/11  
Mr. Manuel Klimis  
10/12  
Ms. Daniella Roos  
10/12  
Ms. Zoe Katsaros  
10/13  
Mr. Gianni Matassini  
10/13  
Mrs. Carole Fotopoulos  
10/14  
Mr. Evan Kalojiannis  
10/14  
Mrs. Lucy A. Malacos  
10/14  
Mrs. Lauren Papadakis  
10/14  
Ms. Teula Trakas  
10/14  
Yiorgos Boulieris  
10/15  
Mr. Joey Johnston  
10/15  
Dr. James Christopoulos  
10/17  
Ms. Evangelia Frantsvog  
10/17  
Aaron Martinez  
10/17  
Miss Sevianna Smith  
10/17  
Mr. Dominic Garcia  
10/18  
Mr. Thomas Ivey  
10/18  
Ms. Evangeline Xeroteres  
10/18  
Mr. Constantinos Matassini  
10/19  
Perseus Papadopoulos  
10/19  
Mr. Andrew Patrascoiu  
10/19  
Mr. Jonah Blankenbaker  
10/20  
Ms. Margaret Halikoytakis  
10/20  
Mr. Daniel Kwasny  
10/25  
Mrs. Stamie Garcia  
10/25  
Mr. John Papaefstathiou  
10/27  
Dr. Domenic Letobarone  
10/29  
Ms. Stephanie Demetriou  
10/30  
Ms. Hannah James  
10/30  
Miss Lauren Mason  
10/31  
Maggie Pliego  
10/31

---

**Have questions?**  
Just need to talk?  
Worried? Sad? Happy?  
*We are here for you!*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alex</th>
<th>262-370-0586</th>
<th>James</th>
<th>401-527-8203</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fr. Stavros</td>
<td>813-394-1038</td>
<td>Fr. John</td>
<td>678-637-4425</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Beware of Emails or Text Messages Asking for Gift Cards**

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

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

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

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

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: __________________________________________________________________
Address: ________________________________________________________________
Phone: ____________________ Email: ______________________________________

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

$50 $100 $200 Other

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

The older I get, the more I have in common with computers. We both start out with lots of memory and drive, then we become outdated, crash unexpectedly, and eventually have to have our parts replaced.

In the 1980s, A & W tried to compete with McDonald's Quarter Pounder by selling a 1/3 pound burger at a lower cost. The product failed, because most customers thought the ¼ pound was bigger.

For English language lovers—what is the difference between being “completed” and “finished”? No dictionary has been able to define the difference between “complete” and “finished.” But in a linguistic conference in England, Sun Sherman, an Indian American, was the clever winner. His response: When you marry the right woman, you are “complete.” If you marry the wrong woman, you are “finished.” And when the right woman catches you with the wrong woman, you are “completely finished.” His answer received a five minute standing ovation.

As a kid, I used to watch the Wizard of Oz and wonder how someone could talk if they didn’t have a brain. Then I got social media.

Getting older is like being on a roller coaster. There are highs, lows, laughter and tears, and sometimes...you just may pee your pants a little!

A pessimist sees a dark tunnel.
An optimist sees light at the end of the tunnel.
A realist sees a freight train.
The train driver sees three idiots standing on the tracks.

On the Serious Side

It is of great significance if there is a person who truly prays in a family. Prayer attracts God’s grace and all the members of the family feel it, even those whose hearts have grown cold. Pray always. ~Elder Thaddeus

Forgive anyone who has caused you pain. Keep in mind that forgiving is not for others. It is for you. Forgiving is not forgetting. It is remembering without anger. It frees up your power, heals your body, mind and spirit. Forgiveness opens up a pathway to a new place of peace. ~Les Brown

I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. 26 times I’ve been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed. ~Michael Jordan

One of my college professors used to say “anything worth doing is worth doing poorly.” I didn’t understand that for years because I didn’t do anything poorly, I had to do everything perfectly. But brushing your teeth for 30 seconds is better than not brushing them at all when that two minutes seems exhausting. Doing ten minutes of yoga is better than 10 minutes of sitting when 30 minutes of cardio sounds impossible. Changing my clothes is good when a whole shower is impossible. Standing on the porch for a few minutes is worth it after being in the house for three straight days because I don’t have the energy to go anywhere. Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly...because doing it poorly is better than not doing it.
LOVE & HUMILITY IN MARRIAGE

There were two houses standing side by side. In one of them, the husband and wife would fight and yell at each other around the clock, while in the other, there was always silence.

Once the wife from the first house told her husband to go to the second house and find out why the other couple would never argue.

