

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

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

Christ is Born! December 2022 Glorify Him!

VISION:

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

MISSION:

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

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Fr. Stavros' Message

Good News of a Great Joy

Merry Christmas



**'Tis
The
Season.**



**Jesus
Is the
Reason!**

The Nativity Fast for Orthodox Christians began on November 15. In our parish, for the third year in a row, we gave out Nativity Bags, with journals to all of our parishioners. The theme this year is "Good News of Great Joy." Ostensibly, this refers to the message of the angels to the shepherds on Christmas night. We don't have enough joy in the world and the intention of this theme is to inject joy into this Nativity season. Throughout the Sundays of this season, we have been leading off sermons and other presentations with focus on good news—the good news of Jesus Christ and other kinds of good news coming from our parish and other places.

This month's message will be filled with good news—it will, as always, have some thoughts that will hopefully lead us to introspective thought. The ability to think deeply, and even to correct our course based on our thinking is good news in itself. First, we will meditate on the question of "What is the Why?" and then share three pieces of really good news of great joy.

Why is the why?

What is the why? That is an important question to ask ourselves in regards to the many things we do. Sometimes we forget the why we are doing something because we've become so engrossed, accustomed or even comfortable with what we are doing. Let's take the question "why do we work?" The easiest answer is "to make money." Now, let's say that you won the \$2B Powerball lottery last month and money was no object. Would you still work? If the answer is "yes," that means that your "why" is about more than money, perhaps it is something more lofty like "I work to make a difference in the world." Hopefully there is some of that in our "why", otherwise work is just an "all about me getting money" proposition. Just something to ponder as we get the message going this month.

We have a *why in our parish*. We know why we exist—we exist to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations. Jesus said that pretty clearly in Matthew 28:19-20. After we have established the why of anything, we next move to the how-how we are going to achieve our why. At St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in Tampa, our how is based on five core values—love, worship, community, learning and service. This is how we

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Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis, Priest

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achieve our why. We talk about these values, a lot. Hopefully we are modeling them. And I sincerely hope people are internalizing these five words. Because these five words are the words we hold us, which help us in making the many decisions we make in our parish.

Moving from the *how*, we go to *what*—what we do that expresses our how, those core values, and our *why*, our purpose which is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this month's message, there are three specific things, three pieces of good news of a great joy that I want to talk about in regards to our why, how, and what.

The Greek Festival

The Greek Festival was an overwhelming success. As of this writing, we don't have the total income yet, as it takes several weeks to pay all the bills, and I'm writing this on November 15. Perhaps by the time you get this issue of *The Messenger* the total will be known. What can be said for sure is that we didn't lose money. Money is going to be sent to three charities—Agape Charities for Hurricane Ian relief, LifePath Hospice for aid to those at the end of life, and to Love Inc. for aid to those who are on the streets of Tampa to get them off the streets and to a more safe and productive life. As we have said many times, 100% of the proceeds of the Festival will be going to charity. Because the early church had TWO concerns—worship and philanthropy. Endowments, beautiful buildings, even amazing ministries, things that are the concerns of the modern church, were not concerns of the early church. And sadly, in the modern church, we have forgotten the philanthropy piece, at least to the degree it was in the early church, when, by the way, the church grew at a rate of 40% per decade.

The Festival brought our community together. Our three dance groups not only entertained our guests, they had fun in the lead-up to the Festival in their practices. Our GOYA came together to clean up the church grounds on October 29. Many women (and men) came together for the baking and cooking days. At the Festival, it was smiles all around as we served our guests. There didn't seem to be as much stress during the Festival this year, and I believe that was because there wasn't the pressure to count every dollar, or sell enough raffle tickets to cover our expenses, or vendors all over the place. It was just a time for fun and fellowship, without the pressure of fundraising. Of course, four days after the Festival, Tropical Storm Nicole rolled through Tampa. Imag-

ine if that had been a week earlier—how it would have ruined tents, flooded our back field, and essentially ruined the Festival. This is the number two reason we shouldn't rely on the Festival to pay our bills—because the weather could wash out our Festival any year. The number one reason, however, is because our community needs to pay its own bills. We shouldn't rely on others buying our food and pastries to do so. We've now done that for three years—two years of no festival because of the pandemic, and now this year, with the money going to charity.

A two-day Festival was good for this year. It was really AWESOME, after two days of raising money for philanthropy, to see our church gather for worship. On Sunday, November 6, the church was FULL. We offered a memorial service for those who have passed since our last Festival. Then we went next door to the hall for a free lunch—all you can eat, with leftovers to go home, watched our dance groups (something we couldn't do while we were working), all danced as one community, and then all cleaned up together, with everything wrapping up by 3:00 p.m. That was an amazing day!

I want to thank all those who helped out at the Greek Festival. Everyone who worked, everyone who helped out before the Festival, our area heads, and most especially the “core four” Festival committee—Mike Xenick, Chris Kyrus, John Zelatis and Theo Panopoulos. These men worked hard, not just during the Festival weekend but long before, to make sure this event came off as it did. And a special thank you to Mike Xenick, who took the lead on this event.

What we will do in the future remains to be seen. For 2022, however, a job well done!

Stewardship

December is stewardship month. Because many people send in their stewardship form in the mail, we aren't collecting as many forms on one single Sunday as we used to. Therefore, we are not going to have a stewardship Sunday as in the past, but a stewardship month. We kindly ask that you send in your stewardship form to the office by no later than December 31, 2022. We also kindly ask that you fulfill the remainder of your 2022 pledge by the end of the year as well.

Our theme for Stewardship 2023 as well as our word of the year for 2023 is the

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word “serve.” The verse that we are basing not only our Stewardship on but the verse that will direct our parish is Joshua 24:15, “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*”

As an aside, I heard a few comments from naysayers about our Festival generosity that “well, I guess we have so much money to give away that we don’t need money.” That is not true. We have money in our savings, for capital improvements, etc. We are now debt-free. The responsibility to be good stewards has nothing to do with how much money the church has. The more the church has, the more philanthropy it can do. The more we offer the church in terms of our time and talent, the more we can actualize our *why and our how—the more we can spread the Gospel and the more we can demonstrated our values of love, worship, community, learning, and service.*

The Biblical concept of the “tithe” was an offering of the first ten percent of one’s goods to the temple each year. Yes, ten percent. But let’s leave the percent and focus on the idea of offering our first-fruits to the Lord. We shouldn’t pay all of our bills, get in all our entertainment, and take all of our trips, and then give the Lord the left-overs. We should take the first of what we have and offer that. I remember my mom telling us when we were kids that the week had 168 hours in it. But the first three hours each week were going to the Lord. We now had 165 hours to get all the other stuff done in. And it didn’t matter if it was a hard week in school and we had lots of projects to do, it didn’t matter if we were on vacation, we always gave those three hours to the Lord. Yes, we always went to church, even on vacation.

In order for our church to do what it is supposed to do, it takes a financial commitment from all of us, the collective body, and then our church is able to serve. The church serves us as individuals, by making sure we have opportunities to worship, to have fellowship, and to learn in a spirit of love. The church, collectively, then serves the greater community in the form of charity and generosity. Sometimes the church serves one person at a time, such as in counseling and confession. Your stewardship commitment helps that happen. Sometimes the church serves one family, such as at a sacrament. Sometimes the church serves a small group of people, such as in a ministry. Sometimes the church serves the entire congregation, such as in worship. And sometimes the church serves people

outside of the church community—such as when we give to charitable organizations like LifePath Hospice, Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC), Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM), International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) FOCUS North America and the many other charitable organizations we support.

Everything we do in life is motivated by a desire to serve—a desire to serve someone else, a desire to serve ourselves, or a desire to serve God. For 2023, our budget again reflects a large emphasis on service through charitable giving, where we serve others. It reflects a large emphasis on personnel who give us the opportunity to learn about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it reflects a large emphasis on ministries who help us worship and deepen our sense of community. Taken in total, the budget reflects a parish which loves God and loves to serve others.

I think on a personal level, we all like to feel like we make a difference for someone, at least I hope we feel this way. It felt so good to hear the compelling stories from the young woman who was helped by LifePath Hospice and to the people who lead Love, Inc. to know that our church is making a difference. It felt so good at the Festival to not just be selling food, but knowing that every bit of profit was going to make a difference. ***I hope you have that same joy when you fill out your stewardship form for 2023, knowing that your contribution is making a difference—whether that is to the person who comes to confession and has a life-changing experience, or the person who comes to Bible study, Sunday school, GOYA, etc. and becomes more committed to the faith, or to the hundreds of people who worship each week and touch Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, or to those who gather to celebrate their joys (weddings and baptisms) and sorrows (funerals).*** Your giving allows ALL of that and more to happen. And all of these things our church does is good news of great joy.

Every family—whether a small nuclear family, or a church family—in every generation has had to choose its priorities. Our parish is choosing the path that Joshua took in the Old Testament, we are choosing to serve the Lord. We invite your family to do the same. Please fill out your stewardship form in December, with an offering that reflects your desire to serve the Lord, as well as our parish, through your sacrificial offering. In a world that

seems to put the individual above everything else, in our parish we strive to put God first, to serve others, and to receive the resulting joy for ourselves.

One final note on stewardship: Being financially independent of the festival will enable us to continue to serve the greater community through charitable giving. Having full use of our facilities will enable us to expand our ministries, bringing others closer to Christ, while at the same time coming closer to Him ourselves. And this is what our stewardship is building toward.

The Nativity of Christ—Opportunities to Worship This December

The most important thing we do in our parish is worshipping. And for those who love worshipping, I have some good news of great joy.

Some Orthodox theologians call the feast of the Nativity “The Winter Pascha.” In other words, like Pascha in the spring, this great feast is preceded by a period of fasting, reflection and spiritual preparation. However, unlike the Great Lent which precedes Pascha, there isn’t the same emphasis on worship. There isn’t a cycle of Monday, Wednesday and Friday services as there is during Great Lent. Of course, the non-Orthodox world all around us uses the month of December for parties, shopping, decorating, etc. and by the time Christmas rolls around, there is almost a sense of relief that “Christmas is over,” rather than a celebration of the birth of Christ. Living in non-Orthodox world, we will obviously get drawn into all of this as well. That is understandable. I wouldn’t expect someone not to go to the company Christmas party because it is before December 25, nor am I suggesting that you do.

