

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

"Behold I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness; Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight." Mark 1:2-3

Christ is Born! December 2021 Glorify Him!

VISION:

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

MISSION:

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

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Fr. Stavros' Message

Christ is our "Thrill of Hope"

Merry Christmas



**'Tis
The
Season.**



**Jesus
Is the
Reason!**

up? How much to spend? And this year, will there be a shortage of Christmas trees or will the cost go up like everything else? Celebration is tempered by the stress of buying gifts, writing cards, shopping and cooking, and trying to fit all this around work, school finals, and Christmas travel. Which causes Christmas to end up for many as a time of frustration. There is almost a collective sigh of relief when Christmas is over. And a feeling of emptiness as we wonder what all the running around was for. The "most wonderful time of the year" has become the "most stressful time of the year."

The Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast (or Advent) begins on November 15. For the Orthodox Christian it is supposed to be a period of fasting and spiritual preparation for the feast of the Nativity. December 25 is not the end of our celebration but the beginning of it. When

The Distorted Image of Christmas

The month of December is perhaps the most stressful month of the year. It is marked by decoration, celebration and frustration. How is that? Rather than looking forward to decorating for Christmas, many people get stressed out about it. When to do it? How much to put

we prepare properly, this feast should be a time of illumination, proclamation and exultation. Illumination or enlightening of our souls, proclamation of the message of Christ's incarnation, and exultation as we come to worship Christ on Christmas.

Giving our Thoughts to God

For our Nativity journey this year, we again have put out journals with verses to meditate on every day. I read in a book recently how we may ask ourselves, "How can I get more of the Holy Spirit?" whereas the question ought to be "How can the Holy Spirit get more of me?" I've reflected on these questions and the answer I've come up with is, "we need to invite the Holy Spirit into our thoughts." We have so many thoughts about so many different things and are we giving much of our thoughts to the Lord? The journals we have prepared and distributed afford us an opportunity to give some of our thoughts to the Lord by reflecting on a verse or two of Scripture each day. *If you didn't start using the journal November 15, don't worry, start using it today. There is a verse for every day through January 8.*

Worship

Another great way to give our thoughts to God is in worship. Worship is where we gather as a group of people, and have our thoughts guided by the prayers and petitions of the service. For example, our thoughts are guided to pray for our country, our city, our parish, for those who are sick or suffering or in need, for forgiveness of our sins and for a Christian end to our lives.

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We Are Naturally Inclined Towards God and Worship

If you painted a straight line on a large piece of concrete, stood at one end of the line, closed your eyes and started to walk, most likely you would not walk a straight line. You would naturally be pulled one way or the other. Some people would naturally be pulled to the left and others naturally pulled to the right, based on which side of your brain is dominant. As human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, there are two things we do “naturally.” If we came out of the womb and were given no instructions, we would naturally incline towards love. Love comes natural to us because God is love and God is inside each of us. Hate is something that is learned, it is not innately in us.

We are naturally inclined to worship a “higher power” as well. We are naturally inclined towards worship of God, again because we are made in His image, and He is in us. The distortion happens when we redefine the higher power, away from God and towards something else. For some people, the highest power is in nature, so rather than commune with God, they find communion in nature. For some, the highest power is in material possessions—because there is an insatiable desire for more and more of them, and each day is filled with chasing the rainbow of riches, only to realize that at the end of the day we can’t find the pot of gold. And the next day we wake up, eager to chase after it again.

O Holy Night

This year’s Nativity Journal theme is “A Thrill of Hope,” four words from the popular Christmas carol, “O Holy Night.” The first verse of the carol goes like this:

*O Holy Night,
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior’s birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
‘til He appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall of your knees O hear the angels voices
O night divine, O night when Christ was born
O night divine, O night, O night divine.*

In reflecting on the words of this verse, it tells us that *Long lay the world in sin and error pining*, in other words the world lived in a state of shame and fear for a long time, from the fall

of Adam and Even until the Incarnation of Christ—shame over its sinful nature, and fear that the end of life was really the end. Most of them struggled with faith, and with God. Many gave up on the idea of God, because God is forever and the human being was working his/her way to an end. When Christ appeared with a message of salvation and eternal life, the soul finally felt its worth. It finally understood that it had worth.



There Can Still Be a Thrill of Hope in a Weary World

Without Christ, we are really very disposable entities. We live, we die, and we are replaced by others. Without Christ, life’s journey is one of fun and enjoyment because when the end comes, there will be nothing left of us. Without Christ, there is really no meaning to life, just a slow march to death and nothing. When we allow Christ to come into our lives, then our souls will feel they have worth. Because life will not be a slow march to death and oblivion, but a journey to heaven. This is the “thrill of hope” for our lives in their totality, that there is something after life.

In 2021, my mom passed away. There will be a little sadness on Christmas, that I won’t be able to speak to her. We have always made her a calendar of pictures of our family to hang in her home at the end of each year, a project I enjoyed and looked forward to and won’t be doing this year. But more than sadness, there is a thrill of hope that this year, she’s not spending Christmas in a hospital battling cancer, but spending it in the presence of God, where there is no pain, sorrow or suffering but life everlasting.

The thrill of hope allows a weary world to rejoice, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. Some of us are weary from the two years of the pandemic, some are weary from our life circumstances, some are weary from sickness, and some are weary from life itself. Christmas is a reminder to rejoice, that our thrill of hope is the new and glorious morn that lays at the end of life, as well as in this life, that was inaugurated at the Incarnation of Christ that we celebrate on Christmas.



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Social Media Is Threatening to Become our god

In the world today, there is a lot of “righteous anger.” Everyone seems angry about something, and everyone believes that their cause, or their side is the right one. We post our anger on social media, get lots of “likes” that convince us even more that we are right. In some sense, social media has become a “god” or a “higher power” for many because this is where we go to express ourselves and to get approval. Our “thrill of hope” is how many people like and comment on what we post. We aren’t inviting the Holy Spirit into our thoughts, we aren’t seeking the approval of God, and the thrill of hope is being found in how many people we can get to like whatever it is we are thinking or doing. Imagine if social media were to disappear suddenly, how many of us would wonder if our soul had any worth.

It’s interesting when you look at the story of the Nativity, that all the main figures would not have been popular on social media. Imagine what they might have posted:

Joseph—status: my betrothed is pregnant with a child that is not mine. An angel said it would be okay.

Mary—status: I am betrothed to Joseph but am pregnant with a child that is not mine. An angel said it would be okay.

Mary and Joseph—status: No one has a place for us to stay tonight, there is no room in any inn.

The Innkeeper—status: the inn is full, I don’t have the capacity to help anyone.

The Shepherds—status: we are social outcasts, there is a census going on in Bethlehem and they don’t even care to count us. We are nomads, we have no homes, we are freezing out here.

The Magi—status: we are leaving our countries and following a star. We have no idea where it will lead us or how long the journey will take or if we’ll ever come back to our countries and when that could possibly be.

Herod—status: I am the highest power. Anyone else who claims to be higher than me is a threat and must be eliminated.

Imagine posting anything like this on social media. Imagine posting the truth of our deepest thoughts on social media. Imagine posting our fears and our failings.

The worth of our souls, therefore, cannot be tied to “likes” on social media. When Christ appears in our lives, when we allow Him in, that is when the soul will feel its worth, and when life will have meaning.

A Gift to Christ this Christmas

A hymn from the Great Vespers of the Nativity speaks about gifts:

What shall we offer You, O Christ, because You have appeared on earth as a man for our sakes? For each of the creatures made by You offers You its thanks: The angels, their hymn; the heavens, the star; the shepherds, their wonder; the Magi, their gifts; the earth the save; the desert, a manger, and we, a Virgin Mother. God before all ages, have mercy on us. (Trans. by Fr. Seraphim Dedes)

Yes, it is true that from the human beings came the Virgin Mother. But what do we offer to God, this year, in 2021? It goes back to that question I addressed earlier—it’s not about how much more we can have of God, but how much more we let God have of us. The thrill of hope is to offer ourselves to God and see what happens.

The Thrill of Hope and Anticipation

To put this in more simple terms, there are lots of people who are thrill-seekers—they go sky diving, bungee jumping, zip lining and roller coaster riding, among other things. There are thrill rides at amusement parks. The “thrill” of these things does not come after they are over. The thrill happens while they are happening. However, even more so, the thrill is the anticipation of what is going to happen, especially when one hasn’t experienced the “thrill” before.

Our thrill of hope is eternal life in Jesus Christ. Our thrill is not only what it will be like when we get there. Our thrill of hope is the anticipation of what will be once we get there. Our thrill of hope is what lies beyond this life. If you’ve ever waiting in line for a ride at an amusement park, the thrill builds with each step we take towards our turn on the ride. Each step doesn’t bring foreboding. It builds excitement.

These past two years, it seems as if we haven’t taken as many steps as usual, like the line hasn’t moved. We’ve had that happen at amusement parks as well. Someone is distracted and doesn’t move with the line. Then the line doesn’t move and we wonder what is the delay. And then they realize they can move and the line moves up a lot and we are excited to have taken many steps. Well, these past two years, it feels like the line hasn’t moved at all, the distraction of the pandemic has made us feel like we are standing in place. This Christmas, we have the opportunity to move up in the line, to make up for the time we weren’t moving, to let the thrill of hope build again in us.

As we shop around for gifts, as we decorate our homes, as we feel more free to move and to be around people, to resume Christmas parties that were canceled last year, to invite over friends we haven’t been able to see, let’s not forget to give room in our thoughts and in our hearts to our Lord, to not only seek to have more of Him but to let Him have more of us. When we let Him have more of us, the thrill of hope will build even more.



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Going back to the roller coaster example, the thrill is not just the ride, but the anticipation of the ride. Seeing the ride and other's reactions to it builds on the anticipation and the thrill. The thrill of the Christian life is not just the end of this life and entrance into eternal life. The thrill can be felt in this life, as we make our way slowly through the turnstiles towards the ride itself.

Thrills for Life Right Now

The last verse of the carol, "O Holy Night", give some insight into the thrills we can experience in this life, as we work our way to the ultimate "thrill of hope."

*Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;
And in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! O praise His Name forever,
His power and glory evermore proclaim.
O night divine, O night, O night divine.*

Love and peace are things we naturally incline to. Hate and war are learned. To reclaim our natural inclination for these two is to reclaim the joy and fulfillment that come from a life anchored in both. Seeing people are our brothers and sisters, rather than our opponents will also release anger and hatred and bring us love and peace and the resulting joy. To worship God, to come to a place where we raise our hands, our hearts, our voices and our thoughts to problem "Christ is the Lord!" is liberating. Like riding a zip line, it does require that leap of courage to step off the platform and begin soaring. However, for those who have zip-lined, once you are free of the platform and begin "flying" anxiety is quickly replaced by exaltation. Many of us are afraid to take that leap towards God, even though it is a leap we naturally incline to.

As we work our way through the Nativity Fast to the feast of the Nativity and a new year, let's each work to let go of the things that take us away from God, and make "church" or "religion" feel like drudgery or even as if they are the enemy, as portrayed in many corners of society today. Let's open our hearts to receive Christ, to give Him room in the inn of our hearts and our minds, to see Him as a thrill of hope, not only



for eternal life, but for this life, and let each step we take be one of building excitement and anticipation. This only happens when we know the ride we are boarding and have seen what it looks like while waiting. We know Christ through opening our minds and hearts to Him. We see glimpses of what heaven looks like when we worship with an open mind and open heart.