The husband went to the ‘quiet’ house and standing by one of the windows, began to watch what was going on inside. He saw the wife cooking in the kitchen and the husband at the table writing something.

Suddenly, the phone rang, and the husband rushed to the hall to get it, but accidentally hit a vase. It fell down and broke. The man kneeled down and began to quickly gather the fragments.

His wife ran into the hall from the kitchen, kneeled down too and helped gather the fragments.

The husband said to his wife: “Sorry, dear, my fault. I was in a hurry to get the phone, hit the vase down and it broke.”

The wife replied to her husband: "No, dear, it's my fault, I shouldn't have put it here..." They kissed, gathered the pieces, and got on with their chores.

When the husband from the first house came back, his wife asked him if he had found out the secret of the ‘quiet’ house. “Yes,” the husband replied, “in their family, both share blame, while in our family, we are both always right.”

DON’T TALK TO THE DEVIL

The devil appeared to three monks and said to them: if I gave you power to change something from the past, what would you change?

The first of them, with great apostolic fervor, replied: "I would prevent you from making Adam and Eve fall into sin so that humanity could not turn away from God."

The second, a man full of mercy, said to him: "I would prevent you from God and you will condemn yourself eternally".

The third of them was the simplest and, instead of responding to the tempter, he got on his knees, made the sign of the cross and prayed saying: "Lord, free me from the temptation of what could be and was not".

The devil, giving a raucous cry and shuddering with pain, vanished.

The other two, surprised, said to him: "Brother, why have you responded like this?"

He replied: "First: we must NEVER dialogue with the devil. Second: NOBODY in the world has the power to change the past. Third: Satan's INTEREST was not to prove our virtue, but to trap us in the past, so that we neglect the present, the only time God gives us His grace and we can cooperate with Him to fulfill His will.”

Of all the demons, the one that catches the most men and prevents them from being happy is that of "What could have been and was not".

The past is left to the mercy of God and the future to his Providence. Only the present is in our hands. "Live in the moment"

THE DEVIL

The devil is the better than most Christians.

Christians fast from food. The devil never eats.

Christians keep vigil. The devil never sleeps.

Christians read the scriptures. The devil has memorized the scriptures.

Christians believe in God. The devil has seen God.

But there is one thing that separates the devil from Christians, and that is Humility.

“Humility is the only thing that no devil can imitate.”
— St. John of the Ladder

So go, and be humble. You have already risen higher than the devil.
Teachers
An old man meets a young man who asks:

"Do you remember me?"

And the old man says no. Then the young man tells him he was his student, And the teacher asks:

“What do you do, what do you do in life?”

The young man answers:

“Well, I became a teacher.”

“ah, how good, like me?” Asks the old man.

“Well, yes. In fact, I became a teacher because you inspired me to be like you.”

The old man, curious, asks the young man at what time he decided to become a teacher. And the young man tells him the following story:

“One day, a friend of mine, also a student, came in with a nice new watch, and I decided I wanted it.

I stole it, I took it out of his pocket.

Shortly after, my friend noticed the his watch was missing and immediately complained to our teacher, who was you.

Then you addressed the class saying, ‘This student's watch was stolen during classes today. Whoever stole it, please return it.’

I didn't give it back because I didn't want to.

You closed the door and told us all to stand up and form a circle.

You were going to search our pockets one by one until the watch was found.

However, you told us to close our eyes, because you would only look for his watch if we all had our eyes closed.

We did as instructed.

You went from pocket to pocket, and when you went through my pocket, you found the watch and took it. You kept searching everyone's pockets, and when you were done you said ‘open your eyes. We have the watch.’

You didn't tell on me and you never mentioned the episode. You never said who stole the watch either. That day you saved my dignity forever. It was the most shameful day of my life.

But this is also the day I decided not to become a thief, a bad person, etc. You never said anything, nor did you even scold me or take me aside to give me a moral lesson.

I received your message clearly.

Thanks to you, I understood what a real educator needs to do.

Do you remember this episode, professor?

The old professor answered, ‘Yes, I remember the situation with the stolen watch, which I was looking for in everyone’s pocket. I didn't remember you, because I also closed my eyes while looking.’

This is the essence of teaching:

If to correct you must humiliate; you don't know how to teach.”

