

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*

April 2022

VISION:

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

MISSION:

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

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Fr. Stavros' Message

A Good Defense (Apology) Will Starts with Knowledge and Succeeds with Conviction

The purpose of my message this month is not to be depressing, but motivating. As usual, I will touch on a variety of topics and tie them all together at the end. So find a comfortable chair, put up your feet and I hope you'll get something out of this message.

On March 14, I turned 50. That's a significant milestone for two reasons. It means that I have lived for half a century, that I'm closer to 100 than I am to zero. And it means that I am very likely closer to death than to birth. More than likely I will not live to be 100. So, more than likely I'm now for sure on the down side of my life. Both my parents passed away at age 78. If my lifespan mirrors theirs, there is almost 2/3 of my life behind me.

Now a person can look at this in any number of ways. One could be depressed that more than half the sand is out of the hourglass of their life. Or one could be more purposeful with the time he or she has left. One could stop and savor the moments and smell the roses. One could be more motivated to accomplish goals. One could be more motivated to learn. And one should be more motivated to prepare, for the "good defense (apology)" before the awesome judgment seat of Christ that will determine where one will spend not his or her next half century, but where he or she will spend eternity.



Fr. Stavros Receiving
Communion at 10:57 a.m.

This petition is offered at every Divine Liturgy. The words "Kalin apologian" are translated as "a good defense." The word "apologia" means "apology", but not in the sense of saying we are sorry, but rather in the sense of defending our lives and what we did with them. An "apologist" is one who argues and

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defends a position. In the early centuries, Christian “apologists” defended the faith, in front of emperors and in front of Ecumenical Councils, often in the face of threat to their own lives. They made a case for the truth of Christianity. And many were martyred as a result.

The most important thing we will EVER do is make an “apology” of our life before the awesome judgment seat of Christ. All the other important things we do—marriage, parenting, job, friends, hobbies, even faith—are things we do in preparation for that eventual “apology.” Christ tells us that He will stand in judgment of every human life, and those who are deemed worthy will go to the resurrection of eternal life and those who are deemed unworthy will go to the resurrection of eternal punishment.

In the first half-century of our lives, it is safe to say we probably spend most of our time figuring out who we are. We spend our youth deciding what we are good at—which sport, which subject in school, which extracurricular activity. We go to college to figure out the kind of job we are going to have. Next, we try to figure out who the person is we will marry, what job we will have, what part of the country we’ll live in, whether we want to buy a home, how many kids to have. We spend our 30s and 40s trying to figure out how to be a good parent and a good spouse, striving for promotions at work, trying to save time for fun and leisure, and many of us obsess with money. In the first half-century, most of us thankfully do not have significant health problems (though some do). We think about where we might like to go but not about how it all ends.

The second half-century of life I would think is different. I’m married, have a child, have decided on my career path, have a house, am hoping not to get “promoted”, etc. Certainly I want to see our son graduate from high school, go to college and prepare for a career. But I’m guessing the thoughts of the second half of life will be dominated more by “how does this all end?” How long will I work? Will I finish in this city? Will I want to retire? What will that be like? Will I have enough money to retire? Will my health hold out? How long will I live? Will the last

years be hard? Will it hurt to die? And...



Icon of the Last Judgement

Will I be prepared to stand before the awesome judgment seat of Christ? Will I have a good apology/defense of my life? Will He judge me worthy to enter into His Kingdom? Will He say the words I hope I will hear—“Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord?”

Some of you reading this message are young—maybe you are a teenager, maybe you are in college, maybe you are a young adult just starting out. And you are thinking more of how you’ll start than where you’ll finish. The challenge for you is this. . .

For all of my life, I have been a Christian. Maybe not the best Christian, maybe not the most consistent Christian, but I’ve shown up for Christ. I learned about Christ from childhood. I stuck with the church during the years when many of my peers were dropping out. I stayed despite the questions and doubts (which I still have, by the way), and now as I enter the second half-century of life, I am in a decent position to at least ask those questions about eternity, and hopefully in a decent position to answer them, or at least work towards a good answer to them. If I had dropped out of the church, if I had stopped believing in God, if I had stopped “showing up” when it got hard, I wouldn’t be considering these heavy questions. It would still be just about making money and having fun. There would be no ultimate destination, which would mean there would ultimately be no purpose, and no meaning.

Why share this as a message for the month of April leading up to Holy

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Week? Because I realize that I have more Holy Weeks in the rearview mirror than over the horizon. And so I want to savor them, and use them to learn as much as I can, so that I can feel more convicted about the faith, so that I can prepare for the good apology before the awesome judgment seat of Christ. Because. . .

A Good Defense (Apology) Will Starts with Knowledge and Succeeds with Conviction.

In Exodus 12, we read about the tenth plague that afflicted the Egyptians, the death of the first born sons. The children of Israel, (God's chosen people) had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. Think about that, 16 generations of slavery. They had long forgotten what it was like to be free. And many had probably long forgotten about God. After all, it is hard to muster up praise in the midst of oppression. God had chosen Moses to lead the people of Israel. He told Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand that he let the people go. Nine times Moses went to Pharaoh. And nine times Pharaoh's heart was hardened against Israel. He would not let the people go. God told Moses that this tenth plague would be the plague that caused Pharaoh to finally let the people go. He told Moses that the people needed to spread the blood of a lamb over the door posts of their homes. The lamb needed to be without blemish, and the lambs would be slaughtered outside the wall of the city on a Friday afternoon. Here is what it says in Exodus 12:12-14:

For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments; I AM the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance forever.

Thus, the Jewish Feast of Passover was established, for Passover marked the day when the angel of the Lord "passed over" the houses of the

Israelites and spared them from death. The Hebrews were to keep this feast each year, to remember what the Lord had done for them. Because as the years passed by and the generations continued, if the feast were not remembered, it might be forgotten.

As an aside, look at some of the holidays we celebrate in America. Most of them are just days off where we have social engagements. Does anyone really read about American Independence on July 4, or remember the end of World War I on Memorial Day? When we are not intentional about remembering the events that caused these days to be established, it is easy to see how their original meaning can be distorted or forgotten altogether.

Jesus was crucified on a Friday afternoon, during the feast of Passover. He was the Lamb of God, without blemish, killed outside of the city wall, just like the Passover lamb. In fact, He was killed at the same hour that the Passover lambs were being prepared. When He rose from the dead, He inaugurated a new feastday, the Resurrection. He inaugurated a new Sabbath, for now we do not honor God on the 7th day of the week, but on the first day, which in Greek is "Kyriaki," the "Day of the Lord." Christ is the New Passover, because by His blood we are saved. The Hebrew word for Passover is Pascha, which is the Orthodox word that describes the Resurrection. So Christ is the New Pascha, the New Passover.

Just like with the first Passover, we are to keep this day, Pascha, forever, throughout our generations, in order to remember what Christ did for us. The Holy Week journey is a long, deliberate, purposeful and intentional journey, not just recounting the events of the week of Christ's Passion, but also touching on all of our Orthodox theology. Throughout the services, we will hear references to the Virgin Mary, the Nativity, the Holy Spirit, the second coming, the talents we've each been given, repentance, betrayal, darkness and light, tragedy and triumph.

As I said, I most likely have more Holy Week journeys in my rearview mirror than over my horizon in life. That is not the case with everyone in our parish, but it most likely

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is the case with me. Even if you are just starting out in your life, we will all each have a finite number of Holy Week journeys during our life on each. This is why it is important to savor each Holy Week, because we will each experience only a finite number of them. There is no way to do something with conviction if we don't first have knowledge about it. The hope this Holy Week is to again have an infusion of knowledge so that we leave from the journey with an infusion of conviction.

I'll be honest, after the last two years, and the struggles we've had in our world, and honestly, in our own parish, it feels a little bit hallow to mark these days, and to do these rituals. One week during our HABITS series, the theme was "Affirm Your Faith." We discussed that faith is not just what we believe, but how we act. For instance, most people have faith that a parachute will slow down a fall. However, most people will not jump out of a plane with a parachute on. Many people's expression of the Christian faith is like this. They have no problem believing, but acting on the belief is something altogether different. For instance, we affirm every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Will Be Done," and yet when it comes down to it, we don't really want God's will to happen if it conflicts with our will. In the same prayer, we pray "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We can only hope that God doesn't actually hold us to that either, as many of us carry grudges or forgive half-heartedly.

It's hard to think about the Triumph of Orthodoxy on the Sunday of Orthodoxy when we have two Orthodox countries at war with one another. The triumphant entry of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday seems rather bland when we have a pedestrian attitude towards Christ. The celebration of Pascha is based on the belief that Christ bestows life to those in the tombs. And yet, as we get closer to the end of life, we fight it with every fiber of our being, hesitant commit our spirits into the hands of God, as Christ did on the cross.

Holy Week will again remind us who we are, what we are created to be, where we are going and why it matters. And hopefully once Holy

Week is over, it will spawn more action, purpose and intentionality in our lives.

The Protestant Churches have a tradition of the church revival, a week where there are extra services and sermons to help people revive in their faith. Their history recounts traveling preachers going to various places and setting up tents to accommodate overflowing numbers of people for an annual revival of faith. We have this revival provided for us each year in the Holy Week journey. Each service has petitions that will prompt us to pray for things that concern us and our whole world. For a week, every day we will be prompted to remember to pray for peace in the world, for our city and our country, for the forgiveness of our own sins, and for a Christian end to our lives. The hope is that having had this infusion of prayer, we will go out and work for peace, work on our own sins, and work toward the good apology of our lives before God's awesome judgment seat. We won't just be content with the knowledge that a parachute works, we'll be motivated to jump out of the plane.

Along the way, we'll receive a dose of healing through Holy Unction, and many doses of Christ through Holy Communion. We'll be able to pray at the foot of the cross and in front of the tomb. We'll offer a memorial service for those who have fallen asleep. We will hear dozens of Gospel reading and hundreds of hymns that will again remind us what we believe, who we are, where we are going and why it all matters. And



we will conclude the week receiving the light of Christ again. The first thing God made was light. We will hear that light always shines in the darkness. And then we will

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receive the light, and either relighting the candle of our souls, or if your light is already burning brightly, allowing it to burn even more brightly.

Life is hard. The stress in everyday living is palpable. God did not make us for stress. He didn't make us to be rich. He didn't make us to have fun. He made us to glorify Him, to share in Him, and ultimately to be with Him. This is our purpose, this is our destiny if we choose it. So, let us make this Holy Week journey again with purpose and with humility. Let us come with open hearts that are ready to be filled with an infusion of Him.

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Fr. Stavros and Presvytera Lisa at Holy Cross Seminary

I am thankful for my fifty years of life. In June of this year, I'll mark 25 years of ordained ministry. I was telling someone the other day that if our lives last 100 years, we can divide them up the way someone divides up four years of college. The first quarter of life, or the first year of college, is spent

trying to figure out what exactly you want to study. The second and third quarters of life, or the second and third years of college, are spent focusing on your major concentration of study, or in the case of life, on the work you have chosen to do. The final year of college is spent preparing

for what comes after. And the final quarter of life should be spent preparing for what comes after. The difference between college and life is that we never actually know when the last quarter of life is. So we've got to have some thought to the last quarter of life even when we are in the first quarter of it. And even though I'm still in the prime of life, I have to give some thought and I am giving some thought to how it ends and am I ready. The truth is, I am not ready. I hope to live a lot longer. But I also hope to prepare much more thoroughly. This Holy Week gives me, and us, a chance to learn more, learn again, commit again, and commit more deeply. It's a chance to pack the parachute again, and hopefully muster the courage to jump out of the plane. It's a chance to strengthen our faith again, and hopefully muster the courage to live it more purposefully.

Have a blessed Holy Week and a Kali Anastasi!

With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros



Fr. Stavros' ordination to the Priesthood
(Fr. Stavros, Presvytera Lisa, and Father's parents)

Praying “Through” The Lord’s Prayer

In Father John’s Monday evening Bible Study, we have been discussing the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer. Two versions are found in the New Testament. One is in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 6, verses 8-13 and another in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 11, Verses 2-4.

While most of us say this prayer on a daily basis, too often we may recite it so quickly that we don’t really think about the meaning of each phrase. Jesus gave His disciples the Lord’s Prayer to show them how to pray, using the words He provided as an outline. It is a model prayer that is to be “prayed through.” It was Christ saying, “Pray in this way,” “here’s how you should pray,” “pray like this.” Christ was giving the points of essence of the believer’s prayer, but it is the *responsibility of the believer to develop the prayer.*

One way to do so is to say each phrase of the Lord’s Prayer and then stop to think about why we are praying these words and what they mean to us. For example, when we address God as “Our Father,” what does it mean to us personally to see Him as Our Father? What is our relationship with Him? Why is it a privilege to call Him ‘Father’? Or when we pray “Who art in heaven,” what do we picture heaven to be like? What will it take for us to be in heaven?



The members of our Bible Study were asked to develop a prayer using just the phrase “Our Father.” Given their permission, I would like to share the prayers from two of our members below:

“Our Father – I address Him as Lord, God, Father. He is the Creator of all. He sees and knows everything at all times. He is my Lord, my God and my FATHER when I pray. He knows me and sees me and is with me all the

time. He understands my struggles, sees my efforts. He always provides and loves me unconditionally. I have no fear to come to Him in prayer with all my faults and sins. I know that He is merciful and gracious but I must humble myself as I approach Him. I ask for His will to be done in my life and acknowledge my weakness. I PRAISE – GIVE THANKS- and SURRENDER TO HIS WILL and then ask for what is needed. HE ALWAYS PROVIDES.”

by Ekaterini Mangarides

“Our heavenly Father, we praise You by singing hymns to Your Name to express our gratitude for Your endless love, Your great compassion, and Your infinite patience that You show to us. Even though You know that we do not follow Your pathway, that we constantly sin, that we do not always practice Your commandments and Your holy will, You are merciful. Heavenly Father, teach us, show us by illuminating our mind, so we can become better children of Yours. We need to heal our troubled soul. Our hope and salvation comes only from You. We will never stop praising and glorifying You Father, with Your Son, and Your Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.”

by Theodora Morgan

As you can see from their beautiful and heartfelt prayers, Ekaterini and Theodora *developed* their own prayers and ‘*prayed through*’ the first phrase in the Lord’s Prayer. These are examples of concentrating on what we are praying, feeling what we are praying, and pouring out our souls to our loving God.

It is important for each of us to have a rule of prayer – to set time aside to talk with and listen to our Lord and Savior. While using a prayer book and the Holy Scriptures aid us in this experience, it is sometimes also beneficial to say a shorter prayer (emphasizing quality over quantity), to concentrate more intently on the words we are praying, and to really talk with God on a personal level from the depth of our heart and soul. For truly He DOES hear us and will grant what is best for our salvation.