With this in mind, as we did last year, we are going to create “Christmas Holy Week” in our parish for the week before the Nativity. Beginning on Sunday, December 18, the Divine Liturgy will be held once a day for 8 days (and two times on Christmas Eve), so that everyone in our parish will have the opportunity for some extra worship services as we prepare for the feast of the Nativity. On Friday, December 23, the Divine Liturgy will begin at 7:00 a.m., early in the morning, for people who are working, and also to afford us the opportunity to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at sunrise. Additionally, the Christmas Candlelight service will be held in the evening of Monday, December 19. This is a great opportunity to invite someone who is non-Orthodox to a service, as

it will be short (one hour) by our standards, there is no Eucharist, and there is also the opportunity to remember those who have passed away in the last year. The Royal Hours will be held at 9:30 a.m. on Friday, December 23.

On Monday, December 19, we will have our annual “Day of Prayer” at St. John, where the church will be open all day for people to stop by and pray. The day will begin with Orthros at 9:00 a.m. and Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. and then be open all day, concluding with our Christmas Candlelight Service from 6:00-7:00 p.m.

On Christmas Eve itself, there will be THREE services, with the hope that everyone will attend at least one of them. On Christmas Eve morning, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. This will be followed by Fr. Stavros reading a Christmas story to our children as he does each year. In the afternoon, we will celebrate Great Vespers at 4:00 p.m. For those unable to attend the Divine Liturgy in the evening, this service will afford us the opportunity to not only hear the Scriptures of the Nativity, but also the prophecy readings from the Old Testament which foreshadow the coming of the Messiah. Orthros for the Nativity will begin at 5:30 p.m., followed by the Divine Liturgy at 7:00 p.m. Because the Nativity falls on Sunday, December 25, we will also have Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, December 25. This is FOUR services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. I hope we will each make at least one of them. The truth is, over 1,200 people call St. John their spiritual home. We could conceivably fill the church for each of these services, if everyone came to one of them.

There is a well-known saying, “Keep Christ in Christmas.” And I can’t emphasize that enough. As another saying goes, “He is the reason for the season.” As we celebrate the Nativity, please do not forget Christ, its centerpiece. One of our core values is worship. In the month of December, there will be 22 opportunities to worship at St. John. Of all the things we do in our parish, worship is the most important. And 22 opportunities to worship in December is definitely good news of great joy.

On behalf of Pres. Lisa and Nicholas, I’d like to wish each of you a Blessed Nativity and a Happy and healthy New Year 2023!

With love in the Incarnate Lord,
+Fr. Stavros

**Looking for an Uplifting Gift to Give to Someone This Christmas?
Consider “The Heart of Encouragement.”**

The Heart of Encouragement:

**176 Reflections to Build You Up and
Empower You to Build Up Others**



By Stauros N. Akrotirianakis
Foreword by Tim Tassopoulos

In February 2015, I started a ministry called “The Prayer Team.” It is a daily reflection that goes out to several thousand people, including many people from our parish. While it is a burden to write almost every day, it is a joy to know that the message of Christ is getting out there and that what I humbly offer is well-received and is making some impact. Through this ministry, I have been blessed to have now seven books published. There is a section in *The Messenger* each month that highlights them.

The latest book is the one that I am most passionate about. It is called “The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others.” Below is a short summary of the *WHY* of the book, as well as a few topics from the Table of Contents. Lots of us, in our idealistic moments, dream of doing something to change the world. This is my attempt to bring positive change into my corner of the world. I do not often ask people to buy things, or endorse things for people to buy. My ministry is not one of commerce. Nor is it a business. Which is why I’m a little uncomfortable asking people to buy a book and encouraging others

to do the same. This book is not about business. It is about pushing a message of encouragement which is so desperately needed in the world today. Please help get this message out by purchasing this book for yourselves and for others. It will be available in our bookstore, as well as on Amazon.

Why This Book?

Very few people have this right. If you ask most people, and they answer honestly, most would say that they are lacking in confidence. A lack of confidence leads to low self-esteem which leads to low productivity, which leads to anxiety, which then leads to a lack of confidence and a vicious cycle occurs. This is not just a teenage thing. If it was, we could call it simply one stage of life. And yes, perhaps this is exacerbated in the teenage years. However, there many people that never break this cycle. They lack confidence throughout life.

On the flip side, there are some people who are supremely confident. They might even have narcissistic tendencies and lack humility. They are confrontational and many people feel uncomfortable around them. Some of these may also lack confidence deep down. They just go overboard in hiding it. There is an overall problem with honesty in our society. In many pockets, it’s not safe to be honest or vulnerable. So we create stories about ourselves based on lies—we don’t tell people we are stressed out, or lack confidence, or need help, because we think we can’t. Because it might cost us a job or a reputation. Or because we might be gossiped about. So, we play this game where we are less than honest.

This book is about encouragement, building up others, creating safe spaces where it’s okay to be honest and vulnerable. The older I get and the more of life I experience, the more I think it is necessary to encourage and reassure others, and create safe spaces. These three things—encouragement, reassurance, and safety—will create environments of honesty, confidence, and productivity. And when I say productivity, I’m not talking about work ethic only. There are many people who can’t be productive at anything because they are anxious, sad and discouraged. By encouraging others, we can help one another be the best version of our-

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selves, and rather than feeling isolated with our thoughts and our worries, we can get out and enjoy life with a little more confidence.

This book contains 176 reflections. Each contains a verse of Scripture, a reflection and a prayer. Each is written with the hope that it will encourage you and build you up in one area of life and will in turn give you some concrete ideas of how to encourage and build up others. Most reflections also include an “Encouragement Challenge,” something to do on a given day that will infuse encouragement into our world.

It’s nineteen sections are based on I Thessalonians 5: 11-28, a mere 18 verses of Scripture that provide an amazing amount of encouragement and a solid framework of how to become a good encourager.

You don’t have to read the whole book or read it in order. Look over the table of contents and find areas of your life where you need some encouragement and read those. If something in particular strikes you or reminds you of someone, feel free to share that reflection with them as you wish. There is so much tearing down in the world today. I hope this book will serve as a way to build you up and help you build up others as well.

No one wants to lack confidence. No one likes feeling anxious. Narcissism is not the answer. Living at either extreme will not allow us to be the best version of ourselves. The answer is somewhere in the middle. And encouragement, I believe, is an important component in getting us to the middle, where we can be the best version of ourselves and help others to do the same.

I have served as a Greek Orthodox priest for nearly a quarter of a century. And I have been an Orthodox Christian my entire life. This book is written for a “general Christian” audience. However, there are occasional references that are specific to the Orthodox Christian Church.

Further, one of the greatest joys in my life has been to serve as the director of a Greek Orthodox summer camp, which I have done for twenty years. I’ve learned many lessons on encouragement from summer camp as well as from my ministry, and many of those lessons and stories will appear throughout this book.

Finally, I am very blessed to have had Tim Tasopoulous, President and COO of Chick-Fil-A, Inc. write a foreword for this book, giving his endorsement on this critical topic.

A Sampling of Some of the 176 Reflection Titles

It’s Okay to Be a “Smith” and Not a “Jones”
Encouragement to be the Person God Created You to Be
How to Build an Encouraging Environment in Your Home
The “Theology” of Fred Flintstone
Peace in the Midst of Conflict
Solving the Maze of Inconsistent Voices
Don’t Be a Victim, Be a Survivor
Get a Win Today!
Make Each Moment Count
A Lot of It Won’t Matter Next Week
You Can Rewrite the Narrative
My Struggle is So Ugly, So I Suffer in Silence
Make a Mantra and Use It
Hold Fast to Your Boundaries—Be (the Good Part of) You
Getting Rid of Guilt and Shame
Go for Excellence, Not Mediocrity
God is Faithful, Even When We Are Not
You Are Worthy
Swimming Against the Current
Practical Ways We Can All Make a Difference
Are You All In?
Go Do It

Please consider purchasing this book for yourself and for anyone else who can use some encouragement.

***“Encouragement is something we all need.
Encouragement is something we can all give.
Encouragement is something we don’t get enough of.
Giving encouragement is something that involves low-cost but high benefit.”***

-Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis

Reflection #1

Monthly Message from Vasili Panagopoulos

If Only We Could Receive a CT scan of our Souls



For some people, going to the doctor for a checkup is routine. Perhaps they go often to bring peace of mind, or because of an underlying condition that requires them to be screened often. They go a couple of times a year to get their vitals taken, receive a physical exam, and have their blood drawn to check their levels. Perhaps families schedule these doctor appointments for the whole

family, and everyone is examined at the same time. And sometimes, this includes seeing other kinds of doctors: dentists, ophthalmologists, dermatologists, etc.

For others, they avoid going to the doctor unless it's necessary. They never go to a Primary Care physician to check their vitals or blood, they rarely see a dentist, and unless they need to check something specific, seeing an ophthalmologist or dermatologist isn't even a thought to be had.

Here is a hypothetical scenario for both kinds of people: if you could only go to the doctor one more time (assuming that time is tomorrow), how would you live the rest of your life? I can answer honestly, I would be scared. I would go to the doctor one last time, have my vitals checked, and receive all the feedback I could from the doctor regarding my health I could. I would like to know what is healthy and unhealthy about myself. Where I am good, and what needs improving, that way I know how to live out the rest of my life in a healthy manner.

How fortunate we all are though, to have access to doctors and hospitals at all times. We can constantly be in-the-know and up-to-date on the state of our health. We can know every little thing about ourselves! What is good and what is bad; what is okay, and what needs to change immediately; what needs

fixing and what needs treatment. What a blessing to know exactly how we stand when it comes to our health.

But yet, how many of us still choose not to know the state of our health?! Perhaps we avoid the doctor to avoid hearing something bad. Of course, no one wants to hear that they have: high blood pressure, a clogged artery, diabetes, or cancer. But, on the contrary, what a blessing we have to know these things, that way we can properly be treated!

In some cases, some of these illnesses could have been avoided if we went to the doctor earlier. If we weren't afraid of hearing something when it was a minor problem, we wouldn't be faced with a mountain to climb in order to be deemed "healthy" again.

My point in bringing this up, brothers and sisters, is that we have the same opportunity in the Church. No, we cannot receive a CT scan of our soul, and we cannot see exactly where we stand with Christ, but you can get a pretty good idea based on when you have been to the "doctor" last.



Christ is the Physician of our souls, and His priests are his Primary Care physicians.

We can go in for a checkup as often as we need by visiting our spiritual father for confession.