Emmanuel means "God is with us." Indeed, God is with us—our natural inclination is towards Him. Our natural inclination is to worship Him. So let's stop fighting and let nature take its course. For our thrill of hope is Christ—for everlasting life, for this life, and for this season of the Nativity.

This Christmas, let's trade decoration, celebration and frustration for illumination, proclamation and exultation. For when we let Christ into our lives, our souls will feel their worth, we will feel the thrill of hope, and we will rejoice, regardless of how weary we feel.



Some Other Notes as We Close Out 2021

The Thrill of Stewardship and Charity

In 2020, our parish set two records—the most services ever celebrated in one calendar year and the most amount of money given to charity. We will not break our record for services in 2021. 2020 will most likely stand as the all-time record, since we celebrated Paraklesis weekly and Divine Liturgy nearly every Saturday, because of the pandemic. We hope to break our record for charitable giving every year going forward. We hope to increase our stewardship each year going forward. Why? Because there is a "thrill" associated with helping those who need help. Not only is it a commandment from Christ to love our neighbor, there is a joy, even a thrill, in being able to do so.

What a thrill it is to know that a prisoner in an isolated and dark cell can experience the light of Christ because we made a contribution to Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM).

What a thrill it is to know that someone who was cold and homeless on the streets now have a job and warm place to go home to because we support Love, INC and Focus North America.

What a thrill it is to know that both the Orthodox faith and humanitarian aid are sent to third-world countries through our support of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC).

What a thrill it is to know that in the last days of life on earth, as people await the ultimate thrill of hope, that they are guided there by the gentle hand of LifePath Hospice.

In 2020, we broke \$30,000 in charitable giving for the first time. In 2021, we will go over \$35,000. And the goal for 2022 is to get to \$43,000.

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The Thrill of Pastoral Care

I used to love the show “Emergency 51” when I was a kid growing up. I loved how the firemen were sitting around the fire station, eating, talking and then the alarm bell would go off, the emergency operator would describe the situation that the fire department was responding to, and they would stop everything, head to the fire trucks and just go. The firemen didn’t sit around the station hoping the bell would never ring. They had eager expectation, even a thrill, for when it did ring. Perhaps that’s one of the reasons I enjoy being a priest, because I never know when the next opportunity will be to help someone, but those opportunities come often, and many times unexpectedly. What a thrill it should be for our community to have Fr. John and Fr. Stratton here to help out, Alex as our pastoral assistant, with another pastoral assistant joining us shortly, to know that whenever the “bell rings” there is a team ready to respond. Because this is what a church does—it responds to the needs of those in the parish, and far outside of it. It brings the light of Christ to those in the community, and to those in the greater community. And this all begins with your stewardship.

The thrill of charity and the thrill of knowing that someone will be there to answer the calls of our people whenever and however they come is made possible through your stewardship. In December, we will again be called upon to offer our stewardship pledge for 2022. My challenge to our parish this year is to make your stewardship represent “a thrill of hope”—hope that Christ brings you, and hope that His church can bring towards you and others. It is a thrill to give.

As an aside, it is not a thrill to ask people to give, especially when we are still asking and the year is almost over. Please fill out your stewardship form, and either bring it to church on Stewardship Sunday, which is December 5, or mail it to the church sometime during the month of December, so that we can have everyone’s stewardship accounted for, for 2022, by the end of 2021.

The Gift Is You

Adding to the stress of the holiday season is the pressure to buy the right gift for everyone we know. I saw a video a couple of years ago, entitled “The Gift is You.” It was an experiment done by a pastor to send letters to parishioners telling them how much they were appreciated and valued. This outpouring of gratitude and encouragement, as you’ll see in the video, made people filled with happiness. As the video says, “This time of year, we often prioritize possessions. So we wanted to celebrate with a better kind of gift—YOU.” So if you are wonder-

Charities we are supporting

LifePath Hospice gives help and support to people in the last days of their lives, helping people to die with dignity and without pain and when possible to pass away at home. MANY of our parishioners have used LifePath over the years.

Love Inc. is a local organization which helps people get off the streets and get job training and job placement, affordable living situations, and education on how to stay off the streets.

Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) supports the spread of Orthodoxy around the world as well as providing humanitarian aid in many third world countries.

Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM) supports Orthodox inmates, as well as other inmates who are interested in Orthodoxy, to repent of their past and to prepare for a future after prison. There is an article later in the *Messenger* with a testimony from an inmate of how this charity is helpful in turning lives of prisoners around.

FOCUS North America is an organization similar to Love Inc., but it run by Orthodox Christians, primarily in the steel belt (Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia) but expanding to other states including California. They help people get off the streets, job training and placement, affordable living, and productive lives.

International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) provides disaster relief both in America and abroad. We give a general donation to them every year, and then we send specific donations every time there is a disaster, such as hurricanes, flood, fires, tornadoes, etc.

Diakonia Retreat Center (DRC) is the retreat center for the Metropolis of Atlanta, where our teens go for summer camp each year, and where other programs and ministries are held year-round. These donations go to help their year-round expenses of the DRC as well as repairs and capital improvements.

Holy Cross School of Theology is the only seminary of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. This money goes towards training the priests and church workers of tomorrow.

Clergy Education Fund is money earmarked for our seminary students to help defray the cost of education.

Discretionary Contributions is money that is given to various charitable opportunities that come up unexpectedly, such as feeding children everywhere, which we did earlier this year with Christ the King Roman Catholic Church. We will send additional monies to our other charities at the end of the year, so that our goal of \$36,120 in charitable contributions will be met.

ing what to give someone for Christmas, write them a letter and tell them what they mean to you. In fact, it is a thrill to not only receive a gift like this but to give it as well. Here is the link to the video:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2878943925491599>

A simple, yet profound idea.

On behalf of Presbytera Lisa and Nicholas, I wish each of you a Blessed Nativity and a Happy and Healthy New Year 2022! May the celebration of our Lord’s Incarnation bring you a thrill of hope this Christmas!

With love in the Incarnate Lord,
+Fr. Stavros

Christmas Traditions, Sabbath, and Everyday Rituals

By Alex Limberatos

Around the time that our daughter was about to experience her first Christmas, my wife intentionally asked me what Christmas traditions I grew up with and what traditions we wanted in our own home. At first, I really had to think about what traditions I had grown up with in my home, because our Christmas' usually had variables. Depending on how much energy we felt that year, we'd get a real tree, a fake tree, or a Charlie Brown Tree. Depending on how much my brother and I bugged my parents, we'd open presents on Christmas Eve versus waiting on Christmas Day. That being said, there were some absolutes. We'd watch Christmas Story at least once (if not more times than that) with my parents, help my parents deliver Greek Pastries to our friends and families homes, see both sides of our family, and above all celebrate the birth of our Lord by worshipping in Divine Liturgy.

In my teenage years, a new tradition arose of gathering with my High School friends to do a Secret Santa Party, wherein we'd choose code-names for ourselves in our gift exchange and conclude with an amalgamation of party games like Pictionary, Apples to Apples, etc. In my adult years, I have intended to become intentional of setting aside time to read on Christmas from something holy and edifying for my soul (something I ought to get better about doing year round), to make space and silence for God.



Usually we think of traditions as something we don't have to think up or get creative with because they've been passed down. That being said, just about any good and holy tradition we can think of arose from a need to remember something important, to acknowledge the transcendent and give it the time and space to manifest as something holy or "set aside." The tradition of celebrating Christmas (such as our traditions of celebrating a Birthday Party or Anniversary) all should be towards the purpose of transporting us to that godly and holy moment in history, to bring forth today the miracles of the past.

My wife and I had to consider and still consider to this day what we want our home and kingdom to have as our Christmas traditions besides the things we grew up with. What do we do with our days after we've gone to church, seen family, and opened presents? What are some things that our house will do annually to bring Bethlehem, Jesus, His parents, the shepherds, magi, angels, even the animals in the cave ALL into our home? We're continuing to get creative and intentional about thinking on such transformative traditions.

But this creative and intentional work of ours has led to other questions of what are weekly and daily traditions, observances, and rituals that we have wanted to be part of our home and kingdom.

The idea of observing Sabbath is perhaps one of the oldest traditions we have, by which I mean it being God's setting aside of time to rest that He handed down in the 10 Commandments. While Sabbath in the Jewish sense developed traditions of what you DON'T do



that day, it did involve a sundown meal of fellowship and a call to action of worship and holy contemplation. We can think of Sabbath as a weekly Christmas, a weekly observance of God's miracle that calls for us to pause and make space for God in our day, in our minds, and in our hearts. As Orthodox Christians, our Sabbath is Sunday, the day we remember Christ's Resurrection, and is a weekly setting aside of time to rest, reflect, and worship whereas Christmas is an annual call to rest, reflect, and worship.

As we reflect on the traditions we hold annually (Christmas and for any other feast and holiday) I think it's important we also consider what are the traditions we hold even daily. We all have daily "rituals" of what we do when we wake up, go to school/work, come home, go to bed. Rituals are cousins to tradition, outward manifestations of addressing something invisible and needed. In the same way that we keep/invent traditions to make sacred days like Christmas or Pascha, I wonder if there's ways in which we can make parts of our day sacred, set aside for God. We know we are to infuse prayer in every day of our lives and every time of day in our lives, but how intentional and routine are we of not missing these opportunities to set aside time and attention for God? We typically don't skip out on Christmas traditions, but then why do we give ourselves a pass on the daily rituals of making God incarnate in our day-to-day lives?

My short and humble invitation this year is that we all become intentional and attentive to good and holy traditions that serve to bring Christ first and foremost into our celebration of His Birth. And as we work to do that, may we also consider ways of inviting Him routinely into our week and in each day of our lives that He may truly have room in our lives to reign and be part of all that we do.

Merry Christmas!
Christ is Born!
Glorify Him!



Liturgical Schedule for December 2021

Thursday, December 2 **St. Porphyrios**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, December 4 **St. Barbara**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 5 **St. Savas**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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

Wednesday, December 8 Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

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

Sunday, December 12 **St. Spyridon**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, December 15 **St. Eleftherios**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, December 18 **St. Sebastian**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 19 **Sunday Before the Nativity**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, December 20 **St. Ignatios**
Orthros 6:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 7:30 a.m. (Note earlier start times)
Church open for prayer 8:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m.

Christmas Candlelight Service 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 22 **St. Anastasia**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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

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

Orthros 5:30 p.m.
Great Doxology 6:45 p.m.
Divine Liturgy 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 26 **Sunday After Nativity**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

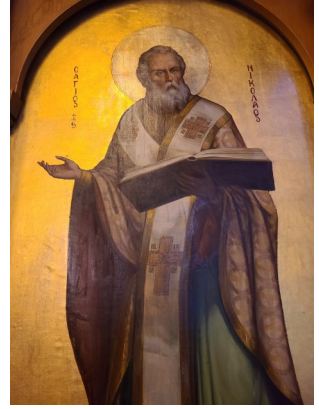
Thursday, December 30 **St. Anyisia**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, January 1, 2022 **St. Basil**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, January 2 **Sunday Before Theophany**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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

St Nicholas
(Right)



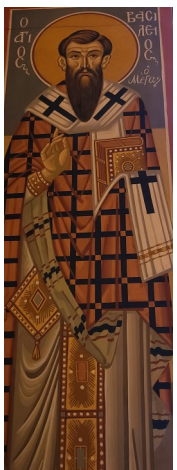
St Spyridon
@ Council
of Nicaea
(Right)



St Eleftherios
(Right)



St Basil
(Right)



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Wednesday, January 5 **Eve of Theophany**

Vespertine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.