With love in Christ,

Father John

H.A.B.I.T.S. and Pre-Sanctified Liturgy

This Lent, we are focusing on the word HABITS. Over the six weeks of Great Lent, we are going to use this word, HABITS, as an acronym for how to a) get something out of this Lenten period; b) get back to the basics of what believe; c) have a better idea of some practical applications of Christianity to our everyday lives; and d) to create new HABITS so that when Lent is over, we haven't made radical but temporary changes, but instead have made some small but permanent ones. Each Sunday will highlight a different letter in our acronym HABITS. We will do so, as follows:

H Have a plan
A Affirm your faith
B Be a Friend
I Intentionally choose Him
T Trust Him
S Surrender to Him



The topic will be introduced each Sunday in the sermon. On Wednesdays, we will resume the pre-Sanctified Liturgy Lenten dinners. At each dinner, Fr. Stavros will offer a presentation to expound on what was introduced the previous Sunday, offering some practical application of each part to our everyday life. And following each presentation, there will be a small group discussion with guided question. The Wednesday evening schedule will be as follows:

6:00 p.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy

7:15 p.m. Dinner (provided by our ministries)

7:45 p.m. Presentation by Fr. Stavros

8:15 p.m. Small Group Discussion

8:45 p.m. Final thoughts, wrap up and closing prayer

9:00 p.m. Depart for home

Our topics will be as follows:

Sunday, April 3/Wednesday, April 6 Trust Him

On the fourth Sunday of

Lent, we hear a man plea to Christ to heal his son. He confesses to Christ, "I believe! Help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24) If we are honest, this is where we all are at least some of the time. We believe something or we wouldn't be part of this church or reading this message. When life gets hard and perplexing, we all struggle to stay strong in our belief. This week will focus on trusting God at all times.

Sunday, April 10/Wednesday, April 13 Surrender to Him

The ultimate expression of Christ's love was to surrender His life on the cross. Our ultimate expression of faith in Christ is to surrender our life to Him. What does that look like and how do we do it? Come for our last session and find out.

The dinners for each week will be sponsored as follows:

Wednesday, April 6 Sunday School

Wednesday, April 13 Parish Council

Each ministry is asked to bring Lenten dishes and help to serve the dinner.



Guidelines for the Remainder of Great Lent

Divine Liturgy to begin at 9:45 on the Sundays of Great Lent

Because the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is offered on each Sunday of Lent, and this Divine Liturgy is slightly longer than the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the Divine Liturgy will begin at 9:45 a.m. from March 6-April 17. The choir will begin the Doxology at 9:35 a.m.

Mondays of Lent - Great Compline

The service of the Great Compline will be read on the following Mondays of Lent—April 4 and April 11. This service lasts about an hour and consists of Psalms and hymns of repentance. Service Books for this service will be available.

Wednesdays of Lent – 9th Hour and Pre-Sanctified Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts (also called Pre-Sanctified Liturgy) will be held on the Wednesdays during Great Lent. This service consists of Vespers with Holy Communion that was “Pre-Sanctified” the previous Sunday. It is an opportunity to receive Holy Communion frequently during the season of fasting. The Pre-Sanctified Liturgy is preceded by the reading of the 9th Hour, a short service with penitential prayers as well as the recitation of the Creed, a pre-requisite for the reception of Holy Communion. Service books for this service will be available. The Pre-Sanctified Liturgy will be celebrated on the following Wednesdays of Great Lent: Wednesday, April 10 and Wednesday, April 13

Fridays of Lent - An Additional Pre-Sanctified Liturgy

The Pre-Sanctified Liturgy has Traditionally been celebrated on Wednesdays AND Fridays of Great Lent. In many churches, the practice of celebrating the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy on Fridays has been curtailed. Because we now have additional clergy available to serve our parish and because there is a greater need for less attended services, we are going to add the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy each Friday of Lent. The 9th Hour will begin at 9:30 a.m., with the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy from 10:00-11:15 a.m. The Pre-Sanctified Liturgy will be held on the Fridays of Lent as follows: Friday, April 1; Friday, April 8 and Friday, April 15

Fridays of Lent - The Salutations to the Virgin Mary (Heretismoi)

This service also lasts about an hour and is a series of prayers and devotions that invoke the intercessions of the Virgin Mary for our salvation. It will be held on April 1 and 8. Service Books for this service will be available.

Sunday, April 3 - Fourth Sunday of Lent - St. John Climacus

St. John of the Ladder was only 16 years old when he left Palestine and went to St. Catherine’s monastery (at Mt. Sinai, Egypt). He lived there for 50 years, where he wrote his famous book, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. This is a spiritual ladder. Christians follow certain rules so that they can get closer to God, and symbolically climb to heaven. He had struggles, like any person does, but he won over those struggles that the Devil put for him. That’s why we celebrate his memory on this Sunday of Lent. St. John is a perfect example of how a person could be faithful all of their life, and be together with God in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Friday, April 8 - Vigil of the Akathist

It is the tradition of the Orthodox Church (practiced in monasteries and in a few parishes) that the Akathist Hymn is celebrated as part of an all-night vigil, culminating in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. A Vigil is when more than one service is held in sequence. We will begin the Akathist Hymn at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, April 12, followed by the Divine Liturgy at 8:15 p.m., with both services concluding by 9:30 p.m. This will afford us the opportunity to pray the Divine Liturgy together in a more subdued atmosphere (and how often do we get to celebrate Liturgy at night in our church?) and to receive Holy Communion on this very special feast day. For those who wish to receive Holy Communion, please abstain from food after 2:00 p.m. on that Friday.

Sunday, April 10– Fifth Sunday of Lent - St. Mary of Egypt

St. Mary of Egypt was anything but a Saint throughout the first part of her life. From a very young age, she was a prostitute. Being from Egypt, she decided that she wanted to see the Holy Land and the Tomb of Christ (also known as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre). As she went to enter the Church, a force kept her from entering. She was unable to enter, while so many others did. She realized that God had done this to have her stop her sinning. She promised to God that day she would stop. She repented with a pure heart, and she was allowed to enter. She went for Confession, received Holy Communion, and then went to the desert to live for years in repentance. Years later, she was visited by a Priest-monk, Zosimos (later a Saint in our Church). He gave her Holy Communion, and they discussed her trials and tribulations. Although she suffered much, she was so happy to be with Christ. Later that same day, she fell asleep in the Lord. Her example of repentance is SO great, we commemorate her life many centuries later.

Why does Liturgy seem longer on Sundays during Lent?

Because it is. It is the Tradition of the Church to celebrate the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great on the 5 Sundays of Great Lent, Holy Thursday morning, and Holy Saturday morning. St. Basil wrote his liturgy in the middle part of the 4th century. St. John Chrysostom would later edit some of the priestly prayers of St. Basil’s liturgy, significantly shortening them. The Anaphora of St. Basil (from the Creed until right before the Lord’s Prayer) has the priestly prayers significantly longer. They contain all the theology of the Orthodox Church. A copy of the “Anaphora” of St. Basil’s Liturgy has been placed in the pews for you to use on Sundays.

Sacrament of Confession

Many people have already made appointments for their confessions to be heard, many for the first time in their lives. It is confidential. It helps you reconnect with God and unburden yourself of guilt. It helps you to make a new start in your spiritual journey and is an integral part of any successful Lenten journey. If you have questions about confession, please ask. There is no better way to prepare for Pascha than to receive this sacrament. Confessions will be heard up to April 15, and then again after Pascha. Please make your appointment as soon as possible, because our priests like to give people whatever time they need. As it gets closer to Holy Week and more and more people are coming, they must go quicker, and it is very important not to be rushed in this Sacrament. **Both Fr. John Stefero and Fr. Stavros are available to hear confessions. You can contact them directly to make appointments.**

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Guidelines for Holy Week

Saturday of Lazarus—April 16

Father Stavros will do the Proskomide (service of preparation of the Holy Gifts) on the solea at 9:30 a.m. This is an excellent opportunity for those who have never seen this service, especially our children, to learn how the Holy Gifts are prepared before each Liturgy. Father Stavros will offer the service and narrate while he is doing it.

Making Palms Crosses

Making Palm crosses will return this year. We haven't done this since 2019 and we are excited to do it again. We will have a free breakfast after the Divine Liturgy on Saturday of Lazarus, April 16, and will make Palm Crosses after the breakfast. Many hands make light work, so please come for Liturgy, breakfast and making Palm Crosses.

Palm Sunday afternoon—The Vespers of Holy Monday—

There is a short vespers service of Holy Monday that is generally suppressed in parish usage. We have done this the past two years and will continue this year as well. The Bridegroom Service is done Palm Sunday night. The Vespers of Holy Monday is the transition from the joy of Palm Sunday to the sorrow of Holy Week. The service begins with bright colors, green for Palm Sunday, and in the middle of the service, the colors change to the dark purple of Holy Week. The service will be from 5:00-5:45 p.m., with the Bridegroom Service beginning at 6:30 p.m. A text of this service will be posted on the website and made available to the community via email.

Why are the services at night during Holy Week called Matins Services, even though they are taking place during the evening hours?

Traditionally, the Matins or Orthros is done in the early morning hours, ending with the sunrise, when the Great Doxology is sung or read. The Orthros or Matins Services of Holy Week are VERY long, lasting almost three and a half hours. During the Middle Ages, the services were transposed ahead several hours, from the early morning hours to the evening of the preceding night. Thus, the Orthros of Good Friday was moved to Holy Thursday evening, the 12 Gospels and the Procession of the Crucified Christ. The Lamentations, which is the Orthros of Holy Saturday was moved from Saturday morning to Friday night. The Vespers services, was moved from Holy Thursday evening to Holy Thursday morning. Our services commemorate events about 12 hours before they happened in real time, with the Last Supper Holy Thursday morning, the Crucifixion Holy Thursday evening, etc. The Descent from the Cross on Friday afternoon remains at its proper time, as a Vespers service, but the interval between the Vespers of Friday afternoon and the Orthros of Holy Saturday does not. The Resurrection Service takes place at the proper time. The schedule of transposing services begins Palm Sunday when we celebrate Orthros and Liturgy in the morning and then in the evening, we celebrate Vespers (appropriately in the evening) and immediately after the Orthros (Bridegroom service). From then on, we are approximately 12 hours ahead in what would have been happening during Holy Week. The Vespers of Good Friday afternoon are at the appropriate time. Then the Lamentations (Orthros of Holy Saturday) is celebrated a couple of hours later. We finally catch up with Pascha, celebrated in the middle of the night, the same hour as the Resurrection happened.

Pre-Sanctified Liturgy on Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, and Holy Wednesday mornings.

These three Pre-Sanctified Liturgies include important Scripture readings—from Exodus, from Job and from the Gospels. The Gospel readings are the last teachings of Jesus to His disciples on Holy Mon-

day and Holy Tuesday. The Gospel of Holy Wednesday morning is the first act of the Passion, the betrayal by Judas. The Scripture readings of these services are an important part of the Holy Week narrative.

Holy Unction

The Mystery of Holy Unction is established upon the words and actions of our Lord Jesus Christ and is a sacrament of the church. This is a sacrament of healing and transformation from a bruised and hurt world to the deliverance from sin and corruption. All sacraments of the church are administered by the priests of the church. In fact, the primary role and identity of the priests of the church is to be the celebrant of the sacraments. Because of this, **Holy Unction may not be taken home**. If you wish to have this sacrament offered, Father Stavros is happy to offer it at the church, on a day and time of your choosing. For those unable to come to church, Father will be happy to bring it to shut-ins who are unable to come to church. *For those who are not Orthodox and cannot receive Holy Unction, as it is a sacrament, Fr. Stavros also has oil from the tomb of St. Nektarios, which can be administered to anyone. The oil will be administered also on Holy Wednesday for those who are not Orthodox, so that they can still receive prayer and anointing.*

Bridegroom Service for the Last Supper

There is actually a Bridegroom Service which is traditionally celebrated on Holy Wednesday evening. However, this service has been suppressed in most parishes because of the Sacrament of Holy Unction. This service is important because it contains the Gospel lesson of the Last Supper. We will celebrate this service, beginning at 5:15 p.m. The evening Holy Unction service will begin at 7:00 p.m.

Holy Thursday Evening - The Service of the Passion

The service of the 12 Gospels and procession of the crucified Lord is the longest service of the Church year. On Holy Thursday, light and darkness, joy and sorrow are mixed. At the "upper room" and in Gethsemane the light of the kingdom and the darkness of hell come together. The way of life and the way of death converge. **However, one cannot truly celebrate the Resurrection if he/she has not stood at the foot of the cross of Christ.** As one prayer of the Sunday Orthros states, "Through the Cross, joy has come to all the world." Without the Crucifixion, there could be no Resurrection. Thus, after the Resurrection Service on Holy Saturday Night, one could argue that Holy Thursday evening is the next most-important service of Holy Week. *If you are unable to attend the entire service, then please come from 7:30-8:30 p.m., witness the Procession of the Crucified Lord, venerate His precious Body on the Cross and leave early. But please do not abandon the Lord as He hangs on the Cross. Holy Thursday evening is the most powerful service of Holy Week and the entire church year.*

An All-Night/All Day Vigil at the Cross of Christ

For the past nine years, we have done an All-Night Vigil at the Cross of Christ. Those who participated found it VERY inspiring. The vigil will begin following the service of the 12 Gospels and will continue until the service of the Lamentations on Good Friday Evening. Thus, beginning at 6:30 p.m. on Holy Thursday, there will be 28 continuous hours of prayer in our church. ***This way, even those who can't come out in the middle of the night can participate by taking a shift during the day*** The schedule will be as follows:

Holy Thursday Evening

6:30-10:00 p.m. Service of the 12 Gospels
10:00 p.m. - 9:00 a.m. (Fri.) Vigil of Psalm Reading at the Cross

Continued...

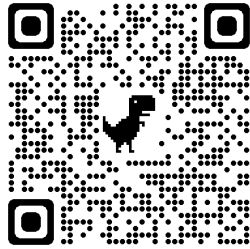
Good Friday

9:00-11:00 a.m. Service of the Royal Hours
11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Vigil of Psalm Reading at the Cross
3:00-4:30 p.m. The Service of the Un-nailing
4:30-7:00 p.m. Vigil of Psalm Reading at the foot of the Cross
7:00-10:30 p.m. Service of the Lamentations

We will have a Sign Up Genius for people to sign up for an hour or two to stand at the Cross and read from the Book of Psalms.

Alex Limberatos will be coordinating this for us. If you are interested in participating at the All-Night/Add-Day Vigil on Holy Thursday, please contact Alex.

QR Code for the Good Friday Vigil:



Sign-Up Link for the Good Friday Vigil:
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20f0548a5af28a1fe3-vigil1>

We know that at the Crucifixion, all but one of the Disciples fled. Only John stayed at the foot of the cross. In our world today, many people are abandoning Christ, Christianity, and any sense of Godliness. If Christ gave His life on the cross and did not abandon us, this is one chance, on this special day, to say thank you to Christ and remember what He did by not abandoning Him.