For those who go to their PCP four times a year, I urge you to hold yourself accountable, and to go to the priest just as often for confession. What good is it to check the status of your physical self so often, if you are not checking the status of your spiritual self at all? This calls to mind the Gospel of Luke, chapter 9, verse 24: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" Does going to the doctor often offer some kind of immortality? Certainly not. For the Eucharist is the "medicine of immortality" (St. Ignatius of Antioch). Only receiving Communion can

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offer life forever, not any modern-day medicine, or practice.



As I said, what a blessing it is to know our illnesses because we can be properly treated. The same goes for our souls: “The sick one who is acquainted with his sickness is easily to be cured; and he who confesses his pain is near to health. Many are the pains of the hard heart; and when the sick one resists the

physician, his torments will be augmented” (St. Isaac the Syrian).

We have the ability to know the status of our health, therefore we know exactly how to treat ourselves. Perhaps, then, we don’t need to go to the doctor that often because we have the ability to check where we stand at any given point. What we should be conscious of, and fearful of is not having the ability to check our spiritual status and where we stand in our salvation. As stated earlier, we can have an idea based on how often we go to Church, say our personal prayers, and receive the sacraments. If one cannot check their vitals or status of health, I would assume they would consult with doctors more often on what they should be eating, how often they should be exercising, etc. Same way in our spiritual life, because it's not possible to see where we stand in our journey towards salvation, we should be visiting our spiritual father often, and trying to live a life towards the Kingdom of God.

Praying for a blessed remainder of the Nativity Fast, and that everyone takes the sacraments of Holy Confession and Communion seriously, to prepare ourselves fully for the Incarnation of our Lord.

Christ is born! Glorify Him!
Χριστὸς γεννᾶται! Δοξάσατε!

With love in Christ,
Vasili



St. John Chrysostom’s Calculation of the Date of the Nativity

Archangel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in Holy of Holies on Feast of Tabernacles (Sept.23). This is the day of John the Baptist's conception (see Luke 1:5-25).

The Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary took place six months later (see Luke 1:26) on March 25th. Christ was born nine months later on December 25th.

Liturgical Schedule for December

Friday, December 2 **St. Porphyrios**

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

Sunday, December 4 **St. Barbara/St. John of Damascus**

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

Monday, December 5 **St. Savas the Sanctified**

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

Tuesday, December 6 **St. Nicholas**

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

Wednesday, December 7 Paraklesis

Service of Supplication the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

Friday, December 9 **St. Anna**

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

Sunday, December 11 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Monday, December 12 **St. Spyridon**

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

Thursday, December 15 **St. Eleftherios**

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

Sunday, December 18 Orthros 8:15 a.m.

Great Doxology 9:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

Our choir will sing the responses of "The Liturgy of Peace" by Christopher Kypros on this Sunday. Because this arrangement is so elaborate, we will begin the Doxology at 9:30 a.m., followed by the Divine Liturgy at 9:45 a.m.

Monday, December 19 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Day of Silent Prayer 11:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.

Christmas Candlelight Service 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday, December 20 **St. Ignatios**

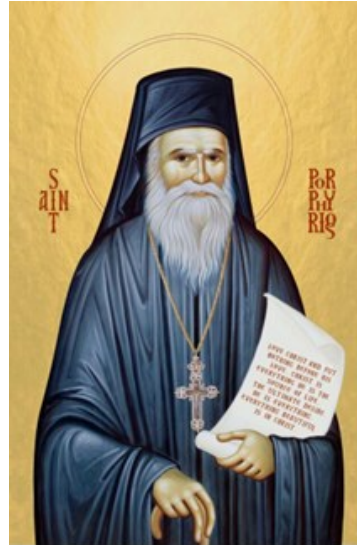
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, December 21 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

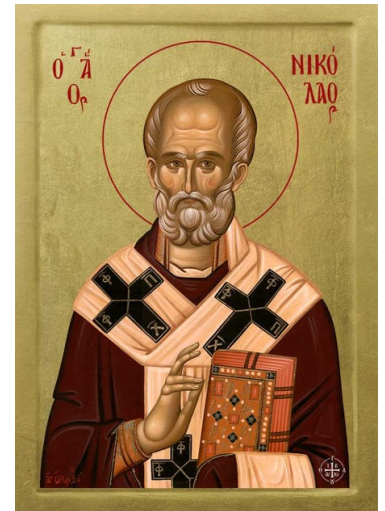
Thursday, December 22 **St. Anastasia**

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

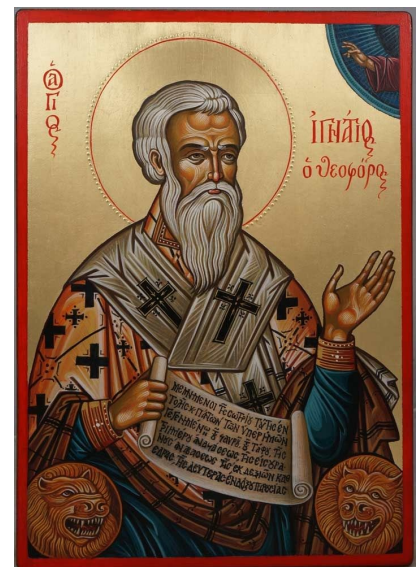
St. Porphyrios



St. Nicholas



St. Ignatios



Liturgical Schedule for December

Friday, December 23 Orthros 6:15 a.m. Divine Liturgy
7:00 a.m.

Royal Hours of the Nativity

9:30-11:00 a.m.

Saturday, December 24 **St. Eugenia—Eve of Nativity**

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

Vigil of the Nativity

Great Vespers 4:00 p.m.

Orthros 5:30 p.m. Divine Liturgy 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 25 **Nativity of Christ**

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

Friday, December 30 **St. Anysia**

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

Sunday, January 1, 2023 **St. Basil/New Year's Day**

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

Wednesday, January 4 **Royal Hours of Theophany**

9:30-11:00 a.m.

Thursday, January 5 **Eve of Theophany**

Vespertal Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.

Blessing of the Waters 10:15 a.m.

Friday, January 6 Theophany

Liturgy at St. Nicholas Cathedral (Tarpon Springs)

Great Vespers for St. John the Baptist 6:30 p.m.

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

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

Sunday, January 8 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy

10 a.m.

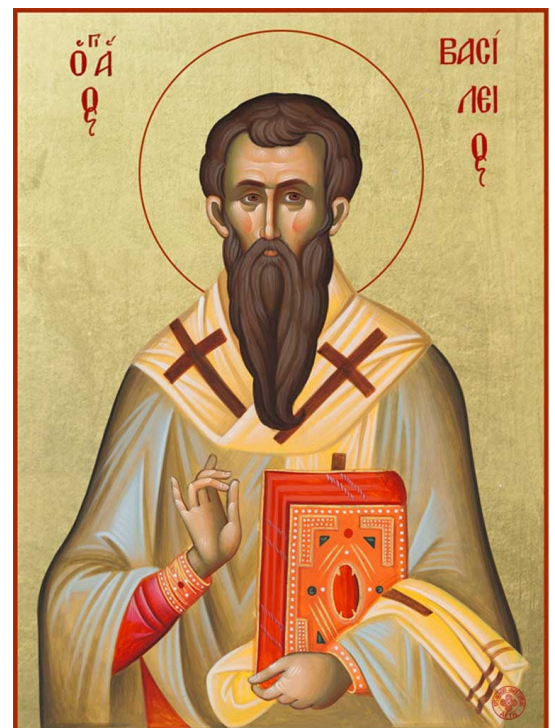
Theophany



Nativity of Christ



St. Basil the Great



Liturgical Notes for December

Friday, December 2 – St. Porphyrios of Kafsokalivia St. Porphyrios was a monk on Mount Athos known for his gifts of spiritual discernment. He lived from 1906-1991, and was canonized in 2013. He was alive in most of our lifetimes. There have been several saints that have been canonized in recent years. And it important that we begin to remember and celebrate some of the them with a celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

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

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

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

Wednesday, December 7 – Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary - We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. We will alternate some in the evening and some in the morning. For December, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday evening, December 7, from 6:00-7:00 p.m.

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

Monday, December 12 - St. Spyridon St. Spyridon was Bishop of Trimythous. Tradition is that each year, the remains of St. Spyridon are opened to reveal that his shoes have been worn out. They are changed each year. St. Spyridon continues to intercede for the souls of the faithful, wandering over the earth to do so.

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

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

Monday, December 19—Day of Prayer—Liturgy, Prayer, Candlelight Service

In past years, we opened our church for a quiet day of prayer a few days before the Nativity and this was well-received. So, we decided that we will take an entire day for quiet prayer, with two services as the bookends. On Monday, December 19, we will celebrate Divine Liturgy. After Liturgy, we will have the church open all day for quiet prayer, and if you want a prayer to be offered, Fr. Stavros and Vasili will be available to offer prayers. If you haven't been to church in a while and would like to stop in during the Christmas week, or if life is moving too fast and you just want to slow down for a few hours and come sit in the church, this day is for you.

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

Liturgical Notes for December

A Christmas “Holy Week”—We will celebrate the Divine Liturgy each day from December 18-December 25, so we can have additional opportunities to partake of Christ as we prepare for His Nativity. From Monday, December 19-Thursday, December 22, Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at 10:00 a.m., preceded by Orthros at 9:00 a.m. On Friday, December 23, Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at 7:00 a.m., preceded by Orthros at 6:15 a.m. We never offer the Divine Liturgy this early in the morning, and it will be a wonderful way to begin the day, to see the sunrise in the church.

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

Friday, December 23 – Liturgy at Sunrise

On Friday, December 23, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at 7:00 a.m. (with Orthros at 6:15 a.m.) We rarely offer Divine Liturgy this early in the morning, and it will be a wonderful way to begin the day, to see the sunrise in the church.

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

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

Services for the Nativity – Saturday, December 24

We will celebrate Divine Liturgy on Saturday, December 24 at 10:00 a.m., preceded by Orthros at 9:00 a.m. It is hoped that those with young children and those who do not drive at night will take advantage of this morning Liturgy. *Following the Divine Liturgy, Father Stavros will read a Christmas Story to our children on the solea.*

Vigil of the Nativity

A “vigil” in the Orthodox Church is where two or more services are connected in order to create a long period of worship. For the Nativity this year, we will hold such a “vigil.” You may attend some of all of it, come early and leave, or come only for the Divine Liturgy, whatever you wish.

Great Vespers of the Nativity—4:00 p.m.—The Vespers of the Nativity includes Old Testament Prophecy Readings, eight of them that begin with Genesis 1:1, the creation of the world, continue with readings from Isaiah and Jeremiah that have some of the more popular prophetic verses that foretell the coming of the Messiah. The sunset will occur during the Vespers service. This is traditional, as Vespers ends one day and begins another. With the setting of the sun, we will begin the feast of the Nativity.