Blessing of the Waters 10:15 a.m.

Thursday, January 6 **Theophany**

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

Great Vespers for St. John the Baptist

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

His Eminence, Metropolitan Alexios, will officiate

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

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

His Eminence, Metropolitan Alexios, will officiate

Sunday, January 9 **Sunday After Theophany**

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



Congratulations to Our Archangel Michael Award Recipients!

Gary Ward (2021), Kalliope Chagaris (2021),
Catherine Mitseas (2020), Alkis Crassas (2020)

(Left to Right)



A Thrill of Hope!

We hope you are enjoying your A Thrill of Hope gift bag, filled with items to help prepare you for the upcoming celebration of the Birth of Christ! Included are some resources to help guide your spiritual path during this season: the guidebook filled with prayers and daily scriptures and journaling space, a pamphlet on the Nativity, and the 2022 Archdiocesan calendar; seasonal items for you to use in your home: an ornament, small magnet, a votive candle, and a special letter to read on Christmas morning; and there are some useful, fun promotional items for you to proudly show off and use year round, too – a magnet, pen, post it notes – all with our updated St. John logo!

Our Welcome Ministry is so thankful for the many volunteers and efforts of all our ministry heads to offer this gift from our parish family.

Please let the office know if you did not receive a bag, or you'd like an extra one to share with a family member, friend neighbor, coworker!

During this season of the Nativity Fast, may we grow in Christ's love, both individually and as a community and experience as a community A Thrill of Hope!

Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

December 1
ARETI, JACOB, NAOUM,
PHILARETOS, THEOKLITOS

December 2
MEROPI, SOLOMON,

December 3
GLYKERIOS

December 4
BARBARA, DAMASKINOS,
SERAPHIM

December 5
DIOGENES, SAVVAS

December 6
NIKOLETA, NIKOLINA, NIKOLAOS, NIKOS

December 7
AMVROSIOS

December 8
PATAPIOS

December 9
ANAI, ANN

December 12
SPIRIDON

December 13
AARON, ABRAHAM, ADAM, ARIS, DANAE, DAVID,
DEBORA, EFSTRATIOS, ESTHIR, IOUBENALIOS,
IOV, ISAAC, MELHISEDEH, NOAH, RACHEL, REBBECA,
RUBEN, SARAH, SUNDAY OF THE ANCESTORS OF JESUS
CHRIST

December 14
ARRIANOS, LEFKI

December 15
ANTHEA, ELEFTERIOS, SOSSANA, SYLVIA

December 16
MODESTOS, THEOFANO

December 17
DANIEL, DIONISIS, IAKHOS

December 18
FLOROS, SEBASTIANOS

December 19
AGLAIA, ARIS

December 20
IGNATIOS

December 21
JULIA, THEMISTOKLIS,

December 22
ANASTASIA, NATASA, ZOILIOS

December 23
NIFON

December 24
AHMET, EVGENIA

December 25
BALTASAR, BETHLEHEM, CHRISTINA, CHRISTOS,
CHRYSTALLA, EMMANOUELA, EMMANUEL, GASPARD,
HRISAVGI, HRISOULA, HRYSA, MELHIOR

December 26
CONSTANTIOS, JOSEF, PANAGIOTIS

December 27
MAVRIKIOS, STEPHANOS

December 28
DOMNA, MYGDONIOS, THEOFILI

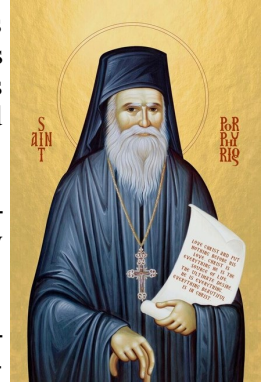
December 29
BENJAMIN

December 30
ANISIOS, FILETARIOS, GIDEON, JOSEF

December 31
MELANY

Liturgical Notes for December 2021

Thursday, December 2 – St. Porphyrios of Kafsokalivia St. Porphyrios was a monk on Mount Athos known for his gifts of spiritual discernment. He lived from 1906-1991, and was canonized in 2013. He was alive in most of our lifetimes. There have been several saints that have been canonized in recent years. As a new practice at St. John, we will celebrate one of these modern saints each year on his or her feastday, and for this year, it will be St. Porphyrios.



Saturday, December 4 - St. Barbara and St. John of Damascus We celebrate the feastday of St. Barbara, a martyr for Christ who was martyred by her own father. On the same day, we celebrate the feastday of St. John of Damascus, a hymnographer of the church who also was a strong defender of iconography.

Sunday, December 5 – St. Savas the Sanctified Saint Savas lived from 439-532 and was one of the leading monastics of his era. He founded monasteries, worked miracles, had great discernment, and did extensive writing on monastic rules of life.

Monday, December 6 - St. Nicholas We celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of travelers. The tradition of Santa Claus is derived from St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, who was giving gifts to those less fortunate.



Wednesday, December 8 – 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 December, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday evening, December 8, from 6:00-7:00 p.m.

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

Sunday, December 12 - St. Spyridon

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

Wednesday, December 15 - St. Eleftherios St. Eleftherios was a priest-martyr in the 2nd century of the church.

Saturday, December 18 – St. Sebastian – St. Sebastian was martyred in the year 288, during the persecution of the emperor Diocletian and Maximian. He had been a member of the Senate who had also been a zealous follower of Christ, converting many to Christianity.

Monday, December 20—Day of Prayer—Liturgy, Prayer, Candlelight Service

Last year, we opened our church for a quiet day of prayer a few days before the Nativity and this was well-received. So, we decided that we will take an entire day for quiet prayer, with two services as the bookends. On Monday, December 20, we will celebrate Divine Liturgy at 7:30 a.m. (with Orthros at 6:45 a.m.). We never offer Divine Liturgy this early in the morning, and it will be a wonderful way to begin the day, to see the sunrise in the church. After Liturgy, we will have the church open all day for quiet prayer, and if you want a prayer to be offered, Fr. Stavros and Alex will be available to offer prayers. If you haven't been to church in a while and would like to stop in during the Christmas week, or if life is moving too fast and you just want to slow down for a few hours and come sit in the church, this day is for you.

Christmas Candlelight Service (December 20)-There is a "canon" (a set of hymns) in preparation for the Nativity. It is very similar in order to the Paraklesis Service that we celebrate in August, except that the hymns are dedicated to the Feast of the Nativity and not to the Virgin Mary, though she is still mentioned prominently in many of them. The service includes the opportunity to pray for people by name, so bring your names and the names of anyone you know who needs prayer to this service. Also, included in this service will be an opportunity to pray for those who have passed away this year. At the end of the service, a Trisagion service will be chanted for all those who have passed away this year. If you know someone who can use some prayer this Nativity, or someone who has lost a loved one, or someone who is sad, please invite them to this service. Allow us to pray for them and their loved ones. The service will be done entirely in English. It will last just over an hour. It will be done only by candlelight. There will be no Communion at the service. So the challenges of a normal Sunday liturgy—length, no intercommunion, use of Greek—that challenge non-Orthodox visitors to our church will not be present. This is a wonderful opportunity there is in the year to invite non-Orthodox friends to our church. Finally, we will have a small dinner following the service, so that we can break bread together.

Wednesday, December 22 – St. Anastasia St. Anastasia lived in the late third century and was martyred on December 25, 304. She is the patron saint of pharmacists, as she was gifted in making medicines, which she distributed to those who were ill.

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

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

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

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

Thursday, December 30 - St. Anysia St. Anysia was martyred in Thessaloniki in the year 304. Her relics are interred in the altar table of our church.



Parish Registry

Baptism-Charlie Madeleine (Magdaleni) Sigety, daughter of Austin and Kimberly Sigety, was baptized on Sunday, October 24. Roula Law was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Wedding-Charlie Hambos (our former Pastoral Assistant) and Elefteria Garos were married on Sunday, November 14. His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios officiated, assisted by Fr. Stavros and many other priests. Nicholas and Katherine Moutopoulos were the Koumbaroi. Congratulations Charlie and Elefteria!

Chrismation—Alina (Maria) Morros was received into the Orthodox Church on Monday, November 1. Christine Scourtes was the sponsor. Congratulations!



Family Calendar for the Nativity Fast 2021

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
November 14 Luke 10:27 St. Philip Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your red candle on your family wreath LOVE	15 Luke 1:30 First Day of Nativity Fast Pray for your friends Matthew 1:18	16 Luke 1:31 St. Matthew Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Purchase items or a gift card to donate for a Box of Hope	17 Luke 1:32 Holy Unction 6:00 pm Smile at everyone you see today	18 Luke 1:35 Send a card to a friend who lives in another state	19 Luke 1:37 Send a thanksgiving card to an elderly person	20 Luke 1:38 Make and send a get well card
21 I Timothy 4:4 Entrance of the Virgin Mary Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your white candle on your family wreath GRATITUDE	22 Matthew 1:18 Pray for your teachers Matthew 1:20	23 Matthew 1:20 Volunteer with a local charity	24 Matthew 1:21 St. Katherine Thanksgiving Divine Liturgy 6:00 pm Donate to a local food pantry	25 Psalm 92:1 Thanksgiving List five things you are thankful for	26 Matthew 1:24-25 Send a care package to a loved one	27 Luke 2:4 Make a Christmas ornament for your tree
28 Romans 12:12 Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your gold candle on your family wreath HOPE	29 Luke 2:7 Pray for your teachers Luke 2:8	30 Luke 2:8 St. Andrew Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Buy a gift off of an angel tree for someone in need	December 1 Luke 2:9 Paraklesis 6:00 pm Make a donation to a charity you love	2 Luke 2:10 St. Porphyrios Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Cut paper snowflakes and hang them in your front windows	3 Luke 2:11 Drive around and look at Christmas lights in your PJ's	4 Luke 2:12 St. Barbara Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Bake and share some Christmas cookies
5 II Corinthians 9:7 St. Savas Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your green candle on your family wreath GENEROSITY	6 Luke 2:13 St. Nicholas Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Pray for a loved one who has passed away	7 Luke 2:14 Take a photo with your Nativity set	8 Luke 2:15 Paraklesis 6:00 pm Leave a poinsettia on a neighbor's porch secretly	9 Luke 2:16 St. Anna Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Learn the words to a new Christmas Carol	10 Luke 2:17 Make a list of three things you love about each person in your family and put it in their stocking	11 Luke 2:18 Joy/Hope Christmas Celebration
12 Psalm 32:11 St. Spyridon Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your blue candle on your family wreath JOY	13 Luke 2:19 Pray for people who are alone Matthew 2:11	14 Luke 2:20 Nativity set Send a secret Santa note to a friend	15 Matthew 2:1 St. Eleftherios Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Decorate your driveway or sidewalk with Christmas messages with sidewalk chalk	16 Matthew 2:2 Watch a classic Christmas movie or TV special	17 Matthew 2:9 Have a slumber party by your Christmas Tree	18 Matthew 2:10 St. Sebastian Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Decorate a gingerbread house
19 II Corinthians 5:7 Sunday Before Nativity Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Light your purple candle on your family wreath FAITH	20 Matthew 2:11 St. Ignatios Divine Liturgy 7:30 am Day of Quiet Prayer 8:30 am-6:00 pm Christmas Candlelight Service 6:00 pm Pray for your priest	21 Isaiah 7:14 Take a selfie in front of your Christmas Tree	22 Isaiah 9:6 St. Anastasia Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Call your Godparents to wish them a Merry Christmas	23 John 1:1 Royal Hours of the Nativity 9:30 am Light your center candle on your family wreath	24 John 1:14 The Nativity of Christ Vespers Liturgy 9:30 am Divine Liturgy 7:00 pm Write a letter to your parents	25 Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 2:1-12 Christ is Born! Glorify Him! Open your letter and read the Christmas Gospel
26 John 14:27 Sunday After Nativity Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Think about your word for 2022 PEACE	27 John 3:16 Pray for healthcare workers II Timothy 4:7	28 Matthew 2:13 Mail thank you letters for your Christmas gifts	29 Matthew 2:23 Do a chore in your yard	30 John 1:5 St. Anyasia Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Write down three goals for 2022	31 Matthew 5:16 Choose a Bible verse on kindness and put it on your refrigerator	January 1 Luke 2:52 St. Basil Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Cut a vasilopita with your family
2 I Peter 4:10 Sunday Before Theophany Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Visit someone who lives alone STEWARDS	3 II Timothy 4:7 Pray for good things for someone who has been unkind to you	4 Luke 3:4 Royal Hours of Theophany 9:30 am Clean your room without being asked	5 Matthew 3:16 Eve of Theophany Vespers Liturgy 9:00 am Blessing of the Waters 10:15 am Send an old-fashioned post card to your grandparents	6 Matthew 3:17 Theophany Great Vespers for St. John the Baptist 6:30 pm Offer a prayer of thanks for clean and fresh water	7 John 3:30 St. John the Baptist Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Draw a picture wishing our parish a Blessed Feast day!	8 Matthew 4:16