Good Friday

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

Apokathelosis

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

The Lamentations and the Epitaphios Procession

The Lamentations are short, poetic verses lamenting the Passion, Death and Burial of Christ. Interspersed with the Lamentations are Psalm verses from Psalm 119, the same verses we sing at a funeral service, which is appropriate, as the Lamentations are the funeral service for the Lord. The service starts with the Canon, and after the Canon is complete, the priest opens the Royal Doors, the lights are turned up, and the Lamentations begin. Everyone is invited to sing together. Books will be provided for your use. Last year, we did the procession indoors, walking around both the interior of the hall and the church, with everyone having an opportunity to pass under the Epitaphios, symbolizing how one day we hope to pass through death to eternal life. This went very smoothly last year and people indicated that they would like us to continue doing the procession like this. Thus the procession will be indoors this year.

Holy Saturday

Anastasis Service

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

Blessing of Baskets of Food

It is the Orthodox Tradition on Pascha that we not only bless eggs but other types of food that will go on the table for the Paschal Banquet. Therefore, if anyone wishes to bring a basket of food to be blessed on Pascha night, they may come and place it beneath or around the table on the Solea where the basket of Easter eggs will be.

Reading of the Resurrection Gospel at the Agape Vespers

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

Holy Communion to be given only during Divine Liturgy

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

Continued...

A Note on Kneeling and Sitting

It is the tradition of the church that we kneel or stand for the majority of the services. However, by dispensation, we now have pews in the church and the faithful are allowed to sit at certain points in the services. Because of the long lines for Communion and because the length of the services, **PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO SIT** as you need to during Holy Week, especially during Holy Communion. Also, for those with bad knees, just sit with your head bowed during times we are kneeling, do not attempt to kneel. Our church never seeks our physical hurt in worship, nor do we want people passing out or becoming sick, which will only make us nervous and anxious.

Holy Week Books are available for sale in the church bookstore.

The Holy Week Book contains the words and hymns of all the Holy Week services and will serve not only as an aid to worship but as a complete theology book, for the services of Holy Week contain all the theology of the Orthodox Church.

Pascha versus Easter

In every language except English and German, the feast of the Resurrection is identified with a word whose root is “Pasch.” For instance, in Spanish, the word is “Pasqual.” “Pascha” comes from the Hebrew for “Passover.” The first Passover occurred in the Old Testament book of Exodus. The last of the 10 plagues on the Egyptians was the death of the first born son. The Hebrews were told to slaughter an unblemished lamb outside the city wall on a Friday, to not break any of its bones, and to spread its blood over their doorways. Those who had the blood of the lamb on their homes would be spared. The angel of death then came to the Egyptians and killed the first-born son in each home. Passover was a holiday celebrating the deliverance of the Hebrews from the bondage of Pharaoh and his taskmasters. The Crucifixion occurred at the Passover—the Lamb of God was killed outside the city wall on a Friday, none of His bones were broken, and by His blood we are set free from the bondage of sin and death. “Easter” comes from the word “Oestre” and was actually a Pagan holiday each spring. That’s why in the Orthodox Church, and in our personal lives, we try to use the word “Pascha” to describe the feast of the Resurrection, rather than Easter.

No Kneeling until Pentecost

It is actually the Tradition in the Orthodox Church that we not kneel on Sundays in honor of the Resurrection of Christ. Because we do not worship on a daily basis in our church communities, priests have encouraged people to kneel on Sundays, the thought being that if we do not kneel on Sundays, that we’ll never kneel in church. It is a Tradition, that for 50 days after Pascha, we do not kneel in honor of the Resurrection. The next time we will kneel after April 23 is on the Feast of Pentecost (June 12) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again on bended knees let us pray to the Lord.”

Fast Free the week after Pascha

Having kept a fast for almost 8 weeks, including the week before Lent, Lent and Holy Week, the church gives us a “week off” from fasting the week after Pascha. During Bright Week, or Renewal Week, as that week is called each day is like a Sunday. Hence, there is no fasting during this celebratory week. Who, then, may receive Communion? Whoever wishes to, providing that they abstain from food the morning they are receiving. So, the Sunday after Pascha, everyone in the congregation may receive. There is no fasting on Wednesday or Friday of renewal week, or any other day of that week either.

Doing it all

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

Excused Absences from School for Good Friday

If you would like to have your child/children attend Good Friday Services at St. John the Baptist, please pick up a letter from the baptistery in the front of the church.

Two Divine Liturgies during Bright Week

Feast of St. George to be celebrated Monday, April 25

St. George the “Trophy Bearer” is one of the most famous saints of our church. He lived in the third century. He was a soldier, famously memorialized in icons as slaying a dragon. Symbolically, he “slayed” the “dragons” that opposed Christianity and was martyred for his faith. His relics were placed in the altar of our church when it was consecrated in 1986. St. George’s feast day is celebrated on the Monday after Pascha when Pascha falls on April 23 or later (when Pascha falls earlier than April 23, we celebrate his feastday on April 23). Thus, this year, we will celebrate his feastday on the Monday after Pascha, April 25.

Friday, April 29 - Feast of the Life-Giving Fountain - Friday after Pascha

Commemorates the consecration of a Chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which was built over a spring in Constantinople, that emits water with healing powers. Hundreds of miracles and healings have occurred at this spring. This feast day of “Zoōdochos Peghe - Ζωοδόχος Πηγή” the Feast of the Life-Giving Fountain, is always celebrated on the Friday of Bright (Renewal) week, the week after Pascha, April 29, this year.

Sunday, May 1 - Sunday of St. Thomas

The Church brings to our mind the unbelief of Thomas followed by his belief after seeing the scars of Christ.

Thursday, May 5 - Feast of St. Irene

St. Irene was a martyr of the 4th century. Many miracles have been attributed to her. She is the patron saint of law enforcement officers.

Liturgical Schedule for April

Friday, April 1 - 9th Hour 9:30 a.m.
Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Salutations to the Virgin Mary—4th Stanza 6:30 p.m.

Sunday, April 3 - **4th Sunday of Lent—St. John of the Ladder**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

Monday, April 4 - Great Compline 5:30 p.m.

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

Friday, April 8 - 9th Hour 9:30 a.m.
Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Vigil of the Akathist

Akathist Hymn 6:30 p.m.
Divine Liturgy 8:15 p.m.

Sunday, April 10 - **5th Sunday of Lent—St. Mary of Egypt**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

Monday, April 11 - Great Compline 5:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 13 - 9th Hour 5:30 p.m.
Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Friday, April 15 - 9th Hour 9:30 a.m.
Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

HOLY WEEK—See Separate Schedule on Next Page

Monday, April 25 - **St. George**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Friday, April 29 - **Life-Giving Fountain of the Virgin Mary—Zodochos Peghe**

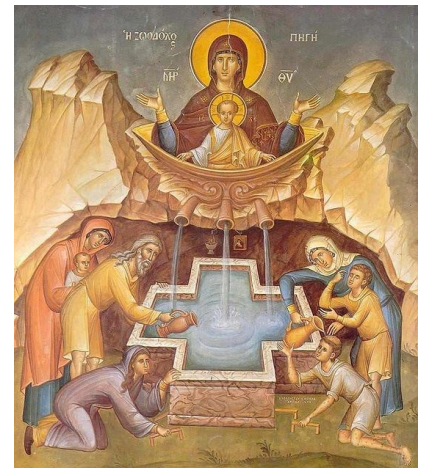
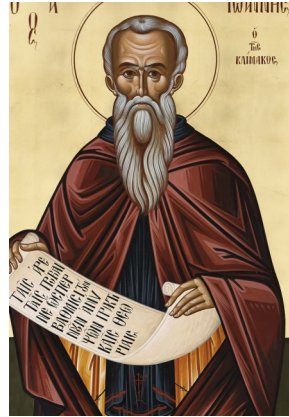
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, May 1 - **Sunday of Thomas**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, May 5 - **St. Irene**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, May 8 - **Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearers/St. John the Theologian**

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



Holy Week and Pascha Schedule 2022

April 16 **Saturday of Lazarus**

Commemoration of the raising of Lazarus from the dead

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Proskomide 9:30 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

April 17 **Palm Sunday**

The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m - 12 p.m.

Vespers 5:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Service of the Bridegroom 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

Procession of the Icon of the Nymphios

Theme: Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church; watchfulness

April 18 **Holy Monday**

9th Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30 - 11:00 a.m

Service of the Bridegroom 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

Theme: The Parable of the Talents

April 19 **Holy Tuesday**

9th Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30 - 11:00 a.m

Service of the Bridegroom 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Theme: The Repentance of the harlot v.s. The Betrayal of Judas

April 20 **Holy Wednesday**

9th Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30 - 11:00 a.m

Holy Unction for Children 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Service of the Bridegroom 5:15 - 7:00 p.m.

Holy Unction for Adults 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Theme: Washing away of sin; healing of soul and body

April 21 **Holy Thursday**

Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 9:15 - 11:00 a.m.

Service of the Holy Passion 6:30 - 10:00 p.m.

Reading of the 12 Gospels, Procession of the Crucified Christ

Theme: The Betrayal, Trial, and Death of Christ, the Passion

All-Night Vigil will follow the service

April 22 **Good Friday**

Reading of the Royal Hours 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Standing vigil at the Cross of Christ

Decorating the Epitaphios 11:00 a.m. (all are invited to help)

Apokathelosis 3:00 - 4:15 p.m. The Unnailing & Burial of Christ

Lamentations 7:00 - 10:30 p.m.

Singing of the Funeral Lamentations and Procession with the Epitaphios

April 23 **Holy Saturday**

Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St. Basil 8:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Reading of Prophecies foretelling the Resurrection of Christ

Great Canon 11:00 p.m.

Resurrection Service 11:45 p.m.

April 24 **Pascha**

Divine Liturgy 12:30 - 2:00 a.m.

Agape Vespers 11:00 a.m. - 12 p.m. (Noon)

The Gospel is read in numerous languages to indicate the universal character of the Christian message.

Πρόγραμμα Ακολουθιών Της

Μεγάλης Εβδομάδος 2022

Σάββατο, 16 Απριλίου **Σάββατο του Λαζάρου**

Όρθρος 8:30 π.μ. Ακολουθία της Θεία Προσκομιδής 9:30 π.μ.

Θεία Λειτουργία 10:00 - 11:30 π.μ.

Κυριακή, 17 Απριλίου **Κυριακή του Βαΐων**

Όρθρος 8:30 π.μ.

Θεία Λειτουργία 9:45 π.μ. - 12:00 μ.μ.

Κατανυκτικό Εσπερινό 5:00 - 6:00 μ.μ.

Ακολουθία του Νυμφίου 6:30 - 8:00 μ.μ.

Δευτέρα, 18 Απριλίου **Μεγάλη Δευτέρα**

Ενάτη Ώρα 9:00 - 9:30 π.μ.

Προηγιασμένη Λειτουργία 9:30 - 11:00 π.μ.

Ακολουθία του Νυμφίου 6:30 - 8:30 μ.μ.

Δευτέρα, 19 Απριλίου **Μεγάλη Τρίτη**

Ενάτη Ώρα 9:00 π.μ.

Προηγιασμένη Λειτουργία 9:30 - 11:00 π.μ.

Ακολουθία του Νυμφίου 6:30 - 8:30 μ.μ.

Τετάρτη, 20 Απριλίου **Μεγάλη Τετάρτη**

Ενάτη Ώρα 9:00 - 9:30 π.μ.

Προηγιασμένη Λειτουργία 9:30 - 11:00 π.μ.

Ακολουθία του Ευχέλαιου τα παιδιά 3:00 - 4:00 μ.μ.

Ακολουθία του Νυμφίου 5:15 - 7:00 μ.μ.

Ακολουθία του Ευχέλαιου 7:00 - 8:30 μ.μ.

Πέμπτη, 21 Απριλίου **Μεγάλη Πέμπτη**

Θεία Λειτουργία του Αγίου Βασιλείου 9:15 - 11:00 π.μ.

Ακολουθία της Σταυρώσεως 6:30 - 10:00 μ.μ.

Παρασκευή, 22 Απριλίου **Μεγάλη Παρασκευή**

Βασιλικές Ώρες 9:00 - 11:00 π.μ.

Αποκαθήλωσης 3:00 - 4:15 μ.μ.

Επιτάφιος Θρήνος 7:00 - 10:30 μ.μ.

Σάββατο, 23 Απριλίου **Μεγάλο Σάββατο**

Θεία Λειτουργία του Αγίου Βασιλείου 8:30 - 11:00 π.μ.

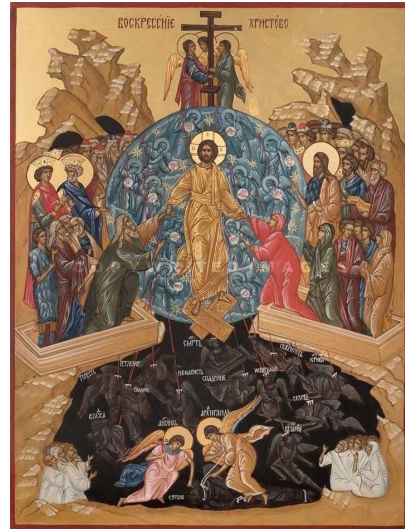
Μέγας Κανών 11:00 μ.μ.