Orthros of the Nativity—5:30 p.m.—Orthros is usually celebrated in the morning. It tells the story of a saint or feastday in hymns. The Orthros of the Nativity has dozens of hymns that tell the Biblical account of the Incarnation. During both the Vespers and Orthros, the church will be illumined only by candlelight.

Great Doxology—6:45 p.m.—The Feast of the Nativity marks the only time in human history that the night became brighter than day with the appearance of the multitude of angels. At 6:45 p.m. the choir will sing the Great Doxology, the hymn that ends nearly every Orthros service. We hear the choir sing this hymn on Sundays. It’s the first hymn they sing. It is the hymn of the angels from the Nativity. How appropriate it will be to hear the Doxology on the feast of the Nativity, as the lights come on in our church and “night becomes like day.”

The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great—7:00 p.m.—The centerpiece of our Nativity Feast is, of course, the Divine Liturgy. *** to hear the Doxology, the hymn the angels sang that first Christmas, as night becomes day. Many of you have made a tradition of coming to church for this vigil of prayer and the Orthros and Liturgy and many people who have done so have commented to me how powerful the celebration of Christmas was for them.

Thursday, December 30 - St. Anysia—St. Anysia was martyred in Thessaloniki in the year 304. Her relics are interred in the altar table of our church, placed in the altar at the consecration of our church in 1986.

St. John the Baptist Community News

Monday night Bible study with Fr. John—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. For December, the dates are December 5 and December 12, before taking a hiatus for Christmas and resuming on January 9.

Women's Bible Study—Women's Bible Study meets on most Tuesday mornings with Fr. Stavros from 10:00-11:30 a.m. either in person or on zoom. We are studying the Gospel of John. For December, the dates are Wednesday, December 7 and Tuesday, December 13, before we take a hiatus for Christmas and resuming on Tuesday, January 10.

GOYA—Our December GOYA Meeting will be Sunday, December 4, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

Men's Group—Our men's group will meet on Sunday, December 11, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Any men of our community are welcome to join us for dinner, discussion. Please bring \$20—we will order in for dinner. Please mark down our dates for men's group for this academic year—Sunday, December 11; Sunday, January 29; Sunday, March 26; Sunday, April 30 and Sunday, May 21.

SAVE THE DATE—Men's Retreat hosted by St. John in Tampa on Saturday, February 18, from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Theme: "How Can I Be a Spiritual Leader If I'm Not Even a Follower: Getting Back to the Basics of Christianity." This retreat is open to any Orthodox men of the Tampa Bay area and any of your friends.

SAVE THE DATE—Women's Retreat hosted by St. John in Tampa on Saturday, March 25, from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Theme: "Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord: Letting life be according to His Word." This retreat is open to any Orthodox women of the Tampa Bay area and any of your friends.

Sunday school Christmas program—December 11—Following the Divine Liturgy on December 11, our Sunday school children will again present a Christmas program for us.

Parish Council Elections—December 11—Parish Council Elections will be held on Sunday, December 11 following the Divine Liturgy in the Kourmolis Center.

Young Adults – We had a great first dinner/discussion with our young adults on November 17. The group decided to continue with this once a month, as well as to get together more informally socially outside of these meetings. We are putting together a "WhatsApp" for our young adults. If you want to be added to this, please contact Aris Rogers at aris.rogers2@gmail.com or at 813-309-5525. Our December dinner/discussion will be Thursday, December 8, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center.

Orthodoxy 101 is starting in January—the Spring installment of Orthodoxy 101 will be held on Mondays January 23 and 30, and February 6 and 13.

College Student Night - We will be having our annual College Student Night on Tuesday, December 20, beginning at 6:00 p.m. We will have dinner and discussion. All college students are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros by December 15 if you plan to attend.

Love to take photos? Come join our Photo Ministry! It's a fun and creative way to serve and to show the community all the beautiful services and wonderful activities we have here at St. John. All abilities are welcome. Please call or text Karina Findlay at (813) 476-9632.

St John needs all hands on deck for Gasparilla on January 28! Every year we've opened our parking lot to attendees of the Tampa Bay Gasparilla Festivities. This has been a successful undertaking for years and we are thankful for all who have helped in years past! To run this event, we are asking for your help once more! If you are interested in helping out, please reach out to Capt. Alex Limberatos at chaplainalex1@gmail.com Even a few hours of volunteering is a great help to make this a safe, fun, and profitable event.

Parish Registry

Baptism—Lukas Angelo Limberatos, son of Alexander and Alexandra Limberatos, was baptized on Sunday, October 16. Elina Gavras and George Gavras were the Godparents. Na Sas Zisi!

Wedding—Aleny Michael Vega III and Anne Maria Kolilias were married on Saturday, October 15. Emily Kolilias was the Koumbara. Congratulations!

Wedding—Anthony Joseph Nico, Jr. and Taylor Marie Goodwin were married on Saturday, October 22. Brandon Goodwin was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

Wedding—Panagiotis George Mamangakis and Hannah Elizabeth Gamache were married on Saturday, October 22. Andrew Mamangakis was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

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.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0f48a5a62da3f49-community1>

(Or use QR code)

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



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.

Loukoumades Booth

Thank You Thank You Thank You!

On behalf of the Halkias & Chagaris families we are so grateful to everyone who volunteered at the Loukoumades booth this year. Thank you for honoring our mother's memory and keeping the tradition alive. We appreciate your time and talents and look forward to next year. I know Engie was with all of us and very proud of the success!

With sincere love and gratitude. The Halkias & Chagaris families

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 smpileggi@gmail.com or (813) 244-5855.

Veterans Day Ceremony

On Sunday, November 13th the Veterans and First Responders Ministry offered a Flag Folding Ceremony to honor the Veterans who have faithfully served our nation. First Sergeant, US Army, (Retired) Bill Comminos, coordinated and led the ceremony. It included the playing of taps by Marine Danny Paul and the folding of the US flag, with an explanation of each fold (read explanation at end of this article). The flag was then presented to Father Stavros for the parish. It will eventually be properly displayed in the church hall.

The Ministry also collected donations of various items which will be sent to our deployed troops overseas at Christmas time via MacDill Air Force Base here in Tampa.

If you would like to be part of the Veterans and First Responders Ministry, please contact Father John at 678-637-4425. You do not need to be a veteran or first responder to join this Ministry Team. Our next meeting will be held in January 2023. A blessed and joyous Nativity to All!
Father John

American Flag Folding

1. The first fold of our flag is a symbol of life.
2. The second fold is a symbol of our belief in eternal life.
3. The third fold is made in honor and remembrance of all the veterans departing ranks who gave a portion of their lives for the defense of our country to attain peace throughout the world.
4. The fourth fold represents American citizens trusting in God, for it is to Him we turn in times of peace as well as in time of war.
5. The fifth fold is a tribute to our country, for in the words of Stephen Decatur, "Our country, in dealing with other countries may she always be right; but it is still our country, right or wrong."
6. The sixth fold is for where our hearts lie. It is with our heart that we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.
7. The seventh fold is a tribute to our Armed Forces, for it is through the Armed Forces that we protect our country and our flag against all her enemies, whether they be found within or without boundaries of our republic.
8. The eighth fold is a tribute to the one who entered into the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day, and honor mother, for whom it flies on Mother's Day.

9. The ninth fold is a tribute to womanhood; for it has been through their faith, their love, loyalty, and devotion that the character of the men and women who have made this country great, has been molded.
10. The tenth fold is a tribute to the father, for he, too, has given his sons and daughters for the defense of this country since they were first born.
11. The eleventh fold, in the eyes of a Hebrew citizen, represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon, and glorifies in their eyes, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
12. The twelfth fold, in the eyes of a Christian citizen, represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies in their eyes, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost reminding us of our nation's motto, "In God We Trust."

After the flag is completely folded and tucked in, it takes on the appearance of a cocked hat, ever reminding us of the soldiers who served under General George Washington, and the sailors and marines who served under Captain John Paul Jones, who were followed by the comrades and shipmates in the Armed Forces of the United States, preserving for us the rights, privileges, and freedoms we enjoy today.

St. John Stewardship Report 2020-2022

Year to Year Comparison ~	2022*	2021*	2020*
Pledged Year to Date	\$437,143	\$490,628	\$514,416
Received Year to Date	\$501,244	\$460,512	\$451,152
Average Pledge	\$2000	\$1,277	\$1,401
Median Pledge	\$1,200	\$850	\$823
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	360	396	391
*YTD as of 11/18/2022, 11/18/2021, 11/18/2020			

Below find the dates, times, address, and sign up website for St John Greek Orthodox Church volunteers. Anyone from our parish can volunteer by registering on the Metropolitan Ministries website below. First come, first served as the sign up slots fill up fast and our slots will be given to other people if we do not sign up.

Christmas Holiday - December 22 3:00 - 6:30 PM

Let me know if you have any questions or issues.
Thank you for your support with Community Outreach.

Greg Melton



Philoptochos News

December 2022

Thank you to all who supported our Philoptochos this year. Because of your generosity and the dedicated work of our Philoptochos members, we were able to contribute to the following worthy causes:

LOCAL:

Hurricane Ian Relief
Champions for Children
Metropolitan Ministries
Zoe for Life
Project Mexico Orphanage
The Spring (domestic violence shelter)
Food Pantry
Bags of Love (homeless)
Alpha House
Tunnels for Towers
Veteran Recognition and supplies

METROPOLIS:

Agape Fund
Clergy Education Fund
Youth/Summer Camp
Special Needs Camp
Youth Progrms

NATIONAL:

Cancer Fund
Autism Assistance Fund
St. Photios Shrine
OCMC
St. Basil's Academy
IOCC
Hellenic College/Holy Cross Scholarship
Retired Clergy & Widowed Presbyteres
Benevolent Fund
Ecumenical Patriarchate
We ask all Orthodox women over 18, to become a "friend of the poor" and help us help others.



Let us help you make your holidays less stressful!

Take It Home Already Made:

Spanakopita

Tiropita

&

Vasilopita

On Sale Sunday December 11th and 18th

also

Please join us on Sunday December 11th for lunch.
All proceeds to benefit The Spring Domestic Violence Shelter

We will also be collecting items for The Spring Dec. & Jan.
Please donate diapers, wipes, mother's personal items such as toiletries and gift cards welcome.