On Death by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom

Individuals and families sometimes request a closed casket for funeral services. The prevailing custom is open casket viewings and funerals. Why? Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, in his book "Beginning to Pray" (Paulist Press 1970) explains it this way (p.15-16): "When I arrived in England I was appalled at the British attitude to death. To die seemed to be almost an act of indecency— if you had fallen so low as to die, then there were special people who would come, undertakers, to pack and wrap you up for the funeral. Then two weeks or so later there is a nice memorial service in which one sublimes one's feelings into kind of a spiritual realm. Then I remember that I went to preach at the University Church in Cambridge on the subject of death and a [Episcopal] priest there told me he had never seen a dead person. Why is there this morbid attitude to death? In a natural way one does not get rid of people through the back door! If death is nothing but defeat, the end of life, it is not pleasant for the family to look and think it will happen to them soon. Of course, if you have a wrong attitude to death, it becomes more and more horrible and frightening. I remember another incident. An old lady died and the family telephoned me and asked me to come because I was a friend. I arrived but could see no sign of the children. I asked why they weren't there, because in the Orthodox Church the children always go to the dead person and the coffin is left open. The mother said, 'They will be terrified, they know what death is.' It turned out that quite recently the children had seen a dead rabbit which had been crushed by a car and the parents thought they would be frightened if they saw granny. I asked if the children could come in, otherwise, I said to the parents, they might always have this frightened attitude to death. Eventually the parents agreed to let the children come into the house and we went up to the room where granny was lying. We stood beside the bed in silence for a while then one of the children said, 'How beautiful granny looks.' Death was no longer something frightening, something to be dreaded."
A DIFFERENT TAKE ON THE GOOD SAMARITAN

A few years ago, a seminary professor of mine decided to use the parable of the Good Samaritan to make a point about how fear influences the decisions we make. He turned to Luke chapter 10 and began to read. I zoned out for a few minutes. I know – best seminary student ever and something you never want to hear a pastor say. But it’s a familiar story. One we’ve all heard a million times. In fact, it’s become somewhat of a cultural norm to point to the Good Samaritan in everyday life. I use it regularly with my boys. I imagine you’ve used it as well in an attempt to convey what it means to be kind in a hurting world. So, I took a little mental break in class. No harm, no foul, right?

After my professor finished reading, he looked up and said, “This is not a story about being nice. This is a story about the transformation of the world.” All of the sudden I was paying attention again. And then he went on to explain that Jesus is responding to a question by sharing that there are three types of people along the road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

The first type are the robbers, whose ethic suggests that “what is yours is mine at whatever cost”. And the robbers will take whatever they need through violence, coercion and whatever means necessary. These are the people who will leave us physically, mentally and emotionally beaten and bruised along life’s road with nothing left but our shallow breath.

The second type of person to walk along the dangerous road between Jerusalem and Jericho is represented by the priest and the Levite, whose ethic suggests that “what is mine is mine and I must protect it even if it means you get hurt in the process”. They aren’t bad people. Both the priest and the Levite are deeply respected in their communities. They very likely follow all the societal rules and norms. They sit on local boards. They pay their taxes on time and likely coach their son’s or daughter’s teams. They also show a great deal of love to those within their immediate communities, but because of what crossing the road to help might cost them, they put their head down and go about their business. So, without even recognizing it, they do more harm than good. Their focus is inward toward their needs and the needs of those who are most like them. It’s an ethic that leads the good and decent priest and Levite toward a life of valuing their reputations instead of relationships. And it often results with them choosing their own individual rights over the health and well-being of their neighbors. Unfortunately, this is the category where I fall most often throughout my life. And if we’re all being honest, I’d say it’s the category that most of us fall into more than we care to admit.

Then there is the Samaritan, whose ethic is love. And along one of the most dangerous roads in all of history seems to live by a code that says “what is mine is yours… if you have need of it”.

- My safety is yours…if you have need of it.
- My security is yours…if you have need of it.
- My resources are yours…if you have need of them.
- My health is tied to your health.
- My well-being is tied to your well-being.

Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. preached on this text often and once said that the real difference between the priest and the Levite from the Samaritan is the question that each must have asked. The priest and the Levite likely asked, “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?” The Samaritan likely asked a very different question - “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?”

Fear has a way of making us all behave badly. It was true for the priest and the Levite, and it is still true for us today. When fear is the ethic of our lives, we tend to cling to our own safety and our own individual rights. When fear is the ethic of our lives, we retreat, mind our own business and rarely cross to the other side of the road to help. And when fear is the ethic of our lives, we end up placing our hope in mottos like “We Dare Defend Our Rights” or “Don’t Tread On Me” as opposed to Jesus’ greatest commandment to “Love God and Love Your Neighbor”.

It doesn’t take looking out the window for very long to know that we are all on a road somewhere between Jerusalem and Jericho right now. It’s dangerous out there. The heart-break and exhaustion are real. It’s not just the virus. It’s everything. It’s layers and layers of being beaten and bruised along a dry, hard road these past 18 months.