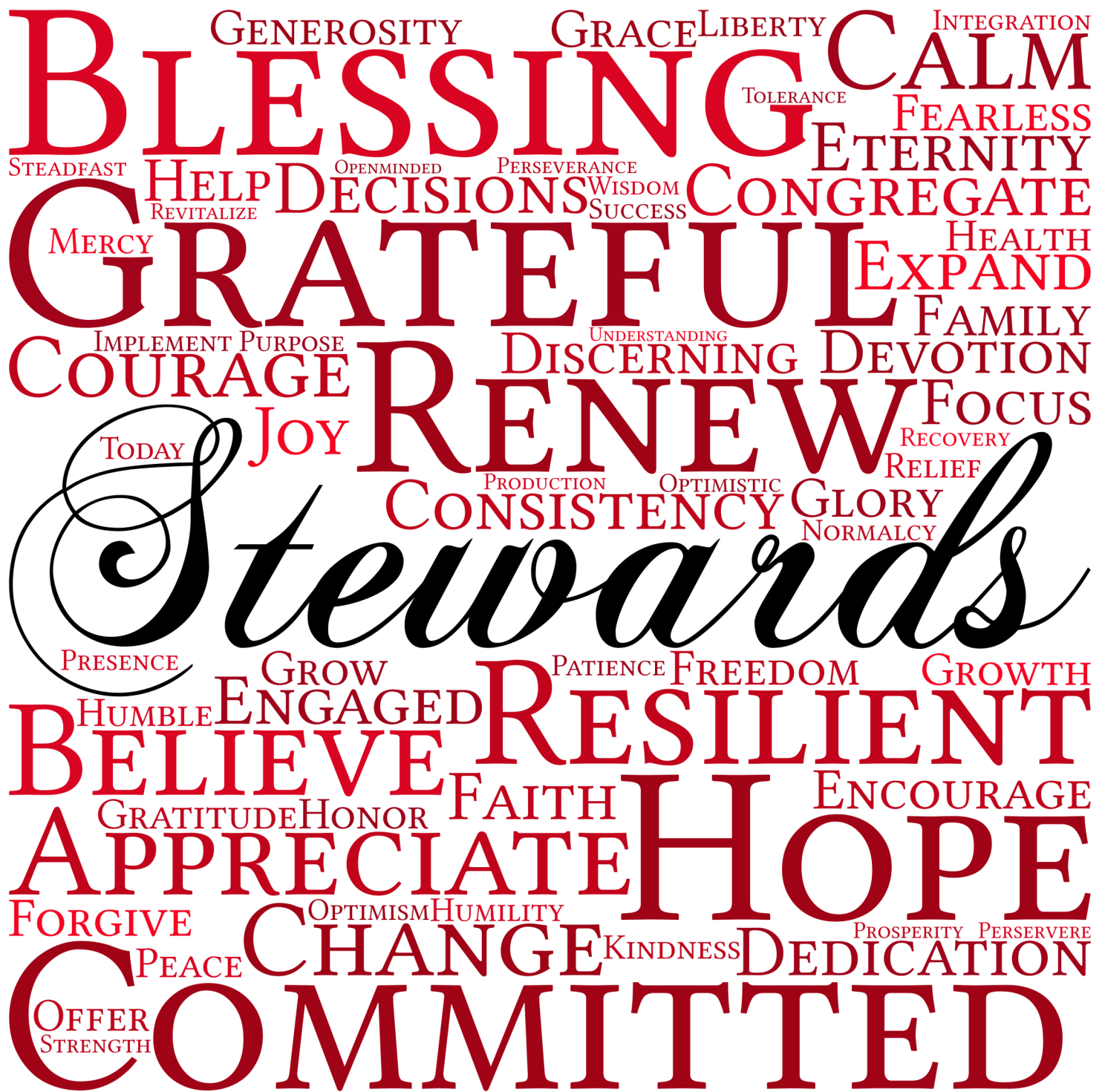
Ακολουθία της Αναστάσεως 11:45 μ.μ.

Κυριακή, 24 Απριλίου **Άγιον Πάσχα**

Θεία Λειτουργία της Αναστάσεως 12:30 - 2:00 π.μ.

Μέγας Εσπερινός της Αγάπης 11:00 - 12:00 μ.μ.





Our word for our parish for 2022 is “Stewards”. Here are the words that our parishioners chose to mark their year.

Verse of the Year—I Peter 4:10

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.

Stewards of God's Grace - Stewards of our Jobs

By: Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis

Our word for our parish for 2022 is "stewards." Every month this year, Fr. Stavros will write a short article on one aspect of this word, to keep it at the forefront of our minds as we journey through 2022.

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. 1 Peter 4:10

We are stewards, or caretakers, or many things. And two of those things are our faith and our church. Our faith is what we believe and our church is the place we use as a base to express that faith. Our church building will be used in April more than any other month of the year. And most of us will probably pay more attention to our faith in this upcoming month and in the other months, simply because of the busy schedule of services.

The Christian faith is something that must be sown, like seed, into each generation. Our children are not going to learn about the faith simply by osmosis. They will learn from someone. Hopefully it their parents, who will pass the faith on to them. Yes, there is a certain amount that a priest can do and a certain amount they will learn in Sunday school and GOYA. But they will not have strong

least as good as I found it, and without making edits to services and traditions. This is true for everyone, not just priests. We want our faith to live on in our children. We want to have a church for ourselves and for those who come after us. It is not up to us to edit out services and traditions as we see fit. And we're not just talking about the church building, which of course we need to maintain. The work of the early church focused specifically on worship and philanthropy. And this is where it needs to stay. In modern times, philanthropy is not happening to the degree it should be happening anywhere. We are working our way up to ten percent of our stewardship going to charity, which is great. We've still got some improvement to do there. And we've all got work to do as far as worship goes, from how often we attend services to staying focused to singing.

Each of us has something to offer the church—it starts with our stewardship—with our time, our talent, and yes, our treasure. Because our treasure pays the bills and also allows for philanthropic giving. When a church can barely keep its door open, philanthropy is often the first thing to go.

Supporting ministries of the church with our talent is also important. We need people to teach, to sing, to clean, to help. There are lots of ministries that need help—welcome ministry, choir, coffee hour, etc. If you see one that appeals to you, let the ministry head know. And if you think of a ministry you'd like to see here and lead, please share that with Fr. Stavros.

The most important expression of our stewardship is our time. The most important thing we do in our church is worship. It is the most important aspect of our Orthodox faith. Thus in being a steward of our faith and our church, think about how much time you spend worshipping, praying, learning and helping. This coming month of April, there are ample opportunities for all of these things.

faith if they only hear about Jesus or pray once a week. This has to be part of their home life. The other place children learn about faith is from their peers and from the media. What? Yes, they will be encouraged in their faith if they have Christian friends, and if they don't have Christian friends, they will actually be discouraged in their faith. Popular media is a faith discourager, for sure, as it encourages so many things that run counter to what the Christian faith is all about.

I remember a Hierarchy of the church telling me when I was first ordained, that I would be a priest on earth for a finite amount of time, and that at a minimum I needed to turn the church over to the one who comes after me at



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Fanatics & Germaphobes

By: Alex Limberatos

The first celebrity I met was Alan Jackson. Until my teenage years, I thought country music was great, because at that time whatever my parents listened to, I listened to. My mother was (and still is) a big Alan Jackson fanatic. I was maybe nine or ten years old when I saw Alan Jackson perform live. More than that, we were able to get up to the barricade separating him from his audience. My mother hoisted me up to the barricade in one of his songs. He was high-fiving everyone at the barricade, and so my mother and I got to high-five Alan Jackson.

“I’ll never wash this hand again,” I said so naively. After all, he was the first celebrity I’d ever met.



Alex posing for a photo with his hero and heroine. He never washed that shoulder afterwards, just ask his wife.

Fast forward to adult Alex just a couple of years ago.

When I began working in the hospital, I’d developed a heightened awareness of what I touched in a patient’s room. If my hands were gloved, they were always folded in my lap—which took a considerable amount of willpower given how I tend to speak with my hands or touch my facial hair when I’m particularly

focused. If I had been in a spore or airborne isolation room, I’d immediately change clothes upon returning home, before even addressing my family. I wouldn’t say I became a germaphobe after working in the hospital, but I certainly did gain a heightened awareness of what I touched, what I washed (and what I didn’t), and how to keep myself and my family safe. I’m sure most of us did the same in our first interactions outside of the home during the peak of the pandemic, being particularly careful of the doors we opened, the gas pumps we operated, and the money we received. Compulsive hand washing and attentiveness to what I touched became ingrained in my spirit.

Attentiveness is one of the most important things we grow in our souls. There’s good reason too for us to pay attention to “attentiveness”. The priest often tells the people to “be attentive” during the Liturgy, and the fact that the highest ranks of angels have so many eyes is a lesson for us to sharpen our ability to be attentive, watchful, mind-

ful, etc.

Obviously there are different scopes of attentiveness. We can be attentive drivers and stay focused on the road instead of on our phones. We can be attentive to a lecture or to someone else’s story rather than be distracted with our own thoughts. Many of you are attentive to detail and are keen to point out the mistakes we make in the bulletin and the messenger.

But attentiveness can also mean a heightened sense of what we interact with, what we touch, what we are surrounded by. Consider my two stories above. I don’t typically pay attention to whose hand I shake, but I was particularly cognizant of this after I high-fived Alan Jackson; it was as though Alan Jackson’s essence spiritually lived on the palm of my hand and that washing my hands would remove his spiritual manifestation. Almost the exact opposite happened when I was in the hospital, wherein I was hyper sensitive if I shook an infectious patient’s hand and the essence of the infirmity living on my hand. The two stories involve a paying attention to what is touched, and both instances produced a strong reaction within me: one in a manner of preserving what I touched the other looking to rid any remnant of what I had touched.

Imagine if we treated church and sin in the same way.

The most sacred thing we can touch is the Body & Blood of Christ when we receive Holy Communion. Some of you may be aware of the older tradition of reverencing no icon or no priest’s hand after receiving Holy Communion as a way to keep from wiping the Blood of Christ from our lips. It’s very similar to the “I’ll never wash this hand again” sentiment. That being said, I’m not so much advocating that we refrain from kissing icons because we have received Communion, but rather that we be hyper-vigilant about what we speak, what words come out of our mouths. But despite whether or not we leave the church having received Holy Communion, can we not leave the church feeling as though we have basked in Christ’s presence and preserve holiness within ourselves. We can do this by being mindful of what we listen to on our drive home, or be discerning with what we watch on television when we get home. My challenge is thus: can we leave church feeling as though we touched divinity and want to preserve that divinity on our bodies, in our very being?

Continued...

The same applies to sin. What if we acknowledged the dirtiness of sin, kept in mind that our words and actions can be as sticky and virulent as an infectious disease? What if we gowned and masked up (in prayer, putting on the full armor of God, our spiritual PPE) when we knew something was sinful around us? What if we meticulously washed ourselves when we knew we had done something sinful and sullied our soil, and rectified this through the cleansing of repentance and confession? Most of us were hyper-sensitive when the Covid pandemic arrived to our country, meticulously gloving or washing before/during/after touching gas pumps and door handles. God gives us a disgust sensitivity to keep our bodies safe. But what of our disgust sensitivity to sin? Do we stop gossip and vulgarity from falling out of our lips as though we might catch something? Can we be discerning about what we watch, listen to, and what we do as though we could contract spiritual disease to something unclean? And if we did happen to interact with something unclean, can we be meticulous about cleansing ourselves as we would leaving a hospital room?

What I'm appealing to on this topic of touch is that we all be attentive to what we interact with. Can we approach and leave the chalice as if we were meeting a celebrity—mind you, the greatest celebrity of all, the Son of God Himself! Can we be attentive to how our words and deeds sully us and even those around us? Can we employ some precaution to prevent us from falling prey to the infection of sin? Can we utilize the Church's services and sacra-

ments in order to cleanse ourselves of the biohazard of sin?

Let us preserve the sanctity we touch and do so by being attentive to Christ's real presence in our Church, and let us implement the necessary precautions to stop the epidemic of sin.

Blessed Lent!



Chrismation of Wesley (Michael) Soper
with his sponsor, Alex Limberatos

Photos from the Sunday of Orthodoxy March 13, 2022



St. John the Baptist Community News

Photo Ministry Looking for more Photographers- Karina Findlay is the new head of the ministry, which documents the activities of our parish. We are looking for new photographers, especially to help in documenting the upcoming Holy Week Services. If you are interested in participating, please contact Karina at 813-476-9632.

GOYA—Our GOYA meeting for April will be Sunday, April 10, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be served.

Men's Group—The Men's Group will not meet in April. It will resume in May.

Women's Bible Study meets on Tuesday from 10:00-11:30 a.m. with both in-person and zoom options. Fr. Stavros leads this group. In April, our meetings will be on Tuesdays, April 5, 12 and 26. We are studying St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

Monday Night Bible Study will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most Monday evenings. Join us in person or via zoom for some very informative, lively and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical principles in our everyday lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics. In April, Fr. John's Bible study will take place as follows; Monday, April 4; Monday, April 11; and Monday, April 25.

GriefShare meets every Thursday In-Person and via Zoom at 6:30 p.m. . It may be hard for you to feel optimistic about the future right now. If you've lost a spouse, child, family member, or friends you've probably found there are not many people who understand the deep hurt you feel. This can be a confusing time when you feel isolated and have many questions. "Going to GriefShare feels like having warm arms wrapped around you when you're shivering." GriefShare groups meet weekly to help you face these challenges and move toward rebuilding your life. Each GriefShare session has three distinct elements: Video seminar with experts, support group discussion with focus and personal study and reflection. We will meet from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in the Administration Building Meeting Room on Thursdays, starting January 20, for 13 weeks, ending on Thursday, April 14. **For April, GriefShare will meet April 7 and 14.** For more information please contact Donna Hambos at 813-843-8412 or dhambos@msn.com. Books for the program will be provided. Donation for the book suggested but not required. Open to all family and friends. ***Griefshare remains open enrollment with support towards healing and hope. You can begin at any time.***

Looking for Donation for Three Icons—We are looking to buy two icons for the Paschal and Nativity seasons. We are looking for donations of \$200 for an icon of the Extreme Humility, \$160 for a Nativity Icon and \$40 for an Icon of the Resurrection.

Baptism—Grace Despina Catsikopoulos, daughter of John and Lauren Catsikopoulos, was baptized on Sunday, February 20. Dionis Milo and Jacklyn Spirtos were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Chrismation— Wesley (Michael) Soper was chrismated on Saturday, March 5. Alex Limberatos was the sponsor. Congratulations!

Funeral— Savvas Klimentou passed away on February 8. His funeral was held on February 23. May his memory be eternal!



St. John the Baptist Joins Instagram!



New Instagram Page & Contest

Our church now has its own Instagram page, so be sure to go give it a follow, and also tag us in any picture you take here at the Church! Our username is: [stjohntpa](#)

To kick off our new page, we are having an Instagram contest.

Enter to win a signed copy of Fr. Stavros' new book: "Commissioned to be Apostles."

- 1.) Follow St. John's on **Instagram**
- 2.) Post a picture of yourself (or with others) at the Church, about Church in general, etc. and tag St. John's **@stjohntpa**
- 3.) Entries will be accepted until April 30, and the winner will be announced May 1

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 the YAH.

MEETING DATE AND TIME:

Our meetings are held once a month from 11:30 to 1 p.m., usually at the Kourmolis Hall. From time to time we may go on fieldtrips or have lunch at a restaurant in place of meetings at the hall.

Birthdays

Andrew Bouzinekis 3/2

Peter Nenos 3/30

Pam Nolan 3/31

New Members

MaryAnn Cathopoulos, Joanne Dalaklis, and Jerry and Debbie Galovic.

Core Values: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, & Service

We continue to reach out to those who are homebound do to illness or are in assisted living facilities as part of our Church's fulfillment of the core values of love and community. We contacted Anastasia Smyrnakis, Dora Koudouna, Mary and Peter Nenos, Marina Paris, and Kathy Kapetan

Planned Activities

The **December** meeting was a Lenten pot-luck luncheon and holiday gift exchange at the St John Kourmolis Center. Elections were held and Bill Manikas was chosen to be president and Dora Morgan was re-elected as recording secretary.

The **January** meeting was held at the **Carrabba's Italian Restaurant**. The president passed out a list of potential fieldtrips that we may go on. These potential fieldtrips are in a radius of two hours from Tampa. We welcomed a new member, Frances Spirides.

The **February** luncheon/meeting was held at **Mykonos restaurant** in Tarpon Springs, and then we went to the Agora and Greek Boys to shop for Lenten Foods. We had a good turn out—18 people.

The **March** meeting was held on Saturday, the 12th. after the service of **Saturday of the Souls** at 10:00 a.m. Afterwards, while in church, Father Stavros led the group in a religious scavenger hunt. It was an exciting way to learn about Orthodoxy. Afterwards we had a Lenten lunch at the Kourmolis Center which was catered by the Evos restaurant. Turnout was very good.