COMING SOON:

January Vasilopita Sunday to benefit St. Basil's Academy
February OCMC Superbowl Luncheon

For membership information contact:

Katherine Sakkis 813-309-1073/ksakkis@sakkisgroup.com

Tampa Daughters of Penelope (DOP) Alcmaeon #167 Chapter

The Daughters of Penelope's Alcmaeon #167 chapter has been engaged in several activities and multiple future activities have been planned. Recent highlights are as follows:

Donation of Hygiene and School Kits to Support Eastern Kentucky flood Victims.

Following an urgent request from the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), the DOP purchased the requested items, and kits were assembled and mailed to Eastern Kentucky.



DOP - Assembling Donation Kits Aug 2022

Founder's day Memorial. Koliva was prepared and current members attended the Memorial Service for the DOP founding members who have passed. These amazing women and many that followed gave their time, talent and treasure to the Tampa community and aided national and international causes. **May their memory be eternal!** To see what DOP is working on today please visit www.daughtersofpenelope.org and look at the at Program Tab-National Projects.

AHEPA Family Dinner in Tarpon Springs.

Multiple members took advantage of this fellowship opportunity and had lots of fun meeting and dining with other members of the DOP and AHEPA.

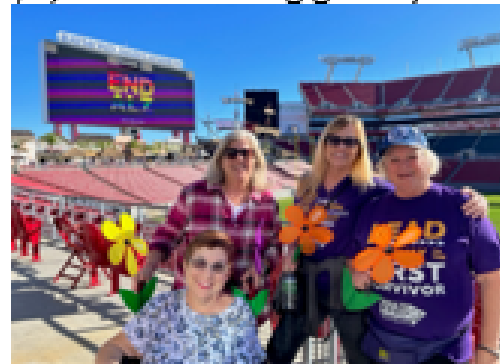


DOP - AHEPA Family Dinner in Tarpon Oct 2022



DOP - AHEPA Family Dinner in Tarpon Oct 2022

Alzheimer's Fundraiser. DOP members (15) donated to this important Fundraiser and several members also walked at the Raymond James Stadium. DOP exceeded the \$1,200 fundraising goal by raising \$1,385.



DOP - Alzheimer's Walk Oct 2022

Greek Festival. The Daughters of Penelope supported the festival and worked in various booths including Salad Preparation which was chaired by AHEPA

Note: Daughters of Penelope meet monthly to establish objectives and to stay coordinated. In addition, pop up fellowship opportunities keep the team connected. New members are welcomed and are encouraged, by this energetic chapter, to stay active and connected, to support each other and to contribute to the community.

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

Many of your St. John fellow parishioners are **Prayer Warriors**, active members of the Parish's Twelve Disciples project. The term "Prayer Warrior" was originated by Fr. Kyriakos (then Charlie) Hambos when he was Pastoral Assistant to Fr. Stavros.

Inception

This was over two years ago when, with Fr. Kyriakos assistance, our community of St. John the Baptist began a program to strengthen our personal prayer discipline: **learning to pray for others.**

The names of all member families of our congregation were compiled into a multi-page document. At least one page of this document was then distributed monthly to each of those in the community who had requested "membership", with each page listing approximately 25 names sorted by families. Each participant in the "Program" was asked to pray for the entire page of names, once daily. Most participants have found that they easily included praying for these individuals during their daily private prayer discipline or rule.

Prayer Rule

"A prayer rule is a simple daily activity (discipline) that can slowly help us to spend more time in deepening our relationship with God." Please refer to "Be the Bee #147"

(<https://youtu.be/8jnufgwLUHk>)

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



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

Join Us?

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

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



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

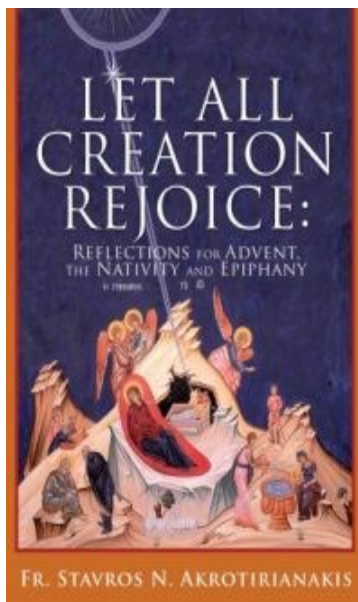
The Jesus Prayer

Start Your 2022 Advent Journey with “Let All Creation Rejoice”

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

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

+Fr. Stavros



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

-Amazon Customer

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

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

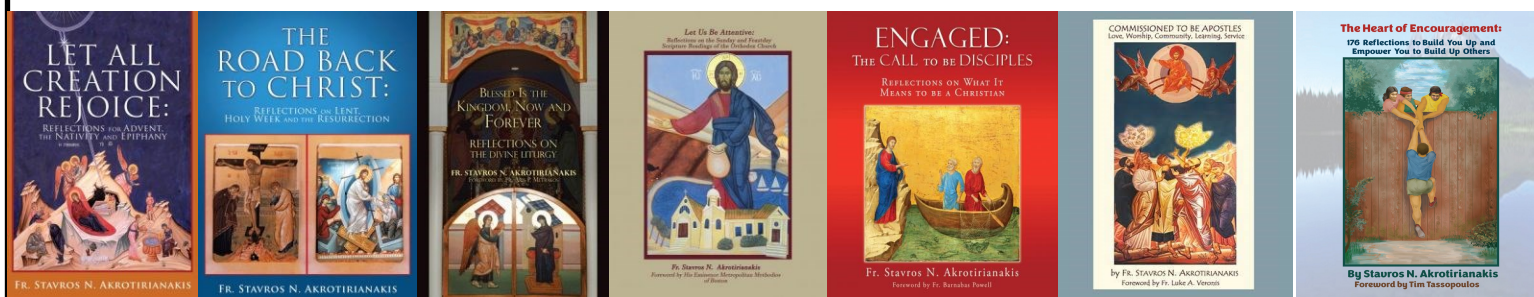
Over 3,741 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Vasili at Vasili@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 prayer-team365@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 SEVEN 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
The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others



Nursing Ministry December 2022

What is the Flu and why get vaccinated



Overview

Flu (influenza) is a viral infection of the nose, throat, and lungs, which are all part of the respiratory system. Most people with the flu get better on their own, but

sometimes influenza and its complications can be deadly, especially for people at higher risk of developing flu complications. High risk includes.

- Young children under age 2
- Adults older than age 65
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- People who are pregnant or plan to be pregnant during flu season
- People with weakened immune systems
- People who have chronic illnesses, such as asthma, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease and diabetes
- People with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher

Flu Season

While seasonal influenza (flu) viruses are detected year-round in the United States, flu viruses typically circulate during the fall and winter during what's known as the flu season. The exact timing and duration of flu seasons varies, but flu activity often begins to increase in

October, peaks between December and February, although significant activity can last as late as May.

How effective are flu vaccines?

CDC conducts studies each year to determine how well influenza (flu) vaccines protect against flu. While vaccine effectiveness (VE) can vary, recent studies show that flu vaccination reduces the risk of flu illness by between 40% and 60% among the overall population. Although the annual influenza vaccine isn't 100% effective, it reduces the chances of having severe complications from infection.

How does the Flu spread?

Person to Person. Most experts think that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby (usually within about 6 feet away) or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Less often, a person might get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

What To Do If You Get Sick

Most people with flu have mild illness and do not need medical care or antiviral drugs. If you get sick with flu symptoms, in most cases, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people except to get medical care.

If, however, you have symptoms of flu and are in a higher-risk group, or are very sick or worried about your illness, contact your health care provider (doctor, physician assistant, etc.).

When Are People with Flu Contagious?

Flu viruses can be detected one day before symptoms develop and five to seven days after becoming sick. People with flu are most contagious in the first three to four days after their illness begins. However, infants and people with weakened immune systems who are infected with flu viruses may be contagious for longer than seven days.

Flu Treatment

If you get sick with flu, influenza antiviral drugs may be a treatment option. Antiviral drugs work best when started early, such as one to two days after your flu symptoms begin. When treatment is started within 1-2 days after flu symptoms begin, influenza antiviral drugs can lessen symptoms and shorten the time you are sick by 1 or 2 days. They might also prevent some flu complications, like pneumonia. For people at higher risk of serious flu complications, treatment with influenza antiviral drugs can mean the difference between milder or more serious illness possibly resulting in a hospital stay.

How long should I stay home if I'm sick?

CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or other necessities. Your fever should be gone without the need to use a fever-reducing medicine, such as Tylenol. Until then, you should stay home from work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

Healthy Habits to Help Protect Against Flu

1. Avoid close contact. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
2. Stay home when you are sick.
3. Cover your mouth and nose.
4. Clean your hands often.
5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
6. Practice other good health habits.

How many deaths in an average flu season in the US?

According to the CDC, in 2019-2020 there were approximately 380,000 hospitalizations and 20,000 deaths from the Flu. Protect yourself, get vaccinated!

Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is excited to share we will continue to offer the Parish Assistance program together with BayCare Behavioral Health. The 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 that are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors. Parishioners can confidentially contact BayCare directly to request up to three free 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. 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-healthservices> Help is available for life issues including:

Help is available for life issues including:

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

This service is completely confidential between parishioner and a BayCare Christian Therapist



BayCare Behavioral Health

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>



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.

WELCOME TO OUR PARISH

If you are new to the Tampa Bay area or just visiting, we would love to get to know you better.

PLEASE TEXT THE WORD

"WELCOME" TO 813-790-5950

FOLLOW THE PROMPTS TO GIVE US
YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION AND FROM THERE
YOU WILL BE DIRECTED TO OUR ONLINE CONNECTION CARD

DO NOT NEGLECT TO SHOW *hospitality* TO STRANGERS,
FOR THEREBY SOME HAVE ENTERTAINED *angels unawares.*
HEBREWS 13:2

St. John's Bookstore



Our bookstore is currently featuring a special Christmas Shop where you can find inspiring and unique items for your celebration of the Nativity of Christ. Included are Icons of the Nativity of our Lord, Christmas cards in both English and Greek, Icon Ornaments, and many other Christmas gifts you just won't find in the shopping malls. Think of us when checking off those names on your gift list. Remember to shop early for the best selection! Have a Joyous Nativity and a New Year filled with God's richest blessings!