St. John the Baptist Community News

Orthodoxy 101 to be held in January 2022 – The next installment of Orthodoxy 101 will begin in January. More information to follow.

The CHOSEN—Movie and Discussion (Sunday December 5) - The Chosen Discussion—Many of our parishioners will be watching the Christmas special on the Chosen in a local theater on December 1. We will be having a discussion for anyone who goes to see the Chosen who would like to participate as part of coffee hour on Sunday, December 5, after Divine Liturgy in the Zaharias Room.

GOYA – The GOYA Meeting for December will be Sunday, December 12. We will meet from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner will be served. And we will have some Christmas games and then a discussion. Parents are welcome to join us.

GOYA Christmas Card—It's that time again for our annual Saint John the Baptist Community Christmas Card, sponsored by our GOYA. The suggested contribution of \$25.00 will go to assist our GOYA Ministry. This is a lovely way to join in the spirit of love and good will during the Christmas season. GOYA will have a table set up in the community center for you to come sign up and make your donations. Please make checks out to St. John the Baptist GOYA. Our GOYA family is truly thankful to you all for the support you continue to show us through the years. Thank you and God Bless! Sign-ups for the Christmas Card will be after church Sunday, November 28, Sunday, December 5 and Sunday December 12 in the Kourmolis Center. If you have any questions, please contact Mike Palios at 813-523-0346.

Men's Group - The Men's Group will be meeting on Sunday, November 28 for our "December meeting" so there will not be a meeting in December. Our next meeting will be in January.

Joanne Dalaklis has been added to the Parish Council to fill a vacancy that has existed for several months. We welcome Joanne to the Parish Council!

Parish Council Elections will be held on December 12 after Divine Liturgy until 1:00 p.m.

College Student Night - We will be having our annual College Student Night on Tuesday, December 21, beginning at 6:00 p.m. We will have dinner and discussion. All college students are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros by December 15 if you plan to attend.

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 December, our meetings will be Tuesday, December 7 and Tuesday, December 14. We are studying St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Monday Night Bible Study — **Fr. John** will continue to lead a Bible study on **Monday evenings at 6:30 p.m.** Fr. John will be continuing the Nativity Story from the Gospel of Luke on December 6, 13, and 20. 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!**

Check-in With Let All Creation Rejoice Book—December 8—For those who are reading the book "Let All Creation Rejoice" by Fr. Stavros, there will be a mid-point "check in" on Wednesday, December 8 at 7:00 p.m. after Paraklesis in person or via livestream.

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

Honoring Tom Georgas-On November 14, we honored Tom Georgas for his 12 years of service as our church's head usher, 2008-2020. Thanks for all your hard work and commitment, Tom!



TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

Over 40 of your St. John fellow parishioners are Prayer Warriors, active members of the Parish's Twelve Disciples project. The term "Prayer Warrior" was originated by Charlie Hambos, a former administrative assistant to Fr. Stavros.

Inception

Over a year ago our community of St. John the Baptist began a program to strengthen our personal prayer discipline, learning to pray for others. The names of all member families of our congregation were compiled into a 12-page document. The individual pages were distributed monthly to those in the community who requested "membership", with each page listing the names sorted by families. Each participant in the "Program" was asked to pray for the entire page of names, once daily. Most have found that they easily included praying for individuals during their daily private prayer discipline or rule.

Prayer Rule

"A prayer rule is a simple daily activity (discipline) that can slowly help us to spend more time in deepening our relationship with God." Be the Bee #147 (<https://youtu.be/8jnufigwLUHk>)

We know from the Gospel that Christ, our model of prayer, prayed frequently. The Epistles mention the importance of intercessory prayer and how we can use it to intensify our spiritual relationship with God. The evidence is overwhelming in the Epistle writings that the Apostles prayed frequently for others and with enthusiasm.

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

Join Us?

Participating requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow parishioners during a time when most of us can spend a quiet moment with God. As Fr. Stavros admonished us in a recent *Prayer Team* message, "We (all) need time to be in the presence of the Son of God."



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

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

The Jesus Prayer

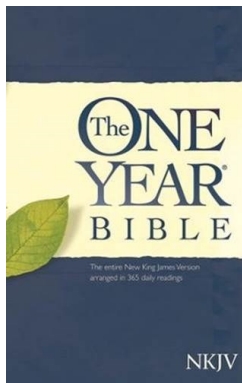
St. John's Bookstore Christmas Shop



Beginning November 28th and continuing each Sunday until Christmas, our Bookstore will feature a special Christmas Shop where you can find inspiring and unique items for your Christmas celebration. Included are Icons of the Nativity of our Lord, Christmas cards, Icon Ornaments, and many other Christmas gifts you just won't find in the shopping malls. Forget Rudolph and the other reindeer this year and put Christ back into your Christmas!

Book Review—The Bible in One Year

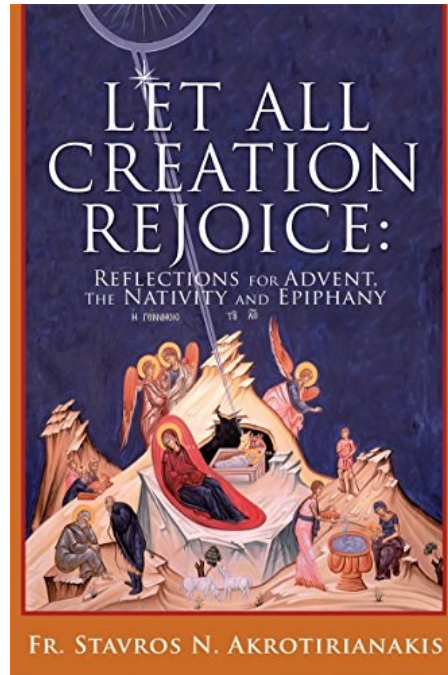
There are many different versions of the Bible in One Year. Different formats, different translations. We chose this one because it is the New King James Version, which is the same translation as the Orthodox Study Bible. In this version of the Bible in one year, there is a reading from the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Psalms and the Proverbs for each day of the year. Thus, the Bible is not presented in order. If you start reading this January 1, you'll have finished the whole Bible by the end of 2022. One good thing about this Bible is that if you read something from the Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs, at least one of the readings is going to really catch your interest. When you read the Bible from start to finish, there are several difficult books that "turn people off" to finishing the whole Bible. To get through this Bible in one year, it should take no more than ten minutes a day. This Bible can be purchased from many different sources including Christian Book Distributors and Amazon for about \$20. Just google "One Year Bible NKJV" and you'll find it. What a great goal it would be to read the entire Bible in the year 2022!



Continue Your 2021 Advent Journey with “Let All Creation Rejoice”

Advent every year begins on November 15 and goes until January 7

As we approach the season of Advent, I wanted to share with you a book I have written called, *Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections for Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany*. The book is approximately 230 pages long. It contains a reflection to be read daily during the period of the Nativity Fast (November 15) through January 7. From November 15 through December 24, one verse of the Gospel accounts of the Nativity is examined in detail each day. It is practical inspiration written to be understood by the average Greek Orthodox Christian. +Fr. Stavros



Although this book is written in an easy to read style - the concepts and application are very thought provoking! My husband and I have been reading it at meal time, as our Advent meditation. Each day's readings help me turn my mind to what's really going on and important this time of year - helping me refocus, and reflect on the events surrounding the Nativity, and what they mean for me! Today's reading, for example, reflected on the angel telling the shepherds, "Don't be afraid," and following reflections on fear in my own life. Excellent book, and now that I am enjoying this one so much, I will be ordering the Lenten reflections, too. -Amazon Customer

A must read for any Christian wishing to renew their spiritual life during the Christmas season. -Amazon Customer

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 3,290 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Alex at alex@stjohntpa.org and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Alex or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the “forward to a friend” option. Also, make sure prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

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

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

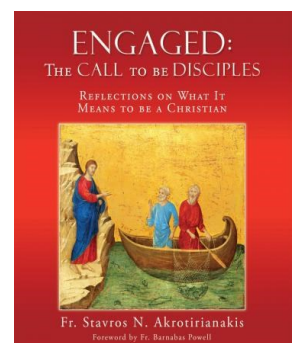
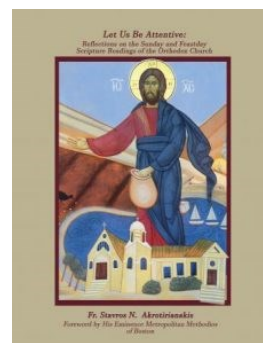
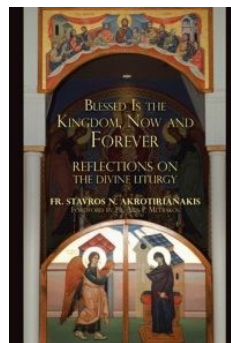
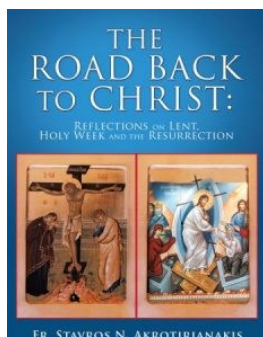
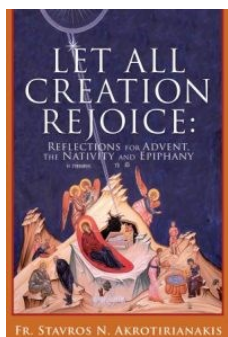
Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany

The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection

Blessed is the Kingdom, Now and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy

Let us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church

ENGAGED: The Call To Be Disciples



Fr. Stavros' New Book, Available Now!