For more information and to get on our email list, contact:

Bill Manikas at wmanikas@gmail.com or 813-716-8185

Dora Morgan at 813-613-3738



As part of the March meeting, Young at Heart did a scavenger hunt in the church followed by a presentation by Fr. Stavros in the hall.

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.

April 3-9

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— Who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign enemies to flight.

Hebrews 11:32-34

The Old Testament is filled with stories of people who were waiting for the promised Messiah. Many of them were martyrs, just like the saints of the early centuries, who gave tremendous witness for God in both life and death. The basic summary of the Old Testament is that God created the world, the world fell through sin, and God desired to redeem the fallen world. His plan for redemption started with a covenant with Abraham, the Law and the Commandments given to Moses, a series of judges and kings, as well as prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is foundational to the New Testament. These people all worked with faith and vigilance to preserve and spread this hope of the coming Messiah. Hebrews 11:32-34 attests to some of their names and some of their work. Each of these affirmed faith in God and played an important role in the journey to Christ. Many of them are depicted in the icon of the Resurrection. Because even they, in their righteousness, were still consigned to Hades, until the time that Christ came and went to Hades to rescue all those who were bound there, prefiguring the Resurrection of all who are in the graves.

April 10-16

And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:44-45

These verses are found at the end of a Gospel passage where James and John try to make a side deal with Jesus, that one will sit at His right hand and the other will sit at His left. Of course, what they don't know is that those at the left will be condemned. No one will want to sit at His left hand. The other disciples, we are told, become indignant with James and John, that they are trying to make a side deal with the Lord. And Jesus tells them that leadership is about ser-

vice, the greatest among them should be as the least, and whoever is the first among them must be the slave/servant of all. For Jesus did not come into the world to be served but to serve. He was Lord, they called Him Master, He revealed Himself as a king, but then demonstrated that His kingdom would be based on love, service and sacrifice, before giving His life as a ransom for many. Many of us are obsessed with fame, power, money and advancement. Jesus is telling us that we should be concerned with serving others. Remember that Jesus came to serve, and service should be one of our main goals as well.

April 17-23

The next day, a great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, crying "Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"

John 12:12-13

These verses are from Palm Sunday, when a great crowd went out to meet Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. They waved palm branches at Him, and cried "Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" This scene brings me a lot of confusion. First, they were hailing Jesus as the King of Israel. Yet, several days later, the same people in that crowd cried out for Jesus to be crucified. How do we know that the same people participated both on Sunday and on Friday? It was the time of the Passover, when everyone was required to go to Jerusalem for the feast. So there were tons and tons of people. They heard Jesus was coming and ran to meet Him. Undoubtedly, as they shouted "Hosanna!" for the King of Israel, they must have wondered where were the chariots and the soldiers to overthrow the Romans. Again, they misunderstood Jesus' mission, which was not political overthrow. Certainly, many were probably disappointed. Certainly they didn't understand who Jesus was. Because the same people became bloodthirsty only days later. We need to remember that our "King" rode a donkey, not a chariot. He had a rag tag group of disciples, not an army of soldiers. As Christians, we need to remember that we are to be like Jesus, to lead with humility and service, not grandeur and self-aggrandizing. We need humble hearts and soft souls. We also need to be like children in the sense that an encounter with Christ in prayer or worship should excite us, as it excited the people of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago.

April 24-30

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:4-5

These verses are read at the Divine Liturgy on Pascha during the Gospel reading. It refers to Jesus, who is revealed as the "Word of God," present from the time of the Creation, and made flesh at the Incarnation. Christ is the life and the light. His light shines in the darkness and no darkness can ever take it. We know that darkness is the absence of light. So wherever there is light, there cannot be darkness. If life becomes "dark" and sad, we need to remember to shine Christ's light on any darkness and it will no longer be dark. Even sadnesses and tragedies of life are lessened when we carry the light of Christ, which brings hope in the midst of despair. As we celebrate Pascha and again receive the Light of Christ, we should receive it with joy and hope, hope that if our light is flickering or going out, that it can be rekindled with the light of Christ; joy that if our light is burning bright, it can burn even brighter. Darkness does not overcome light. Just like sin will not overcome salvation, doubt will not overcome faith, the devil will not defeat God. So let us focus on straightening our lights so that they burn even more brightly, and let us be assured that even when the light is dim, it won't get out as long as we have Christ and allow Him to shine even in our darkest corners, in our heaviest moments.

April 2022 Sunday School Update

The Sunday School staff prays that your Lenten journey is bringing you closer to Christ.

YOUTH SUNDAY took place on March 6th. We need to thank our children, who are singing more beautifully than ever and learning more church hymns under the direction of Maria Xenick. Our Epistle reader was also amazing.



Our PRE-LENTEN RETREAT also took place on March 6th. Our Topics were:

- HOLY UNCTION taught by Vasili Panagopoulos
- FORGIVENESS SUNDAY taught by Alex Limberatos
- LENTEN CALENDAR - COVENANT, and THE PRAYER OF ST. EPHRAIM taught by Maria Xenick.

Afterwards all the children and their parents met with Fr. Stavros in the church. He spoke to them about Lent and closed our retreat with a prayer. We would like to thank Father, the presenters, and all the teachers who helped to make our retreat such a worthwhile experience.



In addition to our Pre-Lenten Retreat, our Sunday School students learned about Forgiveness Sunday, Icons/Sunday of Orthodoxy, Being a Good Friend. (Second Sunday of Lent—The Paralytic), and The Holy Cross-(Third Sunday of Lent). Vasili Panagopoulos was also very busy with our students this past month. He was able to do a lesson for our Pre-K3, Pre-K4, Kindergarten, and 5th - 6th Grade Classrooms. Our Pre-K3, Pre-K4, and Kindergartener also learned about and made Prospora under the direction of Melissa Krinos on March 27th.

On March 14th, all of our Sunday School students carried their Icons in the procession for Sunday of Orthodoxy. A truly special day!

Speaking of Lent and Holy Week, our Altar Boys, Myrrh Bearers, and Maiden for the Bridegroom

Services are preparing and excited for their roles during this important time in our church.

Everyone is also looking forward to our Sunday School Good Friday Retreat on April 22nd.

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

APRIL CALENDAR:

Sunday, April 3rd: Topic: Faith – Fourth Sunday of Great Lent – St. John of the Ladder
Prospora: High School Boys

Sunday, April 10th: Youth Sunday - (7th - 12th Grade Music at 11:40 a.m.)
Topic: Holy Week – 5th Sunday of Great Lent)

Saturday, April 16th: Saturday of Lazarus - Sunday School makes the Palm Crosses

Sunday, April 17th: Palm Sunday
Topic: Holy Week – Palm Sunday
ALL STUDENTS Involved in Palm Sunday Procession

Friday, April 22nd: Good Friday Retreat

Sunday, April 24th: PASCHA – No Sunday School



Please Join us for...

Great and Holy Friday Sunday School Retreat

Friday, April 22nd

Please join us for a day of reflection, activities and worship with Sunday School friends as we Journey through Holy Week in preparing for the Triumphant Resurrection!



Holy Week

The retreat will conclude in time to attend the
Apokathelosis Service -

The Unnailing/Burial of Christ at 3p

All parents are encouraged to attend!

We Hope you can join us!

Please call or email Zackie Ameres to RSVP at

813-245-3813 or zackiec@yahoo.com

Donations Needed for Great Lent and Holy Week

We have many special celebrations during these weeks. We know that many of you would like to contribute to the decorating of our church and icons during this period. For your convenience, below is a list of items needed for the celebration of the Sacred Services of Lent and Holy Week. Please contact the church office to reserve your desired offering for the health of your loved ones or in memory of a deceased loved one.

Payment may be sent to the church office. Checks should be made payable to "St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church" with "Lenten Flower Donation" on the memo line. Online donations are also accepted, be sure to specify.

Lent	Wireless Microphones in the Church	Duracell or Energizer AA Batteries	Many
April 1	Salutations to the Virgin Mary - 4th Stanza	Flowers for Icon of Panagia	\$100
April 8	Akathist Hymn	Flowers for Icon of Panagia	\$100
April 17	Palm Sunday	Flowers for Icon of Palm Sunday	\$100
		Palms Strips & Branches	\$250 total
	Bridegroom Service	Flowers for Icon of Bridegroom on Solea (2)	\$100 each
April 20	Holy Wednesday	Flowers for Icon of Last Supper	\$100
April 21	Holy Thursday	Flowers for Icon of Crucifixion	\$100
		Wreaths for Bottom of Cross (2)	\$150 each
		Candles for Top of Cross (3)	\$15 each
April 22	Good Friday	16 Bags of Rose Petals for Myrrh-bearers	\$100
		Flowers for Epitaphios	Several
		Candles for Top of Cross (3)- Apokathelosis	\$15 each
		Candles for Top of Cross (3)- Lamentations	\$15 each
		Icon of Extreme Humility	\$100
		Easter Lilies	\$25 per Lily



**Attention: All Military (Active and Retired),
First Responders and Government Workers:**

You are invited to an initial meeting to establish a New Ministry at St. John's. Our goal is to discuss how we can help, promote, and recognize those who are serving or have served our nation and its cherished values.

Please text, call, or email Father John Stefero at **678-637-4425** or jwstefero50@hotmail.com if you are interested in attending.

A date and restaurant will be determined soon for our initial meeting.

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.

St. John Stewardship Report 2020-2022

Year to Year Comparison ~	2022*	2021*	2020*
Pledged Year to Date	\$390,227	\$418,053	\$454,470
Received Year to Date	\$204,858	\$167,801	\$176,710
Average Pledge	\$1,711	\$1,678	\$1,532
Median Pledge	\$1,000	\$700	\$700
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	227	274	323
*YTD as of 3/18/22, 3/17/21, 3/10/20			

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).

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

I had rather speak five words with my understanding... than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. (1 Cor. 14:19)

St. John the Baptist's **Twelve Disciples Project** continues, as dozens of your fellow Orthodox Christians, Prayer Warriors, set aside a few minutes each day to pray for "mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, protection and pardon and remission of the sins for servants of God" all members of the St. John's congregation. Are you interested?

Many years ago, prayer was effective in assisting a woman to turn her life around as she spent a lifetime of repentance praying for forgiveness for her prior life.

It was during the 6th century, when a woman, Mary, born in Egypt, was living a life of sin, licentiousness, and wantonness. Looking for adventure, she traveled to Jerusalem and visited the Church of the Resurrection searching for opportunities offered by the many various celebrations. She was drawn to the Church, wishing to observe but when she attempted to enter the church to see, she was stopped by an angel of the Lord because of the impure life she had been living. After repeating the attempt to enter several times, she recognized that her failure was caused by the improper life she had lived. She departed Jerusalem in shame and went to live in the desert, east of the Jordan river where 40 years later she had a marvelous encounter.

A pious monk by the name of Zosimus, followed the instructions of an Angel of the Lord who directed him to a monastery in Jordan where he soon adopted the habits of the monks who populated this monastery. They scattered themselves away from the monastery crossing the Jordan into the eastern desert in different directions to practice solitary fasting and prayer. Each took with him a bare minimum of food that each supplemented by foraging and eating roots and berries provided by the desert, all the while praying and obeying God.

Abba Zosimus, wishing to find someone who might just possibly need him, and while praying and singing the Psalms of the 6th hour, saw a desert dweller, a woman, who had been living in the desert for 17 years. She hid from him since she was naked. She spoke and called him by name, "Zosimus, you must bless and pray, since you are honored with the grace of the priesthood. For many years you have been offering the Holy Gifts, sharing them with others." Zosimus recognized that this was a miracle encounter and after giving the naked woman his outer cloak, asked the woman's blessing who said, "Blessed is God, Who cares for the salvation of men."



Zosimus later offered the woman the Holy Eucharist. Not long after receiving the Eucharist, she went to be with her Lord. The woman was the Saint that we now call Saint Mary of Egypt. For her early life I refer you to her complete story found at <https://www.goarch.org/sunday-stmaryofegypt>.

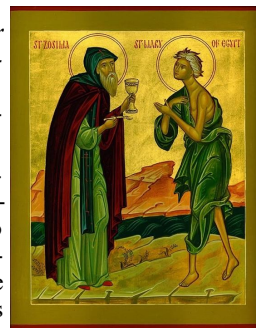
All the monks from the monastery would return annually on Palm Sunday, to celebrate the Holy Pascha. Though not required to account for their desert activity, Zosimus shared his encounter with Mary and the monks shared the story down from monk to monk until a later monk, Sophronius, collected the information and wrote it down so that we have it today to marvel at the repentant and prayerful disciple of Abba Zosimus, St. Mary of Egypt.

Participating in the Twelve Disciples group requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow members of the St. John the Baptist congregation (Just as fellow parishioners are offering daily prayers for you and your family.) There are no restrictions. You may choose a time during the day when you can spend a quiet moment with God.

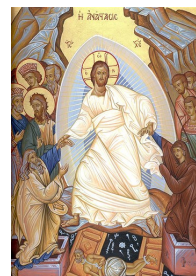
If you'd like to participate (to enjoy the presence of God as you develop your prayer rule) and receive the prayer along with at least one page of names to pray for, please contact Mathew Balasis, 727-345-4855 (mathewbalasis@verizon.net).

Participation will warm your spiritual heart.

Prayer List: Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our Souls and Bodies, visit and heal your servants: Felix; Sylvia Michos; Eva Coppalla; Christopher; Christopher; Mary & Peter Nenos; Tony Ekonomou; Keith Lynn & Patrick Carroll; 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, Toulia 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, 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's Bookstore



Our bookstore has stocked many of the items you will need in preparation for Pascha. Available now are:

Holy Week Service Books

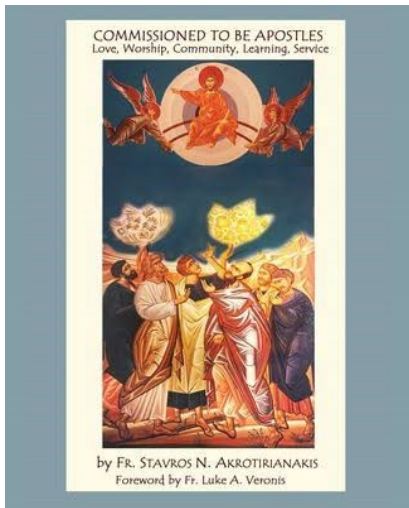
Red egg dye imported from Greece

Books with meditations and readings for Pascha

Resurrection Icons

Wooden and glass eggs with display stands

Greeting cards and Children's books



JUST RELEASED—Commissioned to be Apostles: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Fr. Stavros has a new book out, the sixth that he has published. It was released in March and is now for sale at the bookstore. A disciple is a student. An Apostle is a recruiter, one who actively spreads Christianity. We are commissioned to be apostles, by virtue of the Great Commission that is read over everyone who is baptized. One must be a disciple before one can be an apostle. The last book focused on our call to be disciples. This one focuses on our commission to be apostles. It looks first at the Great Commission and what it means. It includes a section on the Book of Acts and how the church was established, with the hope of getting our modern churches to resemble the early church. The next section talks about what happened at our baptisms. The book discusses the work of the church and our participation in the life of the church. There is a section on bridging the gap between what the church is and what it should be. The final section is on how to transform our church into an even more dynamic and Christ-centered community.