Presvytera Denise and Elaina - Your Bookstore Staff

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
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Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL
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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
Constantine Kallenekos - Tampa, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
Demitrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH
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Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
Lillian Thomas - Dyer, IN
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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.**

Sunday School News

Our topics for November were Communion-Liturgy-Worship and CHARITY - THANKFULNESS. The Sunday School also made cards and wrote wonderful messages to our military men and women serving overseas.



It was wonderful to see the Greek Festival back. Our children were amazing dancers and worked so hard in many areas.

November 13th was our YOUTH SUNDAY SERVICE. Our children sang beautifully throughout this service. We would like to thank them and our High School Student who did a great job reading the Epistle. The parishioners of St. John's are truly blessed to have such wonderful young stewards.

We have to share photos and tell you about what our Middle School and High School did on October 30th. Each student researched and dressed up as one of their favorite saints.



SUNDAY

SCHOOL CALENDAR FOR December:

- Sunday, December 4th: Topic: Stewardship
- Saturday, December 10th: Sunday School Christmas Party and Pageant Rehearsal
- Sunday, December 11th: Sunday School Christmas Program
- Sunday, December 18th: Topic: The Nativity
- Sunday, December 25th: No Sunday School Classes (Christmas)

Our SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS PAGEANT will take place on December 11th. We hope you enjoy this year's Christmas Pageant. The SUNDAY SCHOOL-HOPE AND JOY Christmas Party and PAGEANT REHEARSAL will take place on Saturday, Dec. 10th.

Greek Festival 2022



Visit our Flickr page to
see more!!!
[https://www.flickr.com/
people/
stjohngoctampa/](https://www.flickr.com/people/stjohngoctampa/)







Veterans' Appreciation Day 2022



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

We welcome people of all ages to join us as a member or friend of the YAH
MEETING DATE AND TIME

Our meetings are held once a month from 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., usually at the Kourmolis Hall or a restaurant in place of meetings at the hall. From time to time we may go on fieldtrips. At our meetings we socialize and get to know each other better.



Birthdays: Francis Spiridis - 12/8

Planned Activities: In October we met at the Longhorn Steakhouse on N. Westshore Blvd. with 12 in attendance. We sang happy birthday to Joanne, Diane, and Margaret.

On November 12 we met at the Kourmolis Center for a potluck luncheon. Afterwards we played trivia pursuit based on religious topics.

On December 3, we will have another potluck luncheon and we will exchange Christmas gifts.

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



The AHEPA Family of Tampa invites you to a

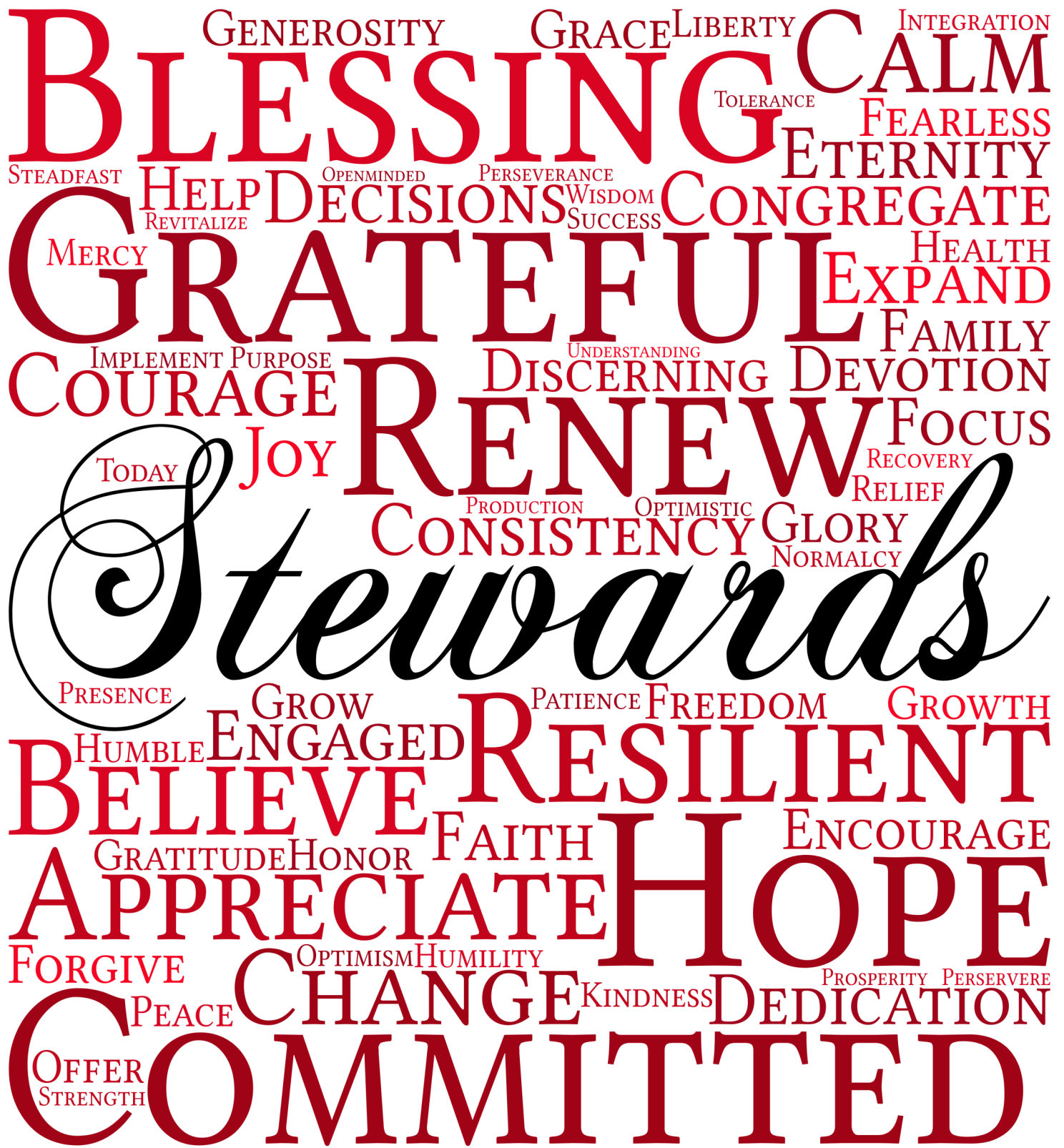
**Christmas Family Social
Thursday, December 15, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.**

Bring the entire family for dinner, creative gingerbread house and ornament making and other holiday festivities

**The Kourmolis Center
St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
2418 W. Swann Ave. Tampa, FL 33609**

**Please RSVP to:
Tom Sakaris at tomsak1234@gmail.com
Elena Paras Ketchum at eketchum@srbp.com**

***Please consider a donation to the AHEPA Family of Tampa Scholarship Fund**



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 Talents/Gifts

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

This month we bring to a close the journey with our parish word of 2022, which is "stewards." We've discussed being stewards of our families, our jobs, our church/faith, our time, our money, our calling, our friendships, of today, and of our possessions. We conclude this journey by discussing the stewardship of our lives.

I've decided to put this topic at the end of the year because the end of each year provides us an opportunity to evaluate. How did we do in life in 2022? Was 2022 a good year or a bad one? Why? And based on what measures? Some of us are satisfied with our year and undoubtedly some of us are filled with regret. The good news is, in a few weeks we will turn the calendar on a new year, with new possibilities for success and growth. But what if there is no 2023, what if the end of this year is the end of your life? Would you be filled with satisfaction, or regret?

At some point, there will be an end to every life on earth. The "year" of our earthly lives will end, and the "never-ending year" of eternal life will begin. The question is, are you, me and us, as we ready to enter into that never-ending year of eternal life? Have we prepared enough for the Kingdom of God? Have we been good stewards of the life He has given us on this earth? These are critical questions.

Thankfully, we are not likely to be asked by God about our stewardship of a particular day. We all have good days and bad days. Thus, we can't get too up or too down on ourselves. But looking at our life in total, have we been good stewards with our lives? Have we taken good care of the life, the years that God has given us? Have we taken good care of the opportunities God has presented us with? Have we fulfilled the life that God has called us to? As we leave 2022 and head into 2023, it's a good time to assess our stewardship of our lives in regards to these questions. Speaking personally, I have been called by God to be a husband, a father, a priest, a Christian—now is a good time to assess how I'm doing with each of these important aspects of my life, and how I can challenge myself to do

even better.

I once read a challenging article about the value of a church to its local community. The article posed the question, "If your church closed its doors, would the local community even notice?" The answer is, if the church exists only for itself (church for us, as I mentioned in a sermon recently), then no one will miss the church if it is suddenly gone. If the church exists for others, then it will be missed.

In determining the stewardship of your life, evaluate whether your life is lived more for you or more for others. Because at the awesome judgment seat of Christ, I believe God is not going to ask us, "What did you get?" but rather "what did you give?" That doesn't mean we can never get things for ourselves, or enjoy a day off, but rather that the overall trajectory of our life makes others a priority. In other words, if God asks us "what did you do with the life I gave you?" we want to be able to answer "I did something to make the world around me better, by being a servant, and by serving others."

MY WORD 2023

For the past four years, we've encouraged parishioners to identify one word that will shape their year. With 2023 now a month away, it's time to start thinking of the word that will define you in 2023. Towards the end of December, Father will send out a request for individual words to define you for 2023.

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. If you have any favorite verse you'd like me to comment on, please forward it to frstav@gmail.com

December 4-10

And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:10-11

The theme of this Nativity season is "Good News of Great Joy." It comes from Luke 2:10, the words of the angel to the shepherds. When is the last time we actually heard good news? And do we spread good news? The best news is the news of Christ, because this news a) never changes, b) never gets old, and c) will change our lives not only now but for eternity. The angel surprised the shepherds. Not only the message was a surprise, but these shepherds were

nomads, they weren't being counted for the census in Bethlehem, as if they were unimportant, and non-existent. And the angel came to them. Surely they were afraid. But the angel comforted them, telling them that they were receiving good news of a great joy that was for ALL the people, including them, maybe especially them. Indeed, this news is great, it is joyful and it is for everyone, EVERYONE. Even if you have had the hardest year, or feel like the worst or most insignificant person, this news is for everyone, including you. And the news is that Christ came for everyone, to redeem everyone, to give everyone an opportunity to come into His Kingdom. The key is what do we do with this good news? Do we go, do we listen, and does it change us?