ENGAGED: The Call To Be Disciples

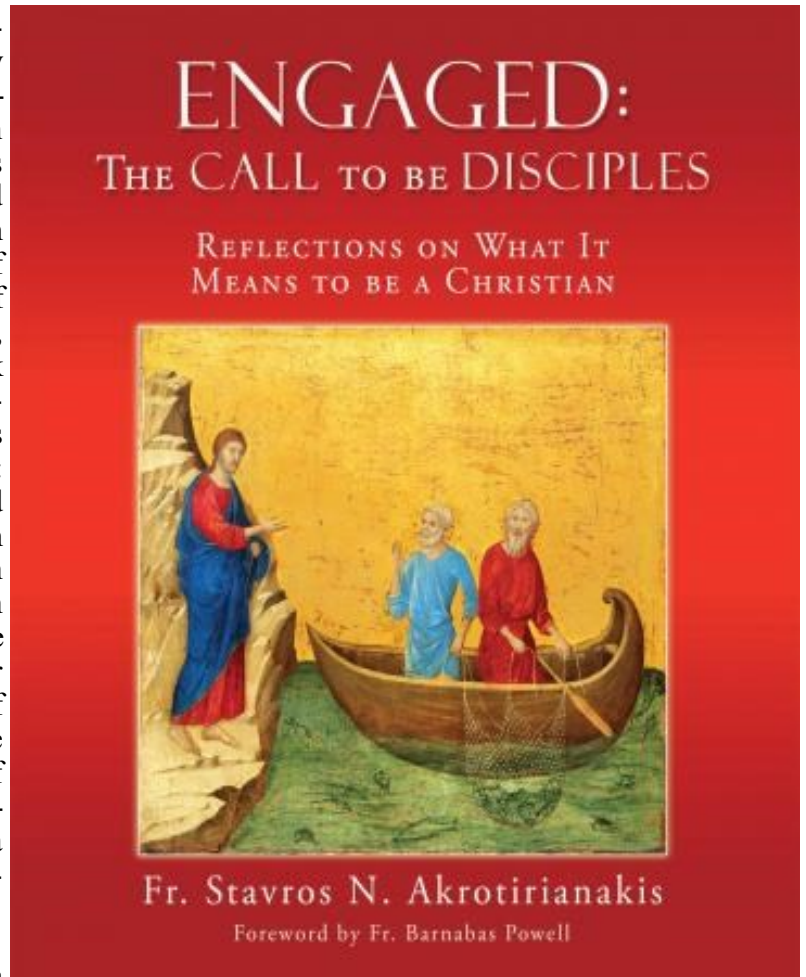
As most of you know, I've been writing a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team" since February 2015. Many parishioners receive these daily messages. If you'd like to be added to the list, visit the church website and subscribe. By God's grace, these writings have resulted in five books. This new book 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



Matthew 25 Temporarily On Hiatus

Our Community Outreach Ministry, Matthew 25, is temporarily on hiatus until further notice. Matthew 25 is waiting for approval to change its base of operations and hopefully will resume in 2022.

We appreciate your patience and will disseminate details once this ministry reorganizes and relocates.

December 2021 Sunday School Update

Our topics for November were THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH, TALENTS - GIFTS, and CHARITY - THANKFULNESS. The Sunday School also made cards and wrote wonderful messages to our military men and women serving overseas. We pray that these messages and cards bring a smile to their faces. On November 14th our 5th and 6th Graders made and learned all about the importance of Prospora. We can't thank Melissa Krinos enough for providing this program to our Sunday School year after year.



November 21st was our YOUTH SUNDAY SERVICE. Our children sang beautifully throughout this service. We would like to thank them and our High School Student who did a great job reading the Epistle. The parishioners of St. John's are truly blessed to have such wonderful young stewards.

We have to share photos and tell you about what our Middle School and High School did on October 31st. Each student researched and dressed up as one of their favorite saints. They also enjoyed a pizza party afterwards.



Our SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PAGEANT will take place on December 12th. We hope you enjoy this year's Christmas Pageant. Last year it had to be a Virtual Production. The SUNDAY SCHOOL/HOPE AND JOY Christmas Party and PAGEANT REHEARSAL will take place on Saturday, Dec. 11th.

DECEMBER CALENDAR:

- Sunday, December 5th: Topic: Stewardship
- Saturday, December 11th: Sunday School Christmas Party and Pageant Rehearsal
- Sunday, December 12th: Sunday School Christmas Program
- Sunday, December 19th: Topic: The Nativity
- Sunday, December 26th: No Sunday School Classes (Christmas)





SAINT JOHN'S PAGEANT REHEARSAL AND YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY

Saturday, December 11th

11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Kourmolis Hall

Christmas program rehearsal at 11a in the church

Lunch at 12:30p

Crafts, Service Project and Party til 3p

Kindly RSVP so all can be plentiful!

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

2 Service Projects to Participate in:

Assembly of Boxes of Hope- Metropolitan Ministries Holiday Dinners

Assembly of fleece blankets for local teens in hospital



ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS... AA BATTERIES

Periodically we ask for AA Batteries for the cordless microphones utilized by our clergy. If you'd like to donate new AA batteries to the church, please bring them to church on Sunday or to the office.

We prefer Duracell or Energizer.

Hope/Joy Fall Food Drive

Sun, Nov 7th - Sat, Dec 11th.

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

Metropolitan Ministries' Holiday Tent helps 50,000+ families in need for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Let's help them meet this year's goal of 1,763,000 pounds of food.

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

Shop for any of the items below and bring to church Sun, Nov 7th - Sat, Dec 11th.

Donate \$25 or more (cash/ check/ gift card) for a Box of Hope-

Checks payable to Metropolitan Ministries

BOX OF HOPE contains:

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

Only non-perishable food donations please. Call Zackie Ameres at 813-245-3813 or email at zackiec@yahoo.com with any questions. Thank you!

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

Proverbs 19:17



PHILOPTOCHOS

Season of Necessities Luncheon and Donation Drive to Benefit The Spring Of Tampa Bay.

On **December 5** the Philoptochos will host a luncheon to benefit **The Spring Of Tampa Bay**. All proceeds from the luncheon will go to benefit The Spring Of Tampa Bay whose mission is to prevent domestic violence, protect victims and promote change in lives, families and communities. We will also be collecting the items below for our Seasons of Necessities donation drive for The Spring.

Bath towels	Bar Soap & body wash	Diapers (sizes 4, 5 & 6) & Pull Ups
Washcloths	Toothbrushes & Toothpaste	Diaper rash ointment
Twin Blankets, flat & fitted sheets	Baby Powder	Baby Food
Pillows & Pillow cases (standard)	Baby Shampoo	Formula
Laundry Detergent	Baby Wipes	Pedialyte
Sanitary Pads & tampons	Baby Bottles	Gift Cards (Walmart, Target, Dollar General Etc.)
Hair care products	Sippy Cups	
Deodorant		

Philoptochos will have a collection bin in the entrance of the Kourmoulis Center throughout the month of December.

Philoptochos Christmas Bake Sale

Philoptochos will be hosting a bake sale after church on Sunday December 5-26th

WHILE SUPPLIES LAST

48 piece appetizer tray of Spanakopita or Tyropita \$30.00

2lb spanakopita pan \$20.00

Baklava small tray \$16.00

Vasilopita \$10.00

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).

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

By Fr. Stavros

Most of us don't spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don't spend any time. Each week since January 2019, we provide in The Messenger and then repeated weekly in the bulletin, a verse or two. I choose verses that are meaningful to me, or well known or ones that have meaning in contemporary times. You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have. If you want a challenge, do the following:

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

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

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

December 5-11

Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

II Corinthians 9:7

The theme for this week is generosity. Gift giving is on everyone's mind during these weeks leading up to Christmas. We feel compulsion to buy enough gifts, the right gifts, and to remember all the people that are important to us. If we forget someone, they might think bad of us. We are also thinking about what we are going to offer back to God in our stewardship pledge. Giving should be something that brings us joy. We should be giving cheerfully. Giving is a personal, private and should be a prayerful thing. What we offer to God and what we offer to others is something we should actually prayerfully reflect on. We should offer things that we can offer cheerfully. We should ever feel pressure to give, unless it is internal pressure. And giving should be done cheerfully, otherwise it is not giving, it is "paying." I don't joyfully give money for my taxes. I pay them. Paying and giving should be two different things. Paying is done out of obligation. Gifts should be given with joy. This applies to our Christmas gifts, as well as to our stewardship gift to God—it should be given with joy and a generous spirit.



December 12-18

Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Psalms 32:11

The theme for this week is joy. The Greek word for joy is "hara". The Greek word for grace is "haris" and the Greek word for thanksgiving is "efharistia." We can see that all three words are from the root "har." And all three are related. God's grace comes to us when we approach God with joy and thanksgiving. When we are thankful, it is easier to be joyful. When we receive God's grace, it can bring joy even in the midst of stress. Joy and righteousness are connected in this week's Bible verse. The righteous are called to rejoice, and to shout for joy. An upright disposition of the heart helps maintain joy. And joy helps to maintain a Godly disposition of the heart.

December 19-25

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

II Corinthians 5:7

This week's theme is faith. The Sunday before Christmas we read the 42 generations of Christ's ancestors. This is roughly two thousand years of ancestors from Abraham to Christ. It is as long as the wait we have had from Christ's earthly ministry until now. At least some of the people from Abraham to Christ held on to faith and preserved it and passed it from generation to generation. Certainly many did not have faith. But from the time God made a covenant with Abraham until the time of Christ's incarnation was 2,000 years. And Abraham and the others in the line kept faith through wars, plagues, slavery, exile and other misfortunes, so that there was still enough faith left so that Christ was recognized by some as the promised Messiah. We live in a similar time as these ancestors of Christ. We are waiting the return of Christ, and final judgment on who will inherit the kingdom of heaven. We have had many things distract us from Christ, now especially with political upheaval and the pandemic. It is up to us to continue to believe and to work, as they did, to preserve faith and hope. Faith is walking even when we can't see where we are going or don't know how far we are from the end. None of us know how long it will be until the Second Coming, or from the end of our own lives. Faith compels us to keep walking, even when the journey is long and uncertain. The church, and being part of it, is supposed to encourage our faith as well.

December 26-January 1

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

John 14:27

The peace of Christ is a peace that can come in the midst of conflict. Jesus said these words just hours before His crucifixion. He was about to leave His disciples, both because of the crucifixion, and then weeks later, for the Ascension. He told them He wanted them to have peace. The world was not going to give them peace. In fact, their desire to spread the message of the Gospel would lead most of them to martyrdom. So, He was warning them that even though the world might not offer them peace, they would have His peace. And because of this, He didn't want their hearts to be troubled and afraid, but rather assured that He would bring them peace in the midst of conflict.