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 are available to watch time.



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

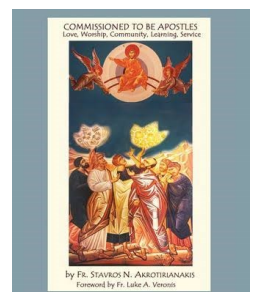
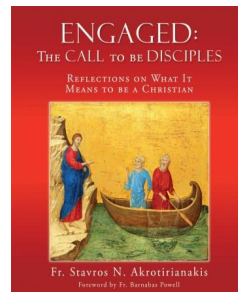
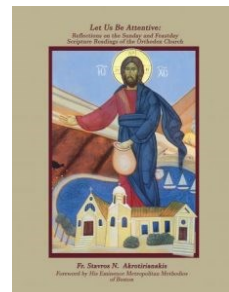
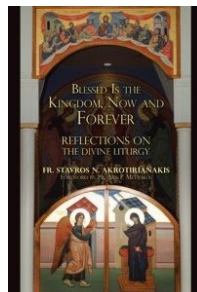
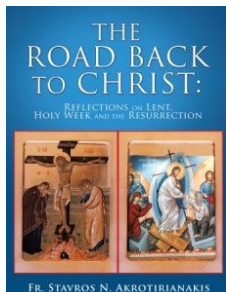
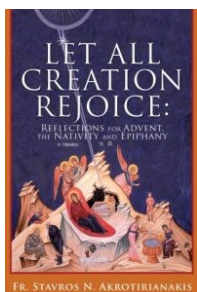
Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 3,555 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 SIX books that are available both in the bookstore and online. They are entitled:

Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany
The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection
Blessed is the Kingdom, Now and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy
Let us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church
ENGAGED: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian
Commissioned to be Apostles: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service



Pastoral Guidance Regarding Funerals

By Fr. Stavros

Here are a few things to keep in mind when it comes to funerals:

First, it is the Orthodox Tradition that we bury people, and not cremate them. Why? In imitation of Christ, who was buried, and in honor of the body that we do not destroy, either in life or in death. If a person is cremated, they cannot have a full funeral in the Orthodox Church.

Second, it is the Orthodox Tradition that the casket is open at a funeral. Why? Again, out of respect that God creates every body, in His image and likeness. So, we honor every body, in life and in death. Seeing the body at a funeral reinforces this. It also allows us to fully comprehend that a death has occurred, when we see our loved one lying there. A closed casket is only allowed in very extenuating circumstances with Fr. Stavros' permission.

Third, it is the practice in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America that laypeople do not speak in the church at funerals, unless given special permission by the Archbishop or local Metropolitan. This is because what is offered at a funeral should be more homily rather than eulogy. I try to interweave both into my remarks.

PLEASE COMMEMORATE THE NAMES OF MY DEPARTED FAMILY

MEMBERS IN THE MEMORIAL SERVICE ON GOOD FRIDAY - April 22

In Memory of

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

****You only need to write the first name of each person. Please mail to the church office by Monday April 18.**

You may also email the names to office@stjohntpa.org

St. John's Nursing Ministry

What is Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH)?

Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) is when the prostate and surrounding tissue expands. The prostate goes through two main growth periods as a man ages. The first is early in puberty, when the prostate doubles in size. The second begins around age 25 and continues during most of a man's life. As you age, your prostate may get larger. BPH is when it gets large enough to cause problems.

While the prostate is usually the size of a walnut or golf ball in adult men, it can grow to be as large as an orange. As the gland enlarges, it can squeeze the urethra. The bladder wall becomes thicker. Over time the bladder may weaken and lose the ability to empty fully. Urine then remains in the bladder. These problems cause many of the lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) of BPH. If you are not able to pass urine at all (called retention) or if you have renal failure, immediate attention is required. But, other symptoms like weak urine stream or the need to push or strain can many times be monitored.

BPH is benign. This means it is not cancer, nor does it lead to cancer. Still, BPH and cancer can happen at the same time. BPH itself may not require any treatment, but if it begins to cause symptoms, treatment may help. It is also of great value to know that BPH is common. About half of all men between ages 51 and 60 have BPH. Up to 90% of men over age 80 have it. The cause of BPH is not clear. It mainly occurs in older men. Hormone changes are thought to play a role.

Symptoms of BPH

Most Symptoms if BPH start gradually. They include:

- Incomplete emptying: the feeling your bladder is full, even after passing urine.
- Frequency: the need to pass urine often, about every one to two hours.
- Intermittency: the need to stop and start several times when passing urine.
- Urgency: feeling the urgent need to pass urine as if you can't wait.
- Weak stream: a weak urine flow.
- Straining: trouble starting to pass urine or the need to push or strain to pass urine.
- Nocturia: the need to wake up at night more than two times to pass urine.

Who is at Risk for BPH?

- ✦ Men over the age of 50 as the risk for BPH rises with age
- ✦ Men whose fathers had BPH
- ✦ Men who are overweight or obese
- ✦ Men who don't stay active

Some men with [erectile dysfunction \(ED\)](#)

Can BPH be Prevented?

There is no sure way to prevent BPH. Still, losing weight and eating a well-balanced diet, rich in fruits and vegetables, may help. Too much body fat, may increase hormone levels and other factors in the blood, and stimulate the growth of prostate cells. Staying active also helps control weight and hormone levels.

Continued...

Diagnosis

See your doctor if you have symptoms that might be BPH. See your doctor *right away* if you have blood in your urine, pain or burning when you urinate, or if you cannot urinate.

Your doctor will do a physical exam to check your prostate. Your doctor also may also perform blood and urine test as well as scans.

Treatment

Treatment for BPH depends on what symptoms you have and how severe they are. Options include lifestyle changes, medicine, minimally invasive procedures, and surgery.

If your symptoms are mild or slightly bothersome, you usually can control them with simple changes these include:

- Reducing liquid intake, especially before bed or going out in public.
- Avoiding caffeine, alcohol, and over-the-counter medicines that make you urinate more.
- Training your bladder to hold urine longer.
- Exercising your pelvic floor muscles.
- Preventing constipation.

Medications

Your doctor can prescribe different medicines to treat BPH. Some of these improve urine flow or reduce blockages in the bladder. Others stop or shrink the growth of the prostate. Sometimes a combination of different medicines is used. Your doctor will recommend medicine based on your symptoms and condition.

Non-surgical Interventions for BPH:

Prostate Artery Embolization (PAE): is a nonsurgical procedure that decreases the blood supply to the prostate, thus reducing its size and symptoms. An [interventional radiologist](#), who uses X-rays and other imaging techniques to see inside the body and treat conditions without surgery, performs PAE.

Surgical Interventions:

There are several types of minimally invasive and invasive surgeries from which to choose. The option will depend on the size of your prostate, your overall health, your physician's expertise and your personal choice. Some types of minimally invasive procedures include, Prostate Urethral Lift, Water Vapor Thermal Therapy, and transurethral Microwave Therapy. Transurethral incision of the of the prostate and Transurethral Resection of the Prostate (TURP) are more invasive surgeries requiring a longer hospital stay.

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



ST. JOHN'S GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
2418 W. SWANN AVE. TAMPA, FL 33609

9th Hour - 5:30 p.m.

Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Lenten Dinner - 7:15 p.m.

Presentation offered by Fr. Stavros - 7:45 p.m.

Small Group Discussion - 8:15 p.m.

Wrap Up - 8:45 p.m.

Each Wednesday of Great Lent

LENTEN PRESANCTIFIED SERIES



H. Have A Plan

3/9

A. Affirm your Faith

3/16

B. Be a Friend

3/23

I. Intentionally Choose Him

3/30

T. Trust Him

4/6

S. Surrender to Him

4/13

Philoptochos News



PASCHA BAKESALE - APRIL 16 & 17

First come...first serve....while supplies last!

Spanakopita 2 lb pan \$20
Spanakopita/Tyropita Triangles 48 pieces \$30
Tsoureki \$10
Koulourakia \$7
Paximathia \$5
South Tampa Sugar Mama Easter Cookie \$4



PALM SUNDY LUNCHEON APRIL 17

Join us for a traditional Palm Sunday Luncheon

Adults: \$15.00

Children: \$5.00

*all proceeds go to Philoptochos charities



Help Needed:

Many hands make light work! We need volunteers to make skorthalia and desserts.

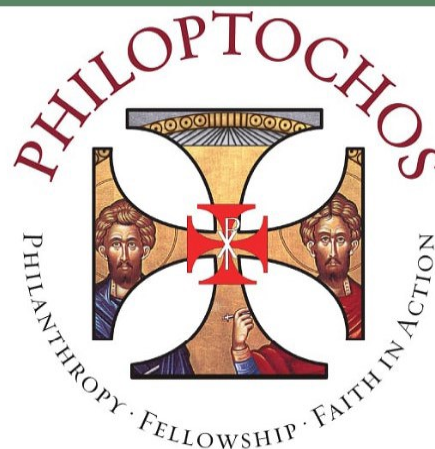
We also need help setting up, serving and cleaning up.

If you can help, please contact:

Lisa Alsina

813-728-1094

lisaalsina@gmail.com



March is Θαλασσαιμία/Cooley's Anemia Month

ST JOHN GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

and AHEPA's Tampa Chapter #12

Cooley's anemia or **Θαλασσαιμία/Thalassemia** is an inherited blood disorder in which the body makes an abnormal form of hemoglobin. Hemoglobin is the protein molecule in red blood cells that carries oxygen. The disorder results in excessive destruction of red blood cells, which leads to anemia.

It mostly **affects people of Mediterranean descent**. People with severe thalassemia depend on blood transfusions to give them working red blood cells. A type of bone marrow transplant has been used to try to cure thalassemia, but it's hard to find compatible donors. And even if a donor can be found, there's still a risk that the patient's body will reject the transplant.



In 1990, after the son of one of our AHEPA chapter members was in need of this surgery, it quickly became obvious that an even greater need existed, thus the AHEPA Bone Marrow Donor Registry was incorporated. Today, there have been incredible breakthroughs in gene editing that may allow for children to live Thalassemia-free!

AHEPA Bone Marrow Registry

The mission of the Ahepa Marrow Donor Registry is to add persons of Mediterranean descent into our database of prospective donors. The best chance for a leukemia patient is from a family member, Secondly, from relatives, and then from their ethnic group.

The chances of finding an unrelated (allogeneic) match are **20,000 to 1**. We must add to our database so that any **Greek** patient has a realistic chance of finding a match.

Some **35,000 children and adults** with life-threatening diseases could have benefited from a **marrow, blood stem cell or cord blood transplant**. Some found a donor within their families, but **70 percent** were put in the unthinkable position of desperately searching among strangers for a match.

How Can You Help?

1. **Get tested**
2. **Education.** Understand the hereditary disease and the need to provide support those afflicted of Greek & Mediterranean descent, those who can possibly be bone marrow donors and for research..
3. **Register** with the AHEPA Bone Marrow Registry to be a possible donor
 - A) **AHEPA Marrow Donor Registry** – There was more than \$180,000 a year in expenses to test prospective marrow donors around the country. Each person is tested at a cost of \$50 to the AHEPA Marrow Donor Registry.
 - B) **Get tested.** It's not enough to spread the word. We also must test ourselves as potential marrow donors. Any-one of us might hold the cure for cancer—not in the form of a vaccine or pill, but in the blood-forming cells inside our bodies. A simple mouth swab is all it takes to find out
4. **Make Donations in the month of March**
 - Please make **check** payable to **AHEPA Cooley's Anemia Foundation** with **"Cooley's Anemia"** in the "Note" section of the check. Send your check to Tom George 506 Lantern Circle, Tampa, FL 33617
 - Call with your **Credit Card** Information to Tom Georgas at (813) 985-0236 or Mike Trimis at (813) 784-4872
 - (Donations are Tax Exempt under IRA Section 170 (c) (4))**
5. **AHEPA Bone Marrow Registry**

Since April 2006, AHEPA has added **3,000 donors** to the Registry. And we're already doing good things. More than **4,000 patients** around the world have searched our database since then, and three of our donors have been asked to "be at the ready" for a donation (cancer patients have to be "healthy" enough to receive the transplant).

AHEPA has partnered with Team Be The Match as a way to more easily raise funds for specific children in need of bone marrow matches. <http://www.ahepamarrow.org/>
<https://ahepa.org/programs/publichealth/>

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

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

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

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

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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

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

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

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.

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



Fr. Stavros
 <813-394-1038



Fr. John
 678-637-4425 >



Vasili
 414-254-5134>



Alex
 <262-370-0586

Opt-in on *The Messenger* -

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

Happy Birthday!

Julie Konstas – April 2

Teresa Miller – April 2

Samuel Rodriguez – April 2

Ekaterini Alithinos – April 3

Nedi Ferekides – April 3

Petra Silber – April 3

Angelika Labatos – April 4

Anthony Koudouna – April 5

Michelle Blankenbaker – April 6

Zachary Carter – April 6

Nicholas Katzaras – April 6

Kristina Hanhan – April 8

Maria N. Miaoulis – April 9

Robert Reace – April 9

Joshua Preston – April 10

Nicholas Kalojiannis – April 11

Harris Robinson – April 11

Brett Sandborn – April 11

Alexis Scarfogliero – April 11

Sadie Schad – April 11

Anna Thomas – April 11

Brett Mourer – April 12

George Cantonis – April 15

Gabriele Molina – April 15

Liam Boomgarden – April 16

Grayson Borgeas-Beach – April 16

James Kavouklis – April 16

Alexandra Patrascoiu – April 16

William Commimos – April 17

Pete Kabougeris – April 17

Samuel Thomas – April 17

Nikos Pagratis – April 18

Vasilios Panos – April 19

Zachary George – April 20

Maverick Horack – April 20

Nicholas Tsiabasis – April 21

Leo Saliba – April 22

Daniel Vukmer – April 24

Doukissa Moshos – April 25

Anna Roussos – April 25

Liam Elly – April 26

Efstratios Stamas – April 26

Marios Stephanides – April 26

Razvan Stingulescu – April 26

Deborah Doucas – April 27

Michael Giallourakis – April 27

John G. Malacos – April 27

Sebastian Boomgarden – April 28

Nicholas Malatin – April 28

Korey Mulberry – April 28

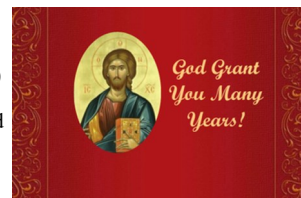
Sebastien Provenzano – April 28

Katherin Voisey – April 28

Frances Spirides –
 April 29

Stella Geis – April 30

Joanne Westmoreland
 – April 30



Memorial & Kolyva Protocol

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

Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

April 2 TITOS	April 11 ANTIPAS	April 22 NATHANAEL, NEARHOS
April 3 ILLYRIOS	April 12 AKAKIOS	April 24 ACHILLES, DOUKAS, ELIZABETH, LAZAROS, THAVMAS-TOS
April 5 PANAGIOTIS	April 13 GERONTIOS	April 25 DAFNIS, DAPHNE, NIKI, VAIOS, GLAFYRA
April 6 EFTIHIOS	April 14 ARISTARHOS, THOMAS	April 28 MAGNOS
April 9 EFPSYHIOS, JOSEF	April 15 LEONIDAS	April 29 ALITHEA, JASON, KERKYRA, SOSIPATROS
April 10 ANAKSIMENIS, DIMOKLIS, DIMOSTHENES, DIONISIS, EPAMINONDAS, ETEOKLIS, FOKION, HERCULES, HOMER, IFESTION, ISOCRATES, MAXIMOS, MILTIADIS, PARMENION, PELOPIDAS, PERICLES, PHILOPIMIN, PINDAROS, POLYVIOS, PROMITHEAS, SOCRATES, SOFOCLES, THEMISTOKLIS, THEOPRASTOS, THISEAS, TIMOTHY, XENOFON, ZINON	April 16 GALINI, GALINOS, HIONIA, CALIS, NIKI	April 30 ARGYRO, ASIMAKIS
	April 20 ZAKHAIOS	
	April 21 ALEXANDRA, FAISTOS, IANOS, JANUARY	

On the Serious Side

-When you have a friend that is going through a personal storm, instead of being a weatherman and spreading the news, try being an umbrella and cover them with love.