So, we have some choices to make. We can choose to make our decisions with an ethic of fear. And for a time, choices based on fear have a way of making us feel safe, but that is fleeting at best.

The other choice is to cross the road to help our neighbor. When we cross to the other side, we’ll get a glimpse of something Jesus talked an awful lot about. We’ll see what transformation looks like. We’ll finally understand who we are called to be. And best of all, we’ll finally encounter the Kingdom we’ve been longing for.
“Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts.” Proverbs 4:23 (GNT)

God is far more interested in changing your mind than changing your circumstances.

You want God to take away all of the problems, pain, sorrow, suffering, sickness, and sadness. But God wants to work on you first—because transformation won’t happen in your life until you renew your mind, until your thoughts begin to change.

Why is it so important that you learn how to manage your mind? Let me give you three reasons . . .

Manage your mind because your thoughts control your life.
Proverbs 4:23 says, “Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts” (GNT). Your thoughts have tremendous ability to shape your life for good or for bad. For example, maybe you accepted the thought someone told you when you were growing up: “You’re worthless. You don’t matter.” If you accepted that thought, even though it was wrong, it shaped your life.

Manage your mind because the mind is the battleground for sin.
All temptation happens in the mind. Paul says in Romans 7:22-23, “I love to do God’s will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God’s willing servant, but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin” (TLB).

One of the reasons why you get mentally fatigued is because there’s a battle in your brain 24 hours a day. It’s debilitating because it’s intense, and it’s intense because your mind is your greatest asset. Satan wants your greatest asset!

Manage your mind because it’s the key to peace and happiness.
An unmanaged mind leads to tension; a managed mind leads to tranquility. An unmanaged mind leads to conflict; a managed mind leads to confidence. An unmanaged mind leads to stress. (When you don’t try to control your mind and the way you direct your thoughts, you will have an enormous amount of stress in your life.) But a managed mind leads to strength, security, and serenity.

The Bible teaches, “Letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace” (Romans 8:6 NLT). Choose life and peace for yourself today.

Have you ever noticed how in the scriptures men are always going up into the mountains to commune with the Lord?

Yet in the scriptures we hardly ever hear of women going to the mountains. But we know why — right?

Because the women were too busy keeping life going: they couldn’t abandon babies, meals, homes, fires, gardens, and a thousand responsibilities to make the climb into the mountains!

I was talking to a friend the other day, saying that as modern women I feel like I’m never “free” enough from my responsibilities, never in a quiet enough space I want with God.

Her response floored me, “That is why God comes to women. Men have to climb the mountain to meet God, but God comes to women where ever they are.”

I have been pondering on her words for weeks and have searched my scriptures to see that what she said is true. God does in deed come to women where they are, when they are doing their ordinary, everyday work.

He meets them at the wells where they draw water for their families, in their homes, in their kitchens, in their gardens.

He comes to them as they sit beside sickbeds, as they give birth, care for the elderly, and perform necessary mourning and burial rites.

Even at the empty tomb, Mary was the first to witness Christ’s resurrection, She was there because she was doing the womanly chore of properly preparing Christ’s body for burial.

In these seemingly mundane and ordinary tasks, these women of the scriptures found themselves face to face with divinity.

So if — like me — you ever start to bemoan the fact that you don’t have as much time to spend in the mountains with God as you would like. Remember, God comes to women. He knows where we are and the burdens we carry. He sees us, and if we open our eyes and our hearts we will see Him, even in the most ordinary places and in the most ordinary things.