Memorial & Kolyva Protocol

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



Plot Available At Garden of Memories

One of our parishioners is looking to sell a burial plot
at Garden of Memories Funeral Home

If you are interested, please call Blanche Badrane at 813-629-2553

Prayer List: Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our Souls and Bodies, visit and heal your servants: Tony Ekonomou; Keith Lynn & Patrick Carroll; Daniel Hoss, Ourania Tziotis, Irina, Marina, Yuri, and Christophoros; Ashley Snyder; Evangelos & Caroline Critkas; Constantinos & Kalotina Klimis; Christine Alex, June, Lillian Thomas; Scotty; Desi Serriera; Ashley Kladakis; Dora Kallas, Kathy & Andrew Bouzinekis; Anastasia; Virginia Georgiou, Ron Myer, Toula Tsaros, Fr. Pat Legato, Nellie Pringle, Yolanda Webb, Angela Bougas, Tony Ekonomou, Ron, Jason Vickers, Rex Garrison, Tina Chakonas, Ann Demas, Christina Noel Kouzes Houck, Evangeline Xeroteris, Ashley Henderson, Natalie Henderson, Chris, Debbie, James, Avery, Lily, Jacob, Jesse, Ann, Rosario, Antonia Caffentzis, Alissa, John, Angela, Joey, Christine Scourtes, Steven, Matthew & Family, Phyllis, John Zelatis, Reagan, Peter Zaharis, Alexandra Ferrarolis, Leon & Despina Botham, Cindy Xenick, Mary Ellen Evdemon, Marie Sofia Panagopoulos, Maria Hursey, Chris Vamvakias, John Myer, Mike Trimis, Robert and Alice Stoccardo, John Alexander, Michael Romero, George Hambos, Dean Kondilis and Family, Bill and Nancy Manikas, Patricia Costello, Anastasia Smyrnakis, Ekaterina & Anna Shushaalykova, Dora Koudouna, Debbie Phelps, Mary Voykin, David Voykin, Denise Badrane, Don Payne, and all victims of war, terrorism, crime, natural disaster, and all of whom we are unaware.

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

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

Live Streaming

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

To access this page

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

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



Ministry Highlights!

On November 7, we honored our Veterans & First Responders!



Community Highlights Continued

**On October 24, our GOYANS celebrated the birthday of one of our faithful GOYA Advisors: Bessie Palios
God Grant you many years!**



On October 17, Our Hope & Joy Celebrated Its Fall Festival In Costume!





Volunteering Opportunities

Love INC can only serve others through the time, skills and gifts of our volunteers. Join the Love INC Volunteer Team and be a part of an organized interdenominational response to our neighbors in need. New volunteers attend an orientation and are given the opportunity to shadow experienced volunteers to understand our processes and become comfortable with expectations. Please visit <https://forms.gle/XcZzG347u9g4dmr59> to express your interest in volunteering with Love INC of Metro Tampa.

Help Center Volunteer Opportunities: (Available weekdays 9AM-1PM)

Intakes

- Interviewing guests referred for services and verifying application information.

Data Entry & Management

- Administrative duties such as validating and updating resources, data entry, answering phones or scheduling interviews.

Case Management

- Making calls to validated resources to advocate for or connect Love INC guests
- Conducting follow-up calls to check in on guests served to make sure the resources given were appropriate/delivered, ensure that they were treated with respect throughout the process, and to check on their well-being.
- Sending prayer cards and notes of encouragement.

**Although some prefer a specific role, many volunteers take on a combination of roles in the Help Center*

REACH Volunteer Opportunities: (Most classes take place every other Tuesday Evening)

**REACH (Relationships that Equip, Affirm, Challenge and Heal)*

Facilitator

- Facilitates a class or course offering based on personal/professional skills or knowledge
 - with the support of Love INC staff

o Some topic areas include: Professional Development, Mindfulness/Resiliency, Tenant Rights, Landlord Relations, Healthy Cooking on a Budget, Personal Money Management, Navigating Section 8 Housing, Navigating Medicare/Medicaid -
Other topics that will benefit Love INC guests

REACH Mentor

- Attend REACH classes and support attendees by working together to create goals, complete assignments and be in relationship

Childcare

- Provide childcare for REACH attendees and their families during class

Resource Navigators: (Based on guest need and volunteer availability):

- Participate in a one-to-one relationship to mentor, coach and support guests who have long-term challenges and are willing to participate in a success plan to improve their future. We match Navigators with guests based on need, skills of Navigator and faith tradition or church affiliation. Navigators are needed for both the **Love INC guests** and men who are in the **Portico Housing Solutions** program.

Furniture Ministry: (Based on guest need and volunteer availability)

- Volunteer with our Furniture Ministry to pick up, organize and drop off donated gently used furniture to Love INC guests

Prayer Ministry: (Based on volunteer availability)

- Help us to launch our Prayer Ministry by supporting the collection of prayer requests and prayer over those requests

Redemptive Compassion Facilitator: (Based on request and volunteer availability)

- Support Love INC Staff in facilitating Redemptive Compassion courses throughout our network of Churches and the community

Special Skills/Services: (Based on guest need and volunteer availability)

- Any professional skills that may be needed by an individual, family or household. This can include budgeting, legal advice, automobile services and home repairs or skills for the Love INC organization like marketing, media and accounting.

Contribute Financially to Support a Vetted Love INC Guest:

- Occasionally vetted Love INC guests may need financial support while they are in transition to stable housing. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please contact Evan Smith - smith@loveinctampa.org / (407) 221-1931

CREATE YOUR OWN OPPORTUNITY

- Do you have a special skill, talent or idea that you think would benefit Love INC? If so, please contact Evan Smith - esmith@loveinctampa.org / (407) 221-1931

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.



MY WORD 2022



For the past two years, we've encouraged parishioners to identify one word that will shape their year. With 2022 now a month away, it's time to start thinking of the word that will define you in 2022. It is also time to start thinking of a word that will define our parish for 2022. If you have an idea for a word for our parish for 2022, please send it to Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com. Towards the end of December, he will send out a request for individual words to define you for 2022.

Youth Protection Program Reminder:

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



If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi1@gmail.com or (813) 244-5855.

Christmas Prayer Request

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

Handwashing

A PSA from St. John's Nursing Ministry

Handwashing - personal hygiene begins and ends with our hands. And though we're taught as children to wash our hands before dinner, it's important to remember that germs don't care what time of day it is. Effective handwashing is the number one way to prevent the spread of diseases. Let's examine some handy (see what we did there?) tips and information in honor of National Handwashing Awareness Week, which takes place each year during the first week of December.



Do it right

Experts recommend washing your hands with soap and clean water for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to get a good lather going and clean the back of the hands, between the fingers and under the nails. Dry them using a clean towel. There is a lot of science behind these recommendations, so be sure to follow them each time you wash your hands.

Memorize the five steps - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calls hand washing "a do-it-yourself vaccine" and suggests remembering five easy steps: Wet, lather, scrub, rinse, dry.

Learn the Four Principles of Hand Awareness

Endorsed by the American Medical Association and American Academy of Family Physicians, the four principles are: 1) Wash your hands when they are dirty, after using the restroom and before eating; 2) Do not cough or sneeze into hands, use a tissue 4) Don't put your fingers in your eyes, nose or mouth.



Fun Facts

Handwashing equals happiness

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, handwashing can prevent 1 in 3 diarrhea-related illnesses and 1 in 5 infections, including the flu.

Beware the twin killers for kids

Sadly, about 1.4 million children under age 5 die from diarrheal diseases and pneumonia — the two most deadly afflictions for children worldwide.

The dirty secret of public restrooms

The CDC also reports that only 31 percent of men and 65 percent of women washed their hands after using a public restroom.

Handwash your way to health

Using antibiotics creates antibiotic resistance.

Handwashing prevents many sicknesses, so people need less antibiotics. Therefore, less antibiotic resistance.



hands palm to palm



Palm to palm with fingers interlaced



Rub palms and fingers and under nails



in between the fingers



Rub each thumb clasped in opposite hand using a rotational movement



Rub each wrist with opposite hand

Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

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

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

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

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

Help is available for life issues including:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family discord
- Marital problems
- Substance abuse issues
- Behavioral issues



BayCare

Behavioral Health

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 are on Saturdays due to some physical limitations starting at 11:30 am. Look for meeting announcements.
- Our November event was a bus trip to Ocala's Greek Orthodox Monasteries on Nov. 13. It was open to anyone from our Church. We had over 35 people attending.



	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Phoned	27	20	40	20	32	38	37	15
						88		
Left Messages	5	1	3	1	6	9	2	8
Visited	4	1	3	1	7	1	3	2
Sent Cards	1	4	2	4	2	0	6	2
Left Text Messages	3	1	3	1	4	2	8	2

- We wished birthday to Ann Demas, Skip Higdon, Alexandra Ferarolis and Voula Athan.
- We continue to reach out to those who are homebound during the pandemic as part of our Church's Core Values: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, & Service

PLANNED ACTIVITIES

- December Meeting will be a Lenten pot-luck luncheon at the St John Kourmolis Center. We will each bring a Lenten plate to share.

PASSED ACTIVITIES

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

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

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

Beware of Emails or Text Messages Asking for Gift Cards

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

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

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



Fr. Stavros
813-394-1038



Alex
262-370-0586



Fr. John
678-637-4425

STEWARDSHIP REPORT	2021*	2020*
Pledged Year to Date	\$485,943	\$520,330
Received Year to Date	\$467,977	\$480,311
Average Pledge	\$1,320	\$1,417
Median Pledge	\$600	\$700
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	368	392
*YTD as of 11/17/21 & 11/17/20		

Happy Birthday!

Terri Syros - Dec 1

Kyleen Papadakis - Dec 2

Athena Smith - Dec 2

Nick Katzaras - Dec 3

Jason Florou - Dec 6

Nickollet Henderson - Dec 6

Christina Matassini - Dec 6

Nicholas Tsongranis - Dec 6

Athanasios Florou - Dec 7

Samuel Preston - Dec 8

Alexander Roy - Dec 8

Evangelina Chandler - Dec 9

Ashley Korakis - Dec 9

Nicholas Akrotirianakis - Dec 10

Jeffery Edwards - Dec 10

Andrew Fellios - Dec 10

Maryann Rose - Dec 11

Kenny Kane - Dec 12

Barbara Schad - Dec 12

Diana Arnaoutakis - Dec 14

Zoe Skourellos - Dec 14

Antonia Costas - Dec 15

Nadia Farah - Dec 15

Alexander Politis - Dec 15

Margaret Scopelianos - Dec 15

Dawn Cyhan - Dec 18

Helena Karoutsos - Dec 18

George Soteriou - Dec 19

Kyra Frey - Dec 22

John Tsibris - Dec 22

Gregory Dimas - Dec 24

MaryEllen Evdemon - Dec 24

Sophia Ladis - Dec 25

Lacey Richardson - Dec 25

Kenny Henderson - Dec 26

Charlotte Sigety - Dec 27

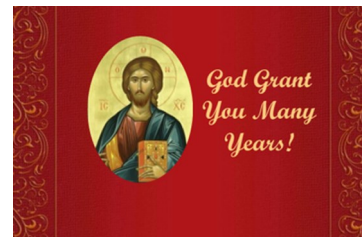
Melanie Axelrod - Dec 28

Philip Kane - Dec 28

Constantine Ameres - Dec 30

Gary Ward - Dec 30

Lucia Yohai - Dec 31



Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Demet & Eleni Anagnostiadis - Bethesda, MD
Nicholas & Doris Andreadakis - Lititz, PA
Andy Apostolopoulos—Ashville, NC
George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL
Nicholas Anton - Dunedin, FL
Gaby & Alicia Atik - Treasure Island, FL
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Richard & Mickie Bass
Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL
Christopher & Jaime Brewer - Tampa, FL
Pete & Carol Caldwell - Ringgold, GA
William Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
William & Kanella Jane Chapman - Ellenton, FL
Nicholas & Sondra Chronis - Mt. Pleasant, SC
Emmanuel Chrysakis - Palm Harbor, FL
Victor & Cynthia Cucuz - Tampa, FL
Fr Stratton & Pres. Denise Dorozenski - Sterling Heights, MI
Eric & Artemis Mellen - Longwood, FL
Elefteria Garos - Palm Harbor, FL
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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
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Tommy Kolouris - Tampa, FL
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Charles Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
John & Deanna Palmer - Greenville, SC
Theodora Pappas Poletis - Nottingham, MD
Luke & Arianna Quinn - Arlington, MA
Nadine Raheb
Pericles & Fotini Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
Lillian Thomas - Dyer, IN
Wesley & Melisa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
Christopher & Georgette Tsavoussis - Dunedin, FL
William Yotis - La Grange, IL

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

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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

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

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

On the Lighter Side

Hallmark Christmas Script

1. Disgruntled single
2. Reluctantly returns to small town
3. Resists obvious romance
4. Experiences “a-ha” moment jarred by Christmas past
5. Kiss by fireplace

Four stages of a man’s life:

1. You believe in Santa
2. You don’t believe in Santa
3. You are Santa
4. You look like Santa

Christmas shopping for your husband is hard, since he got everything when he married you.