-Your children will become what you are. So be what you want them to be.

-You cannot do all the good the world needs, but the world needs all the good you can do.

On the Lighter Side

-The longest drum solo was 10 hours and 26 minutes and was performed by the child sitting behind me on Delta flight 963 to Tokyo.

-I finally heard some good news. . .I'm not overweight. I'm under-tall. What a relief!

-If you don't hear from me, I gave you up for Lent.

Margaret Mead

Years ago, anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture. The student expected Mead to talk about fishhooks or clay pots or grinding stones. But no. Mead said that the first sign of civilization in an ancient culture was a femur (thighbone) that had been broken and then healed. Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal. A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken the time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts, said Mead.

New Parish Directory



*Celebrating faith.
Connecting families.
Sharing hope.*

When people enter the doors of our church they are looking for a place to belong. Our directory brings us together to develop new relationships, connect with our own families and reconnect with those we haven't seen in a while. Join us for this "Connections Event" and be part of what God is doing right here at our church!

Directory Committee

Connections Event

Our church directory will not be complete without you. Join us to celebrate faith and family with our new church family album.

- **Schedule your professional photography session when you stop by the sign-up table at church or simply go online and follow the instructions below.**
If we don't see your name on our list of appointments, you will receive a phone call inviting you to participate.
- **Everyone who is photographed by Universal will receive a complimentary 8 x 10 portrait and a directory!**
- **Universal provides a complete professional portrait studio right here at our church!**
You'll enjoy a variety of poses, backgrounds, portrait sizes, finish and framing options AND have the opportunity to purchase portraits to give to family and friends.

Set your appointment with Universal today!



*Gathering families,
Connecting generations.*



Dear Parishioners,

It's time for a new church directory!

Our church is partnering with Universal Church Directories to put together an updated church directory.

We want you and your family featured! And everyone who gets photographed will receive a free directory AND a complimentary 8x10 portrait!

To make this possible, we need your help!

We need you and your family to sign up online or sign-up in person on Sunday.

There will be four different dates to have your picture taken

- Friday, April 15: 1:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
- Saturday, April 16: 11:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
- Friday, April 29: 11:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
- Saturday, April 30: 11:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

In order to **sign-up in person**, please see Jim Armstrong or Marilyn Sandborn in the hall after Divine Liturgy, sign up your family for a slot, and fill out a sign-up form.

For those who want to **register online** follow these directions:

- Go to: <https://www.ucdir.com/schedule/login.php>
- For Church Code, enter **f1776**
- For Password, enter **photos**
- Click on a date
- Click on "Reserve Time"
- Fill out the form

If you have any questions, please reach out to Alex Limberatos, Jim Armstrong, or Marilyn Sandborn.

We hope you'll be part of our new directory!

With love in the Lord,

+Fr. Stavros

St. John The Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Community Outreach

Hello and WELCOME! **On the 3rd Saturday of each month**, we volunteer 2 1/2 hrs of our time to provide for the needy and homeless of our community in East Tampa. We partner with local charity Matthew 25, Metropolitan Ministries and USF Medical School to serve breakfast, provide clothing and medical needs for our guests.

To Volunteer: Click on our Sign Up Genius below. If you forget to sign up, you can still come!

Place: Tampa Hope @ 3704 E. 3rd Ave. Tampa East

Time: 8:00 AM to 10:30AM

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

Matthew 25 founders Peggy & Mike Kanter, as well as Greg & Victoria Melton, are Go To people if you have questions or need direction on where you may be needed when you arrive.

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

INSERT SIGN UP GENIUS WEBSITE HERE

Greg Melton 813-967-2074 gmelt12@gmail.com



Church Etiquette by Fr. Stavros

As we are in the Lenten and Paschal seasons, many people will be attending church services. It's always helpful to be reminded of a few basic points of etiquette for our church services. I have expanded on the article I have printed in years past so please reread this one.

Some General Thoughts

At a recent baptism, where the sponsor was chewing gum with his hands in his pockets, made me think that we need some continued commentary on church etiquette. The Orthodox Church is a sacred space. Our society is losing its understanding of sacredness in general, but the Orthodox Church is a sacred place. When you enter the church, you are entering a piece of heaven on earth. There are large icons of the Lord, the Virgin Mary and the Saints, that dominate the church edifice. The smell of incense reminds us of our prayers going to heaven. The Body and Blood of Christ are present at all times in the tabernacle on the Altar Table. So, whether there is a service going on or not, the church is sacred at all times.

When we enter the church for a service, before a service has begun, we should be quiet and reverent. If speaking, it should be in hushed tones. It is frustrating that before a baptism, the volume level in church would be the same as in a restaurant or bar, and that we often have to ask people for their attention to begin the service, or ask them to quiet down. Leaving the church is the same thing—when waiting for Antithoron, please do so quietly, and whisper if you are going to speak.

Cell phones should be turned off during the service. This is a time to disengage from the world and enter into God's world. The only cell phones that should be on are for doctors who are on call who come to church and these should be on vibrate mode. Also, please don't give phones to your kids to play on, or text people while in church. I have heard from several people who have been distracted by others who are texting or children who are playing video games. If you want to take a picture or a video of something in church, that's fine, but other than this, please don't use the phones in church.

Gum belongs at a ballgame, not at church. Our mouth should be praying and singing in church, not chomping on gum.

Lipstick stains have been left on the icons in the narthex or on the special icons that are on the solea. Please be careful that you do not leave lipstick marks on the icons. You should not wear lipstick on Holy Thursday or Good Friday. These are days of extreme humility and sadness. Do not leave lipstick marks on the body of Christ as it hangs on the Cross. Please refrain from wearing lipstick if you plan to receive Holy Communion.

Hands in pockets are too casual. Our hands should be in our laps or at our sides or folded in front of us, a position of reverence and attention.

Don't Cross your legs in church because it is too casual. When standing in church, either have your hands on the pews in front of you, cross them in front of you, or hold a liturgy book in front of you. When sitting, place hands in your lap, not around the person next to you. Have your feet flat on the floor, not crossed legs. The preferred posture in church is standing. So when we sit, we are to sit "at full attention." And crossing legs is too casual.

Cocktail dresses are too short for church. Low-cut tops are inappropriate for church and really for anywhere. Dress in a manner that befits an encounter with the living God.

Strapless dresses—in monasteries, women must have their heads covered in church. In our church, we only ask for the shoulders. A three inch wide strap is appropriate. Less than that is not.

Continued...

We should put on our Sunday best for church. If the best at your disposal is blue jeans, then come in blue jeans. But don't opt for blue jeans if you have other attire. If the best you have is a T-shirt, then do not stay away. But if you own a polo shirt or a button down shirt, or a coat and tie, then come at your best.

We would never want anyone to stay away from church because of lack of an expensive wardrobe. Merely, put on the "best" that you have in your wardrobe for church, and come to church respectfully, and ready for worship, not like you are ready for a night on the town. As a society, we have become altogether immodest. I do not wish to return to the overly dressed gentlemen and ladies of the middle-ages, but it seems that we have taken it to the other extreme. And outside of church, we should consider what kind of statement our clothing makes about us and the Christian values of modesty that we claim to hold.

Arriving at church

Come on time - The time to arrive at church is before the service starts. If you arrive after the Divine Liturgy begins, try to enter the church quietly and observe what is happening. **If it is the Small Entrance, the Gospel, the Great Entrance, the Creed or the Consecration (kneeling), then do not enter the church.** Wait until these are finished and then quickly find a seat. Do not enter the nave while Father is giving the sermon. Try to not interrupt the Liturgy by your entrance. The best way to avoid this situation is to arrive on time.

Venerating the Gospel During Orthros—Some people arrive during Orthros, before Divine Liturgy, on Sundays. There is a Gospel that is read during Orthros, and afterwards, on most Sundays, the Gospel is offered for veneration by the faithful. If you enter the church during this time, please come up immediately to venerate the Gospel and then go light a candle.

How late can I come and still receive Holy Communion? This is a sad question. If we really believe that Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ, what kind of respect and order does it show for THE BODY and THE BLOOD of Christ if we are arriving only a few minutes before Holy Communion? If we are not there for the Consecration of the Gifts. We really should be at the Divine Liturgy from the beginning if we are to receive. So, what if we are running late? Can we get there by the reading of the Scriptures? If we can't come on time to hear God's Word, should really be receiving Holy Communion? Some might argue, I can read the Bible outside of Church, why do I need to be there for that? The most basic requirement for Holy Communion is a confession of faith, the Creed. Thus, if you are arriving after the Creed, it is not appropriate to receive Holy Communion. **Please refrain from receiving Holy Communion if you enter the church after the Creed.**

Venerating icons - It is customary to venerate icons in the Narthex when you enter into the church. When venerating (kissing) an icon, you are venerating an image of holiness. A Holy Person, or the LORD Himself is depicted in each icon. Pay attention where you kiss. It is not appropriate to kiss one of the saints on the lips. Rather, kiss the hands or feet of the saint, or if the person depicted in the icon is holding a cross, Gospel or scroll, you can venerate that, along with the hand or feet of the person depicted in the icon.

Lighting candles - Lighting candles is an important part of Orthodox worship. We light them along with offering personal prayers. Thus, it is not appropriate to be lighting candles during the Small Entrance, Gospel, Great Entrance, Creed or Consecration.

While in Church

Talk only to the Lord during the services - worship is not an appropriate time to greet your friends and neighbors. Please leave that for the coffee hour.

Leaving the church early - our Sunday School students go to class after Holy Communion, so that they may receive proper instructions. For those who are not in Sunday School, or when there is no Sunday School, it is expected that everyone will remain in church until the end of the service. To receive Holy Communion and immediately leave is to treat the church like a restaurant where we come and go as we please.

Continued...

When do I make the sign of the cross?

You can make the sign of the cross any time you wish, but please do it in a reverent way. It is not necessary to cross oneself three times in a row. Once, and reverently, is sufficient. Making the cross sloppily many times makes it look like we are strumming a guitar. There are some times when we should cross ourselves.

These include:

- Anytime you hear the name of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- When you hear the name of the Theotokos/Virgin Mary
- Before and after venerating an icon, the cross or the Gospel book
- When you enter and exit the church building
- When you cross in front of the altar, from one side of the church to the other.
- As the Holy Gifts pass you during the Great Entrance
- Before and after the Holy Gospel, when saying “Glory to You O Lord, Glory to You.”
- At the phrase “In one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” in the Creed.
- At the words of Institution - “Take, Eat, this is My Body”; and “Drink of this all of you, this is My Blood.”
- Before and after receiving Communion - Make the sign of the cross before it is your turn and after you’ve stepped away so one does not hit the chalice.
- When the priest comes out with Holy Communion and says “With the fear of God, with faith and with love draw near.”
- On any petition or prayer that speaks to your heart.
- When the priest censures you, or blesses you, you can make the sign of the cross, or simply bow your head.

Listen to the words of the service, they tell you what to do!

At the Small Entrance: “Come let us worship and bow down” make a slight bow.
“Let us lift up our hearts:” Look upwards to Christ in the dome and lift up your hands.
“Let us bow our heads to the Lord:” Pretty self-explanatory, bow your head to the Lord.

Sing with the choir and offer the responses of the Divine Liturgy, this is a work of the people, ALL the people. Recite the Creed and Lord’s Prayer as well.

Kneeling

Put the kneelers up and down quietly.

Kissing the hand of the priest

When greeting a priest, you should kiss his hand as a sign of respect that this is the hand that holds the Holy Communion. This goes for in church, and also outside of the church, for instance when greeting a priest in his office or in the hall. Also, when you kiss the priest’s hand (or the bishop’s) you receive a blessing in return, they offer you a blessing in return.

For Holy Communion:

- Pray the Holy Communion Prayers silently as Father prays aloud.
- As you are waiting in line, pray the Jesus Prayer, “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner,” or the prayer of the repentant thief “Lord, remember me in Your Kingdom” repeatedly.
- Don’t have your hands in your pockets
- Girls, wipe off lipstick before receiving
- When the person before you is receiving, make the sign of the cross.
- When it is your turn to receive, say your Orthodox name to the priest, even if he knows your name.
- Either take the cloth and hold it under your chin or allow the altar boy to do that for you. Come close to the chalice so that Father doesn’t have to reach.
- Open your mouth wide
- Close your mouth on the spoon. Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ—it cannot communicate disease.
- Wipe your lips.

Continued...

- As you walk away, make the sign of the cross
- Take a piece of the blessed bread.
- Pray the post-Communion prayers in the Liturgy book if you are staying in church.

Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ. There has never been a documented case of disease being transmitted through Holy Communion. Every priest in the Orthodox Church, after distributing Holy Communion to all the faithful (and undoubtedly someone is sick in our church each Sunday when over 250 people are receiving) consumes what remains of the Holy Communion. No priest gets sick from doing this. Father chooses to put a lot of Communion on the spoon, so that you can *“taste and see how good the Lord is”* (Psalm 34:8). ***So please don’t pull away quickly, because it makes him nervous because we do not want the Body and Blood of Christ to end up on the floor. Please approach with not only fear of God, with faith and with love, but also with care. This IS THE Body and THE Blood of Christ, “shed for the life and salvation of the world” (Liturgy of St. Basil) and imparted to us for “the remission of sins and life everlasting.”***

Bread at the end of church is called Antithoron which means “instead of the Gifts.” Antithoron is not Holy Communion but needs to be treated with respect and reverence. When you approach to receive Antithoron, cup your hands one inside the other, kiss the hand of the priest as he places the bread in your hand, and then eat the bread carefully so that crumbs don’t fall all over the place. This is holy and blessed bread! When waiting for Antithoron at the end of the service, please do so quietly, and whisper if you are going to speak.