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

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

Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Excerpted from Double Blessing. Copyright © 2019 by Mark Batterson. Used by permission of Multnomah, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tue</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thu</th>
<th>Fri</th>
<th>Sat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sep 2021</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orthros 8:45 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bible Study 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Women’s Bible Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parish Council 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 **</td>
<td></td>
<td>Paraklesis 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 **</td>
<td></td>
<td>OCN—Fr. Stavros</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adult Greek School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6:00-8:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oct 2021</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orthros 8:45 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Men’s Group 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Women’s Bible Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parish Council 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bible Study 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>National Clergy Re-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>treat—October 12-16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fr. Stavros out of town</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adult Greek School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6:00-8:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nov 2021</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orthros 8:45 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fall Parish Assembly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HOPE/JOY Fall Festival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4:00-6:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>St. Luke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orthros 9:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orthodoxy 201 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bible Study 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Women’s Bible Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>OCN—Fr. Stavros</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult Greek School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:00-8:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>St. James</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orthros 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liturgy of St. James 6:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orthros 8:45 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Philoptochos-Zaharias Room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>GOYA 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Women’s Bible Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bible Study 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orthodoxy 201 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>St. Demetrios</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orthros 9:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book Study – 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Holy Protection of Virgin Mary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orthros 9:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liturgy 10:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicates Fast Day</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indicates Fast Day**
Parish Priest  Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis  813-876-8830  813-394-1038
Retired in Residence  Rev. Dr. Stratton Dorozenokski  813-876-8830
Retired in Residence  Rev. Fr. John Stefero  813-876-8830
Pastoral Assistant  Alex Limberatos  813-876-8830
Pastoral Assistant  James Harritos II  813-876-8830
Parish Council  Jim Armstrong, President  954-295-6665
Euphrades Panos, Vice President  813-552-3972
John Zelatis, Secretary  813-727-2271
Gary Ward, Treasurer  813-846-3898
George Chagaris  727-420-1920
Amin Hanban  813-846-2957
Nick Katzaras  863-581-2430
Jimmy Konstas  813-220-7352
Marilyn Sandborn  813-855-8678
Mike Xenick  813-340-8737
Office Staff  Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper  debbie@stjohnpta.org  fax: 813-443-4899

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
2418 W. Swann Avenue
Tampa, FL 33609-4712
Office: (813) 876-8830 Fax: (813) 443-4899
office@stjohntpa.org
www.stjohntpa.org

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
Timetable of Services

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

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

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

Parish Priest  Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis  813-876-8830

Retired in Residence  Rev. Dr. Stratton Dorozenokski  813-876-8830

Pastoral Assistant  Alex Limberatos  813-876-8830
Pastoral Assistant  James Harritos II  813-876-8830

Parish Council  Jim Armstrong, President  954-295-6665
Euphrades Panos, Vice President  813-552-3972
John Zelatis, Secretary  813-727-2271
Gary Ward, Treasurer  813-846-3898
George Chagaris  727-420-1920
Amin Hanban  813-846-2957
Nick Katzaras  863-581-2430
Jimmy Konstas  813-220-7352
Marilyn Sandborn  813-855-8678
Mike Xenick  813-340-8737

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

Adopt a College Student  Volunteer needed!

Adult Greek School  Magda Myer  813-523-5771

AHEPA  Thomas Sakaris, President  201-819-2319

Alto Angels  Enge Halkias  813-932-5859
Sia Blankenship  813-968-8855

Altar Boys  Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis  813-394-1038

Bookstore  Presbyterian Denise Stefero  678-464-4833

Bible Study  Fr. John Stefero  678-637-4425

Book Study  Alex Limberatos  262-370-0586
Buildings & Grounds  813-352-3972
Chantor  262-370-0586
James Harritos II  401-527-8203
Choir  813-390-1782
Ruth Losovitz, Organist  727-688-2782
Community Outreach  Greg Melton  813-967-2074

Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children  813-765-9534
Dance Groups  813-340-9668
Dance Groups  813-523-0347
Dance Groups  813-422-8963
Dance Groups  813-877-6136
Dance Groups  813-340-9668

Daughters of Penelope  Diane Trimm  813-220-3389
Festival  813-340-8737
Finance Committee  813-846-3898
Food Pantry  Sheila Vukmer  412-719-1000
GriefShare  Donna Hambos  813-843-8412
Gasparilla Parking  727-992-4165
John Kokkas  727-992-4165
GOYA  813-523-0346
Michael & Bessie Palios  goya@stjohntpa.org

Hope/Joy  George & Zackie Ameres  813-245-3813
Junior Olympics  Dwight Forde  727-685-9028

MOMS  Mary Ann Konstas  813-215-9862
Men's Fellowship  813-394-1038
Parish Nursing Ministry  Marcelle Triantafillou  612-396-5026
Oratorical Festival  Peggy Bradshaw  727-244-1374
Photography Ministry  Karina Findlay  813-476-9632
Philoptochos  Jeanie Nenos  813-451-9116
Stewardship  757-672-1920
Women's Bible Study  813-748-1220
Sunday School  Vickie Peckham  813-758-3102
Usber  Volunteer Needed!
Website / Social Media / APP  Volunteer needed!

Welcoming Ministry  Maria Xenick  813-765-3587
Women's Bible Study  813-394-1038
Young Adult/OCF  813-370-0586
Young Adult/OCF  401-527-8203
Young at Heart  813-784-4872
Young at Heart  813-935-2096
Youth Protection  Suzanne Pilageli  813-244-5855
12 Disciples  Mathew Balasis  727-421-7376

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

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