Santa has been reading your posts all year. Most of you are getting Bibles and dictionaries.

Deck the halls and not your family fa la la la la la la la.

How to stay financially stable in life:

Step one: Don’t get into LEGO

The end.

What do we learn from Hippopotamuses? That’s it’s impossible to reduce weight by eating green grass and salads and walking.

I burned 2000 calories today. . . That’s the last time I leave brownies in the oven while I take a nap.

This morning, I accidentally changed the GPS voice to “male.” Now it just says, “It’s around here somewhere, keep driving.”

Do you know that awesome feeling when you get into bed, fall right asleep, stay asleep all night and wake up feeling refreshed and ready to take on the day? Yeah, me neither!

Experts: a serving size of chips is 10 chips.

Actual humans: I eat ten chips while standing in the pantry with the bag open, trying to decide if I want to eat chips.

I’m not a morning person or a night person. There are a few minutes in the afternoon where I’m decent and that’s about it.

Conversation with Santa:

~I’ve had a really good year.

~I’ve been okay.

~I haven’t been that bad.

~I’ll get my own gifts.

The Kalamatiano—Greek Dance

Me: You can definitely learn the kalamatiano. Just count to 12.

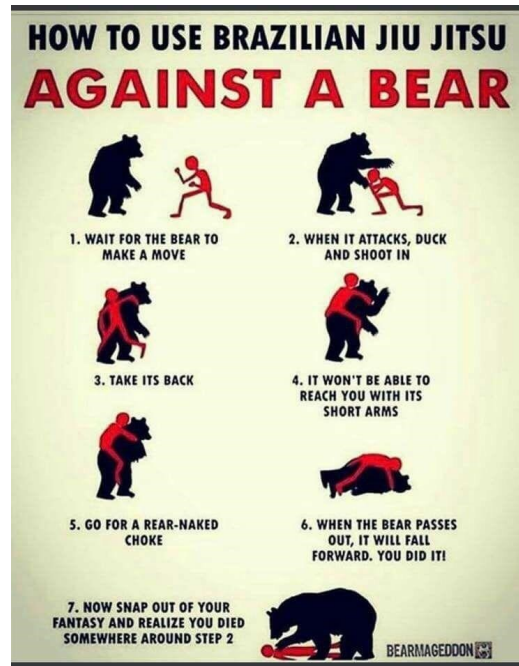
Other Person: But I’m not Greek.

Me: No, I meant count to 12 in English.

When the moon hits your eye

Like it’s 4:45

That’s December!



Sad News from Minnesota

The Pillsbury Doughboy died yesterday of a yeast infection and trauma complications from repeated pokes in the belly. He was 75. Doughboy was buried in a lightly greased coffin. Dozens of celebrities turned out to pay their respects, including Mrs. Butterworth, Hungry Jack, the California Raisins, Betty Crocker, the Hostess Twinkies and

Captain Crunch. The grave side was piled high with many flours. Aunt Jemima delivered the eulogy and loving described Doughboy as a man who never knew how much he was kneaded. Born and bread in Minnesota, Doughboy rose quickly in show business, but his later life was filled with turnovers. He was not considered a very smart cookie, wasting much of his dough on half-baked schemes. Despite being a little flaky at times, he was still a crusty old man and was considered a positive roll model for millions. Doughboy is survived by his wife Play Dough, three children—John Dough, Jane Dough and Dosey Dough, plus they had one in the oven. He is also survived by his elderly father, Pop Tart. The funeral was held at 3:50 for about 20 minutes. If you smiled while reading this, please rise to the occasion and pass it on to someone having a crummy day and kneading a lift.

What do we learn from hippopotamuses?



That it's impossible to reduce weight by eating green grass and salads and walking.

On the Serious Side

Work for a cause, not for applause
Live life to express, not to impress.
Don't strive to make your presence noticed, just make your absence felt.

The biggest lie I tell myself is. . ."I don't need to write that down, I'll remember it."

I think marriage vows need a rebranding. Instead of "I promise to love you forever," it should be "I promise to be accountable and not blame you or try to change you. I promise to make my emotional health a priority. And I promise to show up even when I'm not in the mood." ~Jillian Turecki, from *Third Eye Thoughts*.

The longer you entertain what's not for you, the longer you postpone what is.

Without God, what am I but a guide to my own destruction?
A lie doesn't become truth, wrong doesn't become right, and evil doesn't become good, just because it's accepted by the majority. ~Booker T. Washington

Worry is a conversation you have with yourself about things you cannot change. Prayer is a conversation you have with God about things He can change.

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. ~Winston Churchill

The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work. Hard work is the price we must pay for success. I think you can accomplish anything if you're willing to pay the price. ~Vince Lombardi

Be kind to one another. Say a word or two of encouragement. You never know who may need those gentle reminders more than anything today.

Grandparents

My mom doesn't do everything exactly the way I do. She feeds my children different foods, offers different drinks. They do different things together than we do at home. Sure, sometimes it seems excessive, I mean, does my 3-year-old really need McDonald's AND cookies AND marshmallows toasted over their backyard campfire, all within 24 hours? But here's the thing—it's only for a few days. Or sometimes just a few hours. Maybe my kids will come home wired. That's definitely a possibility. Maybe it will take a day or two to get her back into our home routine. But they will ALSO come home loved, happy, and full of new memories shared with Grandma and Grandpa—memories they will treasure. Their grandparents won't always be with us. And when they leave one day, those memories will be all my children have. So please. . . show grandparents some grace, if not for their sake, for your child's sake. Your child might be thrown off their routine for a short time, but will gain adaptability, treasured memories, and even more love than you alone can provide them. And who doesn't need that?

The first Christmas after you lose someone is hard

You will not feel like celebrating, but you will go along with it for the kids, for the family.
It will hurt.
The presents not bought.
The chair not sat in.
The memories of past Christmases that threaten to steal the joy out of the whole day.
But you will get through it.
You may even raise a smile between the tears.
If you can, thank God for the Christmases you had with them.
Light a candle.
Cry.
Start a new tradition in their memory.

12 Days of Christmas (to the Epiphany)

A way to remember certain Christian tenants?!?!

The partridge in the pear tree, naturally, represents Jesus Christ.

2 Turtle Doves
= The Old and New Testaments

3 French Hens
= Faith, Hope and Charity, the Theological Virtues

4 Calling Birds
= the Four Gospels and/or the Four Evangelists

5 Golden Rings
= The first Five Books of the Old Testament, the "Pentateuch," which gives the history of man's fall from grace.

6 Geese A-laying
= the six days of creation

7 Swans A-swimming
= the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven sacraments

8 Maids A-milking
= the eight beatitudes

9 Ladies Dancing
= the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit

10 Lords A-leaping
= the ten commandments

11 Pipers Piping
= the eleven faithful apostles

12 Drummers Drumming
= the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed

THINK

T Is it true?

H Is it helpful?

I Is it inspiring?

N Is it Necessary?

K Is it kind?

Christmas in the Shadowlands

Bo Stern, [When Holidays Hurt](#)



The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. For those who lived in a land of deep shadows — light! sunbursts of light! — Isaiah 9:2 MSG

This verse is where our story begins. Almost eight centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah told of His coming. The biggest Christmas gift of all time was announced to people who would not live to see the day of its arrival. They wouldn't know the Christmas story in their lifetime. But we can know it.

Though this passage will soon tell us about Jesus, first Isaiah tells us about us. He paints the perfect picture of that brilliant moment when our world collides with His wonder; our darkness is pierced by His light. He didn't come to people who were already spit-shined. He came to those who were buried in darkness, desperate for help, and longing for hope.

Have you been living in the land of deep shadows? I have. I've spent long years in that gray and weary country, and sometimes it makes me feel disqualified from Christmas. Most Christmas carols do not talk about daunting shadows or dreary days. They talk sparkle and shimmer. They talk ho-ho-hoing and mistletoeing, and all of that is fine and fun if you're having a great year. But let's be honest about the fact that this relentless commercialized happiness is not really what lives at the heart of Christmas.

Christmas is deeper than that. It reaches into darker places.

Jesus didn't come to cheer us up; He came into the shadowlands we call home to set us free.

He came to untangle us from the despair that wraps itself around our joy and peace and purpose. It seems, then, that hopelessness is the very first qualification for receiving the bright hope of Christmas. Perhaps you are exactly where you need to be to experience the miracle of Advent after all.



Finding Hidden Hope

Today, when the sun goes down, take a candle and a match into a dark room. Sit in the darkness for a few minutes.

There in the deep blue evening, consider the difficult things you are facing this Christmas. Now light the candle, and look at the way the room changes. What can you see that you couldn't see before? How does the flame flicker through the blackness that used to own the room? If you'd like, this would be a good time to start a journal where you can write down the ways you see His light invade your darkness.

As we enter into the deep days of Advent, keep my heart focused on the real story, the only story that really matters. Send Your light to my darkness, like You did on that first Christmas, so that I can see my place in this season. With my praise and thanksgiving, I will crown You Lord of all.

Angels We Have Heard on High

by Ace Collins,

from [*Stories Behind the Best-Loved Songs of Christmas*](#)

Many images accompany Christmas — fun and frolic, snow and decorations, laughter and family gatherings — images so ingrained in most people’s minds that they find it difficult to imagine the holiday any other way. Yet, in truth, Christmas only recently became the festive holiday we now cherish. For almost fifteen hundred years, the observation of the birth of Jesus was not recognized on every street corner but left to divinely called men who led a hard and demanding life, toiling in poverty and serving people who understood little about the most elementary facets of Scripture and the life of the soul. Yet these men stayed the course and left their fingerprints on every church of every denomination in the world today.