Small Children – We love that there are so many children at St. John the Baptist. Please use discretion and common sense when it comes to taking them out when they become fussy. As the Holy Week services are long and run late, for those who bring small children to the services, please sit near either the side door or in the back and if your child becomes fussy, please take them outside for a few minutes. Our nursery is also open and livestreaming of the services is available both there and in the Kourmolis Center

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



For Those Who Don't Come to Church Often Or Who Haven't Been in A While

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

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

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

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

Church is important. Why?

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

Church is important because

- It helps us slow down the hectic pace of our life so we can reflect on what is really important—our salvation.
- It gives us the opportunity to pray for ourselves and our loved ones.
- It gives us the opportunity to receive the prayers of others
- It gives us the opportunity to enjoy fellowship with people like us.
- It gives us the opportunity to pray in a way that is structured so well, that the Divine Liturgy is a complete prayer that touches on every aspect of our life and our World.
- It gives us an opportunity to touch God and for God to touch us, in the sacrament of Holy Communion.
- It unites us with the saints, the holy ones of God; and also with those in our family who have passed away, since we pray for the departed in our services.

It gives us a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven. Why?

- Because heaven won't be anything like life on earth.
- Heaven will not be a secular experience but a holy, awesome and moving one.
- The central activity in heaven is Communion with God and fellowship with those in God's kingdom.
- If we don't learn how to worship, we won't be ready to enter God's Kingdom, just like those who do not practice their sport don't play well on the field, just like those who don't do well in school do not graduate.

How can you get back in the habit of coming to church?

JUST START COMING!!!

When is a good time to come back?

ANY TIME, BUT ESPECIALLY DURING LENT

But what if I'm mad at someone?

It's a great time to forgive them. After all, if we want God to forgive us, we must forgive one another.

What if I'm totally lost in my faith and don't know how to start over again?

Make an appointment to meet with Fr. Stavros.

SEE YOU IN CHURCH!!!

PLEASE COME BACK!

BOUNCING BACK FROM DEFEAT

By Father Paul Kaplanis

Perhaps one of the most difficult things to experience in life is defeat. Losing at anything is never a good feeling, even if someone explains the benefits of building character. When we think of defeat, we must widen our scope to include all the times when we may have suffered because of some type of failure. It seems to be much easier to look back at our past disappointments and reflect on our complex challenges. Usually as time passes, we feel a sense of understanding and peace, whereas in the middle of our struggle, there was complete turmoil and our entire life was turned upside down.

This must have been the feeling that the disciples of Jesus experienced in the final days of His ministry on earth. The Disciples were confused; they felt that everything they worked for had fallen apart. Moreover, they were the inner circle; those chosen by the Lord as His closest followers. During the course of His ministry, the disciples had come to believe, one by one, that he was the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the Savior. They witnessed Him heal the sick, perform amazing miracles and raise people from the dead. They were certain that He would soon establish God's Kingdom on earth, a Kingdom that would have no end that also would compete with and defeat the Roman Empire.

Since we know the outcome and we can look back, we are reminded how things really unfolded. Things did not go as the disciples had planned or perceived. As things began to unravel, two astonishing events took place. First, Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ and made all the arrangements for His arrest. Secondly, Jesus was put on trial for treason, found guilty and sentenced to death. The victory they had anticipated had been snatched away in a few moments. All but one of the disciples deserted Jesus. The rest were either extremely afraid for their own life or they felt that His plan to save the world had failed and their anticipated joy was now turned into dark despair.



Thankfully, this is not how the story ends. We exist as a Church and Faith, there was a completely different outcome. Our Savior's Death and Resurrection transformed what appears to be bitter defeat into an amazing victory. This is the joy of our Easter Pascha celebration!

St. Paul makes it clear that it is our Lord's Resurrection, which distinguishes our Christian Faith from all other religions. We do not come to the church to worship our dead founder; we gather in communion to celebrate the one who died and has the power to destroy eternal death. We celebrate the fact that God has provided the way and is the *Way for us to be reunited with Him* in eternity. What was broken through Adam and Eve's disobedience is transformed through the New Adam, Christ and the New Eve, the Virgin Mary, Theotokos with her obedience to God's will. What this also means for us is that the life, death and resurrection of our Lord teaches us that there is no defeat that anyone can experience in life that God cannot turn into victory; no failure that God cannot turn into success; no life that God cannot turn into a life that gives Him glory.

Our life on earth gives us the opportunity to give God glory, and yet there are many things in life that can prevent us from doing so.

Continued...

Most of these obstacles to glorifying God involve some type of personal defeat. It may be a failed marriage, a destroyed relationship between parents and children, or being overtaken and enslaved by drugs, alcohol, sex, or some other passion that we cannot control. Perhaps the largest defeat comes if we give up or give in to the one passion that controls us the most. The message of our Lord's Resurrection is that He can turn our worse defeat into victory. God's promise to us is that He can renew, restore and rebuild us up regardless of any failure.

In order to help us with a biblical reference of people rising up from defeat with God's help, we can examine the promises that God made to the Israelites through the Prophet Jeremiah. The Israelites had a history of following God, falling away, then following again and then falling away. And yet, when they repented, God always received them.

In chapter 31 of the Book of Jeremiah, God promised the opportunity to bounce back from the defeat they had suffered as a nation. Presented below are four promises from God that reveal how He can help us bounce back from any personal defeat in life.

1. God has promised his everlasting love.

In our human understanding, we cannot comprehend the depth of God's love for us. His love is so extraordinary and unconditional that no matter how hard we try, we cannot get beyond our own limits. One way to contemplate this is to think of the person that you love the most. Perhaps it is your husband or wife, your best friend or your children. It would be a person to whom you would give your undying love and no matter what they did, you would continue to love them, support them and believe in them. If we know someone like that, then we see a reason why we love that person. Through experience, we have seen certain qualities in them that make them lovable; like goodness or kindness or a great sense of humor or loyalty. If it is our child, then we may perceive in them a reflection of our own self or of our spouse. This is the type of potential, great, love that we humans possess within us. We are able to love those who are the most lovable to us. God's love is different. He is LOVE! Regardless of anything we do or anything that happens to us, His love never changes. He cannot love us more and He will not love us less, for He said in Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 3, **"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."**

Several years ago, the IRS auctioned off the diary of Madelyn Murray O'Hare, the founder of American Atheists, in an attempt to raise money to pay back taxes and creditors. Repeatedly, in her diary she had written, *"Somebody, somewhere, love me." Throughout her life, as she was seeking to be loved, she fought against the God she believed did not exist. Ironically, she never realized that He continued to love her with an everlasting love.*

The second promise God makes in Jeremiah is...

2. God promises to rebuild our life.

In verse 4, God says to the prophet, **"I will build you up again, and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel."** This second promise gives us so much hope and comfort. Our defeats may be large or small. In some cases, our defeats may threaten our career, our marriage, our family, our finances or our soul, but God can turn any defeat into victory. With the freedom that God has given us from the very beginning of time, we must choose to place our faith in Him. In return, God will rebuild us and restore us.

The third promise we see in Jeremiah chapter 31 is...

3. God promises to fill our life with joy.

When we experience defeat, it sometimes seems that we will never be able to laugh again, that this dark cloud of defeat will haunt us forever.

Going back to our childhood days, we may be able to relate to the following scenario.

A man shares the following regarding his youth, “I remember when I was about ten years old, I misbehaved and got into trouble over it. *I will spare you the details, he said, but it involved a baseball, a sliding glass door and a wild pitch. My parents were really mad at me; this wasn't my first offense. In addition to having bad aim, I had defied their rule against bouncing a baseball against the back of the house. Plus, it was after dark, my homework was not finished and I had not cleaned my room. So, I wasn't exactly having a good day. Dad grounded me, but first I had to endure “the lecture.” Dad excelled in this area and his lectures usually took the form of a question and answer session: He said, Do you think I am made of money? Do you see a money tree growing in the back yard? Did you not realize that glass breaks when you throw a ball against it? What in the world was going through your mind as you threw the baseball against the house in the dark? Did you think you could get away with it? The session ended with the reminder that when he was my age he was working at a drug store for 10 cents an hour. He always seemed to mention that detail. Finally, I was sent to my room.*

As I sat there, feeling sorry for myself for being such a wretched creature, I thought back to a time just a few days earlier when I had made a joke that dad had laughed at. I remember thinking, ‘Those days are gone forever, we will never be able to laugh together again.’

In spite of the dad's tendency to give long lectures, he had not done anything to encourage this degree of self-pity in his son. He had punished him, not disowned him and the son over reacted.

Moreover, he was convinced at that moment that all the happy times in life were now behind him. This story cautions us to not blow our mistakes out of proportion and turn them into a huge obstacle. We should not make the darkness of failure, darker than it really is and give it more credit than it deserves.

When we review in our minds the Fall of Man, we are reminded that it was disobedience that caused Adam and Eve to be expelled from Paradise. Obviously, the consequences have been great; however, the very first thing God did was offer an opportunity for reconciliation. Actually, He continued on many occasions to extend forgiveness and covenants to heal what have been damaged in man. Remember, God loves us and so He gives us the freedom to love Him. His forgiveness and mercy is beyond our comprehension. He can take any defeat and turn it into victory. God turns sorrow into joy. He explicitly told His disciples in His final moments with them, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy” (John 16:20).**

The final promise given in chapter 31 of Jeremiah is...

4. God promises to make us effective in this life as we journey towards eternity.

Jeremiah says in verse 5, **“And you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the farmers will plant them and enjoy their fruit.”**

The good news in this passage continues, reassuring us that when we think we are defeated, God quietly and surely leads us to find victory. That victory may come as a surprise to us, not in the form we anticipated. We may have prayed for another method of deliverance, but God knows what we need

Continued...

even before we ask.



When we look at examples for failure and success in the Holy Scripture, Moses comes to mind.

When Moses was a young man, he wanted to be the leader of the Hebrew people, but the first time he tried, he failed. He ended up committing murder and he had to flee Egypt so that Pharaoh would not kill him. Years later, when he was tending a flock of sheep in the land of Midian, God came to him and said, **“I am sending you to bring my people out of Egypt.”** Moses response was essentially, Who am I? What if they do not listen? Please send someone else (Exodus 3-4). We know that Moses came back to Egypt, lead the Hebrew people out of slavery and piloted them to the promise land. God made Moses, forgave Moses and blessed him so that he could bounce back from defeat to victory.

There is a promise that God has not made to us. He never promised that living a Godly life would be easy. In fact, the great Fathers of our Holy Church speak frequently about the struggle of never accepting defeat over the many things that can pull us away from God. When we heard the word struggle, we may think that it is a negative thing, when in reality and in spite of what the world teaches us, it is a positive and good thing. St. Basil the Great and other Fathers of the Church, speak about this struggle as being spiritual warfare comparing the easy way, which is the wide one with the rough and steep narrow way. He says that **“the downward slope has a deceptive guide, a wicked demon who drags his followers through pleasure to destruction, but the rough and steep way has a good angel, who leads his followers through the toils of virtue to a blessed end.”**

Another key element here is to remember that we are not alone in this struggle. This is why Christ and His Church are here to struggle with us. We should struggle as a family, not as individuals. Above all, we should never surrender to the things that take us away from God.

So, if we feel defeated, come and celebrate the greatest victory of all time, our Lord’s victory over death. Christ is victorious, restoring our opportunity for eternal life. Christ shatters the gates of Hades and makes it possible to transform our defeats into victory. Christ binds the Evil One and offers to rebuild our lives and restore our joy and give us hope.

Καλή Ανάσταση! A Blessed Resurrection to everyone!

Fr. Paul Kaplanis is the Dean of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation in Atlanta, GA.

April 2022						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
** Fast Day					1** 9 th Hour 9:30 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Salutations 6:30 p.m.	2 Young at Heart
3** Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m.	4** Great Compline 5:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	5** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m	6** 9 th Hour 5:30 p.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 6:00 p.m. Lenten Dinner	7** Griefshare 6:30 p.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	8** 9 th Hour 9:30 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Akathist 6:30 p.m. Liturgy 8:15 p.m.	9**
10** Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m. GOYA 5:00 p.m.	11 Great Compline 5:30 p.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	12** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m	13** 9 th Hour 5:30 p.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 6:00 p.m. Lenten Dinner	14** Griefshare 6:30 p.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	15** 9 th Hour 9:30 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Registry Photography 1:00-7:30	16** Saturday of Lazarus Orthros 8:30 a.m. Proskomide 9:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Community Outreach Registry Photography 1130-5:00
17** Palm Sunday Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m. Palm Sunday Luncheon- Philoptochos Vespers 5:00 p.m. Bridegroom Service 6:30 p.m.	18** Holy Monday 9 th Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Bridegroom Service 6:30 p.m.	19** Holy Tuesday 9 th Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Bridegroom Service 6:30 p.m.	20** Holy Wednesday 9 th Hour 9:00 a.m. Pre-Sanctified Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Holy Unction 3:00 p.m. Bridegroom Service 5:00 p.m. Holy Unction 6:30 p.m.	21** Holy Thursday Vespers Liturgy 9:15 a.m. Passion of Christ 6:30 p.m.	22** Good Friday Royal Hours 9:00 a.m. Apokathelosis 3:00 p.m. Lamentations 7:00 p.m.	23** Holy Saturday Vespers Liturgy 8:30 a.m. Great Canon 11:00 p.m. Resurrection Service 11:40 p.m. Paschal Liturgy 12:30 a.m.
24 PASCHA Agape Vespers 11:00 a.m.	25 St. George Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. No Fasting this week	26 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m	27 Parish Council 6:30 p.m.	28 Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	29 Life-Giving Fountain Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Registry Photography 1:00-7:30	30 Registry Photography 11:30 – 5:30

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

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

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

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

Pastoral Assistants
Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586 (Cell)
alex@stjohntpa.org
Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134 (Cell)
vasili@stjohntpa.org

Parish Council
John Zelatis, President 813-727-2271
Euripides Panos, Vice President 813-352-3972
Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary 813-855-8678
Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898
Jim Armstrong 954-295-6665
Joanne Dalakis 781-888-3329
Amin Hanhan 813-846-2957
Nick Katzaras 863-581-2430
Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855
Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026
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
Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134

Altar Boys
Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Bookstore
Presbytera Denise Stefero 678-464-4833

Bible Study
Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425

Buildings & Grounds
Euripides Panos 813-352-3972

Chanters
Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586
Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134

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 MAE, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
IIAPEA, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
IIANHGYPI, 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

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
Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Young Adult/OCF
Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586
Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134

Young at Heart
Bill Manikas 813-716-8185
Dora Morgan 813-613-3738

Youth Protection
Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855

12 Disciples
Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376

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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.