December 11-17

For unto us a child is born; to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Isaiah 9:6

This verse comes from the Prophet Isaiah, who wrote hundreds of years before the Nativity about the coming of Christ. As we go through the month of December, anticipation builds for Christmas. But what is the anticipation building for? For the gifts we will receive, or the food we'll eat, or the vacation we'll get, or the relief when it's all over? Or does the anticipation build for something greater—the birth of Christ and the opportunity to celebrate it?! This verse also includes some of the names of Christ—that He is our Wonderful Counselor, when we go to Him in prayer and pour our hearts out to Him. He is the Mighty God, who reigns supreme. He is our Everlasting Father, who loves us as a good father loves his children, and who never runs out of capacity to love us, even when we go astray. And He is the Prince of Peace, being a Christian is supposed to bring us peace. As Christians we are supposed to be ambassadors of peace.

December 18-24

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

Matthew 2:10

We know that the Magi made a two-year journey to see Christ. In fact, when they got to Christ, He was no longer a baby but a child and they didn't find Him in the cave but in a house. Two years is a long

time to do anything. But imagine traveling every day for two years, not knowing where you were going, when the journey would end, where the journey would end, or even the purpose of the journey. The Magi saw a star brighter than any that had ever appeared. They decided to follow the star. They didn't know where it would end or what they would find or how it would change them. But they knew they wanted to follow. When they saw the star, it brought them joy. When they looked at the countless miles of desert and mountains, that might have brought them stress or sorrow. But they didn't keep their eyes on the desert and the mountains or even the length of the journey. They kept their eyes on the star. Many times in life we will be confused as to where the journey of life is taking us. We will question why certain things happen and why other things don't happen for us. The key for us is to keep our eyes on Christ, like the Magi kept their eyes on the star, and to take joy in Christ. We should keep our eyes more on Christ than on the economy or our stock portfolio or advancement at work or anything else, any other "journeys" we are on. And know that the "star" leads now not to a manger but to heaven.

December 25-31

Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

Revelation 19:6

One of my favorite Christmas carols is "The Hallelujah Chorus," which is part of Handel's Messiah. In the song, the line is "For the Lord God om-

nipotent reigneth." It comes from Revelation 19:6. When this song is sung, it is always with great gusto. In fact, when the whole "Messiah" is sung, as I was privileged to watch one time, when the "Hallelujah Chorus" begins, everyone stands with great reverence, because the words of the song show such great reverence for God—He is omnipotent, King of kings and Lord of lords, and He shall reign forever and ever. As we celebrate the Nativity this week, and we prepare to enter into a new year, what kind of chorus rings out in your heart and in your life. Is Christ the King of kings in your life? Or is He just a "prince" among the real things that rule your life? There are definitely things that rule my life—family, job, hobbies, goals, my own ego. Where does Christ stand among these things? At the head? On the side? Not even a thought? I will play the "Hallelujah Chorus" in my car throughout the Nativity season as a reminder that the power and majesty of the music is not even a fraction of the power and majesty of God, and also to have on my "audio loop" the reminder that He is King of kings and Lord of lords, not only in this song, but He should be that in my life as well.

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

Have you downloaded our App?

Download the St. John's app in the App Store, or Google Play Store by typing in "St John GOC Tampa." You can access the Messenger, weekly bulletin, livestream services, and much more all through our app!

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 StJohn-GOCTampa.

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 at anytime.

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



Like



ATTENTION TO ALL PARENTS WHO NEED TO TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT SANTA

Son: "Dad, I think I'm old enough now. Is there a Santa Claus?."

Dad: "Ok, I agree that your old enough. But before I tell you, I have a question for you. You see, the "truth" is a dangerous gift. Once you know something, you can't unknow it. Once you know the truth about Santa Claus, you will never again understand and relate to him as you do now. So my question is: Are you sure you want to know?"

Brief pause...

Son: "Yes, I want to know"

Dad: "Ok, I'll tell you: Yes there is a Santa Claus"

Son: "Really?"

Dad: Yes, really, but he's not an old man with a beard in a red suit. That's just what we tell kids. You see, kids are too young to understand the true nature of Santa Claus, so we explain it to them in a way that they can understand. The truth about Santa Claus is that he's not a person at all; he's an idea. Think of all those presents Santa gave you over the years. I actually bought those myself. I watched you open them. And did it bother me that you didn't thank me? Of course not! In fact it gave me great pleasure. You see, Santa Claus is THE IDEA OF GIVING FOR THE SAKE OF GIVING, without thought of thanks or acknowledgement.

When I saw that woman collapse on the subway last week and called for help, I knew that she'd never know that it was me that summoned the ambulance. I was being Santa Claus when I did that."

Son: "Oh."

Dad: "So now that you know, you're part of it. You have to be Santa Claus too now. That means you can never tell a young kid the secret, and you have to help us select Santa presents for them, and most important, you have to look for opportunities to help people. Got it?"

Christmas Prayer Request

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

Inspiration - How to Be a Good Loser

Take time to mourn the loss. It's natural to get upset after a loss. Give it a good cry and move on.

Be Positive. Winning without honor is worse than a loss. Hold your head up high. Remain calm and level-headed. Tomorrow's another day.

Remain True to your values. These are the times when real leaders reveal their character. Show some grace and self-control. Be a positive role model. Do yourself proud.

Own the loss. Don't look for excuses or cast blame. Accept responsibility for the loss or you'll never take corrective action to better yourself.

Determine why you lost. If the loss was due to poor effort or careless errors, shame on you. It's one thing to lose to a better opponent and quite another to beat yourself.

Raise your game. What can you do differently, next time you're faced with a similar situation? Learn and improve.

Turn barriers into hurdles. Don't let challenges deter you from your goal. Winners run toward challenges, losers run from them.

Don't Quit. Show some grit and determination. One loss doesn't make you a loser any more than one win makes you a winner.

The toxic person will tell you to "suck it up" and make it feel like it's your fault.

The average person will tell you to "stay positive" and pretend to care.

The trauma-informed person will say "I'm here" and let you verbalize your feelings with zero judgment.

Choose your support system wisely.

The sea is the same for all. But some find pearls, some find fishes, and some just find their feet wet. In life too, everything depends on our attitude.

Always pray to have eyes that see the best in people, a heart that forgives the worse, a mind that forgets the bad, and a soul that never loses faith in God.

Christmas to-do list:

Be ~~buy~~ presents
Wrap ~~Gifts~~ someone in a hug
Send ~~gifts~~ peace
Donate ~~shop for~~ food
Be ~~see~~ the lights

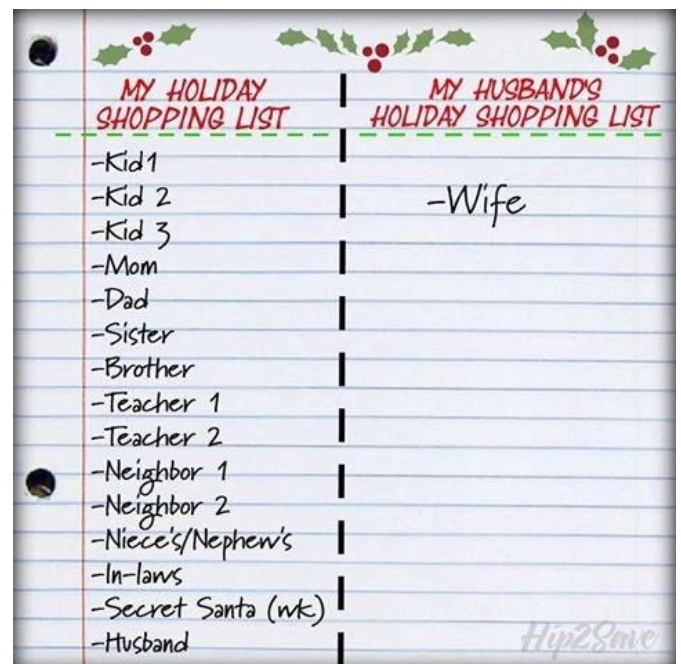
On the lighter side

Everyone was asking a 100-year-old man for his health secrets: The old man said, "I'll tell you a secret. I've been marked for 75 years. Promised my wife when we got married that when we quarrel, the loser has to walk for 5 miles. I've been walking 5 miles every day for 75 years!" Everyone asked again, "But how come your wife's healthy as well?" The old man answered, "I'll tell you another secret. She's been following me to make sure I really finish the 5 miles.

Joseph: Don't be mad. I said I was sorry. I should have made reservations. Talk to me Mary. Mary. . ?!?! MARY????????????

Mary: I'm fine.

How silent night began.