Monks were and still are solitary men, dedicating every ounce of their being to the Lord and giving up their own families to serve the family of God. Their voices were often the only ones who told of the birth of Christ and their lives the only example of Christian faith. Even to those who knew them, monks were mysterious figures. Their world was one of sacrifice, their sense of duty second only to their humble spirit. Yet from this spirit and life came one of the most beautiful and soaring carols of Christmas.

Much like the lives of most monks, “Angels We Have Heard on High” is a song steeped in great mystery. Unlike other carols whose writers are unknown but whose origins can be clearly traced to a certain time or certain place, this song seemingly appeared out of the air. Because the first to sing “Angels We Have Heard on High” lived in nineteenth century France, many believe that it must have originated there. In fact, most sources today call it a French carol. Yet even that assumption is often called into question by songologists. What can be stated with absolute certainty is that this Christmas song must have been penned by a person who had a professional knowledge of the Bible and an incredible gift for taking Scripture and reshaping it into verse. This fact, combined with the use of Latin in the song’s chorus — making it a macaronic carol — seems to indicate that a monk or priest from the Catholic church was more than likely responsible for writing “Angels We Have Heard on High.”

*Angels we have heard on high, Sweetly singing o’er the plains,
And the mountains, in reply, Echoing their joyous strains.*

Chorus:

*Gloria in excelsis Deo, Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say what may the tidings be, Which inspire your heav’nly song?*

Chorus

*Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King.*

Chorus

*See within a manger laid, Jesus, Lord of heav’n and earth!
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, With us sing our Savior’s birth.*

Chorus

Because the first published versions of the song used French for the verses, many have naturally assumed that its writer was a priest from France. Yet there is evidence that at least part of this great Christmas hymn was sung before Christianity took deep root in western Europe. A portion of the carol was used in early Christian church services even before the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as the state religion.

“Angels We Have Heard on High” was first published in 1855 in the French songbook *Nouveau recueil de cantiques, and records indicate that the song had been used in church masses for more than fifty years before that publication. During those five decades the lyrics were coupled with the melody that is still used today. Except for the verses translated into languages other than French, today the song is sung just as it was a hundred and fifty years ago. Yet for maybe a thousand years or more before that, monks probably sang this same song as they celebrated the birth of the Savior. The story may well be as old as the church itself.*

The song’s four verses embrace the angels’ visit to the lowly shepherds and the shepherds’ response. For many biblical scholars, the angels coming to men who worked menial jobs in the fields and informing them of the birth of the Son of God symbolizes that Christ came for all people, rich or poor, humble or powerful. The angels’ words in Luke 2, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people,” paired with Jesus’ own parables concerning shepherds and their flocks, symbolizes that it would be the common man and not kings or religious leaders who would first carry the story of Jesus’ life to the masses.

But while the shepherds’ story of why they came to see the babe in the manger is easily identified in all the stanzas, for many who sing this old song, the chorus is an enigma. “Gloria in excelsis Deo” means, in English, “Glory to God in the highest,” a phrase that played an important part of worship at church masses dating back to 130 A.D. During that period, Pope Telesphorus issued a decree that on the day of the Lord’s birth all churches should have special evening services. He also ordered that, at these masses, after the reading of certain Scripture or the conclusion of specific prayers, the congregation should always sing the words “Gloria in excelsis Deo.” Historical church documents reveal that monks carried this executive order throughout the land and that by the third century it was a practice used by most churches at Christmas services.



Continued...

It can be argued that if the chorus was written within a hundred years of Christ's birth, the roots of "Angels We Have Heard on High" might go back to someone who actually knew Jesus when He walked on earth. Though unproved, it is a very interesting and inspiring idea and ties in to the selfless image of a called member of the clergy bringing faith alive in order to spread the message of Jesus Christ's birth, life, and death.

Another facet of this carol that would seem to tie at least its chorus to the very early Catholic church is the range of notes found in the chorus. While most modern carols move up and down and cover at least an octave and a half, thus testing the upper or lower limits of the average singer, the phrase "Gloria in excelsis Deo" barely moves at all. In addition, the melody used by the song never strays more than one octave and the verse moves through only six notes. This simplicity seems to tie the melody to early chants used by monks and taught to their congregations.

Webster defines a chant as "singing or speaking in a monotone to a hymnlike repetitive melody." Using this approach, important elements of worship were passed on from person to person and generation to generation in the oral tradition. In a day when few read words — much less music — chants helped keep the gospel alive among the common people. Of all the carols born in the chanting tradition, "Angels We Have Heard on High," was one of the easiest and least challenging, despite the fact that the word "gloria" covers three measures and hits almost twenty different notes. Unlike others, which failed to inspire as they taught, this song lifted hearts while telling the story. It embraced the spirit that a called man of God would have felt as he gave up everything to serve his Lord.

So why has this carol of unknown origin remained so popular for so long? Though the tune may be considered monotonous, when the simple text is read it becomes obvious that few Christmas songs so fully describe the joy that the world felt when a Savior was born in Bethlehem.

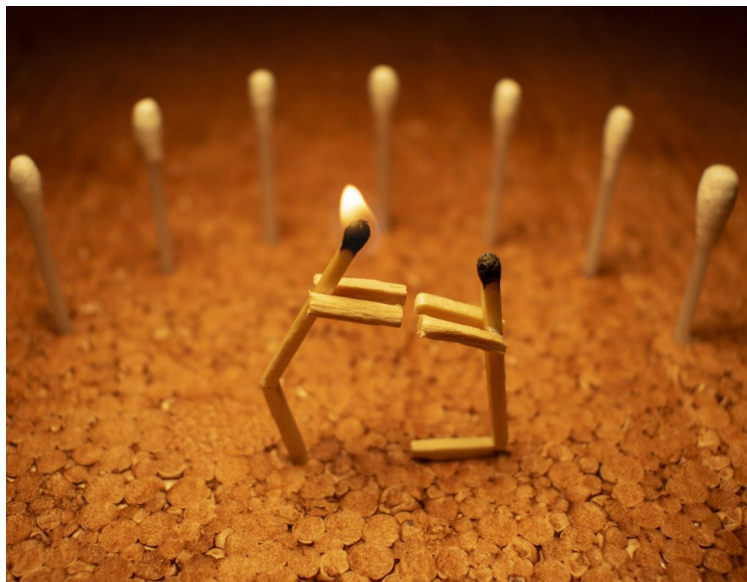
The lyrics don't just ask the singer to lift up his or her eyes and heart in wonder and observe the beauty of what God has given the world, they demand it. There can be no doubt that whoever wrote "Angels We Have Heard on High" not only believed the words found in the Bible, but relished that belief.

Ultimately, it is the sensitive retelling of the angel-shepherd story that carries this song and has made it one of the world's most popular Christmas carols. As Kenneth W. Osbeck wrote in his devotional book, *Amazing Grace*, "The Bible teaches



that angels are the ministering servants of God and that they are continually being sent to help and protect us, the heirs of salvation. "Angels We Have Heard on High" speaks of the incredible, special relationship between Heaven and earth, God and man, like few songs ever have. It embraces one of the most important elements of faith just as the shepherds embraced the Good News they were given two thousand years ago.

The mystery of who wrote this song points back to the lives of all those who are called to spread the gospel, to keep the story alive, to provide a means for people everywhere to hear and know the message that came to earth on that first Christmas. One of those nameless servants wrote this song to share the story with others. Though he has long been forgotten, what he believed is alive in not only his song but in hundreds of millions of souls around the world. His prayer has been answered: the angels are still heard, the Savior still welcomed, and the soul still stirred.



Litany of Humility

O Jesus! Meek and humble of heart, hear me.
Deliver me, Jesus,

From the desire of being esteemed,

From the desire of being loved,

From the desire of being extolled

From the desire of being honored,

From the desire of being praised,

From the desire of being preferred to others,

From the desire of being consulted,

From the desire of being approved,

From the fear of being humiliated,

From the fear of being despised,

From the fear of suffering rebukes,

From the fear of being calumniated,

From the fear of being forgotten,

From the fear of being ridiculed,

From the fear of being wronged,

From the fear of being suspected,

That other may be loved more than I,

That others may be esteemed more than I,

That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase
and I may decrease,

That others may be chosen and I set aside,

That others may be praised and I unnoticed,

That others may be preferred to me in everything,

That others may become holier than I, provided that I
may become as holy as I should,

Jesus, Grant me the grace to desire it.

◀ Nov 2021	December 2021					Jan 2022 ▶	
	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
**Fast Day Philoptochos Spanakopita sale 12/12 and 12/19	GOYA Community Christmas Card 12/5, 12/12			1 **	2 ** St. Porphyrios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	3 **	4 ** St. Barbara Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Christ the King / Metropolitan Ministries Community Outreach
5 ** St. Savas Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. The Chosen Discussion (After Church) Stewardship Sunday Luncheon	6 ** St. Nicholas Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study-Fr. John 6:30 p.m.	7 ** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	8 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	9 ** St. Anna Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	10 **	11 ** Sunday School Program Rehearsal & Party 11:00-3:00 p.m.	
12 ** St. Spyridon Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Sunday school Christmas program Philoptochos benefit luncheon Parish Council Elections GOYA 5:00 p.m.	13 ** Bible Study-Fr. John 6:30 p.m.	14 ** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Parish Council In Person Meeting 6:30 p.m.	15 ** St. Eleftherios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	16 ** Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	17 ** AHEPA Scholarship Dinner—Kourmolis Center	18 ** St. Sebastian Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young at Heart	
19 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	20 ** St. Ignatios Orthros 6:45 a.m. Liturgy 7:30 a.m. Christmas Candlelight & Day of Prayer 6:00 p.m.	21 ** College Student Dinner/ Discussion 6:00 p.m.	22 ** St. Anastasia Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	23 ** Royal Hours 9:30 a.m.	24 ** Nativity of Christ Vespers 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Orthros 5:30 p.m. Liturgy 7:00 p.m. Office Closed	25 Nativity of Christ Office Closed	
26 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	27 No Fasting until January 5, 2022 Office Closed	28	29	30 St. Anyisia Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	31 Office Closed		

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

2418 W. Swann Avenue

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

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frstav@gmail.com

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813-876-8830 (Office)

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

Pastoral Assistant Alex Limberatos
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alex@stjohntpa.org

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

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

Adopt a College Student
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

Adult Greek School
Magda Myer 813-523-5771

AHEPA
Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319

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

Altar Boys
Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Bookstore
Presbyteria Denise Stefero 678-464-4833

Bible Study
Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425

Buildings & Grounds
Euripides Panos 813-352-3972

Chantor
Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586

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

Community Outreach
Greg Melton 813-967-2074

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

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

Daughters of Penelope
Diane Trimis 813-220-3389

Festival
Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

Finance Committee
Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Food Pantry
Sheila Vukmer 412-719-1005

GriefShare
Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

Gasparilla Parking
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

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

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

Junior Olympics
Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

MOMS
Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

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

Parish Nursing Ministry
Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026

Oratorical Festival
Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Photography Ministry
Karina Findlay 813-476-9632

Philoptochos
Melissa Krinos 813-716-9975

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

Sunday School
Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102

Usher
Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

Website / Social Media / APP
VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

Welcoming Ministry
Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Women's Bible Study
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Young Adult/OCF
Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586

Young at Heart
Mike Trimis, President 813-784-4872
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12 Disciples
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“May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” From the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.