Family Calendar for the Nativity Fast 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
November 13 Luke 10:2-7 St. John Chrysostom Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Light your red candle on your family wreath</i> LOVE	14 Luke 1:20 St. Philip Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Pray for your friends</i>	15 Luke 1:31 First Day of Nativity Fast Holy Unction 6:00 pm <i>Purchase items or a gift card to donate for a Box of Hope</i>	16 Luke 1:32 St. Matthew Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Send at everyone you see today</i>	17 Luke 1:35 Thanksgiving Psalm 92:1 <i>Send a card to a friend who lives in another state</i>	18 Luke 1:37 St. Katherine Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Send a Thanksgiving card to an elderly person</i>	19 Luke 1:38 <i>Make and send a get well card</i>
20 1 Timothy 4:4 Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Light your white candle on your family wreath</i> GRATITUDE	21 Matthew 1:18 Birthplace of the Virgin Mary Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Pray for your teachers</i>	22 Matthew 1:20 <i>Volunteer with a local charity</i>	23 Matthew 1:21 Thanksgiving Eve Divine Liturgy 6:00 pm <i>Donate to a local food pantry</i>	24 Psalm 92:1 Thanksgiving <i>List five things you are thankful for</i>	25 Matthew 1:24-25 St. Katherine Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Send a care package to a loved one</i>	26 Luke 2:4 <i>Make a Christmas ornament for your tree</i>
27 Romans 12:12 Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Light your gold candle on your family wreath</i> HOPE	28 Luke 2:7 Come and See Dinner <i>Buy a gift from an angel tree for someone in need</i>	29 Luke 2:8 St. Andrew Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Make a donation to a charity you love</i>	30 Luke 2:9 St. Andrew Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Make a donation to a charity you love</i>	December 1 Luke 2:10 <i>Use five things you are thankful for</i>	2 Luke 2:11 St. Porphyrios Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Drive around and look at Christmas lights in your Pjs</i>	3 Luke 2:12 <i>Make a Christmas ornament for your tree</i>
4 11 Corinthians 9:11 St. Barbara Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Light your green candle on your family wreath</i> GENEROSITY	5 Luke 2:13 St. Savvas Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Pray for sick children</i>	6 Luke 2:14 St. Nicholas Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Take a photo with your Nativity set</i>	7 Luke 2:15 Parables 6:00 pm <i>Leave a postcard on a neighbor's porch secretly</i>	8 Luke 2:16 <i>Make a list of three things you love about each person in your family and put it in their stocking</i>	9 Luke 2:17 St. Anna Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Leave the words to a new Christmas Carol</i>	10 Luke 2:18 <i>Bake and share some Christmas cookies</i>
11 Psalm 32:11 Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Light your blue candle on your family wreath</i> JOY	12 Luke 2:19 St. Spyridon Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Pray for a loved one who has passed away</i>	13 Luke 2:20 <i>Send a secret Santa note to a friend</i>	14 Matthew 2:1 <i>Decorate your driveway or sidewalk with Christmas messages with sidewalk chalk</i>	15 Matthew 2:2 St. Eleutherios Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Watch a classic Christmas movie or TV special</i>	16 Matthew 2:9 <i>Have a slumber party by your Christmas Tree</i>	17 Matthew 2:10 <i>Decorate a gingerbread house</i>
18 11 Corinthians 5:7 Sunday Before Nativity Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Light your purple candle on your family wreath</i> FAITH	19 Matthew 2:11 Divine Liturgy 7:30 am Day of Quiet Prayer 8:30 am-6:00 pm Christmas Candlelight Service 6:00 pm <i>Pray for your priest</i>	20 Isaiah 7:14 St. Ignatius Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Take a selfie in front of your Christmas Tree</i>	21 Isaiah 9:6 <i>Call your grandparents to wish them a Merry Christmas</i>	22 John 1:1 St. Anastasia Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Visit someone who lives alone</i>	23 John 1:14 Royal Hours of the Nativity 9:30 am <i>Light your center candle on your family wreath</i>	24 Luke 2:1-20 The Nativity of Christ Vespers Liturgy 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 7:00 pm <i>Write a letter to your parents</i>
25 Matthew 2:1-12 Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Christ is Born! Glorify Him! <i>Open your letter and read the Christmas Gospel</i> PEACE	26 John 3:16 <i>Pray for healthcare workers</i>	27 Isaiah 48:10 <i>Mail thank you letters for your Christmas gifts</i>	28 John 1:5 <i>Do a chore in your yard</i>	29 Matthew 3:16 <i>Write down three goals for 2023</i>	30 11 Corinthians 6:2 St. Anyasia Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Choose a Bible verse on kindness and put it on your refrigerator</i>	31 Luke 4:18-19 <i>Put a crosshairs on your family</i>
January 1 Joshua 24:15 St. Basil Divine Liturgy 10:00 am <i>Think about your word for 2023</i> SERVE	2 Psalm 100:2 <i>Pray for good things for someone who has been unkind to you</i>	3 Romans 12:11 <i>Clean your room without being asked</i>	4 Luke 3:4 Royal Hours of Theophany 9:30 am <i>Send an old-fashioned post card to your grandparents</i>	5 Matthew 3:16 Eve of Theophany Vespers Liturgy 9:00 am Blessing of the Waters 10:15 am <i>Offer a prayer of thanks for clean and fresh water</i>	6 Matthew 3:17 Theophany Great Vespers for St. John the Baptist 6:30 pm <i>Dress a picture wearing our parish's Blessed Feast Day!</i>	7 John 3:30 St. John the Baptist Divine Liturgy 9:30 am

The Thrill of Hope

By Shawn McEvoy

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

"A thrill of hope; the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn." ~ O Holy Night

Does Christmas thrill you?

Children get excited at the coming of the season, and often we might feel a bit of a charge through experiencing their amazement, but the chores we go through to provide that for them are often the very things that rob us from knowing the wonder for ourselves. Plan the party, trim the tree, max out the MasterCard, wrap, ship, take a trip. And that's assuming we aren't one of the multitudes who find themselves with a case of the Holiday Blues.

So if Christ's coming into this world offers hope, and hope, as the song says, provides a thrill, how do we locate that experience amid the distraction and disillusionment of December?

Well that's the cool thing about Hope. Just as total darkness can't hold back the light of a tiny flame, so does even the smallest increment of Hope provide joy and purpose.

Here are a few scriptures I've been mulling over on the subject:

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

Notice the parallel between "things hoped for" and "things not seen." Talk about a paradox; try applying "assurance" to something your five senses can't detect. It's a challenge. The plus side is that hope, through Christ, is available to you no matter what you see, hear, or feel. It's above your circumstances.

"We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance [brings about] proven character; and proven character [brings about] hope; and hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

Do you ever hear people say, "I don't want to get my hopes up" because they're afraid of being disap-

pointed? What would you make of Paul's claim that "hope does not disappoint"? Might the disconnect have something to do with what we're hoping for or expecting? Max Lucado thinks so:

"Hope is not what you'd expect; it is what you would never dream. It is a wild, improbable tale with a pinch-me-I'm-dreaming ending... Hope is not a granted wish or a favor performed; no, it is far greater than that. It is a zany, unpredictable dependence on a God who loves to surprise us out of our socks and be there in the flesh to see our reaction."^[1]

"Love... hopes all things...but now abide faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:7,13).

Ever wonder why faith, hope, and love are the greatest virtues, and apparently in that order?

Maybe hope isn't actually something we *do*, but something we *receive*, like grace. If it's true that "without faith it is impossible for us to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6), perhaps it's conversely true that without Hope it would be impossible for Him to please us. The same verse says that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Is hope that reward?

I mean, if faith is what we give to God, and hope is what He gives to us, then we have the dynamic of a relationship. With that in place, we can love. So love is built on hope, which is built on faith.

For hope to exist, unfortunately it looks like there has to be hopelessness first. A perfect world wouldn't have any need of hope. Deliverance arrives undeservedly and perhaps unexpectedly, just as in the unlikely way God came to earth to provide a once-and-for-all substitute for the sins of all men on the first Christmas. That's why things can look bleak, but that's where hope lives.

The good news is: you simply can't hope big enough, which goes back to the idea of our minds and senses being inadequate to judge God's design and methods, and hope being more a function of God's involvement than our desires. I readily acknowledge I could not have conceived of the plan of salvation or the virgin birth. I couldn't have imagined the plan for the walls of Jericho to crumble, for hungry lions to turn into Daniel's pet kittens, or the Red Sea to part and offer up dry land. So neither do

I know how my problems will be solved, or what miracles I'll be blessed to see this Christmas.

Isaiah 9:6-7 concerns the hope of the prophecy being fulfilled that brought us a "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace." The last sentence of verse seven says it's "the zeal of the Lord" that will accomplish this. God is excited! He's zealous (enthusiastic, passionate, obsessive even) to bring us this hope!

Romans 15:13 is my Christmas prayer: "*May the God of **hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.*"

Why is there hope? Because Jesus was born. O holy night. What a thrill. God is at work.

[1] From *God Came Near*, page 89

Intersecting Faith & Life: What does hope out of despair look like? There are lots of examples in any Christian's life, but in terms of contemporary cinema, I know of no better example than the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. *Go back and watch those movies again over the holidays, keeping an eye out for allusions to hope and hopelessness.*

A Beautiful Tribute to the Children Killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School December 14, 2002

Written by Cameo Smith, Mount Wolf, PA

Twas' 11 days before Christmas, around 9:38 when 20 beautiful children stormed through heaven's gate.

their smiles were contagious, their laughter filled the air.

they could hardly believe all the beauty they saw there.

they were filled with such joy, they didn't know what to say.

they remembered nothing of what had happened earlier that day.

"where are we?" asked a little girl, as quiet as a mouse.

"this is heaven." declared a small boy. "we're spending Christmas at God's house."

when what to their wondering eyes did appear, but Jesus, their savior, the children gathered near.

He looked at them and smiled, and they smiled just the same.

then He opened His arms and He called them by name.

and in that moment was joy, that only heaven can bring those children all flew into the arms of their King and as they lingered in the warmth of His embrace, one small girl turned and looked at Jesus' face.

and as if He could read all the questions she had He gently whispered to her, "I'll take care of mom and dad."

then He looked down on earth, the world far below He saw all of the hurt, the sorrow, and woe then

He closed His eyes and He outstretched His hand, "Let My power and presence re-enter this land!"

"may this country be delivered from the hands of fools"

"I'm taking back my nation. I'm taking back my schools!"

then He and the children stood up without a sound.

"come now my children, let me show you around."

excitement filled the space, some skipped and some ran.

all displaying enthusiasm that only a small child can.

and i heard Him proclaim as He walked out of sight, "in the midst of this darkness, I AM STILL THE LIGHT."

◀ Nov 2022		December 2022				Jan 2023 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
December 11 and 18-Philoptochos spanakopita-vasilopita sale	**Fast Day			1 ** Adult Greek School	2 ** St. Porphyrios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	3 ** Young at Heart
4 ** St. Barbara Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA 5:00 p.m.	5 ** St. Savas Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	6 ** St. Nicholas Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos Board Meeting (Zoom)	7 ** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Choir Practice	8 ** Adult Greek School Young Adult Discussion 6:00 p.m.	9 ** St. Anna Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	10 ** Sunday School Christmas Retreat HOPE/JOY Christmas Party Program Rehearsal
11 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos Benefit Luncheon (Spring shelter) Sunday school Christmas Program Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	12 ** St. Spyridon Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	13 ** Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	14 ** Choir Practice	15 ** St. Eleftherios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA Christmas Social-Hall Adult Greek School	16 **	17 ** Community Outreach
18 ** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	19 ** Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Christmas Candlelight Service 6:00 p.m.	20 ** St. Ignatios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. College student night 6:00 p.m.	21 ** Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Choir Practice	22 ** St. Anastasia Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School	23 ** Orthros 6:15 a.m. Liturgy 7:00 a.m. Royal Hours 9:30 a.m.	24 ** Nativity of Christ Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Vespers 4:00 p.m. Orthros 5:30 p.m. Liturgy 7:00 p.m.
25 Nativity of Christ Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	26 Office Closed	27 No Fasting until January 5	28 Choir Christmas Party	29	30 St. Anyisia Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	31

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

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Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

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Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425

Bible Study-Tuesday Morning
Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Buildings & Grounds
Euripides Panos 813-352-3972

Chanter
Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134

Choir
Tara Swartzbaugh, Director 813-313-0439
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

College Student Program
Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134

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 ΜΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668

Daughters of Penelope
Elena Paras Ketchum 813-229-0144

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

Joy Tweens
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963

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

Veterans/1st Responders
Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830

Website / Social Media / APP
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Welcoming Ministry
Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Young Adult
Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

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

Youth Protection
Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855

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Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376

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

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